Listening to the Voice of Children

Systemic Dialogue Coaching:
Inviting Participation and Partnership in Social Work

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To social workers as Eva, Jessica, Nina, Lena, Maria, Thomas, Kalle, Marie, Lotta, Eleneor, Helena, Helen, Mattias, Ylva, Ulrika, Claes, Björn, Marianne, Kerstin, Gunvor, Joonas, Anna, Ann-Christine, Lilian, Jenny, Christina, Carina, Viveca, Anette, Gunnar, Ulla, Merja, Ingrid, Cecilia, Beatrice, Karin, Linda, Rolf, Anders, Ola, Richard, Jimmy, Thorbjörn, Hanna, Owe, Sven-Erik and all the others participating in and supporting this study.
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Abstract

This is a study in and about systemic coaching in social work – systemic, and, as it unfolded, dialogical coaching, later named Dialogue Coaching (DC). Focus lies on what the conducted coaching brought forth, generated and created in the context of social work and for the members of the participating social welfare organisations. My specialities as coach became to inspire social workers to invite clients and especially children into partnership, making their voices heard, both in the written text and in the process of social investigations.

The study was integral parts of commissions (and vice versa) of the County Administrative Board of Scania, Sweden, in my profession as systemic consultant and supervisor in Sweden. It was a study in how dialogical communication could improve how social workers, listening to the children’s invitation, could make children’s voices more heard in social investigations. In all, 55 social workers in seven municipalities participated in the dialogical participatory action research (DPAR) study, developing coaching and improving the dialogical interaction in social investigations. Focus moved from collecting data for decision-making, about what would be best for the child and other clients, to focusing on the changing process in relation to the participating clients, including children when they wanted to and could, co-creating new orientation on how to go on.

The focus on communication and dialogue in the coaching changed and developed the participants’ approach in relation to clients and one another and others. In the emerging awareness of how we reciprocally and reflexively co-create occurrences and outcomes, including who we become in relation to one another, the participating social workers’ awareness of the impact of their own contributions, and their own importance in relation to children and other clients, also improved. The expressions listening ears and listening questions were invented, capturing my, the coach’s, participation of placing myself completely
at the other participants’ disposal, completely accessible in the mutual responsiveness in the moment – being here and now in the present. The systemic methods and techniques were reflexively influenced and adapted from within the relational dynamic of joint actions in the dialogical interplay, metaphorically presented as peloton cycling in a voyage tour, becoming living tools in both the social workers’ practice and the coaching researcher’s practice, facilitating learning-by-doing with methods and approach connected to Appreciative Inquiry (AI). One of the living tools was reflecting teams emerging also into so called delta-reflecting teams with open narrating included.

Key words: systemic, dialogue, coaching, investigation, social work, welfare, protection, children, client, social worker, coach, participation, partnership, involvement, listening, presence, relationship, joint action, action research, PAR, dialogical.
1. Introduction

– Could you be our coach in a systemic project we are launching next year? Our idea is that someone with a lot of experience as social worker and manager in social organisations, becomes coach for social workers in doing their best to involve children and making their voices heard in investigations on children and their families. It has to be someone who can manage this in social work practice with a systemic approach. You are the only one I know with all this including having experiences from doing social investigations within the exercise of public authority.

Systemic coaching in social work – that was what the voice in the telephone receiver required. I was talking to Eva Carlström, social director in the County Administrative Board of Scania/Skåne¹, henceforth shortened to the County. She was to be project leader of projects where Dialogue Coaching (DC) was to be created. I was going to become a coach, a systemic, and, as it unfolds, a dialogical coach, in social work. My specialities were going to be to inspire social workers in inviting clients and especially children into partnership, making their voices heard, both in the written text and in the process of social investigations.

All this was to be the foundation for important and far-reaching developmental social work in child welfare and protection. This was going to increase both the children’s and other clients’ as well as the social workers’ involvement,

¹ Sweden is divided into 21 counties, each of which has its own County Administrative Board and County Governor. The function of the County Administrative Boards is to be a representative of the state in their respective counties, and serve as a link between the inhabitants, the municipal authorities, the Central Government, the Swedish Parliament and the central state authorities. The Board of Scania (Swedish: Skåne) is the southernmost county in the country. The board of Scania is a multifaceted authority employing about 500 employees - including lawyers, social scientists, economists, biologists, engineers, social workers, architects, veterinaries and more (Länsstyrelsen i Skåne län, 2008).
improving investigatory social work as well as the working conditions/environment of the participants.

At the same time, this was going to become a comprehensive action research study for more than five years in all. As the engaged coach, I was going to conduct participatory action research (PAR) (Whyte, 1991). All the 55 participating social workers gave their consent to the PAR. They were involved in a way similar to how they were expected to involve and invite clients into partnership and participation in dialogical interaction. Later I added Dialogical to PAR: *Dialogical Participatory Action Research (DPAR)* emphasising the dialogical interplay characterising the conducted research. *Dialogical* and *dialogue* I use in the meaning of living interaction; spontaneous, chiasmatical\(^2\), mutual, expressive, embodied responsiveness (Shotter, 2002, 2004a, 2004b).

The research study was done in the framework of the *Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice* at KCCF\(^3\) and the University of Bedfordshire.

**1.1 Research Focus**
Systemic Coaching, which I later named Dialogue Coaching (DC), is in focus in this research study, but also what the conducted coaching in systemic practice brought forth, generated and created in the context of social work and social welfare organisations and for the members of these organisations.

When this study started the participating social workers (in Scania, Sweden) were not familiar with systemic practice or with the conceptualisation ‘partnership’ as a characteristic of the relationship between social worker and client. However, in the Swedish discourse of social work the concept of ‘participation’ was important – and inviting to participation under development according to Swedish social legislation.

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\(^2\) From Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004) and used in the meaning of intertwined in one another as becoming in a mixture. Read more about dialogical interplay in chapter 3, section 4.

\(^3\) KCCF – Kensington Consultation Centre Foundation, London.
Simultaneously, in a relational dynamic of joint actions (Shotter, 1984, 2005b), DC emerged influencing my progress as systemic practitioner, coach and researcher which plays an integral part of this study.

This research was conducted as an Appreciative inquiry (AI) process emerging from within the intertwined and reflexively co-created joint actions emerging in the two actions projects. In the study these processes became metaphorically talked about as going on cycling voyage tour riding in the peloton. In this dynamic flow of dialogical collaborative joint actions we found the direction how to go on (with whom, when, where, how, with what and why) through exploring and reflecting both in the actions during the ride and learning by doing in an ongoing flow of joint actions. Sometimes we stopped for replenishments during the tour, reflecting on the progress and on the impact of our actions as well as our collaboration, exploring from different views and positions. Using ideas from AI we dreamt about new orientation how to go on, designed some ideas about how to continue, tested – learning by doing – exploring and giving feedback what came out of the testing (the ongoing circular process Dream – Design – Delivery – Discovery is in AI called the 4D-model (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2003, 2005, Cooperrider et al., 2005)).

Sometimes during the tour, some of us chose new, different ways. They joined a new peloton returning later on or continuing in another directions. This was both about shifting and fluid membership (Hart and Bond, 1999) in a loosely bound relationship with one another. The peloton shape changed as well as my position as coach and researcher as well as my issue from within the participation in the peloton. Sometimes I was in the top pulling choosing the way for the whole group, creating new space or orientation. Sometimes I was drafting, falling down in the peloton, trusting and relying on my co-researchers’ and the other participants’ capacity. We were moving in flow of dialogical joint actions, dreaming about and preparing us for whatever would be expected and we would be able to co-create in relation to whatever would be expected from us and possible for us in relation to what was going to emerge further on in the ride,
perhaps after next turn, in the next curve. In all this we were continuously delivering, continuing our journey of social work reflecting in and on our actions, narrating and reflecting in so called delta-reflecting teams, designing new ideas, testing, learning by doing and exploring one another’s and others’ efforts and results including other practitioners’ and researchers’ experiences. We were co-creating and re-creating how to continue, when, where and with what, finding new orientations in how to go on and with whom. In exploring others’ experiences and findings our focus was into, what we, the participating social workers, client and/or I found useful and bringing new ideas into our journey. So in this thesis, narrating and developing about the logic in use in this research journey of dialogical interplay, emerged chapters different from what usually readers will found in dissertations. This is a thesis of practice delivering narratives from within the practice giving account for what emerged to become useful to impose from the arenas of research, social work and other resources. In these aspects the conducted research, and consequently this thesis, became different from what usually can be expected. Four themes emerged and became predominated during this journey and in the reflecting and learning; (1) the language in use, (2) the dialogue coaching (DC) in itself, (3) the narratives emerging in the context of DC and in relation to DC about how the social workers became listing to and inviting the children into partnership and (4) the way all this became conducted in the research, the DPAR. All these themes have a chapter of their own in the thesis.

1.2 Research questions
Listening to the participating social workers, I directed my attention to the following research questions:

1. What emerging differences can use of systemic and dialogical interplay in coaching of social workers co-create in social work practice for children and other clients?
2. How can coaching from within dialogical interplay facilitate learning for the participants and the development of emerging ideas?
3. How can participants in systemic dialogical coaching be helped in conducting social work and changing processes?

The study provides ideas, which could be used as guidelines for how the social construction of polyphony within organisational life can serve social work professionals in creating positive changes within an agency as well as in or in relation to other systems (cf. Hazen, 1993, Kornberger et al., 2006). The word polyphony has different meanings as do other words as we co-create the meaning in use in the context (Shotter, 2005f, Vygotsky, 1979, Wittgenstein, 2001). Here, I use polyphony, like the Swedish word *flerstämmighet*, in the context of making several and different voices heard – addressed, expressed and listened to.

1.3 The study

Even though this is a study in a framework of an English Professional Doctorate, the events actually took place in Sweden, to be precise, in the county of Scania in the south of Sweden. All the events and actions in DC and in the conducted DPAR, apart from the written papers in the course and this dissertation, were done in Swedish. It is a study conducted *from the perspective* of the participating social workers. Consequently, the actions and the dissertation have a style characterised by the Swedish language, culture, prevailing social welfare system and discourse amongst the participators, including myself.

1.3.1 Social constructionism, systemic ideas and Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

The journey between English and Swedish has played a crucial part in the research, just as language on the whole plays a crucial part working in a view of social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, 2007, Gergen, 2001, 2002, Burr, 1995) and the systemic ideas (Bateson, 1987, 2000, Watzlawick et al., 1967, Anderson, 1999), which have been and are signposts for me in my work as well as in this study. With a systemic view of circular reflexive connections and of how we *become* in relation to one another (and others and otherness) as well as with a social constructionist view of how our social world is created in our
communication, the lived practice expanded in the study. The actions evolved into living dialogical interplay in the meaning of spontaneous, chiasmatical, mutual, expressive, embodied responsiveness (Shotter, 2002, 2004a) responding to and addressing one another, other and otherness in joint actions (Shotter, 1980, 2003b). As a way of unfolding the researching movements and emerging impacts of the joint actions the metaphor of going on a voyage tour, a cycling tour and riding in the peloton, was invented (see more in chapter 3).

As a study conducted from within social work and systemic practice the focus was into, using our curiosity, inquiring and exploring what works and how, reflecting in and on (Schön, 2002) and learning by doing (Dewey, 2007) in new efforts, in alternatives, exploring, dreaming, designing and delivering, again and again, with new reflections and actions in an ongoing circular process and flow giving new orientation in how to go on. These ideas emanate both from ideas of action research and systemic practice (see chapter 3) as well as from the area of leadership and organisation, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2003, 2005),

1.3.2 Ethical view
For me working from a systemic point of view means for me to bring with me a living ethical perspective in all considerations and actions. This was also obligatory as the research was an integral part of the commissions for which our company AMOVE AB⁴ was contracted. The other part of the contract was the County, the local supervisory authority of the Government (State), supervising the social welfare services, including what and how the actions in relation to the coaching were conducted as well as my actions in the coaching (including the written documents).

⁴ AMOVE AB is a private limited company owned by me and my husband, Sven-Erik Olsson. I am the only employee of the company. The contracts with the commissioners in question in the projects, stipulate that I am the principal agent and researcher. They also require AMOVE AB to ensure that appropriate scientific expertise is available for the principal agent. This is secured internally by Sven-Erik Olsson (holds a PhD in Sociology of Law, is a trained social worker and works as a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at Kristianstad University).
1.3.3 Intertwining coaching, researching and learning

The social director, Eva Carlström, and I had worked together in an earlier County project with the new elderly delegates. By asking me, she and the other members of the primordial group in the County (called the Idea Group), had chosen a person they expected to employ systemic ideas focusing on language, interaction and communication, with mutual dialogical conversation in view.

The commissioner’s choice of main method (the method required in the action projects) was systemic coaching. The participants were also invited to an eight-day systemic course at KCCF. Five days in London and three days in Sweden. Martin Little, KCCF, was senior teacher and I was assisting as coach. The course formed an important basis for the action projects. The commissioners expected me as coach to use systemic ideas and support the participants in learning by doing (Dewey, 1980, 2007) so we successfully carried through the projects and brought the aims into effect. In the commissions, I was instructed to conduct and develop the coaching, together with the participating social workers, as well as support the realisation of the commissioner’s aim for the projects.

The commissioners also expected me to explore, evaluate and expose the accomplishments, documented in a similar way that I had done in the safety delegate project (Olsson, 2004) making the progress striking and transparent for a larger audience. They wanted me to facilitate learning and further development of the ideas emerging in the projects. Thus, in the agreements (between the County and AMOVE AB) it was stipulated that my actions as coach was going to be integrated with action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2006a, 2006b). I was also given permission to use all the practice in further research and writings of my own.

The Swedish Parliament had decided to establish 100 new safety delegates of elderly people in the country, stationed at the regional authority level in the County Administration Boards. I was engaged as systemic consultant to support the introduction and the progress of the new posts as ‘Safety delegate of elderly people’ in developing a new style in conducting inspections. In Scania, six safety delegates of elderly people were engaged. This became an important phase in my progress as systemic consultant.
In both the projects of the County I was supposed to write consultative documents regularly (in Swedish), accounting for and exploring the processes and the results of the research and actions. This strengthened my ambition and supported me to work continuously with the participating social workers in developing ways to make collaborative reflections on (analyses) and accounts of what was emerging in the projects and in the research – and how. The first book was published in 2005, another in 2006, two in 2007 and two in 2008, by the County (Olsson, 2005a, 2006, 2007b, 2007c, 2008a, 2008c). They all form the basis for this dissertation.

1.3.5 Delta-reflecting and reflecting teams
In using language systemic ideas and reflecting teams, as Tom Andersen used them (Andersen, 1987, 1992, 2003), I developed new ways of using these ideas and forms, both in actions as coach and as researcher. For example, I complemented with what I came to call delta-reflecting teams in the DPAR. This supported the co-creating and narrating (1) in DC, (2) about DC and (3) about what and how DC and the systemic ideas were brought and used further. In Swedish, the word “delta” is used both in the meaning of “participate” or “share” as well as the dividing of the mouth of a river in several river channels. In using reflecting teams, the teamwork and the interaction in the reflecting sometimes also grow and flow over into what we can call several outflows and inflows of narrating. The participants connect to their own experiences and bring narratives of their own into the team, reflecting both in what they have heard in the session and in their own narrating. I began to use this delta-reflecting in making many voices and narratives heard in collecting data in the research. These contributions were very important from the perspective of my research, but, as it emerged, for the participators as well. They were encouraged to reflect on what they had heard, expand the reflections with new narrating, and contribute with experiences of their own and whatever they wanted to bring into the dialogue in connection to the subject(s). This facilitated the polyphony. More became told and heard with new nuances. The systemic approach, or as one of
the social workers called it, the *listening questions* and *listening with acceptance and attention* (see chapter *Dialogue Coaching*), seemed to create space and freedom to speak and narrate, to be heard and listened to, in nuances and different intonation. This style I also brought into and expanded in the DC as a way to elicit polyphony in the organisations.

### 1.3.6 The main action project and the attached/appended project

The main project and commission of the study is the one in which DC originally emerged named *Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children* (2004 – 2008). It was followed by and partly integrated with another project named *Individual in the Chain of Care – Investigation and Participation* (2006 – 2008). In this dissertation I do not give account for this project separately or use examples from this second project. However the emerging DC were interwoven in both the projects so I can not talk about DC without connecting to the participating social workers in this second project as well. AMOVE AB was contracted for both projects. The settings were social work on child protection and welfare, including their families, and, in the attached project, social work with alcohol and/or substance (ab)users. In both projects the setting was investigational social work. The focus was on dialogical interaction that makes a difference, on successful examples increasing *children’s and other client’s participation and partnership* unfolding in both the process of the investigation and written investigations.  

#### 1.3.6.1 The aims of the actions

I met the group where the project ideas initially emerged, the so-called Idea Group, in the autumn of 2003. They had a dream about supporting social

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6 The term investigation is applied in laws on care for all matters that have the purpose of enabling a committee to reach a decision in a case they are responsible for, including assessments. The concept is also used as a comprehensive term for the final written documentation – the case investigation results. From a legal perspective the aim of the investigation is to provide the municipal Social Welfare Committee with a reliable foundation for decision making and to establish a basis for counselling work (Friis, 2003, Edvardsson, 2003, Socialstyrelsen, 2006d). However the investigations can also fulfil other purposes and be used with other aims as we found out in current research projects.

7 The Idea Group was a group of representatives invited by, as he was then, the county governor of Scania, Bengt Holgersson. He asked them to co-create a project idea with the purpose of
workers conducting investigations and doing assessments in social work by
highlighting good social work practice, encouraging it to grow and to be
improved by the participants (by the participating social workers and clients)
with support from a coach in systemic practice.

The Idea Group wanted to make the voices of children and other clients heard.
This was an effort at developing in executive authoritative parts of social work a
more democratic and equal relationship between social workers and clients. By
using systemic ideas the Idea Group wanted to make it easier for project
participants to mutually involve themselves in dialogical interaction and
communication using different perspectives, including each other’s and
particularly the child’s. The projects focused mainly on the investigating phase
of social work, but also addressed other parts of social work. A diversity of
social workers was represented in the coaching and the projects, working with
investigations, social service and security, foster-care and working with welfare
care, treatment and rehabilitation.

The commissioner’s hopes and dreams I heard as if they wanted to create
answers to the critical voices which at this time were raised in Sweden about
social workers’ approaches and methods in conducting investigations and other
social work tasks. Most of all, critical voices had arisen about social workers and
their interaction with children, or rather lack of interaction. In other words, the
progress, the processes and effects (the results) of the project(s) could be seen as
answers to these critical questions, but also as a contribution by improving and
highlighting good examples of social work. My task as coach and conductor of
the action research was to support and encourage the social workers’ efforts,
ideas and experimental work in increasing children’s and other clients’
participation in the investigating processes, in the social workers’ writing on the

improving the conditions for vulnerable children in the context of the Social Welfare Services in
the municipalities. He had invited representatives from all care homes in the county together
with representatives from the Social Welfare Office in the respective municipality. The Idea
Group also took the first initiatives in designing the research study. The project leader Eva
Carlström, in particular, supported me in designing and conducting the research together with the
participating social workers.
written investigation and/or how their voices are heard in the text of the written investigation$^8$.

When I started as a coach in this study I brought many years of experience into this practice, as social worker and as leader and manager in the context of social work and in different other contexts for example one year’s work in a unit of Research and Development in Kalmar, Sweden, and experience from being a guest-teacher and -tutor for students in social studies since 2004 in the University of Kristianstad, Sweden. My systemic voyage tour started 1999 when I joined my first course at KCCF with Peter Lang, followed by a Masters course at KCCF with John Shotter as my tutor. My interest in dialogue and dialogical interplay has been strongly supported by John Shotter influencing both my approach and the emerging design of this study.

1.4 The dissertation
In this dissertation I have explored narratives from different phases and eras in the conducted action research; (1) Oral or written narratives by the participants about the coaching and their use of DC and ideas from DC in different contexts. (2) Narratives of mine in and from sessions of DC and about my, our and the participants’ use of DC and what emerged in the context of and in relation to DC in social work. (3) Answers given and narratives told by clients I have interviewed about their participation in social investigation, care and rehabilitation. (4) Written investigations about children and their families and

$^8$ According to the Social Services Act (socialtjänstlagen, abbrev. SoL) the Social Welfare Committee shall without delay open an investigation of matters which have been brought to its knowledge by application or otherwise and which may occasion action by the committee. The legislation is two-fold, one voluntary (family service), the other coercive (child protection). This results in two different kinds of inflow to the Social Services. The first type is a result of someone asking for help, the second when someone files a mandated report (Cocozza, 2007). According to SoL, each local authority is responsible for social services within its area. A committee, usually a Social Welfare Committee, carries out the local authority’s duty in respect of the social services. Under SoL, the municipal Social Welfare Committee is responsible in particular for ensuring that a child who risks developing in an unfavourable direction should receive the protection and support needed and, if considered to be in the child’s best interest, care and upbringing away from home (Friis, 2003 Ponnert, 2007).
about other clients. I have explored most of these narratives during the action research process, sometimes together with participating social workers, and have told and accounted for parts of this research in Swedish in the books published by the commissioner. In this dissertation I have used some of this already published Swedish material, re-written it, compressed and once again analysed it together with more and new experiences and narratives from the interaction and narrating in the research process.

1.4.1 Narratives as reconstructions

Our narratives about the past, as well as those we call ‘data’ in research, are even “softer” than we usually imagine (compare with the expression “hard facts”) (Spence, 1982). Rather, we construct a suggestion to how an event could unfold – a reconstruction that is supposed to correspond to something in the past (Spence, 1982). In telling stories or narrating our own stories and narratives also reflexively influence us. So making accounts and narrating can be done in many ways, with different focus, changing and differentiating over time and space also in the same person, and we never know if we are close to the historical truth or not. We cannot reach it. But we have the narrative truth with its limitations and possibilities. For example: It is never too late to have a happy childhood (Furman, 1997) [my translation of the Swedish title to Ben Furman’s book about how we can talk about the past in different ways. Furman is using what he calls solution-directed course of action – again my translation from Swedish (Furman and Ahola, 1990)].

We constantly re-author and construct new and different perspectives in relation to the past time and the present. Even if we use exactly the same words, the words are used in a new meaning when re-used – at least this time they are heard in the light of having been heard before, they are used in a recurrent context of already having been told and used. We are making constructions and reconstructions, or as Spence pointed out, it is about making creative propositions (Spence, 1982). Thus, when I write this dissertation I am making reconstructions that are supposed to correspond to what I have participated in
and heard in the past as well as what I now are able to formulate and reformulate as creative propositions to what was heard and narrated within the study.

1.4.2 Language and the audience
Here, I use my second language, English, and probably use it similarly to how I use the Swedish language. I write similarly to how I talk in my practice. That, not surprisingly, is read and heard as a more practical based language in the discourse of social work where I am moving in my everyday professional practice. My presumed/assumed audience is, paradoxically when I write in English, also here in the dissertation, the Swedish social workers that enthusiastically have assisted me throughout the whole project, together with the Examination Board at the University of Bedfordshire and my colleagues in the systemic world. The audiences probably have a lot in common, but, for me, these assumed and desired audiences, also make me divided in the imagined expectations. On the one hand I thought of the English examiners as perhaps not knowing all that much about the Swedish context of social work and on the other hand I thought of the Swedish social worker as perhaps not so familiar with the academic requirements in the English context. And who is familiar with the systemic ideas in use besides my systemic friends and colleagues? In this dissertation I have tried to incorporate these considerations by using for example verbal signposts, or explorations of ideas, for the readers. The signposts are supposed to have a direction into future, even though I sometimes write or use them as if they were creating a background or a special view. I also hope the references will open up new possibilities for further exploration of concepts and ideas. With an audience of practitioners I am referring to literature also with the purpose of giving comparing alternatives. I am using references both in English and Swedish. Unfortunately only a few of them are written in both languages.

1.4.3 Content
The setting in the dissertation is more or less formed as the study unfolded in the practice. To be able to write about it, in making the practice accountable, I have had to do many adjustments in adapting this several years’ action study to a limited amount of words in writing. The study generated different directions,
however in very close connection to each other, collaborating and influencing each other.

The dissertation starts, after this introduction, with a chapter (2) about the language in use in the study, giving some examples of differences in meaning-making and some signposts of the ideas in use in the study.

The latter are brought further in the next chapter (3) where the unfolded Dialogical Participatory Action Research (DPAR) is expanded and explored as closely intertwined in the practice and vice versa. I invited social workers to become involved in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Foote Whyte, 1991b) and into a dialogical partnership in a similar way they were expected to involve and invite the children and other clients.

Next chapter (4) is about the dialogue coaching and how this increases self-reflecting awareness as participant, including for the coach, and supports the use of the dialogical style in social work as a whole.

Following chapter (5) gives examples on how this dialogical style unfolded in the investigational work in relation to the DC. The examples are from the social workers’ narrating in DC and about how the social workers, with inspiration and preparation from within the DC, succeeded in keeping up their ambition, courage and spirit in involving children (and other clients) in dialogical participation and partnership in conducting investigations including assessments. It also includes examples on how the introduction of dialogue coaching and the use of action/collaborative research became a way to elicit polyphony within organisations.

The dissertation ends in a chapter (6) with reflections and conclusion, which have unfolded during this journey of actions and coaching, guiding the participating social workers, or at least some of them, and me, how to go on as social worker and as coach working with and from within a dialogical style.
2. Language in use

The switching between English and Swedish in this study increased my awareness of the language in use and how language constructs our social world from a social constructionist view (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, Burr, 1995, Gergen, 2002). Working in a systemic practice (Bilson and Ross, 1999), language and communication were already in my focus, seeing human systems as systems of language creating different meanings, different directions, expanding views, in our communication (Andersson, 1999, Bilson and Ross, 1999, Campell et al., 1991, 1994, Watzlawick et al., 1996).

I explored the language in use and how different meanings were created with focus on my own language journey. In this chapter I am exploring conceivable differences in the use of language – how the journey between English and Swedish could be not only a question of translation, but also a tour in different cultures and discourses. In this study I am using important examples as dialogical conversations and investigations on children and in the latter also exploring differences in meaning making from within social work in Sweden. This is followed by an orientation in meaning making of coaching, another important term in this study. The chapter could be seen/read both as a background and as a guideline, signposts, in further reading and understanding of the accomplished study’s narrating and narratives.

2.1 Open narratives and spontaneous narrating

In the study I have preferred to use the words narrate, narrating and narratives in writing and telling about the actions, interactions, relations, movements and dialogical interplay in the study (cf. Johansson, 2005). My preference for the word narrate is connected both to how this word can be used in Swedish meaning (1) more open, don’t-know-the-end-yet-approach, in a more free telling without a ready conclusive end or forehead given plot, and (2) of how this verb positions me as narrator/teller/writer. I become participating both in the narrative
lived and told and co-creating in an ongoing progress, in a not yet completed process here and now.

One alternative word would have been account – give account for. Account becomes, as I hear the meaning of the word from a Swedish perspective, connected to justification and explanation. Marvin B. Scott and Stanford M. Lyman have divided accounts into two types: excuses and justifications (Scott and Lyman, 1968) similar to the meaning I connect to accounts. To me, justification and explanation is telling and thinking about something from an outside position while my efforts here aim to narrate from a position from within, together with the participating social workers – from external observations to participatory understanding (Shotter, 2004b), from aboutness to withness in everyday life (Shotter, 2004d, 2004e):

*Withness (dialogical) - thinking* is a form of reflective interaction that involves coming into living contact with an other’s living being, with their utterances, their bodily expressions, their words, their ‘works’. (Shotter, 2005e, p. 50) […]

*Aboutness (monological)-thinking*, however, is unresponsive to another’s expressions; it works simply in terms of a thinker’s ‘theoretical pictures’ – but, even when we ‘get the picture’, we still have to interpret it, and to decide, intellectually, on a right course of action. (Shotter, 2005e, p. 51)

My use, meaning-making, of the word narrate (*Swedish: berätta*) is connected to everyday conversational narrating and story-telling (Norrby, 1998). This does not include any special other order than that there is an open, spontaneous narrating without any predetermined end, which is sometimes connected to both narrating and story-telling (Adelswärd, 1996, 1997, Hydén and Hydén, 1997. Johansson, 2005, Labov, 1972). However sometimes the use of *berättelse* (narrative) in Swedish can also give a similar meaning of ‘account’; for example,
in annual accounts where the Swedish word for annual report is årsberättelse which literally would be “narrative of the year” in English. In other words, ‘account’ seems to be a difficult word to use in a journey between Swedish and English (Hydén, 1997). ‘Account’ corresponds in Swedish more to concepts of redogörelse (account, report) and redovisning (statements of accounts) (Buttny, 1993) in the meaning of explanation, calculation, adjustment or report, in which elements of narrative are rare (Hydén, 1997).

Another alternative English word in this could be the expression “telling a story”. The word story however could be translated to both historia (English: history/story/affair) and berättelse (English: narrative/narration). I see berättande and narrating as creating a new story (or several) in interaction with and within responsive dialogical conversation (Shotter, 2000). Somebody says something with a receiver – an addressee – to be seen, heard and expanded in responsiveness (Bakhtin, 1991, Polkinghorne, 1988). Compared with historieberättande (English: story-telling) in the meaning of telling an already prepared or completed story – to tell a story in a special form or order (for example, beginning, middle, end) and with one or several storylines or plots (White, 1973, Linde, 1993). Thus I connected the Swedish word historia more to the English word story and the Swedish word berättelse more to the English word narrative. In the study I have encouraged the participating social workers to berättande – to create and tell berättelser. Consequently, I use the words: narrating and narratives in English.

2.2 “Sam-‘words to “dialogical co-‘words
I want the language in use in the dissertation to be as close as possible to the language I use in my practice, translated though, in order to facilitate the understanding of the unique experiences in the (research) practice. The translation played tricks on me. Take for example some of the most important words in this study: dialogue, dialogical and conversation which in Swedish have at least two different meanings, one very similar to the English and another
one, *samtal*, with a touch of a different meaning even though the word is connected to all three of them:

**Table 1. English words and/och Svenska ord**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Swedish alternative 1</th>
<th>Swedish alternative 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dialogue</td>
<td>Dialog</td>
<td>Samtal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dialogical conversation</td>
<td>dialogisk konversation</td>
<td>dialogiskt samtal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conversation</td>
<td>konversation (small talk)</td>
<td>Samtal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Swedish word *samtal* could in a literal sense be translated in English to *co-talk* or *co-dialogue*. Another Swedish word with the prefix *sam-* is *samspel* which I in the study used as a meaning *co-created interaction in responsiveness* or *dialogical interaction or dialogical interplay*. I have used the latter translation in the dissertation.

Another important word and concept with different meanings in use, also in this dissertation, is the word *investigation*, in Swedish *utredning*. I will return to this after I have introduced some signposts for the orientation on the language in use and differences in meaning making.

**2.2.1 Re-orientation in new meanings**

John Shotter has drawn my attention to how Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michael Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky point out ways of joining and entering into the dynamic flow of dialogical relations, listening to the co-creations of meanings of the words in use in the language (Shotter, 2005f):

… rather than a focus on *patterns of already spoken words*, they have focused our attention on people’s *word in their speaking*, on the dynamic ways in which people’s *use* of words in the course of their actions, and on the subtle details of how, as their use of words unfolds in responsive relations to those to whom they addressed, people adjust their expressions accordingly. Their writings can help
us ‘get inside’ the dynamics of these moment by moment unfolding processes in which we, as living beings, i.e., as spontaneously responsive and expressive beings, directly and immediately, influence each other in our daily activities. (Shotter, 2005a, p. 7)

Also, when the words are well-known and we have used them many times before the real meaning is created in the moment of this unique action and interaction (Vygotsky, 1979,1999). The concepts used in the research in question, for example the concepts of investigations and assessments, we have all probably used many times before. We probably thought we understood the meaning of the words in the actual moment. But, Wittgenstein says:

203. Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about. (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 97)

This makes it even more important to really listen and make every participant’s voice heard in every unique situation and conversation of an investigation. My own interpretations, or those by someone else not participating, will bring in other contexts of the word – not the meaning of words or stories told at a particular time or heard in the unique voice of a participating child and client as in the projects in question. As the children which I interviewed in the study said to me about talking to social workers: – You have to be careful. You never know how or what you have said or told is going to be understood from another person’s view and used in another context in the future (Olsson, 2007b).

Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses
of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170)

The meanings of the words are living, moving and changing. In a new place, in new relationships, in new conversations, in new investigations and in new assessments we have to re-orientate ourselves into the unique moment of time, context, relations and language in use.

2.2.2 The living language
When I began participating in the systemic courses and supervision in 1999, which have all been held in English, I was not able to observe all the nuances and different uses of the English language. I still don’t. However, what has increased during these ten years of studying is my awareness of differences in the meaning of words, both within a language and between different languages like English and Swedish. Sometimes we deal with a word and we assume that we use the same meaning of the word, but suddenly you get the feeling that something does not fit, becomes strange in the use of the language. Even when the spelling and pronunciation is the same and the translation between the two languages seems to be correct, according to the dictionary, something appears confusing.

What is more, in reading about assessments (of need in partnership between professionals and parents of children), I found that the English words for what we were trying to accomplish in the action projects of this study, were rather, participation and partnership (Dale, 1996) when we in Swedish were talking about deltagande and delaktighet. However, in my translation from Swedish to English both go for ‘participation’.
2.2.4 Living meanings of investigation and assessments
At first the meaning regarding the words investigation and assessment seemed to be just a matter of translation. However, when I explored this a little bit further I noticed that in Sweden we use the word *utredning* (investigation) and *bedömning* (assessment) similarly to England, but also differently, at least in the context of Social Welfare Services. The differences in the meanings of the words *investigation* and *assessment* I also connect to differences in legislation and established practice. Rules and regulations may seem similar but they become shaped and understood through communication in the prevailing discourse and culture (Pearce, 1989). In the UK and Sweden the legislation seems to be built up around the use of a similar (translated) terminology, but the meaning of investigations and assessments in the English context emerges from a child protection orientation while in Sweden the dominating meaning in use has a child welfare orientation including early and preventative actions as well as protection:

A child welfare orientation emphasizes the prevention of harm by instituting a welfare system that can ensure that certain risks (mostly those associated with poverty) are avoided in the first place. Risk avoidance in child welfare does not imply dissociation from knowledge found in the use of risk assessment tools but it is not dependent on these tools to the same extent either. A child welfare orientation means that when a vulnerable child is identified, a broader range of measures is at a social worker’s disposal.

In Swedish, child welfare, where control over everyday decision-making is highly decentralized, social workers talked about relying on an investigatory process (enquiry) to produce cumulative information with which to assess a child’s needs. (Khoo, 2004, p.79)

What is called *assessment* in the English discourse seems to be an important part of what in Sweden is expected to be included into the meaning in use of *social investigation*. Particularly assessing is an important part before the final
decision-making in the investigation (Socialstyrelsen, 2006a, Edvardsson, 2003) but also in the prelude; before one of the first decisions about if it at all comes to be an open case of investigation (Socialstyrelsen, 2006d). Förhandsbedömning (Advance Assessments) is the term used in Swedish for these initial activities. It starts when the social worker is suspecting maltreatment of children or when a report has been received about suspected maltreatment; alternatively when a parent (who has custody of the child) is making an application for contributions or assistance from the Social Welfare Service. The social worker makes an assessment about whether to start an investigation or not (Socialstyrelsen, 2006a). Advance Assessment is not a small or an early investigation into the children’s needs – only an estimation about whether the social welfare is going to initiate a social investigation at all (Socialstyrelsen, 2006a). This is quite another meaning than the English where services are offered within the Initial Assessment (Platt, 2006):

There has been a perceived tendency in the UK for initial assessment to lead to the provision of family support services, and for investigation to lead to procedures such as protection conferences and, in serious cases, to legal proceedings. (Platt, 2006, p. 268)

However, in a published Swedish dissertation, written in English, exploring Swedish social workers’ use of Advance Assessments these were called/translated to Initial Assessments (Cocozza, 2007) and included in the English system’s investigations:

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The legislation (chapter 14 Social Service Act) states that: "Any person receiving information of a matter, which can imply a need for the social welfare committee to intervene for the protection of a child should notify the committee accordingly. Authorities whose activity affect children and young persons are duty bound, as are other authorities in health care, medical care, other forensic psychiatry investigation service and social services, prison and probation services to notify the social welfare committee immediately of any matter which comes to their knowledge and may imply a need for the social welfare committee to intervene for the protection of a child ...” (2005) Socialtjänstlagen. The Social Service act of Sweden.
Table 2 Comparable levels of the English and Swedish Child Protection System (Cocozza, 2007, p. 47)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>England Gate-keeping point one – Report</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Sweden Gate-keeping point two – Investigation</th>
<th>Sweden Gate-keeping point three – Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry point – Reports registered</td>
<td>Entry point – Reports registered</td>
<td>Investigation according to Chapter 11 of the Social Service Act&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Retained in system – Children given support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost cases – Reports that were never found</td>
<td>Lost cases – Reports that were never found</td>
<td></td>
<td>Retained in system – Children given support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checks</td>
<td>Reports where no contact was established between the family or authorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td>Initial assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the model, Cocozza places the Swedish Initial Assessment on the same level as the English Investigation. She also shows how Swedish investigations range over both (parts of) the gate-keeping point one and two, giving an image of being more extensive than the English<sup>11</sup>.

In these examples, I exemplify the complexity in moving between different systems of language in use. This complexity might have appeared and emerged more distinctly for me in moving between the two languages. However, this creation of different meanings takes place in all communication and language use. This being so, different meanings are naturally in use also in the meaning making of social investigations from within the Swedish language system. Social investigations on children are in Sweden spoken of as (1) preventive

<sup>10</sup> “The social welfare committee shall without delay open an investigation of matters which have been brought to its knowledge by application or otherwise and which may occasion action by the committee. Information emanating from an investigation and material to the determination of a matter shall be securely stored.” chapter 11 § 1 Social Service Act<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Madeleine Cocozza (2007) compared the English and Swedish child protection systems using results from her own study and from an English study carried out by Gibbons, Conroy and Bell (1995). Cocozza explains gate-keeping as the points at which decisions are made if a report regard a maltreated child are going to be done or not. She gives references to Parton, Thorpe and Wattam (England) (1997) and Susan J. Wells, John D. Fluke and C. Hendricks Brown (USA) (1995).
action – an early given offer to the child and the family with a welfare approach, (2) for inquiries into the living conditions and the developing needs of the child, including resources and strengthening factors, (3) mobilizing these possibilities and empowering the child and the child’s family to participate and make changes of their own and (4) inquiries aimed at finding out, and making assessments about, whether the child needs protection from the Social Welfare Service’s point of view or not, and if so, how.

According to the Social Services Act (socialtjänstlagen, abbrev. SoL) the Social Welfare Committee shall without delay open an investigation of matters which have been brought to its knowledge by application, reports of or otherwise and which may occasion action by the committee. According to SoL each local authority is responsible for social services within its area. A committee, usually a social welfare committee, carries out the local authority’s duty in respect of the social services. Under SoL, the municipal Social Welfare Committee is responsible in particular for ensuring that a child who risks developing in an unfavourable direction should receive the protection and support needed and, if considered to be in the child’s best interest, care and upbringing away from home. The committee should principally provide for the child’s care needs with the consent of the parents. Failing that, the committee, provided it considers that all other legal requirements have been fulfilled, must apply to the County Administrative Court for an order for placing young persons under care pursuant to the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (lag med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga, abbrev. LVU), and given these powers, determine in what way care should be provided (Friis, 2003). The court decides whether the conditions for compulsory care are fulfilled or not, based on a written assessment carried out by one (or two) social workers, and an oral negotiation in the court. This means that the assessment process takes place in a specific context, where the social workers have to relate to the child and its parents and the County Administrative Court as a decision-making authority (Ponnert, 2007)
The fourth aspect (see above) is sometimes marked with more legislated
directions or/and based on a medical case-management order (Edvardsson. 2003,
Hillgaard and Keiser, 1982, Pettersson, 2001, Richmond, 1965). In the first
phase of the study, I constructed the following table as an overview of different
meanings in use (Olsson, 2005a). The division is in three discourses, where in
two are identified as medical-social and socio-legal, emanating from versions of
Knut Sundell and Tine Egelund (2000). The third, I identified as the dialogical
discourse living in the action projects:
### Table 3. The Three Discourses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medico-social discourse</th>
<th>Socio-legal discourse</th>
<th>Dialogue structural discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The care approach fits concept of the medical-social discourse. Somebody getting treatment, is cared for or nursed for ill-health/diagnose/a problem that first of all is established through an examination and investigation forming basis for the professional assessments.</td>
<td>Legal focus means that childcare investigations are going to secure the protection of the child and legal security for both the child and the parents.</td>
<td>The guiding principle in the discourse is the dialogical interplay and the creation of space for the orchestra of dialogues securing the child’s welfare and protection. The child and parents are approached as experts and main actors in their own change processes including making assessments and preparations for the future. The professionals support and facilitate theses processes by opening and expanding the communication in the network. Investigations can be seen as fora for the voice of the child to be more heard and increase his/her network’s understanding of the child his/her perspective. The social worker invites dialogical collaboration and partnership in facilitating the voice of the child to be heard, both in the network and in relation to the social workers, aiming to support the child and the parents on how to go on and if an intervention from the social welfare is needed, how the social workers can assist and support the progress. The written texts also participate in the dialogue; What does the social worker choose to write about and for whom? What are the readers hearing in dialogue with the written investigations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included in the medico-social discourse is the casework model. Focus lies on first identifying the case’s problem, making a risk and damage assessment and then taking care of the problem through measures and treatment. The approach is positivistic with a linear cause and effect relationship and ideas of identifying and isolating damaging factors. Prognoses are underpinned by links between cause factors and their effects.</td>
<td>The social worker’s attention is directed towards securing and conducting the procedures correctly, fulfilling the legal claims and criteria. Not until the legal claims are fulfilled might a decision about intervention be made. The investigation is about collecting information aimed of describing the child’s and the parents’ situation and condition as neutrally as possible forming the basis for professional assessments and judgements. The social workers’ focus is on discharging their official duties in guaranteeing children’s safety and protection. For easier supervision of the investigational work one seeks to attain one unit system with uniform concepts and criteria. The child/client has pre-defined needs examined in relation to the parents’ capability and the conditions and possibilities in the environment. The professionals are seen as experts and collaborate according to agreements in plans and models.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human beings and children in different age groups have, as it is seen, objectively defined needs that are fundamental and universal. These needs can be looked after in similar ways. The professionals are seen as experts on the needs and how they can be provided for. Parents’ actions and omissions are accentuated as central risk factors for children’s health and progress.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The written texts also participate in the dialogue; What does the social worker choose to write about and for whom? What are the readers hearing in dialogue with the written investigations?
Swedish social workers’ investigating practice varies widely which has been found in several studies (for example: Löfholm Andrée and Sundell, 2003, Östberg et al., 2000, Högdin, 2002, Rasmusson, 2004). Amongst researchers there seems to be widespread dissatisfaction with the abundance of variation, arguing for more specific guidelines and criteria (see for example: Sundell, 1997, Wells et al., 1995, Cocozza, 2007, Zellman and Faller, 1996). However, standardized approaches to assessing risk may mean that certain categories of vulnerable children are identified, but it also means that the social work skills of empathy, engagement and empowerment have been pounded into oblivion by standardized technical skills that are not dependent on the more humane aspects of social work (Khoo, 2004).

2.3 Living and emerging meanings in the study
A living idea in the projects from the commissioning County was that the social investigations in social welfare offer unique opportunities to create differences that make a difference (Bateson, 2000) for involved persons. The focus was not “only” on how the investigation ends in assessments and decisions but, in the highest possible degree, on how the investigations were carried out – on interaction, communication and the changing-processes in the investigation.

Driving aspects in the projects were to promote emancipation and democracy, that is, to increase the participator’s influence and power, creating a relationship of partnership between the clients and the social workers, aiming to take care of, look after and mobilize the clients’ own resources and knowledge as experts on their own lives. The legal rights of the individual client are both about what comes out of an investigation in the end and during/in the investigation process – how the investigations are conducted. From a professional view the how-questions and the accounting of what the investigational work will accomplish are about how to secure the quality of social work and, not least, about learning and development – to become aware of your own professional contributions and successes. This was where we were supposed to set out from in the unfolding
coaching that in this context became characterised by the dialogue in use. However, the words coach and coaching are, as most other words, also living, used in and creating different meanings.

Our language is full of metaphors, even though we seldom notice them or become aware of them. The word coach is such an example. I traced the word coach through my Hungarian friend Desző Veszpremi, Kristianstad, Sweden, to the Hungarian word kocsi depicting a wagon from Kocs, a village in northeast of Hungary, with a tradition of making excellent wagons of a special kind. In a transferred sense, both the Wagoner/driver and the wagon became called coach and coaching used in the meaning of bringing people from the life they are living to the life they wish to live (Berg, 2004).

### 2.4 Meanings of coach and coaching

Coaching has a long story. In England this means transport and the word ”coach” was introduced during the second half of (16th century). It was a ”coachman”, the Waggoner who drove the horse-coach/cab and also took care of the horses (Stelter, 2003). In the 19th century, the concept ”coach” became used in the pedagogic world. These coaches were supporting persons to students in Anglo-American universities during the student preparations for examinations and sport contests (Stelter, 2003). When it was transferred to social work in the County projects in this study 2003/2004, this was a new occurrence, a rare phenomenon at this stage.

Extract from one of the events with participating social workers delta-reflecting on the DC and what has emerged in relation to the DC (Event III 2007 September 14th and group C)

– For me, I do not experience it as a method. It is focus on language. But it is not easy to tell what the coaching is and what is in the coaching. Otherwise we have a clear picture about it, that is, what emerges … it is about a personal approach and attitude.
– But there are difficulties with the word …
– It sounds like a sports coach.
– I have difficulties with the word.
– It is being with-it – the in-thing now.
– Three years ago it would have been named question/asking-consultant.
– It makes the interviewer important – gives a whole new dimension
– what enormously important function you have when you include questions and then this with the details – easy to forget. You get an answer and forget … why did I not ask more [about the details]
– It is the details that make the difference. You get a tremendous feeling of being seen. That is what makes the difference.
– You re-tell how you’ve done in the action, what you have said and reflected in it. Then you hear so much more …
– Yesterday we had an interview. In the end a lot of questions arose. We had had thoughts about using a reflecting team but did not. For me this is also about having the courage to start, to dare ask. On the one hand you leave out, pass over – and you forget to use the open questions.
– I was together with Ann-Margreth – we co-operated – she interviewed and how useful it was – it made such a difference. We did hear so much more …

Now, seven years later from the County’s original start in 2003, an inflationary expansion of coaches in all sorts of areas has emerged. For example in improving learning (de Hann and Burger, 2005), leadership (Anderson and Anderson, 2005), development (Flaherty, 2005, Jarvis et al., 2006), techniques for coaching (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005a, 2005b) and skills (Nelson-Jones, 2007) including in social work (Danielsson, 2007, Åkerlund, 2006) and for coaching parents (Wahlberg, 2004).

Many authors are aspiring to find or create a joint definition and/or clear definition of coaching, separated from related distinctions such as supervision and mentoring (Steinberg, 2004), consulting (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003, 2005,)
learning and developing (Stelter, 2003, Gjerde, 2004), training (Gåserud, 2001) and therapy (Berg, 2004).

2.5 Summarizing the chapter about language in use
During the voyage tour of DPAR in this study my awareness of the language in use and of the impact of different meanings co-created and in use in different perspectives and contexts increased. In this chapter I have emphasized how moving between English and Swedish not only became a question about translation but about creating different meanings. The reflecting in and on the practice of social work from within DC, connecting to ideas of John Shotter and others in the systemic arena, increased my awareness of how we were (and are) using and co-creating different meanings in language in use constructing and re-constructing our social world.

The living idea and logic in use in the study was to explore the living, the meanings in the current topic of practice addressing what was further to come. This evolved for example different meanings in use about social investigations in social welfare.

In the chapter were outlined examples of the complexity in moving between different systems of language in use. This creation of different meanings takes place in all communication and language use. This being so, different meanings are naturally in use also in the meaning making of social investigations from within the Swedish language system. The emerging meaning of investigations in use in this study was about investigations offering unique opportunities to create differences that make a difference for involved persons. This meaning had focus not “only” on how the investigation ends in assessments and decisions but, in the highest possible degree, on how the investigations were carried out – on interaction, communication and the changing-processes in the investigation. Investigations can be seen as fora for the voice of the child to be more heard and increase his/her network’s understanding of the child and his/her perspective. The social worker invites dialogical collaboration and partnership in facilitating
the voice of the child to be heard, both in the network and in relation to the social workers, aiming to support the child and the parents on how to go on and if an intervention from the social welfare is needed, how the social workers can assist and support the process.

In the study, as has appeared earlier in this chapter, there were no aims to try to catch a certain meaning of coaching, neither any logic in use that supported an idea like that. Here, the living idea and logic in use were to explore the living, the meanings in the current topic of practice addressing what was further to come (Bakhtin, 1986, Wittgenstein, 2001). In next chapter follows another example of living meanings in this study – about the emerging action research.
3. A Dialogical Participatory Action Research tour

In this chapter I am creating an outline of my tour (actually our tour) of researching of coaching in partnership with the participating social workers and managers in seven municipalities and in collaboration with the County. The start, the route and the finish are all in the language and all continues in the language…

… the language turn draw our attention to the way knowledge is a social construction; the action turn accepts this, and asks us to consider how we can act in intelligent and informed ways in a socially constructed world. (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b, p.2)

3.1 Dialogical and social constructionist ideas in language


Other living ideas are that words and narratives are given their meanings in use and are contextually associated (see chapter Language in use) (Shotter, 2005e, Bakhtin, 1986, Wittgenstein 2001). Thus, I am approaching the language as if it
has no “one and only” purport of the words. The language, nor any dictionary or handbook, does not own the meaning of words. The dictionary gives one meaning, a suggestion or an opportunity, a direction in which the meaning could be of use in the living language (Vygotsky, 1979). The meaning is co-created in the unique use of the language in the communication of the participants. That is also the way I have approached the meaning of practice and research, of DC, AR and PAR, etc. Thus, and also with reference to the following quotation, I have not puzzled my head with establishing the differences between different definitions of research, of AR and PAR, but focused on the meaning co-created from within this study.

… action research is participative research, and all participative research must be action research. (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2)

Action research cannot work from a position where the main flow of impulses moves from general theory to local action (Gustavsen, 2008). We must move away from theory-based approaches to ones more rooted in people’s practice (Shotter, 2005c).

Along with the movement from a point of departure in one grand theory of work and organization and to the present focus on making social change out of initially scattered local developments, there has been a successive shift in the formal and informal patterns of organisation in the action research establishment itself. While in the beginning all activities were thought to emanate from one theory with one intellectual centre, the present pattern is built on a substantial number of research groups, each group relating to its own set of local actors and running its projects and building its theories on an autonomous basis. ‘The general’ has to emerge out of this process, as a part of the process of practical link-ups. The point is not to make general theory out of limited local experience but to make limited
local experience interact with other limited local experiences to constitute broader waves of development. (Gustavsen, 2008, p. 433)

In the action projects of the County of Scania, it became important that the research in use supported and strengthened the empowering and mobilizing movements in the rest of our practice from within the projects. It was important that the practice of research emerged hand in hand with the processes in the rest of the emerging practice. This became mutual processes of joint actions creating expanding and diffusing effects as well as intensifying the progress and the processes. I saw and see this interplay as a *dialogical tour of teamwork and interplay*. We became travellers on a tour of joint actions in a practice of not only theory or practice but a mixture which, further on in this chapter, I liken to the interplay in cycling in a peloton in a cycling tour – a polyphony of voices and actions and other things in a joint action of dialogical interplay.

The study became …

… much more a matter of imagining and grasping new *possibilities* than a matter of understanding current *actualities*. (Shotter, 2004c in conclusions).

Where we …

… fashioned between [ourselves], dialogically, new shared, and sharable, sense of how [we] *might* go on together to act in new ways. In other words, the issue here [was] not a matter of *discovery* but of *creation* (Shotter, 2005c, p. 150).

### 3.2 The research issue

Action research (AR) is a form of practitioner research dealing with tasks and changing processes in the world – in everyday practice (Denscombe, 2009) – in
the everyday conduct of our lives (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b). It requires actions as an integral part of the research process itself and necessarily insider research, in the sense of practitioners researching their own professional actions (McNiff et al., 1996).

The ideas in Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Whyte, 1991) seemed to be convenient, especially as I indeed were participating, both in the practice of DC and of research, as well as all the participating social workers in DC.

Gradually, I also find good reasons to add Dialogical to Participatory Action Research (DPAR), illustrating how the interplay emerged in this study, in our local version of action research (more about that in this chapter).

With many actors involved and many voices heard, the narratives about DPAR would vary. So, when I try to answer the question ‘What is DPAR?’ in this chapter, or rather ‘What became of DPAR?’, it will be my understanding and the meaning which emerged for me in the study.

My narrating starts with a similar answer as Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury had (Reason and Bradbury, 2006a, 2006b) to the question ‘What is action research?’:

– There is neither a short nor a right answer to the question.

Peter Reason’s and Hilary Bradbury’s give a working definition that action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.
3.3 *Dialogical Participatory Action Research*

With the purpose of exposing, what unfolded as DPAR, I use some quotations about AR and DPAR as a springboard.

Action research starts from quite a different position than the conventional model of pure research …

> … in which researchers serve as professional experts, designing the project, gathering data, interpreting the findings, and recommending action to the client organization. […] In PAR, some of the members of the organization we study are actively engaged in the quest for information and ideas to guide their future actions. (Whyte, 1991, p.20)

The researcher’s knowledge becomes …

> … another resource to be applied to the issue investigated and stands alongside the knowledge and understanding of other people whose deep and extended experience in the setting provides knowledge resources that might be applied to the solution of the problem investigated. (Stringer and Genat, 2004, p. 27)

PAR contrasts sharply with the most common type of applied research (Whyte, 1991):

> … some of the people in the organization or community under study participate actively with the professional researcher throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of results and discussion of their action implication (Whyte, 1991, p. 20)
These quotations both have aspects in common with the research emerging in this study and aspects that seem to be quite different.

### 3.3.1 Both – and practice

In this study, the meaning in use for participatory action research was that participation in the actions in DC and in relation to DC was intertwined with the participation in the research and vice versa.

### 3.3.2 “Loose membership”

All the participating 55 social workers in DC also participated in the action research. When they began in DC they also entered the research process. This means that they started in different phases of the study and also ended their participation at different times and of different reasons. Some of them changed jobs, moved to other places, retired or went on parental leave and other things in life. After DC they continued to participate in different meetings of reflecting in groups and network meetings if they wanted to. Some of them, 18 in total (plus one social worker from a municipality not included in the County’s projects), continued as co-researchers. This was both about shifting and fluid membership (Hart and Bond, 1999) in a loosely bound relationship with one another.

### 3.3.3 Emergent developmental form

The processes in this study could not be described as going from an “initial design to the final presentations of results” as in one of the quotations above.

This study was more a tour on a winding road – an ongoing flow of living practice of research, social work and coaching, creating a mixture of phases of exploring, reflecting and analysing, spreading and diffusing results and new ideas, testing, outlining and re-orientations in how to go on (see figure 2 in the chapter Reflections and conclusions). The frequent preparation and production
of the six books published by the county, as well as the reading of the books, created natural punctuations of dialogues, regular phases of stop-look-listen, reflections and learning, in the study as well as a framework.

3.3.4 Practical issues
In the research process we had our own actions “under study”. We had practical issues to be explored, developing understandings of meanings in use and in the progress, reflecting and acting and vice versa. These led us onto new ways with new orientation on how to go on.

… action research is about working towards practical outcomes, and also about creating new understanding, since action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless. (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b, p. 2)

3.3.5 Travellers on a tour
We became researchers of our practice from within, using the metaphor of (cf. Morgan, 1986) a traveller on a tour from within my own practice (cf. Andersen, 2001).

… in the traveller metaphor the interviewer is a traveller on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told upon returning home. The interviewer-traveller wanders through the landscape and enters into conversations with the people he or she encounters. The traveller explores the many domains of the country, as unknown terrain or with maps, roaming freely around the territory. The interviewer-traveller, in line with the original Latin meaning of conversation as “wandering together with”, walks along with the local inhabitants, asking questions and encouraging them to tell their own stories of their lived world; some such as anthropologists, living
for a longer timer with their conversation partners. (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48)

A traveller concept leads to interviewing and analysis as intertwined phases of knowledge construction, with an emphasis on the narrative to be told to an audience (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The traveller derives from a post-modernistic, constructive approach to knowledge, leading to a dialogical perspective in research (Kvale, 1997).

3.3.6 Relationship on equal basis
As follower-traveller the relationship between the participants and me emanated from both a similar and quite different position than what I hear in the examples above. I approach the social workers as equal and so did they with me. We meet with mutual interest in each other, anticipated a future collaborative relation with one another rather than an investigation of them (or me). My background and identity as a social worker and many years of experience as a manager in social organisations probably made a difference in relation to the participants to join in. I easily joined their grammar (Wittgenstein, 2001) moving between different places, sectors and activities, in living space and hierarchies in the social workers’ arenas and other professional networks. Using Michel Foucault ideas of discursive practice (Foucault, 1972), this could be expressed as me moving, acting and talking from within the discourse and the relations of power. I used my experience and accustomedness to communicate in different contexts and from different positions.

In AR, insiders and outsiders join in a mutual learning process. The enabling mechanism for this is communication. New understandings are created through discourse between people engaged in the inquiry process. For this to occur, a mutually understandable discourse is required, and this is achieved through living together over time,
sharing experiences, and taking actions together. (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p.80)

3.4 Dialogical flow in interplay
I use dialogical in the meaning of living interaction; spontaneous, chiasmatical, mutual, expressive, embodied responsiveness (Shotter, 2002, 2004a, 2004b). Shotter uses the term chiasmic (Shotter, 2004e, 2005d) following Maurice Merleau–Ponty (2004), in the sense of intertwining one another in a mixture (Shotter and Gustavs, 1999). Dialogical interplay is about moving in a mutual living and expressive responsiveness, responding to and addressing one another, other and otherness in joint actions (Shotter, 1980, 2003b).

As living, embodied beings, we can, at each moment in our interactions with others and othernesses around us, not only ‘go out to meet them’, with the appropriate anticipations and expectations at the ready, but we can also have an evaluative and anticipatory sense of ‘where’ we are with them, and of ‘where next’ we might go with them – that is, we can have a shaped and vectored sense of how we are placed and how things are going for us in what we might call “the landscape of now”. (Shotter, 2004c, p.3)

The dialogical flows of these joint actions are processes difficult to account for. The outcome of any exchange cannot be traced back to the intentions of any of the individuals involved (Shotter, 2004c). The joint actions are impossible to divide and recognise from each other (Shotter, 1987). The dialogical reality constructed between them seems to “just happen” without an author, like if “a third agency is at work in all dialogical realities” (Shotter, 2004c, p.3).

With this view, to sort out and give account for when, where, who, what, why and how our actions unfolded during the years of actions and research become a
impossible (com)-mission. Metaphorically it could be seen as if we were in a ‘mishmash’ of relationships, of communication and interactions interweaved and entangled from within (with and in) our interplay. With the systemic view (epistemology) of circular reflexive connections (Lang, 1997) in use, to wind up and trace how the emerging ideas and the lived practice in the study expanded, would be to try to live backwards (Bateson, 1987).

3.4.1 The researching process as a voyage tour
As a way of unfolding the researching movements and emerging impacts in the projects and the research in question, the metaphor of going on a voyage tour, a cycling tour and riding in the peloton became helpful to me and hopefully to the reader as well. It is a tour where we have some ideas about the end-in-view beforehand (Dewey, 2007) and have sketched out some possible routes but mainly trust that new orientations on how to go on will emerge in the dialogical interplay between the participants as the tours goes on.

In the voyage tour I see how the participating social workers and I travelled, guided by the (re-)narrating of examples using (verbal) systemic signposts and directions in the action research – for example, the ideas of curiosity (Cecchin, 1987, Lang and McAdam, unknown-a), reflexivity (Pearce, 1994), co-construction and co-creation (Lang, 1991), dialogues as mutual spontaneously living communication in responsiveness (Shotter, 2002) and learning in actions in reflecting on and in reflections (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, Elliot, 2006). Other verbal signposts guiding me and giving orientation in DC were appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2003, 2005, Cooperrider et a., 2005), solution-focused course of action (de Shazer, 1997, de Shazer and Berg, 1997, Berg and Jong, 2003, Berg and Miller, 1996, Korman and Söderquist, 1994) and ideas in social constructionist (Burr, 1995) and narrative work (Morgan, 2004, White and Epston, 1990, 2000, Järvinen and Mik-Meyer, 2004, Payne, 2006).
The social secretaries, secretaries of fostercare homes and other social workers were, through and in the context of the action projects and the coaching, speaking more and more about dialogical and more democratic meetings where more voices were heard. New words came into use, showing increasing focus on and interest in systemic concepts and ideas: non-knowing position (Anderson, 1990, 1999), moral position (Lang and McAdam, 1994), the domains of actions (Lang et al., 1990), logic in use (Kaplan, 1964, Dewey, 1991), circular questioning (Penn, 1982, 1985, Tomm, 1989, 2000, Cronen and Lang, 1996), reflecting team (Andersen, 2003), open dialogue (Seikkula, 1996), dialogical meetings (Seikkula and Arnkil, 2005), narrating (White and Epston, 1990) and externalization (Karl Tomm, 1989), systemic stories and narratives (Lang and McAdam, 1994), different perspectives (Shotter, 1984), different voices heard (McAdam, 1995, Smith and Nylund, 1997) and language in use (Cronen and Lang, 1994). All introduced in the way I conducted DC and some of it in the project’s courses by KCCF. We were riding in an ocean of systemic ideas stopping at some of the possible halts of ideas, getting a sense of how much more there was to explore and highlight, catching a glimpse of how many other different directions there were to choose, but also finding inspiration and fresh support on how to go on.

The tour in the peloton could also be seen and used as an illustration of how our actions in the research were intertwined with movements and processes in the action projects (and vice versa) as well as in relation to our surroundings – the impact of other contexts in the present, in the past and expected in the future (cf. Coordinated Management of Meaning, CMM (Cronen, 1994, Pearce, 1999, Cronen et al., 2009).

3.4.2 A cycling tour in the peloton's joint action
Using this metaphor of a cycling tour, I chose to think of the researching process metaphorically as the joint action of cycling together in a peloton. In the peloton, I am cycling amongst all the other participants or some of them, and we are
going fast, a lot is happening. Sheltered from the wind (by the protection of the others around us) everything seems to go easy and smooth. Those in front are taking the brunt of the nasty wind, sucking and pulling us up to their speed. They have got the direction, how to go on, I am following the flow…

At the same time, I have to be very careful, paying a lot of attention to every movement implanted, flowing and streaming in the group. Every little movement of the other participants, especially from those in front of us, is transplanted and transformed in relation to everybody else in the peloton. I am sensitive to what is happening around me; the speed, fragrances, sounds and movements. I am paying attention and responding in relation to my surroundings, the condition of the roads, my body’s signals as well as from the bike. I am riding relaxed, not too tense in muscles and nerves; I let the bike go with me. I am enjoying the ride, the company, the flowers on the verges, the birds in the sky, the church towers in the horizon and the bike. We become like a unit body – the movements and the anticipatory ones are in us as an embodied whole of the peloton. I do not have to wait for my companions’ next moves or they don’t have to complete their moves before I can understand their message/response sufficiently for me to respond to it in practice and guiding me to know, or give an orientation of, how to go on, to understand where they might possibly move next (Shotter, 2008b). In this background of relational dynamic, a ceaseless flow of expressive-responsive, living, embodied activity spontaneously continuously, which occurs between us and the others and the othernesses around us in our meetings with them, as me on the bike in the peloton, we all carry out our daily lives (Shotter, 2004c). The joint actions are so closely interwoven and intertwined with each other and everything else and everybody else in the moment, so nobody can notice the differences or the parts or how they are being connected, influencing and mutually responding in the chiasmatic interaction. This is what happens in a dialogically involving communication. It is an imperceptible flow or movement you can sense – sense it in your body. Shotter calls it embodiment (Shotter, 2003a). Anne Hedvig Vedeler, Norwegian systemic family therapist, calls it resonance (Vedeler, 2008) – a resonance heard
and felt from within the field of the peloton, in the interplay between the riders, guiding and giving orientation on how to go on, respond and ride further.

3.5 The flow in the journey and stops for replenishment

The reflections we made and learning we got from within DC, about our own context and interplay, were strengthened and brought further in other meetings in the study, where we came together, stopped, looked, listened on the development and our progress on the whole, comprehensive. I have selected three different events\(^\text{12}\) (2005, 2006 and 2007) that could be seen as special stops for replenishment on our tour. When we stopped, looked, listened on these special occasions (Event I, II and III), this gave us important understanding and knowing on how to go on – refreshments and supplies for the continued ride. But so did the ride between the events as well as now in the on-going systemic network, see below. To promote meetings, organize in time and space, as well as narrating, stories told and created in the expectations and afterwards in a smile of recognition, create ‘ripples in the water’ effects (Gustavsen, 2008).

In the tour/study, we found out that it made a difference when the social workers turned directly to the child in person. This direct approach seemed to strengthen the child as an agent of her/his own both in the perspective of the child and his/her parents but also in the view of the participating social workers (Olsson, 2005a). It made an impact on all the relationships. These experiences brought me to another halt in the research tour. An idea emerged, that I as well, was going to have dialogues and listen directly to some of the children in the investigations. The social workers in Lund introduced me to twelve of the children in their work, twelve children who had given their consent (and their parents)\(^\text{13}\), to meet me and be interviewed about their experiences of dialogues with social workers and about participating in investigations.

\(^\text{12}\) Bakhtin used the notion of once occurrent event of being in the meaning of unique moments (Bakhtin1993).

\(^\text{13}\) Five boys and seven girls: One child aged five, three children 7-8 years old, two children 10-11 years old, four children 12-13 years old, one child 15 years old and one just moved from foster care, 20 years old. She decided for herself.
Two interviews were done in pairs and eight individually. Six were videotaped, three tape-recorded and one documented by my notes. The children decided how I was going to make the documentation. Those who chose video recordings, were later sent a DVD disc with his/her/their participation\textsuperscript{14}. I also sent drafts of the manuscript to the children and their parents (not to the parents of the 20 year old participant) for feedback and asked them for further consent on how to go on.

Another stop in this journey was when I explored 181 written investigations from four of the participating social organisations (Lund, Malmö, Svalöv and Trelleborg). 50 of the investigations were conducted in 2005 in Lund and 68 from 2007 – all conducted in the period of March – May on children. 30 were done in the same period in 2007 on adults in Lund. 10 were investigations conducted in Svalöv, 2 in Trelleborg and 20 were from Hyllie, Malmö. In these 20 from Hyllie, the social workers used the so-called “Children’s Book”, which they had developed in DC with ideas I brought from Dorothy Porter, KCCF, and Barnado’s, UK. These books increased the children’s involvement in the investigatory process and made the children’s voices and opinions heard in the texts (Olsson, 2008c).

3.5.1 Sources and springs in the tour
What I have done during this journey of dialogical and systemic action research is to trace, and together with participators, choose examples, ideas and narratives given in the context of the action projects and research which we experienced as striking or unique examples (Shotter, 2000, 2008b), useful for bringing the emerging ideas in the projects and the systemic ideas into further learning and developments, disseminating them as ripples on the water into new contexts.

\textsuperscript{14} Except from one child who did not want any DVD disc.
… we demonstrate a method, by examples, and the series of examples can be broken off. – … (Wittgenstein, 2001 extract from nr 133)

The examples emerged in different contexts: in dialogical conferences (cf. Shotter and Gustavsen, 1999), meetings with reflecting teams and delta-reflecting, in meetings with clients and from within the DC. It was examples that emerged for the social workers and/or for me as important and significant for the progress and impact of the projects and the study. The narratives of these examples, emerging in DC and in other meetings, became important for me to study more closely and hear other people’s understanding – that is the participants’ understanding and interpretations (Foote Whyte, 1991a). Involving the participants in the on-going analysing\(^\text{15}\) in the study; inviting to reflect and delta-reflect, to read excerpts of transcriptions or drafts of my manuscripts, to watch selected parts (I selected) of the video-recordings or other exercises aiming at making me hear other voices in understanding the progress and results of the study, became a further linking of the inquiry to the actions.

In the beginning of the study (2004 – 2005), all the participants were invited to and involved in these processes. When the number of participants grew I asked if there was anyone who wanted to become co-researchers. Since 2007 I have had a group of nineteen co-researchers\(^\text{16}\) ready to assist me in the study. In the end they have become key participants in the research process, supporting me in different ways. For example, they prepared, managed and conducted activities in delta-reflecting in meetings (for example in Event III). They have read drafts of writing, given their views (and new contributions) and expertise, guiding me on how to go on and where to have my focus in further research. This resulted in

\(^{15}\) In action research, analysing is constantly recurring (Elliot, 2001).

\(^{16}\) A social worker from the municipality of Skurup also joined the co-researcher group. He is a former student in systemic practice in Gothenburg and wanted to keep in touch with systemic ideas by participating in the Systemic Network of Southern Sweden.
some themes which became more frequent and steered me towards the following conclusions.

We have various habits of punctuating the stream of experience so that it takes on one or another sort of coherence and sense. (Bateson, 2000, p. 163)

Some of the participants chose (all were invited) to contribute in the research as co-authors and wrote papers of their own to me. I have chosen to render excerpts both from their written contributions and from their narrating in viva voce (excerpts from transcriptions of dialogues). I believe, using Catherine Riessman Kohler’s words:

In keeping with the constructionist approach that ultimately guided the research I wanted to avoid the usual transformation of ”data” into a written report that disembodied the subject and represented the results as a set of ”findings”. The solution that I adopted was to devote considerable space to excerpts from the interviews, which show how individuals themselves constructed their accounts. […] As I wrote I felt a tension between the sociologist’s interpretive voice and letting people’s own understandings speak for themselves, and when I had to choose, I sought to allow those I interviewed to speak on their own behalf. Quoting extensively from narratives and other qualitative replies allows the reader to see how individuals themselves make meaning out of loss – a problem that the methodology of survey research cannot address. (Riessman Kohler, 1990, p. 230)

All these contributions from the participants have not only been of great value for the development of the coaching and the conduct of the research, they have been indispensable, absolutely necessary, for the outcome of this study. However, when you/I involve participants, you/I also have to be ready to pay
attention to what they produce, highlight and ask for, as well as take into serious considerations what they want you/me to do or not do. So when I involve participants, as I have done so far, I have to be prepared to cut, change and re-write chapters, or as it happened in this study, half a manuscript of a book (Olsson, 2007b, 2007c). This is an important example of how I act from within the ethical domain as the dominating domain for my orientation in life.

3.6 Ethical considerations
There is always another way, another voice, another version we/I could have chosen. In this study, in progress for so many years, there have been a lot of different choices and decisions to be made. For me, the most important guiding principles, or verbal signposts, are the ethical code. This includes keeping my promises, striving to reach agreements in dialogical interplay with others and be very open with what and how I am working and the ideas I use.

In this study I have moved between working with individuals and groups of social workers in confidence, also according to the Official Secrets Act, and working as researcher collecting data, exploring the progress, analysing, making parts conspicuous and transparent, exposed for a larger audience. This means an enormous amount of considerations in relation to a large number of people in different aspects and in relation to organisations, professions, trades, cultures, gender, legislations, laws, and communities – the society.

My way of managing this complexity has been to stick to my guiding principles.

I am a trained social worker in Sweden, so called authorized socionom, and it is my duty to adhere to the ethical code for social workers (SSR, 2007). This ethical code is founded on very important values: human rights, humanity, solidarity, dignity and integrity, freedom and self-determination, democracy and participation, justice, equality. The social legislation is based on these same values, as is the County’s action projects.
For the County, the commissioner of this study, whose one of the most important task is to supervise and control the observance of the laws and regulations as well as all the participating social welfare organisations, our company and myself, it was, of course, very important that, in carrying out the projects and in conducting the involved research, all actions were consistent with the stipulated values and that ethical considerations were made at every step.

My participation, as researcher and systemic practitioner and coach and social worker and entrepreneur, was filled, as I mentioned above, with ethical considerations paying attention to different dimensions, different perspectives, different interests including concerns about how “this or that” would unfold on different levels for the participants, including me, and others involved or directly or indirectly influenced of our and my actions focusing on the children and other clients – both in general and in the cases in question in the study. How would “this or that” unfold on an individual/group/organisational/professional/cultural/societal level?

Thus, my considerations and questions often led me, naturally, into open-ended answers.

3.6.1 Safety device
The contracts of the commissioners stipulated me as the principal agent. The contracts also required our company, AMOVE AB, to ensure that appropriate scientific expertise was available for me. This was secured internally from Sven-Erik Olsson and externally from John Shotter at KCCF. Sven-Erik Olsson also ran the back office. This included processing recordings (from tape to CD/DVD) and maintaining data security/integrity.

AMOVE AB and their employees are responsible for preserving records as long as required by law and business requirements. This usually means a period of 10 years. The preservation of records is secured by keeping them in a locker. When no one is attending our house the alarm is activated. The security firm Securitas
monitors the alarm. Media that may contain identity data is kept in the locker when not in use. An exception is email. E-mail is kept on computers. The computers are regularly backed up. The hard disk backup is kept in the locker and the computers are protected by passwords. The computers used for email are UNIX-based which to our knowledge is the most secure OS-base available. Media such as CDs and DVDs have clearly marked text indicating agreed level of disclosure.

Due to the effect of company law and the stipulations in the contract between the Board and AMOVE AB the “default” level of protection for the participants is actually higher than what is recommended in the Swedish codes for research that apply for research grants.

3.6.2 Confidentiality
To protect participating organisations from disclosure was in this study a futile event. The Board reported on the projects separately to the government and the participating municipalities were never a secret – on the contrary. It is customary that organisations that participate in projects financed by the Board are invited to talk about their experiences at conferences arranged by the Board and/or other interested organisations, which they also did (see examples in the chapter narratives from within DC). All participating organisations have in fact promised the Board and showed an interest in publicly announcing that they were a part of the research study. They have welcomed the opportunity to develop in the new direction.

In the beginning of a contact with a new individual participant in the study, I as coach and responsible representative from AMOVE AB both set the context with the managers of the organization in question and with the participants personally. The agreements included ethical considerations (among other things), such as confidentiality, consent, co-creation and the research.
I always asked the participants about his/her view on participating in the research and continuously respectfully took into consideration the participants’ opinion about participating in the research. If a participant asked, I left out parts or special aspects of his or her contributions and activities in DC. I sent the participants drafts of and information about my further use of what they had said, written or done somehow, how and what I had written. I sent them both drafts and completed manuscripts giving them opportunities to respond and ask me to leave out or change parts if they so wished. This way of opening up opportunities to change at the very last moment put me in great trouble several times. Once I had to re-write almost a whole manuscript just before I was going to leave it for publishing. Twice I had to make new arrangements and new agreements with parents of participating children before I could use the children’s narratives and drawings.

At the same time, all these steps and considerations ensured that the participants really gave their approval and consented to what I was doing, not only in the beginning when we set the context for the collaboration and made a contract with the participating clients (these were also documented in written and signed documents) but throughout the entire journey.

3.6.3 Trustworthiness and authenticity
When you act from a basis, from a paradigm, where everyday reality cannot be captured in absolute truth or a valid picture, you need other methods and criteria than the positivistic reliability – and validity criteria to secure the quality in the projects and the research.

Qualitative research methods assume that there is no single reality. Rather, the nature of reality is defined by the interaction of the researcher with the phenomenon under study. Researchers should take advantage of, rather than avoid, applying their own perceptions and assumptions to the research study. To accurately represent that which is studied, researchers must also enter into
the participant’s world. Therefore, qualitative researchers stress intensive, real-world interaction … (Mark, 1996, p.61)

Reliability is dealing with the consistency of the results and the validity about if the study is exploring what it is supposed to explore (Kvale, 1997). Lincoln and Guba (1989) suggested two fundamental criteria for the assessment of qualitative research and inquiry, namely trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness could be assessed from criteria of being authentic, transferable, reliable and if it is possible to verify and confirm every phase of the study (Bryman, 2002). Lincoln and Guba write about establishing trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability and how to establish this in inquiring research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Both the trustworthiness and authenticity in this study can be assessed based on, for example, how the narratives in the study have been created, understood and used, how I made them accessible for other assessments and how the reader can follow this as well as how the development and the results have emerged and are accounted for. The study’s trustworthiness and authenticity increased from the way I have reproduced and depicted varied citations from the interviews and the narrating in the coaching conversations and other meetings with the participants, including the interviews I have done with clients. There are also several examples of glimpses of the dialogues that I have transcribed. There are both examples from conversations where I as the coach have participated and examples of dialogues where the social workers have talked about the coaching without me. Some of the participating social workers have written their own contributions to the research and all of them have participated in videotaped conversations about the coaching and their use of the coaching and the systemic ideas.

The requirement for the assessment of this study’s trustworthiness and authenticity might essentially also be increased from the way I have chosen to present the documentation of the processes and the narrating in interviews,
coaching sessions and other meetings. I have taped and video-recorded almost every meeting. I prefer the latter because I find it easier and more stimulating to follow and hear the conversations when I can also see the persons talking and watch the interaction. Especially when, as it was in this study, I am going to study hundreds of hours of conversations. However, most of the recorded material from everyday coaching sessions is only tape-recorded, because there are only a few persons participating (mostly one social worker, sometimes a couple, and myself). Larger meetings and special occasions of reflecting on the coaching using delta-reflecting teams (see the chapter *Introduction*), for example the meeting on September 14th 2007, were videotaped. I also encouraged the participating social workers to make their own written contributions, reflecting, exploring and narrating from DC and emerging examples in relation to DC. Twelve of the participants did write and I have in chapter *Narratives from within DC* used and presented in total eight extracts from their written contributions. Thus, I have chosen to use several methods and perspectives – triangulation – in exploring and comparing different meanings and understandings (Mark, 1996, Mason, 1996).

### 3.7 Invitation of participants

The choices for example of which municipalities and which social offices to invite, how many social workers and managers and who and so on, were made by the County Administrative Board in consultation with the leaders of the organisations in question.

Prospective participants were invited by the County Administrative Board representative (the project leader), approaching agencies asking if they thought employees would be interested in participating. A conference was arranged with the staff in each municipality where I was introduced. The project leader informed the participants (to be) as to the values, ideas, goals and conditions of the project, including the participation in collaborative research and opening up for reflections and further dialogue. It was in these meetings that the participating social workers and I started our on-going dialogue about how to
collaborate in developing and conducting both systemic coaching and participatory action research, as well as developing and improving the social worker’s practice. It was stressed that collaboration was not a formal setting but contingent upon involvement and dialogue.

A procedure has been developed to ensure that participation is informed and voluntary while maintaining openness. Participants were asked personally and each time if they would like to proceed, and if they agreed, by which means to proceed. In the further developments, municipality agencies themselves approached the project leader or the researcher concerning possibilities to participate. There was nothing to gain from standardising recruiting other than to ensure that participation was voluntary, informed and enjoyed. This was not a project where the power of numbers has any bearing other than to secure that there is sufficient variation in terms of municipalities. Since much social work is (g)local and contingent upon geographical and demographical conditions efforts have been made to ensure that small, middle and large municipalities with regards to area and population were “represented”.

Initially, four different municipalities were represented as a result of the invitations. Two more were added by request. Another three were subsequently added due to a second and third invitation. A total of 55 social workers have participated, 44 women and 11 men, in different ages. A total of 12 clients, children, participated in the interviews I conducted. I explored in whole 181 written investigations from four of the participating municipalities (Lund, Hyllie, Svalöv and Trelleborg).

No record was kept of how many clients participated in the action projects through their social workers participation.
Table 4 The Sample Participants in the research studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Title</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children</td>
<td>The Administration of the County Board and the municipalities of Hässleholm, Lund, Malmö (Hyllie), Svalöv, Tomelilla and Trelleborg</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Individual in the Chain of Care – Investigation and Participation.</td>
<td>The Administration of the County Board and the municipalities of Bjuv, Lund and Trelleborg</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| coaching | 12 |
| clients | 151 |
| investigations | 30 |

When clients were approached the first contacts were always done through the social worker. The social worker informed the client and invited him/her to contact the researcher. In the event that a child was involved, the parents were informed and measures were taken to secure that they agreed to a contact. A business card and/or a letter of information were handed over, containing the information needed to make the contact. If a child was involved, cards and letters were given to parent(s) and child. If the client rejected the invitation, did not accept the card or the letter, or did not contact the researcher nothing further was done. There was no second attempt made. Once the client made contact, or asked for contact the information about the project was given.

As interviewer and researching coach I negotiated individual agreements about the conditions and about my further use of the participants’ contributions. I was given permission to use their contributions for my work and research now and in the future, always with ethical considerations in view. For me, it was important to open up possibilities for further contact, if someone should want to renegotiate or add something, which also happened (see below).
Almost everyone I asked expressed enthusiasm about participating in the research, even though they did not always want me to use everything they said or did in the context of the coaching. A majority of the participants also accepted recordings of the conversations in the coaching. If they showed the slightest sign of not wanting to be recorded I gave up the idea of recording and made written notes afterwards – except for the parts of meetings when the participants did not want to have any documentation. This was mostly for personal reasons – private aspects in life and relations. As agreed, I did not make any documentation of those parts and are not using or exploring the content of those dialogues in the research at all.

You never know how something you have said or written will be used in another context by somebody else, one of the participant children said to me. I think this is a very important statement and consideration for my writing and my use of data. Even if I am asking the participants for their consent and what they want me to consider, I have a responsibility of my own to make special consideration about how I think data, examples, statements, etc., could be read and used “in other contexts”, with new meanings and in other interests than mine. So, even if I had their consent I chose to use the no-name option in the dissertation\textsuperscript{17}.

Participating in courses and official projects as a professional in the public sector does not give you an immediate right of protection of your identity in Sweden. However, we were all bound to professional secrecy in relation to the clients. About the secrecy in relation to themselves, the social workers put their trust in me. I promised that I would not disclose their identities in relation to what they had done or said if they did not want to. I promised to continue conferring about my further use (in the research and the documenting books) and communicating what I was going to use, and how, if there was something which had unfolded in relation to the social worker in question.

\textsuperscript{17} For example, instead of their names I called the social workers “social worker” in combination with a number or letter (in alphabetical order).
I gave all the participants opportunities to influence, stop or suggest changes in my text, sending them drafts and extracts from transcriptions of dialogue from meetings they had taken part in. Only a few of them contacted me asking for changes. I have always taken into consideration comments and remarks from participants. It has been very important for me to take an ethical stand every step of the way from beginning to end.

**3.8 A model of DPAR**

Below, I have sketched out some punctuations in an attempt to further reveal how and to what DPAR emerged to in this unique study and in these local conditions and circumstances – the meaning used and reflexively emerging in this study and context. These punctuations have guided me in my actions in relation to the participating social workers and others in the study.

They have grown from within several sources in my practice and from the literature review I did in the study. I read and became influenced of for example: Elliot (2001), Stringer (1999), Whyte (1991) and (Zuber-Skerritt (1996) (not mentioned below).

1. A participatory, emancipatory and democratic process, concerned with developing practical knowing from within actions, aiming to improve practice – informed, committed, intentional actions with a worthwhile purpose. “Action research is wedded to the idea that change is good” (Denscombe, 2009, p.124).

2. To make explicit and transparent the processes through which the knowing and the impact are emerging – systematic inquiry made public – the processes and the results as open and accessible as possible.

3. To bring together action and reflection, theory and practice – create new forms of understandings “since action without reflection and
understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b, p.2).

4. To research “… with, for and by the involved persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sensemaking that informs the research, and in the actions that is its focus” (Reason and Bradbury, 2006b, p.2).

5. “… it is necessarily insider research, in the sense of practitioners researching their own professional actions” (McNiff et al., 1996, p.14).

6. Cyclic processes where actions, reflections and inquiries are interwoven in dialogical conversations and interplay, creating new responsive understandings of ways of going on, giving new orientations pointing towards another kind of future (Shotter, 2004c) – open-ending outcome (Hart and Bond, 1999).

Below, I have tried to outline a figure of the cyclic processes in the ongoing flow of living. The figure is not doing justice to how intertwined the different phases become in each other nor does it show the endless amount of variations emerging in the interplay. It could both be read as an illustration of the conducted DPAR and DC.
This research was conducted from within the practice and vice versa – the practice was conducted from within the research. It was not applied research with a separation between thoughts and actions (Greenwood and Levin, 1998) or theory and practice (Shotter, 2005c). Valid knowing was derived from practical reasoning engaged from within the actions (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). The unfoldings in the practice were integrated with the research and vice versa – in joint actions (see the sections about the dialogical flow in the peloton) – and the participants, including myself as coach, were researching practitioners. I acted as coach to facilitate both DPAR and DC at the same time.

### 3.9 Summarizing the DPAR tour

The research presented in the chapter was conducted from within the practice of social work and vice versa – the practice was conducted from within the research in an ongoing flow of actions. It was not applied research with a separation between thoughts and actions or theory and practice. The unfoldings in practice were integrated research in social practice and vice versa. The metaphor of going on a voyage tour, a cycling tour with the participants riding in the peloton describes the dialogical flow of joint actions, chiasmatically intertwined and
mutual involved in one another in mutual, living responsiveness, giving new orientation and new directions in how to go (in the tour of life, social work and/or research).

The reflections made and learning from within DC were strengthened and brought further in other meetings in the study, where the participants came together, stopped, looked, listened on the development and the progress on the whole, comprehensive. In using language systemic ideas and reflecting teams, as Tom Andersen used them (Andersen, 19, 2003) so call \textit{delta-reflecting teams} emerged. In Swedish, the word ‘\textit{delta}’ is used both in the meaning of ‘participate’ or ‘share’ as well as the dividing of the mouth of a river in several river channels. The reflecting grow and flow over into what we can call several outflows and inflows of narrating. This gave important understanding and knowing on how to go on – refreshments and supplies for the continued ride. But so did the ride \textit{between} the meetings as well as now in the on-going systemic network. In this the idea emerged to interview some of the children in the investigations. Twelve of the children were interviewed about their experiences of dialogues with social workers and about participating in investigations. Another stop in the journey was the exploration of 181 written investigations.

In the journey was traced, together with participating social workers, examples, ideas and narratives given in the context of the action projects and research which we experienced as \textit{striking} or unique examples (Shotter, 2000, 2008b), useful for bringing the emerging ideas in the projects and the systemic ideas into further learning and developments, disseminating them as ripples on the water into new contexts. The examples emerged in different contexts: in dialogical conferences (Shotter and Gustavsen, 1999), meetings with reflecting teams and delta-reflecting, in meetings with clients and from within the DC.

It was examples that emerged for the participants as important and significant for the progress and impact of the projects and the study. The narratives of these examples, emerging in DC and in other meetings, became important to study
more closely and hear other people’s understanding – that is the participants’ understanding and interpretations (Foote Whyte, 1991a). Involving the participants in the on-going analysing in the study; inviting to reflect and delta-reflect, to read excerpts of transcriptions or drafts of my manuscripts, to watch selected parts of the video-recordings or other exercises aiming other voices to be heard in understanding the progress and results of the study, became a further linking of the inquiry to the actions and to know how to go on in the DPAR voyage tour.

In all, 55 social workers in seven municipalities participated in the dialogical participatory action research (DPAR) study, developing coaching and improving the dialogical interaction in social investigations. In the study these processes became metaphorically talked about as going on cycling voyage tour riding in the peloton. In this dynamic flow of dialogical collaborative joint actions we found the direction how to go on exploring, reflecting, dreaming, designing, delivering, inquiring and learning by doing and reflecting in the actions (see figure 2) It became a tour of refreshing stops where we were looking into the social work practice, inquiring, with an appreciative approach, from within dialogical collaboration.
4. Dialogue coaching

Dialogue coaching, as I had named the unfolding dialogical collaboration from within the coaching in the study I later found out, was already an established phenomenon in a quite different context than social work: the movie industry and show business.

“What does a dialogue coach do?” I asked.

[…] What-does-a-dialogue-coach-do was a question that would start a new career for me, launch me into forty years of film work, and thrust me up with the stars, although then, back in 1964 in Paris, I hadn’t the foggiest notion of what a dialogue coach was.

“Well”, said Parrish, “a dialogue coach rehearses the actors, gets them prepared before they reach the camera”.

(Becker, 2004, pp. 1-2)

This form might also be called rehearsal coaching and/or performance coaching (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003, Whitmore, 2002). Neither is all that far from what sometimes emerged in the DC of this study. My task as coach was to encourage and stimulate the participators to increase their self-awareness and consciousness about their own abilities, skills and methods in use. At the same time, it was important in performance of practice to just “let it happen!” otherwise we might have risked making too much of an effort, focusing on technique more than responses and awareness in the situation (Gallwey, 1997, 1981). As John Dewey points out:

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18 *Awareness skills* increase our ability to focus our minds non-judgmentally in the present moment, on details relevant to our purpose (Gallwey, 1981).

19 *Letting* it happen is not *making* it happen. It is not *trying* hard. It is about ”trust thyself” (Gallwey, 1997).
… while if he accompanies his performance with conscious statement of some form of procedure (outline, topical analysis, list of headings and subheadings, uniform formula) his mind is safeguarded and strengthened. As a matter of fact, the development of an unconscious logical attitude and habit must come first. A conscious setting forth of the method logically adapted for reaching an end is possible only after the result has first been reached by more unconscious and tentative methods, while it is valuable only when a review of the method that achieved success in a given case will throw light upon a new, similar case. (Dewey, 1991, p.113)

Sometimes we rehearsed in preparation of new meetings, learning to learn (cf. Bateson, 2000), developing and improving skills and our capacity for different unfoldings. We highlighted methods and techniques that were easy to combine with a strengthening and appreciative approach, having in (my) mind the reflexive influence between used approach, method and techniques (Burnham, 1992). From a systemic point of view, we explored different ways of doing, emphasising multiplicity, avoiding one dominating alternative as the “truth”, including avoiding talk about right or wrong. Instead we concentrated on inquiring and exploring the logic in use, investigating examples and statements from different points of view and perspectives, creating new alternative systemic stories, hypothesising stories, increasing our curiosity in the idea(s) in use, especially when somebody is doing or saying something strange and/or striking (Bateson, 2000, 19887, Cecchin, 1987, Boscolo et al., 1990, Lang and McAdam 1994). Thus I could also have named DC Appreciative Coaching (AC), seeing that many of the fundamental premises from the work of David Cooperrider and his colleagues make the foundation of DC. Through the use of appreciative

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20 Cf. The essence of awareness skills is learning to see things as they are – that is non-judgmentally. When a golfer sees his swing in terms of “good” or “bad” he will not have a clear picture of it as it is. Awareness never judge; only Self I does. True awareness is like a flawless mirror; this principle is basic to Inner Game understanding. Awareness is curative only when there is no judgment, and when it is combined with purpose, effective action and learning can take place (Gallwey, 1981).
language we focus on existing strengths and distinctive competencies similar to for example behavioural coaching (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was developed within the area of organisation and management (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2003, 2005) and can be used in all sorts of contexts (Hammond, 1996, Hornstrup and Loehr-Petersen, 2001) and in appreciative dialogues (Bergman and Blomqvist, 2004). Analogous to AI is solution-focused brief therapy in family therapy. Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer and their colleagues developed solution-focused brief therapy in Milwaukee (Berg and Szabó, 2005, Berg, 1991). Appreciative coaching, brief coaching (Berg and Szabó, 2005), coaching to solutions (Pemberton, 2006) and solution-focused coaching (Jackson and McKergow, 2007) – there are several forms of coaching in the systemic practice. In the dialogue coaching I am doing, we are using solution-led thinking and using most of the principles of a solution-focused approach (cf. Lipchik, 2002). For example the idea of approaching and working together with the client as expert in his/her own life and some of the, in solution-focused context used term, rules (Berg and Szabó, 2005, Berg and Miller, 1996):

— If it is not broken DO NOT TRY TO MEND IT!
— When you know what works DO MORE OF IT!
— If it doesn’t work, stop doing it. DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT!

Through reflections on the practice (examples, narratives, video recordings and joint actions in meetings) and reflections in actions of our present context (the present – here and now) within the coaching, we try to increase our awareness of co-creating meanings in our use of language (Bakhtin, 1991, Vygotsky, 1979, Wittgenstein, 2001). We also try to improve (through rehearsing and preparing ourselves for performances – and through reflecting in our new use – increasing our awareness) our use of dialogical involved conversation in spontaneous mutual living embodied and expressive responsiveness (Shotter, 2004c). For us this became to stay/be in the presence and to use all our senses improving our
awareness and listening “here-and-now” – to trust our gut feeling – in the mutual interplay and responding in dialogical conversations.

The social workers and I explored different examples from their practice – examples or moments that the social worker identifies as striking or as special events which brought forth the learning. We focused both on what was working and successful and, unlike solution-focused coaching, explored difficulties and (what was told about as) failings. The use of the expression striking examples comes from Shotter (2000, 2008b) connecting to Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 2001):

… we should see the use of striking examples – as provocative of new reactions – as one of Wittgenstein’s central methods in his attempt to teach us the practicalities of doing his kind of philosophical investigations into our practices, examples we ‘get into’. (Shotter, 2004b, p. 1)

In a Swedish context the expression “being struck” is a common metaphoric expression which I often use in questions within the context of coaching, noticing that this seems to increase the responsiveness in the dialogue.

129. The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one’s eyes.) The real foundations of his enquiry do not strike a man at all. Unless that fact has at some time struck him. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 50)

The joint search for striking moments seems to help the participants to “Stop – Look – Listen” in their memories within the contexts of the coaching process (Dewey, 2007, Arendt, 1978, Shotter, 2005g). I am asking them for details in the
moment, often in chronological order and in small steps. The purpose is also to bring the participants into the situation, remembering from within (Shotter, 2000), to seek participatory understanding, avoiding an approach from the outside as observers (Shotter, 2004b). For example:

- When you went for that visit, who accompanied you?
- How did you go there?
- What were you talking about?
- Where did you go?
- What did you notice immediately when you arrived?
- Who was meeting you?
- How did they welcome you?
- What did he/she say?
- How was the place?
- Did you notice anything special/different?
- What did you do?
- Who else was there?
- Who was talking to whom?

What I am doing here has a lot in common with brief and solution-focused coaching. Questions of similar type are used in setting the contexts in beginnings and in increasing the co-operation between coach and participant (Berg and Szabó, 2005). The use of open questions, such as What? Who? When? Where? How?, also connects to Motivational Interviewing (MI) (Rollnick and Miller, 1995, Miller, 1996) which both the Swedish National Institute of Public Health

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21 The other way in which we can arrive at a comprehensive view of the whole responsive order within which we live and share our lives with others, is through participating in with them all in creating that order – but participating in it in certain special ways that help us to acquire a reflexive awareness of some aspects at least of its nature. Our explorations have been aimed at increasing our awareness of our own involvements in creating, elaborating, and refining such an order. The form of understanding to which involvements give rise is that of a relationally-responsive kind. It is a kind of understanding democratically distributed throughout the whole order within it has its being. It is an understanding of a much ‘fuller’ or ‘deeper’, i.e., more ordered kind, than given by a system of propositions imposed upon it, externally (Shotter, 2004b).
(2008) and the National Board of Health and Welfare recommend (Socialstyrelsen, 2007a).

The primary tool of communication and of intervention in brief and solution-focused coaching, as well as in several other forms of coaching, is asking questions (Berg and Szabó, 2005). Maintaining a posture of curiosity, asking questions, exploring different views, aspects and perspectives, are also distinguished features of systemic practice. This is told about (using position-theory (Harré and van Langenhove, 1999)) as maintaining a position of not-knowing (Anderson, 1990, 1999, Anderson and Goolishian, 2001) – one of the “rules” or fundamental assumptions and principles that underpin solution-focused work (Berg and Szabó, 2005, Jackson and McKergow, 2007). Asking questions rather than telling the client or the coachee what to do is also connected to certain pedagogic ideas, among them learning by doing and freedom to learn (Dewey, 1980, 1997, Freire, 1972, Hooks, 1994). Myles Downey argues for non-directive coaching, which rely on the capacity of individuals to learn for themselves, to think for themselves and be creative (Downey, 2003). Others argue that there is a range of techniques, from non-directive to directive that can be used depending upon the readiness of the learner (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005b). The principles upon which non-directive coaching is founded first came to prominence as The Inner Game by Harvard educationalist and tennis expert Timothy Gallwey (1997, 1981, 2001). The word ‘inner’ was used to indicate the player’s internal state or voice. Many coaches of latter days are referring to Gallwey and claiming to extend his ideas (for example: Whitmore, 2002, Downey, 2003, Whitworth et al., 1998).

I often interview the coaching participant so that he or she tells a narrative, story or account about his/her practice. Together we reflect on what the participant has said – about the actions in the practice of the participants, about the story told (or not told) and in the end, about our own actions within the coaching. We learn and develop both our skills of making inquiries, using questions and our curiosity, our storytelling and narrating as well as the practice of social work and
of coaching. Learning by reflection in action and on action I relate to Donald Schön’s concepts of “reflection-in-action” and “reflection-on-action” (Schön, 2002, 1987). Schön, as well as Paulo Freire, attach great importance to the connection between action and reflection for learning and development (Freire, 1972). Freire claims that learning cannot be done for anyone but together with (Freire, 1978). Reflecting/reflective coaching relates to how we create different meanings of our experiences (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003). It is through language we make our realities (Burr, 1995). Within the dialogue in the coaching we explore different use of language and words (see chapter 2 Language in use), we explore different meanings in use and co-create new meanings out of our experience, generating new distinctions and creating new stories narrating. Language shapes the reality. In DC we explored the stories, the narratives and the language in use. I, as the coach, challenged and inspired the participants to reflect both on the language in use, beliefs and assumptions, and to create new meanings and stories – narrative constructions – using the language (de Hann and Burger, 2005). The idea in use in dialogue coaching is to realize an open dialogue with open space and atmosphere for unique responsiveness in spontaneous and mutual co-creation in the conversation (Seikkula, 1996, Seikkula and Arnil, 2005).

4.1 Systemic DC in practice
The commissioners’ choice of main method in the projects was systemic coaching and dialogical conversation. They wanted me to customize/tailor the coaching so as to fit for the individual case and the individual social worker and his/her working conditions and environment. This meant that I was supposed to follow and stand by for whatever emerged and unfolded in the chosen cases, in relation to the social workers, exploring, from within DC, the uniqueness of the unfolding progress. Thus what emerged in DC and what DC became grew from within a mutual interplay, in collaboration, with the participating social workers and their cases. Here is an example of how the social workers were talking about their participation in DC and what they appreciated in this.
This example, as well as other examples which I have chosen to highlight in the study, could be seen as a form of ideal type, which is formed from characteristics and elements of a given phenomena but is not meant to correspond to all of the characteristics of any particular case (Eneroth, 1984). With this I mean that the examples contains both unique quotes and, at the same time, represent quotes that could be seen as typical for what was heard in the narrating about DC in the study. The quotes has been expressed by social worker A, B and C and could have been or have been said by other participants – however perhaps not using the same words.

Extract (my translated transcription) from one of the events with participating social workers delta-reflecting on the DC and what had emerged in relation to the DC (Event II 2006 and group 2).

Social worker A: – I think it was so exciting to set the focus like this – not to pick it up only once because you yourself have chosen it for supervision once and then ever again. Here it was something you should do, it was an ongoing process, continuousness, you really follow what emerges and how. That knowledge gives much more in relation to other cases too.

Social worker B: – Yes, it does. All the time retelling/re-narrating and with due consideration what you have done and are going to do. When you explore it afterwards it somehow gets into you. It feels more somehow. For me this became very important. I am not very good at narrating and she has assisted me lots and lots.

Social worker C: – So I am considering this too now in the end. Some of this we did talk about, that it could feel as if the dialogue became rubbish and as if I was not important at all in the meeting [with the boy in the case in DC]. He has come for the conversations and I thought, this has not been so good for him but when we were going to end our contact he said: – Yes, but I don’t
want to end this. Then I had been important after all. If we had done it differently, would it have been the same?

Social worker A: – He must have experienced that somebody – you – noticed him.

Social worker C: – Yes, exactly, he wanted the contact to continue.

Social worker B: – And before this invitation we instead only had cleared it with the parents …

Social worker C: – Exactly, it was super – this has given me a lot of aha-experiences [understandings] during this time.

Social worker B: – In reality it is not so difficult this coaching – […] – or?

Social worker A: – No, this is how we work.

Social worker B: – Exactly – how easy it becomes when you return to the simple – this is not difficult. This is something we could continue with and do with one another – of course it would not be the same as when Ann-Margreth is doing this – but in the same spirit. To assist each other – coaching one another. That would also be training in what is emerging in the room – to re-narrate this – awareness is not so easy …

Social worker A: – To be in training to put in words [what you are doing]. What was heard? If you get support that it is working. If somebody pulls you a little bit …
Social worker C: – To make a film, I find, makes it very clear what is happening in the room – otherwise you miss a lot …

Social worker B: – Yes, what I think has been super as well is Ann-Margreth fitting like a glove with the tejping-dolls\(^{22}\) – somehow this has been strengthened together with Ann-Margreth and the project – it suited so well – that we had started with [the dolls] – it fitted so well!

In the example above I was struck by how the participants emphasized the continuity. It seemed to have made a difference for the participants that we focused on a few cases and followed them continuously. I have also noticed how they throw light upon their narrating from within DC. I hear them talking about how the narrating seemed to re-create and re-live earlier meetings with clients. This seems to have strengthened their listening as well as their awareness of the process and of their own contributions. They realize that they have the necessary qualities to start coaching one another, which some of them actually did (Olsson, 2008a).

I also hear the social workers talking about how they sometimes in DC prepared themselves for upcoming meetings. We sometimes called it going into training with future dialogues in view (cf. end-in-view (Dewey, 2007)). However, when the social worker had prepared herself/himself for any technique or method, for

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22 *Tejping*-dolls emanates from the Norwegian psychologist Martin Soltvedt use of what he calls *leksamtal* play-dialogues or -conversations in family therapy, where he sometimes uses small dolls (Soltvedt, 2005). The Norwegian children started to call them *tejping*-dolls referring to the tape which was sometimes used on the table for marking the context, for example marking a room or a territory. "In this way the narrative was on the table” [my translation] writes Soltvedt (2005 p. 204). I would call this an externalisation (White & Epston, 1990) – to put the narrating as if it is outside, external, not integrated in the child, but on the table where it becomes more handy to deal with, to explore and study. Through the use of the dolls, which represent different persons involved, including the child and the social worker, the dialogue continues/takes place on the table. The child gives an opportunity to give voices to the dolls/persons he or she has chosen (and named). You can listen to their voices, explore further by asking through your own doll on the table. This could also be done by the use of dolls other than those called *tejping*-dolls. A Swedish company in Uppsala (Nilsson & Sjölin Psykologkonsult AB, 2005) puts the use of *tejping*-dolls on the market.
example *tejpings*-dolls, which they mentioned above, the challenge becomes to “let it happen” (Gallwey, 1997) in the meeting – “let” the preparation “go” or let it become “rubbish” as the social worker expressed it above – to trust yourself (Gallwey, 1997) and rely on your listening and your responses in the present moment (Seikkula, 2008). I hear the social workers connect to this paradoxical task; on the one hand to focus on preparing, practising and developing the social worker’s abilities and skills, on the other hand to develop and learn to use an approach of just “letting it happen”, of trust in listening and responding to your own spontaneous, embodied responding (Shotter, 2004c). We talked about an orientation towards “staying in the moment”, “being here and now” and trusting your gut feeling, to trust your abilities to listen and address new answers as questions. “Listening questions” as one of the social workers named this approach23, new orientations on how to go on – the easiest thing in the world for social workers when they bring themselves to stop, look, listen (Dewey, 2007) to themselves and others.

4.1.1 The participants
In all 55 social workers, 45 women and 10 men, in social welfare organisations in seven municipalities (Bjuv, Hässleholm, Lund, Malmö, Svalöv, Tomelilla and Trelleborg) participated. The choices about which municipalities and which social offices to invite, how many social workers and managers and who and so on, were made by the County Administrative Board in consultation with the leaders of the organisations in question. The County Administrative Board made a strategic choice, in all aspects and in every step, to support and live according to the systemic ideas they wanted to introduce and create an interest in. Thus, in selecting municipalities and participating social workers, the project leader decided to rely on whoever showed an interest or wherever signs of

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23 In section *Voices heard about DC and in relation to DC, December 2006* a social worker named this mutual listening and responding addressing answers by as I understood her and have given the expression meaning.
interest came from\textsuperscript{24}. All this started with the so-called Idea Group, the primordial group the county governor had invited in the beginning.

Thus, in common to all the participating social workers was that they all where persons who, when asked, became interested in participating in DC, a project and the study. They all worked in social offices with managers and social politicians who supported this participation. 53 of the 55 participants were graduated from a School of Social Studies. Female social workers were in majority. Only a few of the participating social workers were new in the profession. Predominating were experienced, well-trained social workers in different ages with different backgrounds. Typical about them was that they all showed openness for changes in relation to clients. However, I do not think none of us, at least not from the beginning, expected how much this would bring and be about ourselves, our own involvement – mutual involvement in relation to clients and between the social workers, their managers and colleagues, and me.

4.1.2 The coaching
The duration of a coaching period varied from participant to participant from a few months to one-two years, with a variation of frequency from once a week to once a month. This varied from person to person, case to case, depending on different circumstances in the organisations, in relation to managers, colleagues and others, as well as in relation to me and/or my commissioners in the County.

The coaching was conducted individually and/or in pairs or in groups. In one municipality (Lund), the coaching was mainly individual. In Hyllie (Malmö) and Hässleholm, the social workers in the coaching participated in pairs. In Bjuv, they participated in a group of three, in Svalöv in a group of four or five persons and in Tomelilla and Trelleborg in different combinations of pairs. How the coaching was organised was up to each organisation. It was the manager of each participating organisation that recruited the social workers in each workplace.

\textsuperscript{24} You could say that here the ‘ripples on the water’ effect started that I write more about in the final chapter Reflections and Conclusions.
They were also responsible, if not the project leader, for all the arrangements around the coaching in their organisation in question.

The offer of continuous coaching, which could be conducted individually, was a completely newfangled thing in the context of social work for the participating social workers. Both individual coaching and individual supervision were very rare. Nor is group supervision a matter of course for every team of social workers in Swedish municipalities (Höjer et al., 2007).

The value of transparency about one’s work and the value of “show-and-tell”, either through participating, observation or taping, grew and expanded amongst the social workers during their participation in DC. In the beginning, however, several of them hesitated at the prospect of talking about and showing their own work and reflecting on their own contributions25.

Coaching in pairs seemed to facilitate the learning and the disseminating process of the emerging ideas to colleagues and managers. With two participants, the development of a closed system is less likely and diversity of views is more probable (York, 2009, p. 328). As one of the participating social workers in the first phase (Event I, 2005) said:

– When you are two who participate in the coaching, then you are also two in sharing this and more in the work group, participating from the beginning. I recognise the questions, the confusion – what is this? It is still a little bit confusing and difficult to explain to the others in the work group. It is abstract somehow. You have to experience it. It is not only a matter of presenting a case and saying that now we are going to do it this way.

25 Read more about this in chapter Narratives from within DC and section Emerging mutual partnership as well as in the ending chapter Reflections and Conclusions.
On the other hand, being alone with me in the DC seemed to create more space for the social worker to use the moment however she/he wanted. It seemed to create a stronger sense of security, to expose yourself without risking your integrity or professional identity in the view of others. Individual (one-to-one) coaching offers an intimate supervising experience, where the coach/supervisor does not have to deal with the complexities of group or team processes. The participants may be more comfortable and open to appreciate and criticise their work with an individual supervisor they trust. It offers a powerful learning experience (York, 2009).

Group supervision offers a greater complexity of relationships and experiences of anxiety and competitiveness, as well as distinct opportunities for participial growth (York, 2009). The group process will be the constant focal point rather than individual growth and learning.

A major advantage with groups is that they require fewer resources in terms of supervisor’s time and cost (York, 2009).

A second advantage is that unlike one-to-one supervision the group provides a supportive atmosphere of peers in which new staff or trainees can share anxieties and realize that others are facing similar issues (Hawkins and Shohet, 2007, p.133)

A group can create a rich context of different viewpoints. Group interaction builds professional colleagueship and confidence (York, 2009). The participants share reflections, feedback and new ideas and provide a wider range of life experiences and multiple voices, for example at the level of gender. Another advantage is that groups provide more opportunities to use action techniques as part of the coaching/supervision (Hawkins and Shohet, 2007), providing different opportunities to learn and prepare for a new orientation on how to go on.
A disadvantage, which the social workers highlighted in this study, is that participants in group supervision/coaching usually rotate case presentations, whether live sessions, audio or video, which provides less continuity for following the development of the supervision/coaching relating to a specific case and supervisee. Therefore, supplemental individual supervision may be needed (York, 2009) or coaching.

4.1.3 The cases
The social workers chose at least one case each that we followed during and in the coaching. Often they used two, three or four cases to explore within the coaching. The selection of a case was based on different criteria. The majority of the participants said they had chosen a new case for investigation. This could be for self-evident reasons – you have a maximum of four months by the law to conduct an investigation on a child.26

Some of the social workers working with adults (often with addiction problems) said they had chosen an old case – a person they already had done several investigations on. Now this client had come up again. The case had become an “old prejudice”, hard to find new approaches to or ways to enter and work in. The social worker felt stuck in the casework and wanted to find a new orientation on how to go on (cf. the practical aim to be able to go on (Wittgenstein, 2001) and (Shotter, 2005f, 2005d)).

In the coaching, we mainly explored the chosen cases. However, we also entered into other tracks in the social worker’s working life, other cases and other/new examples of what emerged in relation to the coaching. Sometimes the participants also invited me into more personal contexts of their lives, influencing how they are getting on at work.

26 The time can in special circumstances be prolonged for another four-month period.
4.1.4 The place – to enter the social worker’s everyday life

In many respects it was up to the participants to decide when, where and how we were going to meet and how they wanted to use me as a coach within the given frames and conditions. I came to them – to their workplaces or other places they had chosen.

For my understanding, it was important to visit their everyday life and working surroundings. I also think it was important for the social workers to see and have me there – in their working environment and in relation to others in their network. In this I offered the participating social workers to invite me into meetings with their colleagues, managers or collaborators.

This idea of mine (and the commissioner), to enter the participants’ workplaces, brought matters to a head in different aspects. I had to be able to move between different spaces and places of working cultures, discourses and orders. However, I developed a skill of tuning in and keeping in tune with the different cultures, discourses and orders in the social offices – also tuning in and coalescing with the social worker’s individual style and way of acting and talking. Of course, also a mutual and reflexive adapting to one another between the social worker(s) and myself took place, as well as in relation to the surroundings and the conditions in the respective workplace.

In Sweden, each municipality is sovereign in how to carry through the social welfare for their citizens, so I also had to develop my skills in recognising differences in applications, guiding principles and management from one place to another.

4.1.5 Resources for “good enough”

The resources the commissioner had provided for our company and me to carry out the projects were limited even though the resources seemed to increase with the enthusiasm and devotion of the participating social workers, influencing my capacity and abilities.
Even though the social workers almost always talked about job strains and how overloaded they were with work (recognised by other researchers (Oxenstierna, 1997, Tham, 2008)), they did devote time for the coaching and participated whole-heartedly focusing on the task. It seems as if we mutually received fresh support by each other, encouraging and spurring each other on towards further work and curiosity about when, where, what and how we were thinking, working and going to go on – further orientation.

At the same time, I was the only coach in the projects and supposed to be “good enough” for everyone participating.

For three years, John Shotter was engaged as my external tutor in my work as systemic coach in the County’s projects. This has meant a lot both for how the projects developed and how I have managed to conduct and develop DC and this study in dialogical interplay with the participants and the commissioners.

Important for my progress and for me to manage to conduct the coaching was naturally my own working environment and closest relations in life. At home I had a very important supporter in Sven-Erik, my husband and partner in the company. Being an experienced supervisor and teacher in social work as well as a person I trust and think highly of, he continuously was my personal coach and “interior” tutor. He was within reach for consultation whenever necessary. He was also my computer consultant, which was very important. Working alone as a coach I was depending upon e-mail communication in keeping in contact with the social workers, the commissioners and others. I was also depending on good communications of public service. According to the quality standards of our company we want to take the environment into consideration. Thus, for example I go by bicycle, bus or train whenever possible instead of taking the car.
4.1.6 Learning and connecting to expertise

How I have managed to be accessible enough is probably connected to my approach, both overall and in detail. In the participants’ view, they said, I was considered a calm and solid (and steady) innovator, deeply rooted in social work and connected to social work research. They seemed to expect me to be (or become) orientated in both research findings and in different consultant’s concepts, as well as in what experts of other topics were offering. I was also interested in these expected inquiries. To search and explore the research done, and come in contact with other persons in everyday social work, increased and supported my understandings. I have put some of the results of these inquiries into this dissertation (for example, the use of tejping-dolls. Further on in this chapter, the use of ASI\textsuperscript{27} and BBIC\textsuperscript{28}. In next chapter, the section on Previous voices on participatory child investigations). I used more in the practice.

Exploring the narratives of the social worker, listening to and seeing them in action and talking about their work and what they co-created together with the clients, taught me more and more about social work and social workers. Exploring research and other references connected to methods and the terms the social workers were using made me learn even more and be even more curious about the social workers’ used logic. Slowly but surely I managed to enter what was in fashion in social work of today. So I constantly picked up new methods and techniques from the participants and was learning what seemed to be the latest news in the trade. After a participant had mentioned a for me unknown method or concept, I found myself searching for literature and research for deeper study. More and more, I found myself trying to combine systemic ideas

\textsuperscript{27} Addiction Severity Index (ASI) is a structured interview designed to provide diagnostic information on a client prior, during and after treatment for substance use-related problems, and for the assessment of change in client status and treatment outcome that the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW) is implementing in Swedish social work (Socialstyrelsen, 2007a).

\textsuperscript{28} Barns Behov i Centrum (BBIC) (Children’s needs in focus) is the Swedish version of the British Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families and Integrated Children’s System (ICS) (Socialstyrelsen, 2000).
with these methods or trying to transform them into systemic versions, which I will return to.

4.1.7 Time and space enough
In this, I also had the idea that it was important to bring into the relation to each participant that I had “all the time in the world” – to become his/her coach. In this I developed all kinds of techniques, for example, I always waited for the participants to make the booking and to ask for my support. In return, I was ready to act and support in all sorts of ways and contexts, and whenever they asked me (except for when I was already booked).

For example, I took responsibility for network meetings (Seikkula and Arnikil, 2005), managed dialogue conferences (Shotter and Gustavsen, 1999), assisted in solving conflicts in workplaces and took personal responsibility towards the community in the projects by placing myself at the disposal of the participating social workers whenever they asked for my service, which was the deal with the County.

4.1.8 Details from within
In DC we, step by step, very closely and in detail, explored the development in the chosen cases and how the dialogue, or whatever the social worker narrated about, might have been heard, seen or understood from different perspectives and from different people’s points of view. This way of acting, to continually, thoroughly and carefully explore details, was built on ideas about it being the details that makes the difference and that changes emerge in small steps/differences (Bateson, 1987, 2000). It was also based on the idea that reflections and learning in reflections and dialogue (Schön, 1987, 2002, Freire 1979, 1972, Singh, 2008, Tseliou, 2007) are facilitated when you really get into it, making the inquiry from within the events and moments of happening (Shotter, 2003b), if we can reach the understanding from the interior of a conversation searching for orientation how to go on (Shotter, 2005f, 2005c).
To enter \textit{into, from within} a course of events and conversations through asking for and exploring details, moves and conducts the participant in the coaching, including the coach, into what John Shotter speaks of, from Bakhtin (1986), as \textit{responsive} understanding in \textit{relation} to others and othernesses, \textit{relationally-responsive understanding} (Shotter, 2008b), in the narrating. When we are narrating in conclusive forms \textit{about} an event, giving a representative account from the outside, the account gives a \textit{representative} understanding without any actual \textit{amovement}\textsuperscript{29} in the receiver (or the teller). When you become involved you can feel it in your body, embodied (Shotter, 2004e, 2005c, 2005d, 2005e). You move in a living, flowing interaction with others and othernesses (Shotter, 2008b) creating an appetite, desire and disposition, in Swedish summarized in the word \textit{lust}, to go on continuing being in living responsiveness with your surrounding. An example of how the social workers talked about the living flow in the dialogical interplay in DC follows here:

Extract (my translated transcription) from the Event III 2007

- It becomes – it creates another atmosphere in the dialogue.
  Hard to say what it is but somehow it creates results, make you get more, to hear more and things and aspects you would have never heard otherwise. It creates another atmosphere. More reflecting approach – more opening.
- When you say atmosphere …?
- In the dialogue?
- Creates another atmosphere.
- Also in new contexts.
- As?
- We have used it for example in the presence of politicians.

\textsuperscript{29}Amovement and amove, as in our company name, are old English words. Definition in Brainy Dictionary, (2004): (v. t.) To remove, as a person or thing, from a position. (v. t.) To dismiss from an office or station. (v. t. & i.) To move or be moved; to excite. The third alternative is used in this dissertation
– When we have submitted a case in the social committee we used the team. Became more active and you get more assisting help. I feel that I get more energy. I want to do something. [laughs]
– Feels directly [laughs].
– I recognise myself in this very much – I feel the same.
– Otherwise it could be so much like following the same old routine amongst colleagues and in meetings with clients.
– *Lust*-inducing and creating.

4.1.9 Reflecting teams and delta-reflections

Through the years I have adapted reflecting teams to different situations and group constellations in social work, including more formal conferences and committee meetings, in positions other than as coach and researcher (for example as head director in executive groups and as politician in board meetings) with varying success. For example, I have not always succeeded in convincing people who are used to traditional decision-making processes, to adopt the wisdom of reflecting and exploring different perspectives before making decisions. However as a systemic supervisor and in management I generally use reflecting teams in different variations. As a researcher, my use of reflecting teams has transformed into what I came to call *delta-reflecting teams* (see the Introduction).

4.1.10 Playfulness in serious matters

The creation of *delta-reflecting team* is an example of my approach and is established in systemic ideas and methods. In both my actions as coach and as action researcher I was searching to bring about a co-operation between the established systemic ideas and methods (or rather how I had understood and was using them) and new ways of using these ideas and forms emerging in the interaction within the DC. So I approached “the original” ideas and models with what could be called an *independent playfulness in serious matters*, where the
participating social workers and I carefully tested different uses, felt our way around and co-adapted these ideas and methods into social work. With the systemic ideas in use, this was also a story about how we mutually responded to each other and everything else in the contexts, influencing these moments, including the approach, methods and techniques in use. However, as I explored elsewhere (see chapter about the action research), all these responses and influences are so chiasmatically intertwined that it is not possible to disentangle what is affecting what or how (Bateson, 1987).

4.1.11 Stop, look, listen from different perspectives

John Dewey’s concept *end-in-view* is about entering into a direction or directions (Dewey, 2007). The ways and the means are as much aims as ends and if you want to do all this in an intelligent way you have to “stop, look, listen” (Dewey, 2007, p. 80). In DC we stopped, looked, listened in and on the social workers’ practice, exploring how the events, what was said and done, could be understood from different perspectives and positions.

The inquiry in the coaching emanated from the social workers’ narratives and understandings of what had emerged in different meetings in their practice. We explored and expanded on what they had heard and said, how they had taken part and how this might have been understood from the view of other participants or other persons (or something else, for example an animal or an externalised problem).

We also explored different alternatives with meetings in hand, making preparations, before they went into meetings. In this we explored possible used ideas – the *logic-in-use* (Kaplan, 1964) – approaching worries and hopes, exploring prejudice and preconceived ideas of ours (if we discovered them), including making preparations through training and testing different alternatives.

In a flow of conversations, our view and focus was in the direction of the social workers’ participation in meetings and conversations – a form of end-in-view –
giving directions (Dewey, 2007, 1997). Using Bakthin’s ideas: we were anticipating and addressing persons in future meetings in the participant’s dialogical artwork (Bakhtin, 1986) in preparing for how to go on in the best way.

Extract (my translated transcription) from the Event III 2007

– You get the feeling of becoming braver – to test and examine together with the client. The coaching put new heart into us. To be prepared …
– With a client?
– Yes, it was terrific.
– Also the reflecting, which we used spontaneously. We did a U-turn, and I had a colleague [with me] – in 30 seconds we decided spontaneously that we should reflect. And it worked because we had been practicing on it.

In DC the social workers did not make any definite plans for how to carry through a meeting, but prepared themselves for different unfolding and directions in next meetings. They tested new and different techniques and methods. You could say that they went into training in preparing themselves. One of the social workers wrote about this (see next chapter Narratives from within and in relation to DC). Her narrative starts with following opening:

Extract from writings in the third phase from a social worker in working with foster care homes and children in foster care (Olsson, 2008a, p. 54) [my translation]

After my conversations with Ann-Margreth, where I got the opportunity to "get wind to” thoughts "go on foot” in my head during many years, I started to test some of the techniques that systemic thinking has found so well-working, to contribute to people opening up to reflect on how another person can think and feel.
I am fascinated by how easy it has become for me to appropriate this and start to work with interviews and listening and reflecting teams.

### 4.1.12 In the presence, here and now, inquiring

As coach, my contribution was to go into the coaching session with as much of myself as possible, to have my mind and body totally present and working. As I experienced it, this was about entering the moment of speaking (Shotter, 2003b, 2004a), listening and participating in a joint inquiring in what(ever) the participant brought up to participatory understanding (Shotter, 2004b). I am wondering if that is what makes the difference that makes the difference in DC as well as in other dialogues – cf. the example in section *Systemic DC in practice* and my following analysis (in the beginning of this chapter). In being completely present in relation to one another, here and now, you are becoming ready for and inviting yourself and others to a spontaneous interaction in this mutual responsiveness John Shotter says is crucial for the dialogue to emerge and be alive (Shotter, 2008b).

### 4.1.13 Questions

Questioning, mainly from only one (me as coach) of the participants in a conversation, could easily become a monological interrogation or a conversation of two monological voices heard without the living mutual responsiveness of interplay. What made the difference in our conversations? What made it possible for me as coach to ask a lot of questions and still make it possible for us participating to experience the conversations as dialogical and mutually involving? How did the coaching emerge to joint inquiries when new questions often became the coach’s/my way of responding to the interaction in the dialogue? Could it be something about how I made myself completely accessible in the moment, absolute presence (which I often experienced)? Could it be something about how I used an approach of curiosity and interest in what was told, placing myself completely at the other participants’ disposal and to the
responsiveness’ in relation to the other participants? Was this what the social worker was referring to, later in this chapter, when she called my way of participating in DC and conducting interviews for/as using listening questions? I return to this in the last chapter, the section How the actions informed and developed my approach.

Using questions instead of statements, as above, is one of the living ideas in systemic practice. Questions usually open up for further exploration and reflecting. Intertwined in my questions are reflections on what will unfold in the reflections and conclusions at the end of this dissertation. However, living ideas in systemic practice are also that there are no one-and-only true and correct answers or conclusions. My answers and conclusions are rather suggestions than final results.

In DC my questions seemed to support an explorative and investigative approach for both me as questioner and the addressee, the participating social worker(s). Soon we were all joined in the inquiring and the participants remembering and narrating more and more. Questions (and answers) open up curiosity and facilitate mutual interest in the relationship and to yourself and your organisation (Lang, 1999, Lang and McAdam, 1994). Questions seem to be thrown back to the questioner as well, as if mirrored in a hall of mirrors (reflexivity), but are also at the same time mutually responding and changing in the process (responsive). To compare with the use of conclusions and statements where you are telling the other how to listen and understand – how to do. These utterances tend to drop “dead” instead of giving life.

**4.1.14 Living in the communication and joining the grammar**

Especially in the beginning of a coaching session, I usually became the participant who asked most of the questions. My idea was to open up, invite to and support a start of curious exploration from a position of (almost) not knowing (Anderson, 1990, Anderson and Goolishian, 2001) and creating a more equal position (cf. Garfinkel, 1956). However, I believe that many other contexts
in my life (as well as in all the other participants) influenced and gave a special meaning to our interaction and communication in DC. For example, it made a difference that I am an older experienced social worker and former manager of social organisations. This seemed to open up opportunities for me, also within myself, for example, to ask all sorts of questions without risking losing face or standing, but also in being approachable as a person you can trust as a former colleague or an affirming “know-how-it-could-be” person in social work, a person who talked the “language”, joining the grammar\(^{30}\) of social organisations.

### 4.1.15 Curiosity and joy

My aim in the introduction of systemic ideas in DC was to create an atmosphere of curiosity and joyfulness in moving in the systemic practice, for example, from and between different perspectives and positions in the conversation. I supported narration and creation of new stories to blossom about what we heard, telling and narrating (and sometimes how) in DC. Here complexity and diversity usually unfold which could be what the participating social workers report about as going into wooliness (or fog or into confusion, see below). In this phase, the DC is not about simplifying – rather the opposite – which sometimes created confusion. They left with even more questions than they perhaps ever had had in the matter they have brought into the coaching. At least this is what I could notice and hear in the participants’ response at the beginning of their participation in DC, in their first meetings with systemic practice. I can also often notice how they were more used to act and move in the so-called production domain (Lang et al., 1990) where it is important to be in a knowing position, creating clarity, making plans and getting the answers. Instead, I was invited into the exploration domain and the aesthetic domain (Lang et al., 1990, Maturana and Poerksen, 2004). Gradually, I could notice how the participants caught the ideas of knowing not as a sense of certainty or knowledge of “the truth” but:

\(^{30}\) To join the grammar is about to know how to engage in patterns of conjoint action in which the words are used (Cronen & Lang, 1994, Wittgenstein, 2001).
“Knowing” is about a sense of how to go on in relationships, in conversations, in a piece of work. “Knowing” is not about certainty but having a knowledge that is sufficient to provide a clarity for us to be able to go on in exploration. So to say “I know” is to assert that you know how to go on in exploration “for the time being”. (Lang, 1997, p.1)

4.1.16 Learning by daring to let yourself go into uncertainty

The narrating in, from and about DC, contains how the coaching throws the participants into confusion and uncertainty. As you as reader will read more about later on in this chapter, it could be metaphorically described (cf. Morgan, 1986,1997) as walking into a fog where you lose your bearing for a while – your orientation. The continuations of these stories are about recommending to colleagues to dare to test and rely on the process from within the fog – to put up with the exploring phase where “everything” is turned inside out, and turned over again and again. Here is a translated extract from one of my books that the county published (in Swedish):

Extract (my translated transcription) from one of the books published by the County (Olsson, 2008a pp. 23-24)

When they were asked to talk about the coaching’s significance to them, the participants emphasised that they felt more secure and courageous. They said that they now had the courage to go into situations and conversations and be more re-examining and inquiring. What they earlier talked about in terms of unclear, blurry, fuzzy and confusing now unfolded as the complexity and diversity they most of all were curious about exploring. They were also talking about a new style, from within the project, which also influenced their meetings with clients.
Work had become more enjoyable. This was about becoming more aware of your own contribution, the influence of your own attitude, used approach and your own special style. This resulted in increasing assurance/confidence that in turn created the courage to try to do things differently – to become more exploring and inquiring. This however also led to greater confusion – but somehow this became an ”acceptable confusion”, supporting the curiosity, the narrating, social secretaries\textsuperscript{31} said. Without confusion we tend to simplify and explain too soon from our own world of ideas, instead of searching for different perspectives and methods together with the clients, they continued. To colleagues they said:

– Be ready for this state of confusion!
– Keep an open mind and let yourself go!
– Go with the flow – to let oneself go in dialogues.
– It is a new way of looking and listening – to open up for the clients to surprise you!
– To listen to the voices of the context!

This was also about how the action projects were conducted under the management of the project leader. Only verbal directions and frames were given. Otherwise it was up to us who participated, to develop and learn by doing, to take responsibility and participate in a collaborative co-creation according to the given frames and aims of the projects.

\textbf{4.1.16.1 The fog} 

One of the participants narrated in the \textit{delta-reflections}:

\footnotetext[31]{Social Secretary is the title of social workers with exercise of public authority in their post.}
Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker G: I have just started. I am getting this picture. I don’t know if I have told you before, Ann-Margreth, I was thinking of Chaplin’s *The Dictator*. There he is walking in the fog, believing he is amongst his own people and so he was walking with the enemy at his side. I am getting the same picture again. So what is going to happen when the fog disperses? I think it is misty around myself right now. What is this? How is this different? I have never had this before, well, from the team leader of course, will it be cleared up when I get out and have those who have already participated in this … are they having a clear vision now or is it still foggy… This is how I have been thinking?

Another of the participants responded to the story above. She entered the coaching from quite another view – another perspective. She made the connection about the importance of what she called parallelism. She claimed that what her colleague emphasized in terms of ”foggy” and perhaps hostile was something she was longing for. This was exactly what she had understood as the *essence of the coaching* for them as social workers:

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker H: – We are work with investigations need to learn exactly this, not to deliver complete solutions and concepts – to work with security. We, if anyone, need to learn to endure insecurity in processes, get used to letting things happen and learning to use the processes, *go with the flow*, follow the movement instead of trying to control it.

To be able to conduct investigations and the processes in the interplay, the social workers needed to increase their learning of how to use and endure processes
and anxieties in their work. The latter social worker understood the pedagogic idea of the coaching, to use processes aimed at learning this – *learning-by-doing* (Dewey, 2007, 1997). To trust the process and your own contributions as a social worker – to endure and recognize the mutual learning and changing processes also taking place in the investigation phase (not only in subsequent social measures in the form of so called treatment). To become aware of the co-creation, increasing the self-awareness about how and what you as participant, social worker, client, coach or whoever, are participating, influencing and contributing in. We called it self-reflections or, following Donald Schön, reflections-in-action or (afterwards) on-actions (Schön, 1987, 2002).

For the relationship between social worker and client, the social worker’s self awareness becomes a matter of vital importance as it is determining the exercise of official authority, the decision about if and how social measures are going to be used – the conclusive decision and subsequent social work (contributions, aid, help, support or treatment).

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker H: – Important with the process – that nothing is so clear and finished – we struggle with this in the cases – that the social measures should be clear and distinct already from the beginning, to leave out all these thoughts. At the same time, I act as if I knew the measures, but in this way I try to be more and more in the process, I try to be more reflecting, in any case it is a help not to be in the measure already from the beginning. As (colleague’s name) said earlier: – Perhaps there is no need for a measure from the beginning – to dare to release the case, let it go after the investigation …

Later in the delta-reflections:
Social worker H: – It is different. What becomes different is that you start thinking more in processes instead of having questions, a whole battery of questions, which I want to use – the coaching situation/context brings me into much more exploration. I don’t know, I feel as if I am just sitting there babbling a lot, all of a sudden I can think: can I talk about this or is this not correct, and then, as if it is a searching to dare to be in this situation where it is not so much structure from the beginning or predetermination and just see where we end up at and as [colleague’s name] said earlier, you co-create something together. Because the experience I probably have is that what we in the end bring out or the thoughts I get with me, emerge in this, I did not have the slightest idea how this should come out and very likely nor did Ann-Margreth, somehow it grew out, emerged, it is not a great big thing but new thoughts and perspectives somehow … and that I, I myself am doing, made me grow to become more personal, private, than I have been with anybody else … that I permit myself to bring up things that really amove me more individually. This is a possibility … I do not know where it will lead me … it feels pleasant to make my voice heard in this … (Event I 2005)

4.1.16.2 A glimpse of the coaching dialogue and my reflections
In this section I give a glimpse of the coaching dialogue. I have explored this example earlier in my practice and studies (Olsson, 2005b, 2006). It is a part of the conversation with social worker G, who in a section above used a sequence in Chaplin’s movie The Dictator metaphorically. This extract is from one of the dialogues I had with her about this. Here we are in the end of this coaching session and I have reminded her of her initial experience and worries. In another session she had told me about her preference, that she had a predilection for
using metaphors in her language. This inspired me to take deeper interest in the use of metaphors. We use metaphors all the time in our language, even though we do not always notice them. They are opening but also closing, limiting our associations and reflections (Morgan, 1986).

4.1.16.2.1 The social worker as the squaddy
In this time the social worker I had met for more than six months regularly. The case we had focused on dealt with a nine-year-old girl and her divorced parents, who were at "war", using all kinds of methods in trying to win the daughter. This is our last coaching session. We have been talking for a while when I am reminding her about our beginning:

Translated extract from my transcription

*Coach:* Do you remember […] There is a section where I am referring to what you said in the reflecting team. I think you also talked about this with me the first time we met. You were thinking around the coaching associating to the movie *The Dictator*.

*Social worker:* Hmm.

*Coach:* You … eeh … did not know who was beside you in the fog …

*Social worker:* Hmm.

*Coach:* … where the Führer\(^{32}\) is walking and he discovers that he is amongst enemies …

*Social worker:* Hmm.

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\(^{32}\) Here I had not seen the movie. Now I know that Chaplin in this phase of the movie is still the soldier – squaddy.
Coach: ... do you remember this? Naturally you created this question for me to ask here and now: Has the fog lifted? Or what did you think of?

Social worker: Yes, I believe so ... yes, I believe the fog disappeared listening to John Shotter in his lecture\textsuperscript{33}. He was talking a lot about this. He made it theoretical – he talked about the theory while at the same time showing us in practice.

Coach: Yes, yes.

Social worker: I think that is an acknowledgement. You also need this ... now I do not remember exactly ... I have got more hang of it ... I think I said that I wanted to read about this (shows me the book “The Children’s Social Secretary”) ...

Coach: Mmm.

Social worker: ... because you are writing about the theory in this.

Coach: Mmm.

Social worker: I would like to look more into it. It became alive for me in his lecture.

[Silence]

Social worker: I can still... [silence] ... I can still ... well now we have gone through this.

\textsuperscript{33} John Shotter visited us in Lund and this social worker and her colleagues had a day together with him.
[Silence]

Social worker: … so the questions you had, in our first meeting that is in the coaching, what was it, roughly, yes what was it?

Coach: Hmm, yes.

Social worker: … and then I could talk about that picture that …

Coach: Hmm.

Social worker: … I was walking here in the fog and there was somebody [laughing] walking beside me and who is that? [she laughs] … and what are we going to do … oh …I don’t know, perhaps we shall stop there in using this picture, because I …then we probably arrive to … then we arrive to ”Big Bertha”\(^{34}\) and he is running like a … well, we can in fact continue in these thoughts [more and more laughing] …

Coach: How are you thinking now?

Social worker: Well, actually …

Coach: Are you the Führer?

Social worker: [with strong voice] This question is loaded. [As she had seen the movie she is saying:] Here it is not the Führer, you know, because here he is the soldier.

\(^{34}\) ”Big Bertha” is a type of super-heavy gun or cannon from Germany.
Coach: He is also Chaplin.

Social worker: Hmm … He is the soldier there.

Coach: Yes.

Social worker: … who is told to do things.

Coach: Yes.

Social worker: … and you could say, so was I, so you could say I was also there in the situation.

Coach: That’s what I was wondering …

Social worker: Mm, mm … thus I would say, I was not forced to have a coach but I, similar to Chaplin then, I chose to go to do war … [laughing outright].

Coach: … that was …

Social worker: Hmm, hmm.

Coach: … that was what I had wondered actually …

Social worker: Hmm.

Coach: If it wasn’t only this about the fog but perhaps also an ingredient of being told to … and if you are Chaplin … he does …

Social worker: … in a very special way …
Coach: … exactly.

Social worker: [cries out] Ha!! [laughing]

Coach: … it is humour in this too so when …

Social worker: I still like this picture and it is … [hesitate] … it is not about violence … it is about the soldier.

Coach: Yes.

Social worker: He doesn’t represent the Führer in this part – I do not know when you watch The Dictator – I think you should see it …

Coach: I get curious.

Social worker: I definitely think that you should. You can see it thousands of times. For me it is fantastic. I have seen it several times.

Coach: Yes.

Social worker: I am laughing just as much each time. It think it is so sublime.

Coach: Yes.

Social worker: I think it is a masterpiece.
This extract is also an example of a moment in the study which I recognize as a very special event which I have stopped and looked at (stop, look, listen) remembering my gut-feeling – bodily – as moments where something unique emerges – striking moments and examples (Shotter, 2008b, 2004b). Through this extract (from the transcription) I invite the reader into the unique details, to take part within the event.

The social worker had just started to participate in DC and came in contact with the County’s action project. She associated her experience so far with the situation in the movie The Dictator. In the episode she was thinking about, Chaplin was the squaddy soldier walking around in the fog not knowing that instead of being with his troop he had the enemy beside him. She wanted me to see the movie and so I did. At the end of the movie suddenly the squaddy soldier has become the leader – the dictator. Who is becoming who and when? What did she mean – what did she want to tell others and me? How did this point at the coaching? Didn’t she participate voluntarily? Was this addressed to me personally or was this about something else?

I also want to use this as an example of a person who might have been feeling more secure and comfortable approaching the coaching if there had been one definition presented, one answer to what and how the coaching is or could become.

In the coaching it happens that I give both advice and illustrative examples as answers. In many narratives and stories I have rendered there have been examples of what and how somebody has done and/or of what I have become reminded of in listening to the participants in DC. The coaching has foremost been to explore those narratives the participant has told or the new narratives we collaboratively co-created and that were emerging from the old stories. In this exploration, both in the new, more hypothetic (unlived) stories and in the already lived ones that the participant had narrated, I have as the coach often taken a
leading position, inquiring and using different kinds of questions (for example open, circular, reflecting, hypothetic or future questions (Cecchin, 1987, Cronen and Lang, 1996, Lang 1999, Lang and McAdam, 1997, Penn, 1982, 1985, Tomm, 2000). We have turned the meanings of words and different uses over and over again in our minds, explored the language in use, turned our prejudices, pre-understandings and pre-knowing up side down, shaken our old narratives to pieces and created new ones, often from new perspectives and other points of view. This has rather created and exposed the complexity, diversity and differences than created “easily” attained answers and solutions.

However, answers creating simplifications of the complexity in reality can sometimes be both comfortable and necessary to give and get (also in coaching). It can be both practical and strategic to be able to give an answer or a simplifying story, for example about DC and the action research in the projects. The participants have narrated about their difficulties in explaining to colleagues and other people in their surroundings what systemic practice and ideas are as well as what the design of the action projects and DC are. They have given various examples of the dilemmas emerging in participating in open process-oriented projects as these in question.

Thus, it can be experienced as safer, more secure, to approach an established definition, even though the definition is only one of several different stories about coaching and coaches. As definitions and stories, they are contributing to create new narratives about and in coaching.

4.2 Delta-reflections in the first event of 2005
After the first phase of DC in the action project Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children, all the participants were invited to meet the participants who joined the project and started to participate in DC in the second phase (2005 – 2006). They were invited to half a day (Event I, 2005-04-05) of narrating and reflecting on the coaching, on how they had experienced DC so far. With the
purpose of making many voices heard, creating an atmosphere and order where the participants felt that they had enough opportunities to speak, be listened to and really listen to what was said and communicated, we used *delta-reflecting teams* (even though I had not yet named it delta at the time).

The meeting was video-recorded by me. I started the meeting and introduced the form. Those who had participated in the first phase of the action project, formed one delta-reflecting team and all the others, those who joined the project in the second phase, formed another team. There were fifteen persons in the room all together. I started the dialogue by asking the question:

– What do you want to ask those who have already been participating in the coaching?

The questions dealt with what this systemic coaching was all about, the project ideas and the colleagues’ experiences. Here unfolds the example above with the new social worker associating to Chaplin’s movie *The Dictator*. The social workers had taken part in DC during the first phase. They talked about learning and developing a new approach, changing their way of working both in relation to clients and to colleagues:

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker I: – I feel afterwards that it has influenced the group. I myself am working differently now than earlier. It is influencing … so I usually highlight this, so they can see that there are other ways, but they have to make their own choices. However, they can see that there are alternatives. Now we have the youths. It is obvious to me now, earlier I could meet the parents first and then the child – now I invite both the child and both the parents directly – no secrets. All this is about caring for the child, with the child in focus, then the child should be allowed to narrate. Does the child
know why it is here? What picture does the child have about everything? Then the parents could be invited to listen. And then they may talk and the child listen. It became as if reflecting team. We create a dialogue in a new way – instead of becoming the one who is supposed to explain who has said what and next time when I meet someone else I have to repeat what someone else have said – it only creates a lot of oddities, this becomes more direct – it is also timesaving – in one way – it doesn’t create any strange features. Everybody is there and everybody is saying and hearing and giving and getting response in this immediately …

Coach: – Is this about you working with young people?

Social worker I: – I do not exactly have any experience of a six months old baby. I believe that we have to consider that the child is living in the middle of this, even though naturally you have to be careful about what you say and do, but this is nothing peculiar – if somebody should be chocked it would be me [laugh] for the child this is everyday life. What we are talking about is their reality, this is the child living in – there are limits also in this, however, this has made a difference that makes a difference …

[...]

Social worker J: – When we go through cases, I have more and more noticed how colleagues are giving good advice; Have you thought about this and that? Aspects you already have considered and could have been able to mention yourself. If you can change this and develop it to more reflecting, it appears like this now when I am looking at it more from the outside – we have it like this in the supervision [another supervisor] as well, superficial, such things you already know about, not what you need, you need something deeper …
The participants talked about how they were in an ongoing changing process creating new narratives in and about investigations and the investigational work. They talked about how their own identities were changing and how they were becoming more self-aware:

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker K: – A colleague asked me who had had coaching, if it was becoming easier now for me to motivate parents to go on in treatment? I then thought about my own efforts and contributions, since Ann-Margreth asked me this question: ” – What is that have to happen before you judge that it is good enough with [what you and the clients achieve through] the investigation?” That was a completely new thought. Was it possible that this, which I was doing, was [good] enough? Now I can think that it can be enough if I succeed to have these kinds of meetings during the investigation … what is good enough? What is enough? These were questions that arose in the investigation.

Social worker I: – Now I can relay on myself much more, for example when a boy had a suggestion for a solution. Now I let him negotiate for himself […]. Earlier I probably would have persisted in [my solution].

Social worker K: – I recognise that. I am thinking of a case about abuse that I had. In this case I trusted my gut feeling that it was [good] enough with the meetings and the dialogues I had had. Earlier I would not have dared to even think like this.

Social worker I: – [Earlier] I felt vulnerable when I was going to try something new. Now I am not afraid anymore. Ann-Margreth had focus on it all the time until we realised: “Now I forgot the child, again …” Ann-Margreth asked [from the children’s view] so
we returned to this all the time, inquiring, so you could have the courage to test another way. I am not so afraid anymore. She gave support. That’s the most important thing – I would not say that I otherwise follow a manual, but sometimes I become too one-sided. Ann-Margreth showed me other ways to the most important …

Social worker K: – We had never decided any theme for our dialogues beforehand. What it should be or so… what comes may come…

Social worker M: – These methods lead to something different. It has been so important to separate investigation – decision – execution. But now, now all these things are happening all over.

In this first phase of the study and the action projects, several new experiences and understandings were emerging and noticed. Above, among several other things, were highlighted differences in point of view and meanings of social investigations. The social workers had noticed the difference that makes the investigating process different in systemic practice; the basis of seeing the investigating process as the phase that could open up for further change; the difference that makes the difference for the rest of the client’s life (and for the social worker’s – who knows?).

4.2.1 Increasing awareness
There were also examples of what I regularly noticed in the study, and have written about in other places in this dissertation, how the social workers underestimated their own contributions in relation to the clients, and especially from the children’s viewpoint: – Who was the social worker becoming for the child? Or, as we came to metaphorically express the social worker’s use of a child perspective: How to become the children’s social worker and become the
child’s commissioner\textsuperscript{35}? Reflexively, this increased the importance of the social workers’ awareness of their own participation – in how his/her own approach in use and actions influenced and co-created the outcome. These aspects were in continuous focus in DC, increasing the social workers’ self-confidence and courage to take new considerations and explore their own contribution and, which became important, to ask the participating clients for feedback and explore together, listening to one another’s perspective.

4.2.2 Different perspectives
An important aspect of my task as coach was to introduce the children’s perspectives as well as other clients’ perspectives (especially later on when the adult project started).

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker N: – It is also new, this using of different perspectives, to reflect from a child’s perspective about the parents’ actions for example.

Social worker O: – It is new, this using of different perspectives, to think as if you are the child, how the parents think …

Then one of the participants challenged the others with a statement:

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event I 2005

Social worker P: – Different perspectives, when we use this, that is not about how it is – we are just sitting there and making up fantasies – as in the theatre – something we perhaps just make up.

Other colleagues gave tit for tat:

\textsuperscript{35} More about becoming the child’s commissioner in chapter Narratives from within DC. It is about changing your approach in relation to the child as if the child was your commissioner.
Social worker Q: – Though that is not a big deal. The idea is not to explore as if we know what X thinks but, as a social worker, to get new aspects and thoughts no matter what he is thought or if he are thinking like this – that’s why it is not made up.

Social worker R: – There is no objectivity in this. It is like in psychodrama – if you want to increase your understanding …

**4.2.3 Unique opportunity**

As a whole, the participating social workers seemed to enjoy and find the coaching important, and that it contributed in a positive way to their working life:

Social worker S: – It is unique to be able to sit alone with a coach of your own who has no formal rights or responsibilities; it is completely up to me to do it afterwards. We have so much time together. I am enjoying myself and it makes a difference that my coach is not going with me – is not having the responsibility to carry through whatever we have been talking about …

Social worker K: – Luxurious to move further, to become inspired before meetings, to return and reflect on what was learnt in this, to talk about it, makes a difference when you get home, a new situation: – What is this doing to me?
4.3 Voices heard about DC and in relation to DC, December 2006

One and half years later social workers (representatives of social secretaries, secretaries of foster care and managers) were once again reflecting in and on their participation in DC in a joint process. I call this Event II. Three delta-reflecting teams explored the emerging meaning in use of DC, how they were using DC and how they experienced what emerged in relation to DC in their work, in relation to clients, each other and others and otherness? How was their practice, working environment and interaction in their working group influenced? In the final chapter, where I am reflecting on the whole progress and all the important events of the study, I listen to all the voices heard (and remember) I have heard in the study including all the groups in Event II. Here, however, I only give a full account of one of the groups’ contributions, as we again make our acquaintance with the social worker who in the introduction associated with Chaplin’s movie The Dictator, using several metaphors in her narrating. Here, she is being interviewed by two of her colleagues. We join them after the introduction when she has been asked what she was going to remember most about DC. This is their second meeting on the subject and sometimes they refer to what was said in the first meeting. It starts with a striking example of how the social workers explore the meaning of their understanding of “doing nothing” as one social worker calls it. From within DC, the social workers seemed to realize that they tend to diminish and understate their own influence and the effect of their own contribution. Their attentions had been so directed towards fixing and producing, fulfilling the legal claims guaranteeing children’s or other clients’ safety and protection, that they seemed to have missed the possibilities they and the clients created in relation to each other. The dialogue continues with other striking examples about how they notice that they were not used to either the attention to their work or to putting their own words into what and how they were doing.

36 Cf. Social-legal discourse in table 3 in chapter Language in use.
4.3.1 From ideas of “doing nothing” to becoming aware of “doing something”

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event II 2006 and group 3 (Olsson, 2008a selections from pp. 48 – 53).

Social worker A: – Your answer to the question was: ”– What am I doing when I am thinking that I am doing nothing?” I have written this citation down here. This is how you expressed it. What did you mean?

Social worker B: – I think I meant … however this is the meaning I am giving now: At once when I talk to somebody something happens, but that is not what we into words. On the whole it is difficult to put this into words. You don’t really know. You don’t consciously think that now am I going to say this and then that will happen … although it seems fuzzy, something is happening in the conversation itself. It starts processes in the other person and it does something with me as well – which I now put into words – which I otherwise would not have noticed.

Social worker A: – Exactly. That’s how I heard you. You put in words something you already had caught in your doing.

Social worker B: – Mmm.

Social worker A: – As my own. When I don’t think I am doing anything – it strikes me that you [social worker C’s name] came up with a very good Winnie-the-Poo-proverb.

Social worker C: – It was exactly when Winnie-the-Pooh says: – Now I shall go out and do nothing – and so I did!
All [laughing]: Yes.

Social worker C: – That’s what we talked about – that we actually are doing something …

Social worker A and B: – Yes.

Social worker C: – You are doing something in doing nothing …

Social worker B: – Yes, we are tremendously fixed on action – we are determined on action – that’s what [the manager’s name] says: – Do something! – Take action – do something. That’s terrific in some contexts – but from within a dialogue is it probably not so that we should have our attention in that direction [to focus in production]. Instead we shall act with a reflecting and open approach, yes, both for myself and for others participating. So, often we have had with us that we shall give advice and do so and so, but that does not generate very much. However, this, this opens – generates more in the dialogue.

Social worker A: – This steers me into the second aspect I heard earlier; when you think about the coaching and the difference that makes a difference, that was what you were touching on, what was so special for you in the coaching and you talked about being listened to in the dialogue with Ann-Margreth … Can you expand the meaning in what became so special in conversations with Ann-Margreth?

Social worker B: – It was a little of what [social worker C’s name] said earlier about navel-gazing somehow – not to have focus on any agenda in front of you [showing on the table how to follow a list from top to bottom] without any focus from within [pointing to
her chest], without knowing what will happen but to approach whatever emerges even if it does not always seems to connect at once, but it was allowed to go with it anyhow and then everything seemed to belong to this somehow, whatever you get into spontaneously. Something happens with you inwardly then – so somehow it was connected after all, yes …

Social worker C: – Mmm.

Social worker A: – To be listened to, to be accepted as I am in the coaching and somehow also, you felt that it “spilled over” to the families you were working with?

Social worker B: – Yes, exactly, to let it be. This is what our clients need also – be allowed to search for their own solution – this thing about solution focus – it is not so easy to find, you have to “dig” around – start somewhere. It was perhaps not what we wished to hear, however it might be the process that makes the difference – and that is what we get [in the coaching] – instead of being served …

Social worker A: – Yes?

Social worker B [changing her dialect – pretending]: – Yes, yes, I am going to set to work with that. Yes, that you have to do. Only because we have been told that …

[Laughing]

Social worker A: – I think you said [social worker C’s name]: – Most important is that you yourself make the conclusions,
formulate the thoughts and you yourself reach for what is most important. That’s what’s most important for the families too.

[

Social worker B: – Then you said [to social worker C]: I have got affirmation in doing what I am doing and that the direct meeting is actually worth something – this is OK – you don’t necessarily have to use models and tools, even though they could be of some value. What you got in the coaching is that you became somebody in your work, what you did was affirmed, and then you connected this with to stop and listen without necessarily giving anything more in return – how you connect this to clients, how you approach clients and other persons too …

Social worker C: – Now I was going to do it again, what I said I am going to leave in my thoughts, to be a little ahead of things and think about whatever I shall answer instead of listening, which I think I shall do, to what you were actually saying …

As so many times before in DC, the social workers returned to the importance of reflections in actions and on actions. As social worker you not always immediately have to arrange for measures. It could even be advisable to stop, look, listen.

4.3.2 What works?

Finally the social workers approached the question:
– Whatever made the coaching work?
Here are some answers:
4.3.2.1 Listening ears, acceptance and attention in the listening

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event II 2006 and group 3

Social worker C: – To have a listening ear and keeping one’s attention – listening. There didn’t have to come out anything from me – nothing wrong with that. Ann-Margeth had, by having this time I’ve got some sort of feeling for this and she has also been affirmative in relation to me a lot ... That it is also okay that the tool is you … also okay, you are allowed to conduct these dialogues with children in the way you prefer. You don’t have to have Bear Cards or anything else. The dialogue is enough. You always remember to listen a lot …

Social worker B: – That’s interesting. What did Ann-Margreth do that made you feel some calmness within, that you are okay as you are and that this hopefully shall land with the clients, that you are going to transform in relation to the clients; to let it go and let the help find itself. Can you see what it was in Ann-Margreth’s approach that made you feel at ease in your mind, that you are pleased, that you are okay?

Social worker C: – Yes, I believe so. She was also listening very much. – She isn’t any cipher. – She gave in return, so it became a dialogue, a very much listening one, in the same way I would like to be and try to attain. Something you have to keep with it – work with [the improvement] all the time.

Social worker B: – She gave in return but didn’t she give any advice?

Social worker C: – No.
Social worker B: – What did she give in return then?

Social worker C: – Perhaps she did it with questions. Yes, questions that made me think.

### 4.3.2.2 Listening questions

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event II 2006 and group 3

Social worker A: – These questions – deepening questions – is that what you are thinking of the most?

Social worker C: – Listening questions, if you can express it like that.

Social worker A: – Mmm.

Social worker C: – Reflecting questions started processes [showing with a movement beside her head], which I experienced as very exciting. That is what I think Ann-Margreth has assisted me with, to think along new lines – you need new guidelines – directions in your head, you might say.

Social worker A: – Mmm.

Social worker C: – Strange [laughing] that you can succeed in this.

Social worker A: – In this through Ann-Margreth?

Social worker C: – Yes, however I have contributed to some of it.
Social worker A: – Of course. […] Is this that you are becoming more listing in your work, is this something that appears in your private life as well?

Social worker C: – Yes I actually believe it does – hard to know – nobody has said anything about it.

### 4.3.2.3 To have the courage to dare to let yourself go into the unknown and take some risks

Translated extract (my transcription) from Event II 2006 and group 3

Social worker A: – What would you like to say to those who are going to start coaching with Ann-Margreth?

Social worker C: – To really take part, become active, take care of all the time, and, we used the word, enjoy every moment …

Social worker A: – Yes?

Social worker C: – Think, here is a person who comes to me and I am allowed to sit there for perhaps two hours and nobody is interrupting; on the contrary she may sit there as long as you like. To really [showing with her hands] take this opportunity and use it for some kind of inner development and reflect on why am I doing what I am doing and how – which ideas do I have in my use and so …

Social worker A: – You used the word courage and to be careful [in the earlier meeting]. What did you mean?
Social worker C: – To have the courage to dare to let yourself go into the unknown and take some risks …

Social worker A: – Wasn’t it also about to be careful in relation to yourself and others in the process?

In the quotes above some very interesting and striking answers emerged, indicating how DC was co-created by us participants. Once again someone claims that it is important to let yourself go (cf. for example earlier section Learning by daring to let yourself go into uncertainty and references to coaching (Gallwey, 1997) and how important what happens between us is, in the interplay, in relationships and that it is about mutual responsiveness.

The concept “listening questions”, which was mentioned here, I use and hear with the meaning of how the listening gives birth to new questions, continuing the conversation and giving orientation about how to go on in the dialogue, addressing the other participants in the dialogical flow, who are ready to respond with what could be “listening answers”. As in love or in a successful dance you do not have to think about and plan the next step, you just take it and so does your partner(s). In the earlier chapter, A Participatory Action research tour within systemic work, I used cycling within a peloton as an example of joint action with the purpose of illustrating the interplay within this study. The simultaneously ongoing interplay and mutual responsiveness heighten the quality (Shotter, 1993). Something (a third) is born in between the two and neither you nor I are “to blame” – as if it just happens (Shotter, 2004c).

Shotter used to call this relational dynamic joint action (Shotter, 1984, 1993, 2000). Later he called it, following Michail Bakhtin (1986, 1997), the dialogical and nowadays, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004), to do the weird kind of complexity created he calls it the realm of activity created in our meetings, the

37 More reflections on this part and quotations in chapter Reflections and Conclusions.
realm of the Chiasmic – the realm of Entangled or Intertwined (Shotter, 2005c). I continue to call it joint action as well as dialogical and sometimes I use the word chiasmic in relation to both the words.

4.4 Delta-reflecting teams and coaching colleagues conducting the first network meeting, 14 September 2007

Nine months later a final event, Event III, and at the same time the starting point for the new South Swedish Systemic Network, took place. The commissioner of the action projects, now former, social director Eva Carlström, the new social director Gunvor Landqvist and social counsellors of the County invited all the participants.

4.4.1 Successful partner-researchers

The social workers who had become my partner- or co-researchers and I had made all the preparations for the meeting and I was only setting the context. The partner-researchers independently carried out all the rest. They organised delta-reflecting teams, interviews and other activities using a variation of systemic ideas. In the morning they worked with four groups in three different rooms and in the afternoon with five groups in four rooms. I paid all the groups a visit, observing and listening, but mostly concentrated on the cameras, noticing how elegant the partner-researchers’ managers conducted the arrangements and how successfully they managed to involve all the participants in dialogical conversations with each other. Everyone present seemed to me to be participating with his or her heart and soul. This was confirmed by the partner-researchers when we some weeks later watched selected parts of the tape recordings from the meeting. Listening to the voices during the day and watching the tapes, I am impressed with and delighted how the systemic ideas lived among the participants, how they showed a systemic approach and narrated about good systemic examples in their practice.

Here, I have chosen only one sequence (more voices heard in the delta-reflecting teams in Appendix A). I have chosen this as a striking theme in the delta-
reflections, growing and increasing in the study as well as afterwards. These final voices highlight how to connect and adapt manual based social work into systemic practice, and vice versa, as important and growing concerns.

4.4.2 How to adapt prefixed schedules for questioning and manual based methods into systemic practice?

The participants talked about how they experience the difference between an interview with a presettled/prefixed schedule, for example questioning according to a manual, and the dialogical use learnt and developed in the systemic practice in the actions projects and the study. One of the social workers had been to a job interview where a reflecting team was used. In the introduction they had asked him if he knew about reflecting teams. He had answered with a smile of recognition as he also did when he talked about this memory. Surprisingly the interview was conducted with an interview based on a questionnaire without any adaptation to the presence, to his answers or the responses in the situation. The social worker had expected the interviewer to move with him following his answers. Instead, the interviewer had just followed his schedule, even though the answers were already given. The whole situation felt absurd, said the social worker. I felt like nobody was listening, as if my voice did not count at all. After listening to this story the group of participants continued reflecting as follows:

— All these templates. It takes away everything that new unfolds – nothing is allowed to interfere. You don’t have time or space for any answers, because you have so many questions.
— This question comes later on. You have to wait or we return to this question later on.
— I’m working with addiction and we have been to a course in ASI. We’re going to use these ASI interviews and they don’t fit in with the ideas in the systemic practice at all.
— We have the same with BBIC.
— It could be, depending on how you use them.
— We have been taught to use and follow it to the letter.
— There’s no life in these papers.
— If this it was we are supposed to follow we have to force ourselves to follow it – you have to excuse yourself …
— It is so woody questions because it is going to be statistic.
— You have to explain to the client …
— You almost have to say: This is what we always do at the beginning …
— But if it makes un-repairing damages [in the relationship].
— Many of those who have used [a type of questionnaire] are not supposed to create relationship but that is what we are [and believe in].

The participating social workers continued to speak about how they struggled with how to conduct manual based interviews and other predetermined forms of work into the dialogical conversations, as well as dialogical investigations emerging in DC. When the participants planned for the next network meeting (2008) this became the theme they chose to continue with and expand on further.

4.5 **Summarizing the DC chapter and the tale of the projects**

In the chapter was presented how the coaching was conducted and developed. The participating social workers chose at least one case each that was followed. Often they brought in two, three or four cases. The majority of the participants said they had chosen a new case for investigation. Some of the social workers working with adults (often with addiction problems) said they had chosen an old case – a person they already had done several investigations on. The social worker felt stuck in the casework and wanted to find a new orientation on how to go on. The task as coach was to encourage and stimulate the participators to increase their self-awareness and consciousness about their own abilities, skills and methods in use.

Different ways of practicing were explored emphasising multiplicity, concentrating on inquiring and exploring the logic in use, investigating examples and statements from different points of view and perspectives, creating new
alternative systemic stories, hypothesising stories, increasing our curiosity in the idea(s) in use, especially when somebody is doing or saying something strange and/or striking. Sometimes DC became preparation of new meetings, learning to learn, developing and improving skills and our capacity for different unfoldings. At the same time, it was important in performance of practice to just “let it happen!” (Gallwey, 1997, 1981), otherwise we might have risked making too much of an effort, focusing on technique more than responses and awareness in the situation.

The joint search for striking moments seemed to help the participants to “Stop – Look – Listen” (Dewey, 2007), looking into details in the moment, often in chronological order and in small steps. The purpose was also to bring the participants into the situation, remembering from within (Shotter, 2000), to seek participatory understanding, avoiding an approach from the outside as observers (Shotter, 2004b).

DC became learning by reflection in action and on action, related to Donald Schôn’s concepts (2002, 1987) as well as Paulo Freire, who attached great importance to the connection between action and reflection for learning and development (Freire, 1972).

The concepts listening questions and listening ears evolved in DC with the meaning of how the listening gives birth to new questions, continuing the conversation and giving orientation about how to go on in the dialogue, addressing the other participants in the dialogical flow, who are ready to respond with what could be listening answers. The expressions listening ears and listening questions captured the coach’s participation of placing herself completely at the other participants’ disposal, completely accessible in the mutual responsiveness in the moment – being here and now in the present.
I conclude this chapter with the project leader Eva Carlström’s summary at the final event (III). The partner-researchers asked her to tell them what they called “The tale of the projects” (abbreviated version):

— Once upon the time it was a lovely day and I was sitting in the county governor’s car, driven by his chauffeur. This gave me strength, not the car and the chauffeur, but the county governor’s interest in vulnerable children, and we talked about inviting people in the county to lunch at the residence. So we did. We invited all the children and young people’s homes and people from the Social Welfare Offices in the municipalities. All of them did not come but those who did open up a dialogue. I remember how we discussed how the Social Welfare Services could enter into these children’s lives earlier, and how the investigations thus far were conducted with an adult perspective while the Children Convention proclaimed something quite different.

— We continued to meet and in the end those most interested in these questions came and initiated the launch of the project *Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children in Scania*. Those participating had made an individual choice to create this – something new and useful. Some of the participants did not endure being in the gap of confusion in the process – in not getting the answer or any “true facts” from someone else – but a dialogue together with other participants. Some of those who put up with this, perhaps ten people in the end, are with us here today …

— I am the one to blame for this systemic direction. I had worked together with KCCF in the nineties and was bringing these ideas with me from the county of Uppland to Scania. So it happened that Ann-Margreth called me38, on quite another matter, and we somehow came to talk about KCCF and realised how much we had in common …

38 Here, Eva Carlström is referring to a telephone call other than the call in the beginning of the first chapter, about the request of coaching. This telephone call, when we realized we both had a connection to KCCF, was before the project with the safety delegates in the spring of 2003.
These projects are also examples of new and different ways of using project resources in and of the Board. A difference that made a difference in this was that I plucked up the courage to claim that the Board most certainly was allowed to manage projects of their own and that the Director General of the Board let herself be talked into these projects.

However, not until now can I read in Ann-Margreth’s manuscript\(^{39}\) how my dreams, when I was sitting there in the County Governor’s car, were carried into effect. I wanted to hear about: What are social workers occupied with? What hides in their minds? What makes a difference for social workers’ doings and actions? Now I can read about what was in my dreams, page after page, in her next book. There is nothing about “Now we are going to criticize social workers again”, if anyone thought that. No, this is the other way around and a lot has taken place, emerged and been improved …

This is Commencement Day. I am stepping aside. Good luck with all the chatting and talking.

After this, the peloton continued the ride without any more support from the County. The project leader had said that she was pleased; we had succeeded and fulfilled her and the County’s dream with the two action projects. The communication and dialogue in the peloton had changed us and our approach in relation to clients, one another and others. In the emerging awareness of how we reciprocally and reflexively co-create occurrences and outcomes, including who we become in relation to one another, the participating social workers’ awareness of the impact of their own contributions, and their own importance in relation to children and other clients, also had improved. Focus had moved from collecting data for decision-making, about what would be best for the child and other clients, to focusing on the changing process in relation to the participating clients, including children when they wanted to and could, co-creating new orientation on how to go on.

\(^{39}\) Here, she is referring to the manuscript of *Social secretaries of the clients*... (Olsson, 2007c).
5. Narratives from within DC
In this chapter, the participating social workers and I give examples of the progress from within the investigational work in relation to the DC. The episodes are from cases and narratives from within the conducted DC and in relation to DC (as my interviews with 12 children), from delta-reflecting teams in the conducted events and from the written contributions from participating social workers (in all 10 of the participating social workers) in this study. The examples I have chosen focus on the emerging partnership between social workers and children – on children’s participation in their own investigations. Through these examples I want to throw light upon the emerging changes of the practice in relation to DC from the social worker’s view; what they related to DC and what took place in DC from their point of view. The chapter starts with the background, aims and verbal signposts giving orientation in the study.

5.1 The background to and the aims of DC
My task as coach was to carry the action projects’ ideas, aims and methods into effect by developing and conducting systemic coaching, using ideas from systemic practice and supporting the participating social workers in creating and elucidating illustrative examples of good relationship-based, reflective and collaborative investigations in social work in which the clients, and especially the children, were invited to share and participate. They were invited into the investigating process as well as into making their voices heard in the written investigations, including the assessments and the basis for the decision-making. The aims to make children’s (and other clients’) voices heard, both in the investigation process and in the text of the investigation, was used in the study, not only in the meaning that the investigation should include *dialogical conversations with the child but also that the child should be invited to participate and together with the social worker develop a kind of partnership* in the whole process of the investigational work, if the child/client so wished. A child has strategies of its own which they perhaps want to share with the social worker. They might also have questions, ideas, wishes, suggestions, hopes,
experiences or worries they want to express to the social worker, as we will return to and see later in this chapter.

5.2 Previous voices on participatory child investigations

The background to the project and the commissioned research work was that the commissioners wanted to create new alternatives and answers to the critical voices that at this time were raised in Sweden by researchers and others about the approaches and methods social workers used in investigational work. Most of all, critical voices had arisen about social workers and their interaction with children, or rather lack of interaction. In other words, the progress of this study and the impact DC had in changing social work could be seen as the commissioners’ answer to these critical questions. This led me to explore some of the previous research and the findings of earlier critical voices. I wanted to learn from those experiences and measure our progress. What were they saying about children’s and other clients’ participation in social investigations?

5.2.1 Search strategy and methodology

As these searches were done mainly in purpose to make it possible for me as a professional to improve my understanding of my commissioners’ view with the purpose of improving my fulfilment of the commission of the County, I concentrated the search on research and authors of articles and books in Sweden, although I also found other interesting references on the way. Thus, during the first years of the study I focused on research about the interplay between the social worker and the participating child in the context of social investigations on children. Later, I found that the term partnership could be relevant as well (Braye and Preston-Shoot, 1997, Preston-Shoot, 2007). At the time of writing, I made a new search, without any geographical limitations, on child, social work, investigation/assessment, partnership/participator/participant or children’s participation – both in English and Swedish.

Through the University of Lund I have access to the databases providing references to articles, books, book chapters, doctoral dissertations, reports, etc.
Some databases contain entire texts. Others have references to literature that I can find among the journals in ELIN@Lund or in the library catalogue Lovisa. I can also search for books outside the university through LIBRIS, the Swedish library base. I find references to scientific articles in journals and databases available through ELIN@Lund.

I have used these databases for more systematic searching about for example coaching (Olsson, 2005b, 2006). I have also followed the progress of the Swedish adaptation of the English *Integrated Children’s System (ICS)*, built upon previous developments like the Looking After Children materials (1995) and the Assessment Framework (2000), introduced in the UK (Every Child Matters, 2007). These English frameworks have been adapted to the Swedish context by the National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW) of Sweden (Socialstyrelsen, 2007b). The Swedish version is called *Barns behov i centrum (BBIC)* (Children’s needs in focus).

I have also come into contact with references by other strategic choices. For example, I met and listened to Mona Sandbæk and Eva Friis at conferences as well as to Elisabeth Näsman. Näsman participated in the seminar *Children’s participation* in the Research Conference at Forsa40, March 20th 2007, Lund. In the same seminar was the project *Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children*, presented by representatives from the social organizations of the municipalities of Lund and Malmö (I return to this at the end of this chapter).

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40 Swedish Association for Social Work Research – FORSA (Förbundet för forskning i socialt arbete) FORSA is a politically independent organisation open to practitioners and researchers who are active in the social field in Sweden as well as to other stakeholders who share its aims. Since its inception FORSA is an institutional member of the Inter-University Consortium of International Social Development (IUCISD) and the International Council for Social Welfare (ICSW).
Another way to get clues to new orientation that I use is to look into the list of references used in interesting articles and search for the original versions of the references I find interesting.

In the next sections, I have chosen to highlight the findings that I had found most enriching in relation to the County’s project *Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children*.

### 5.3 Research narratives about investigations on children

Practitioners may find it difficult to engage children in the assessment process (Shemmings and Shemmings, 2004). There are a lot of good reasons to focus on the parents. As a social worker you are dependent on their consent and cooperation in order to learn to know the family and the child’s world and to be able to support them. The child needs its parents and their resources and the social worker’s task is to support the parents and help them use and increase their own possibilities in relation to their child (Hafstad and Øvreeide, 2001). At the same time, children develop their own strategies – strategies that make it easier for them to move between different contexts and to form/shape their lives according to circumstances and conditions in the surroundings (Bäck-Wiklund and Lundström, 2001). Children often have strong opinions about their needs and ways in which they can be met, and are able to express their views and feelings if the relationship between the child and the professional feels trustful (Bannister, 2004, Butler and Williamson, 1994). Arguments about children not being old enough, or qualified enough or competent enough to be involved in assessing their own situation should be considered with this in mind (Bäck-Wiklund and Lundström, 2001). Research studies have demonstrated that children and young people know what their needs are and can usually communicate these needs if practitioners take the time and develop the skills to listen to them.
5.3.1 Stories told
In my inquiries I found dominating stories told about social workers that did not involve or talked with children in investigations, did not make the children’s voices heard and did not account for the children’s point of view in written investigations. There were several studies about unseen children and about children not being heard or involved in social work and the legal system related to social work (Wåhlander, 1994, Andersson, 1995, Hollander, 1998, Hindberg, 1999, Egelund et al., 2000, Sundell and Karlsson, 1999, Sundell and Egelund, 2000, Cocozza, 2007) which also the National Board of Health and Welfare of Sweden (NBHW) had paid attention to (Socialstyrelsen, 2001). The predominant stories about social workers were about social workers focusing on the parents, in investigations on children and, above all, creating a process of cooperation with the mother aimed at succeeding in providing for the child’s care needs with the consent of the parents (for example in: Andersson, 1991, 1995, Egelund, 1997, Claezon, 2004, Sundell and Egelund, 2000). Did the social workers not entrust children to participate or to share the power as actors asked Gunvor Andersson (2000)?

5.3.2 Stories lived
In my practice as coach and supervisor there were a lot of stories told and lived about social workers talking with children and relating to their point of view in

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41 The expression and the ideas of exploring the difference between "stories told and stories lived” from W. Barnett Pearce (1994). “The concept of the tension between stories lived and stories told is familiar to many systemic practitioners. Stories lived are the co-constructed patterns of joint-actions that we and other perform; stories told are the narratives that people use to make sense of stories lived. Although most people feel need to align stories lived and stories told, they cannot be identical, and the tension between them provides the dynamic for much of our lives.” (Pearce & Pearce 1998, p. 171).

42 The term investigation is applied on laws for all kinds of care with the purpose of enabling a committee to reach a decision in a case, including assessments. The concept is also used as a comprehensive term for the final documentation – a case investigation result. The aim of the investigation is to provide the municipal Social Welfare Committee with a reliable foundation for decision-making and to establish a basis for counselling work. (Friis, 2003, Edvardsson, 2003, Socialstyrelsen, 2006d).

43 The committee should principally provide for the child’s care needs with the consent of the parents. Failing that, the committee, provided it considers that all other legal requirements have been fulfilled, must apply to the County Administrative Court for an order for placing young persons under care pursuant to the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (lag med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga, abbrev. LVU), and given these powers, determine in what way care should be provided (Friis, 2003).
investigations. At this time the focus in the developmental work in children welfare and protection was about improving social worker’s conversations with children. This was given a lot of attention by the National Board of Health and Welfare of Sweden (NBHW) (read more about the implementation of BBIC further on in this chapter) (Socialstyrelsen, 2004b, 2006a) and a lot of literature was published on the matter (for example in: Cederborg, 2000, Øvreeide, 2000, Wilson, 2001, Lindstein, 2001, Cederborg, 2005, Soltvedt, 2005, Holmsen, 2007, Iwarsson, 2007).

Beyond dispute was that clients, neither children nor adults, rarely participated with the social workers in writing the report (Olsson, 2005a, 2007c). Grown-ups were invited to take part in the written investigations, but the stories told about the clients as well as those told by the children I interview in this study, were about lack of or very little interest in taking part in or even read the written report. The logic behind their relation to the written investigations is not elaborated upon here but explored in two of the books published by the County (Olsson, 2007c, 2008b).

5.3.2.1 The proceedings from within the investigation were not accounted for

What was also revealed in the social worker’s narrating was that they had made a practice in the writing of investigations, of not giving any account of the process from within the investigatory work, the considerations they had done carrying through the investigation, the logic in use or what agreements they had reached with the children during the investigation process about their working methods in the investigations. Some of them related how many meetings they had had and with whom. That’s all.

In exploring this in DC, we connected it both to how the social workers had tended to minimize the value of their own work so far as well as to the importance of their relation to the children and other clients (see for example the reflections about “doing nothing” further on in this chapter). We also connected it to their earlier training in behaving as neutral investigators, collecting data
before analyzing and deciding (cf. table 3 and socio-legal discourse in chapter *Language in use*). However, an integral part of the legal rights of the individual client should also be that the social workers account for the way they proceeded in the investigations.

These concerns (above) were something I pointed out to the participating social workers and their managers as well as to the County. I have also written about these findings in one of the books published by the County (Olsson, 2008c). In the book I write about the findings I made in studying and exploring 181 written investigations in all from four of the municipalities participating in the County’s projects. 10 of these had been done with the support of DC. Most of all I could notice a difference that made a difference in how the processes and the proceedings were accounted for. I return to this in section *New orientation in investigations – signs in documentation* in this chapter.

### 5.3.3 BBIC

Some of the investigations I explored were conducted and written according to BBIC – *Barns Behov I Centrum* (Children’s needs in focus). What struck me most of all in these investigation texts was how the children’s narratives seemed to disappear.

The social workers had analyzed the children’s narratives according to the BBIC triangle very well. All these were accounted for under headlines identical with the variables in the triangle together with what everybody else had said. The result was that it became impossible to read and hear the child’s narrative in full, as a whole. The children’s voices became hard to hear. At the end of the book, and to the social workers I met and meet, I recommend a both-and solution: *both* do and account for the analyses *and* keep the child’s narratives in whole – in dialogue with the child in question.
5.3.3.1 English framework for assessment

In the UK, the *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* was introduced to encourage local authority social work teams to conduct initial assessments rather than child protection investigations in borderline cases, with a view of finding less intrusive forms of practise that addresses the wider developmental needs of the child (Platt, 2006) (Department of Health et al., 2000, Department of Health, 2000, Department of Health, 2003).

A conceptual framework and practice tool known as the *Integrated Children’s System (ICS)*, built upon previous developments as the *Looking After Children* materials (1995) and the *Assessment Framework* (2000), was later introduced in the UK. It offers “a single approach to undertaking the key processes of assessment, planning, intervention and review based on an understanding of children’s developmental needs, and their parents’ capacities to respond to these needs in the context of their families and communities” (Every Child Matters, 2007, p. 1).
These English frameworks the National Board of Health and Welfare of Sweden (NBHW) have adapted to the Swedish context (Socialstyrelsen, 2007b). BBIC was presented by NBHW as a response to the criticism that was repeatedly directed at child welfare from both researchers and supervisory authorities. BBIC provides a structure for systematically collecting information and documenting children’s and young people’s need of services with the purpose of having the child in focus. The work of assessing, planning and reviewing is done as far as possible by the social services in cooperation with the child and the parents and there are special forms of work and meetings in the BBIC to facilitate this cooperation (Socialstyrelsen, 2002, 2003, 2006c, 2007b, Rasmusson et al., 2004, Rasmusson, 2009).

5.3.3.2 Different responses and strategies
NBHW’s implementation of BBIC also included the social workers in Scania. One of the largest municipalities in Scania, Helsingborg, was involved at the experimental and developmental stage of the implementation, and the social workers in Helsingborg very early spread the manuals to their colleagues in other municipalities.

At the same time, there was a solution-focused movement among the social workers in Scania, also influencing the investigatory work (for example: Korman and Söderquist, 1994, Söderquist and Suskin-Holmqvist, 2006, Turnell and Edwards, 1999).

The purpose of the BBIC project, as in Scania’s project Strengthening the protection of vulnerable children was, to strengthen the participation of children and improve cooperation with the child’s parents and wider family. However the ideas in use in development strategies were quite different.

Within BBIC, the NBHW take as its starting point to implement a stipulated form (Hedlund and Lovén, 2008). If a municipality wants to work according to BBIC, the social welfare board in the municipality has to reach an agreement
with NBHW about this (Socialstyrelsen, 2006b). This municipality then has a period of probation (maximum 24 months) for the implementation. When the municipality (read the social workers) successfully adheres to the BBIC concept, using stipulated forms and manuals, NBHW issues a license for the municipality. NBHW can withdraw this license with six months notice if they find that BBIC is not properly used.

The County’s projects were more about “letting many flowers blossom” (the County of Scania at this time distributed postcards in the form of bags with seeds of meadow flowers as a metaphor for their policy). Working with systemic ideas in management in leadership, diversity and the ideas of circularity in co-creation were important aspects in used strategies. The county governor and managers in the County wanted to work in dialogue with the actors, encourage and stimulate (give nourishment), and wait and see what (seeds) would grow, blossom, where and through whom. When the aims were to empower and encourage mutual partnership in dialogical interplay, as in these projects, then this had to permeate all levels and relationships, said the project leader Eva Carlström.

5.3.3.3 Diversity

These ideas of developing dialogical interplay and social investigations based on dialogue might support the investigations to become conducted differently. Multiple versions of investigations in social work were not advisable according to NBHW (Socialstyrelsen, 2006a).

There were scientific and political currents claiming that social work and especially investigations in child welfare and protection have to be more equally conducted and aim for the guaranteeing of quality. Researchers argue for more specific guidelines and criteria or that screening should be more formalized (Sundell, 1997, Jergeby and Sundell, 2008, Cocozza, 2007) when research results when showing how social workers’ investigating practice varies (cf.

NBHW found it important to move towards a more uniform model of investigation, to create a structure and system in the assessments, to make it easier to follow-up on and contribute to greater protection of rights (Socialstyrelsen, 2006a).

The overarching objective of BBIC was to form a national uniform system within child welfare that could be offered to local authorities throughout the country in an evidence-based practice in social welfare work (Socialstyrelsen, 2004a). However, so far the evaluations of the use of BBIC reveal various versions of the use of BBIC (Rasmusson et al., 2004, Rasmusson, 2004, 2006).

Analysis of the documentation illustrated that the children’s own statements were not documented in the forms to the extent that is desirable and to be expected, based on the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare. The documentation often gave an “objectified” description of the child, the child’s own perspectives were found to a small extent or were totally absent. An exception is the consultation form for children and records from review meetings, which usually contained documentation on expressions of children’s own wishes and opinions. (Rasmusson, 2006, p. 12)

[...]

Meanwhile the interviews with the social workers illustrated that the children participated in documentation to a larger extent than appeared in the forms. Generally viewed, the documentation gave a clear picture of what the social workers considered necessary for the child. Simultaneously, it can be concluded that none of the cases
studied were dealt with entirely according to the ‘rule book’ and the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare. Many of the cases lacked, for example, care plans and treatment plans in accordance with BBIC. However, although no complete file studies have been carried out, this does not mean that care and treatment plans were entirely deficient. They may have existed in some other form than in the BBIC-forms. (Rasmusson, 2006, p. 12)

The social workers do not seem to have the requisite amount of time to keep themselves updated in BBIC, conduct all the procedures in BBIC or for reflections and learning (Sjömar, 2007).

A few critical voices have been heard about BBIC, most from practitioners, with one exception, Bo Edvardsson, Örebro University (Edvardsson, 2003). Bo Edvardsson claims that BBIC has not made any difference (Edvardsson, 2009). BBIC both lacks scientific support and has not created any improvements regarding objectivity in investigations (Hedlund and Lovén, 2008). Psychologist Håkan Svenbro emphasizes that the BBIC-triangle shows the investigatory world giving an impression of setting the investigator in the dynamic centre, not the child (Svenbro, 2008). Mats Lundsbye, systemic family therapist in Gothenburg, explores how BBIC concentrates on the child and the parents as individuals without the contextual impact and the network in view. BBIC does not support a comprehensive view (Lundsbye, 200X, 2009).

### 5.3.4 Research about involving children in investigations – not involving children

There seems to be very little research on involving children in the social investigation process and participation (Egelund, 1997, Sundell and Egelund, 2000). Also, when I did a new search at the time of writing, I only found a couple of more studies exploring children’s participation in investigations (not including BBIC which I have followed continuously). One was from Sweden (I had come
across it earlier in the research conference in March 2007 in Lund) about investigations according to Swedish family law. Another was from the UK and dealt with children’s involvement in child protection investigations, which was exactly what I was looking for. Both these research projects also involved children in the research inquiries (see next section).

Most of the research on investigation processes and texts in Sweden seem to have been done by exploring written documents (case books for example) (Sundell and Egelund, 2000, Cocozza, 2007, Friis, 2003, Hollander, 1998, Mattsson, 2002, Lundström, 1993, Wåhlander, 1994, Bernler and Johnsson, 1993, 1995, Renström Törnblom, 1988). This raises questions about whether or not this could be of any significance for the emerging stories told (see above) and the reality constructed about social workers not involving or talking to children in social work?

Some researchers had studied both documents and interviewed social workers about their work on investigations and compulsory care (Ponnert, 2007, Claezon, 1987). Tine Egelund, a Danish researcher, also conducting research in Sweden, explored what the child protection services do when assessing risks and deciding on interventions by studying documents, observing meetings and interviewing families (in Denmark) (Egelund, 1997). This research is an example of studies focusing on children’s involvement without involving children in the inquiries but inviting the parents to explore the collaborative process of an investigation.

There are other examples of this, and there are studies about participating clients, but not focused on children’s involvement (Hyvönen and Forsgren, 2000, Hermodsson, 1998). When these studies pay any separate attention to children’s participation it is about whether the social workers had had any conversations with the child or not.
5.3.5 Research about involving children in investigations – involving children

Here follows four examples of research where children were invited to participate:

5.3.5.1 Children involved in child welfare protection, school counselling or child psychiatry

Mona Sandbæk, Norway, in her dissertation study, explored children’s and parents’ contact with child welfare and protection, school counselling and child psychiatric services. Her focus was on both children and parents as social agents (Sandbæk, 2002). She interviewed (1993) 24 children, 20 boys and 4 girls, aged 11 to 14. 9 of them had been in contact with the child social welfare, 5 the child psychiatry and 10 agencies with pedagogical-psychiatric aims in view. Her studies show for example:

… that looking for what works provides a more nuanced picture of clients than the traditional exclusive focus on their shortcomings. The difficulties do not disappear, but they are supplemented with information about positive qualities. The children themselves gave important contributions regarding their strengths and interests, while at the same time sharing worries and defeats. Such knowledge can serve several purposes. It can counteract stigmatisation and provide more balanced perceptions of service users among the professionals as well as in public. It can also raise the clients’ self-esteem and offer new approaches in the practical work. (Sandbæk, 2002, p.121)

The children drew the attention to how the contact with the social services was facilitated.
They did not want to be separated from other children, through for example having to leave their lessons. They also tried to avoid that the appointments interfered with their leisure activities. The children strove to make their contacts with the social services fit into their own priorities, which were rarely asked for. (Sandbæk, 2002, p.121)

This connects to my and the participating social workers’ experiences within the project and this study. The children talked about how they especially appreciated that they were consulted about when, where and how they were going to meet the social worker (Olsson, 2007b). For example, the participating social worker asked the child:

— Do you want to have the meeting at home or at the social office or somewhere else?
— Do you want somebody to join the meeting?
— Do you want me to call her/him?
— Something you prefer to do together with the social worker?
— Do you want something to eat or drink?

5.3.5.2. Children’s voices heard and involved in protection investigations

Margaret Bell, University of York, UK, interviewed (1999) 27 children aged between 8 and 16 about their experience of the intervention from first contact, through assessment and conference in child protection investigations to the subsequent and ongoing interagency involvement (Bell, 2002). One of the most striking findings was that most of the children had experienced a positive relationship with a social worker. This was also what I heard from the participating children.
Bell’s following conclusion also corresponds with what I heard from the participating children:

The tasks for social workers and other professionals are clearly indicated by the children themselves. They want to be seen alone, they want to have the time and opportunity to build a relationship, they want information that is accessible and appropriate, and they want to be offered real choices about what services are available and the range of ways participation and representation can take place in decision-making forums. (Bell, 2002, p. 10)

5.3.5.3 Children about participating in investigations in family law

Maria Eriksson and Elisabet Näsman, Uppsala University, Sweden, interviewed (2007) 14 children and 3 answered a questionnaire (Eriksson and Näsman, 2008, Eriksson, 2009). There was children, ten boys and seven girls, aged 8 to 17, with a father who is violent to their mother and who experience and deal with encounters with social services’ professionals carrying out court-mandated family law investigations. In Sweden, these investigations form a part of the proceedings in legal disputes between the parents. Family law opens up the opportunity for children to be perceived as subjects and parties to the case. However, in many cases this approach has not been put into practice (Dahlstrand, 2004, Eriksson 2003, Röbäck, 2008). Eriksson and Näsman found that the child became disqualified both as a participant and as a victim in the investigation process. They argue that children’s rights to provision, protection and participation in family law proceedings are not mutually excluding. On the contrary, they should be considered in relation to each other. If children are perceived as social actors, the social setting for children’s agency becomes a key issue (Eriksson and Näsman, 2008). While children’s participation is mainly associated with their citizenship and rights, it can be argued that, within a care
perspective, participation can also be defined as something central for children. It can create possibilities for the validation of children’s difficult experiences and, following that, the support of children’s recovery after violence and abuse (Eriksson and Näsman, 2008, Eriksson, 2009).

To approach vulnerable children as victims and actors seems to be a challenge for social workers. (Eriksson, 2009, p.442)

5.3.5.4 Children’s experiences of review meetings in BBIC
Research involving children has also been done in BBIC about children’s participation in review meetings, a method for reviewing foster and residential care (Rasmusson et al., 2004, Rasmusson, 2006). Bodil Rasmussion, Ulf Hyvönen and Lina Mellberg conducted the evaluation on behalf of Socialstyrelsen (Rasmusson et al., 2004). The study was presented at Childhoods 2005 and is published in English as a working-paper of Lund University (Rasmusson, 2006).

The objective of the evaluation was to investigate frameworks and scope for – as well as the child’s experiences of – participation and joint decision-making, concerning planning, decision-making processes and review of arrangements. The overall issue propounded was linked to one of the aims of the development work: does review meetings contribute to strengthen the child’s position in accordance with the aims of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Social Services Act? The study included content analysis of 55 BBIC forms and interviews with 11 children, aged 8 to 18, 8 independent chairpersons and 11 social workers.

Despite the adults’ good intentions, small details can appear that have been missed or omitted regarding the preparations and during the actual meeting, which can affect the child’s attitude towards and willingness to participate in review meetings. It became apparent that
there were differences in children’s and adult’s perceptions of what took place during the review meetings. The children’s descriptions were in many cases, more critical than those of the adults. The method demands a lot of sensitivity on part of the adults concerning the feelings of children and the way in which they express their interest in various stages of the processes involved in planning and reviewing. The adults’ attitude, thoroughness, vigilance and respect for the children are of decisive significance for the achievement of the objective of strengthening the position of children. (Rasmusson, 2006, p.19)

The researchers’ conclusions was that, “although certain deficiencies were observed” (Rasmusson, 2006, p.20), the framework and scope that is created for the child’s participation in reviews within the BBIC project provide the preconditions to strengthen the position of the child in accordance with the aims of the Social Services Act and articles 3 and 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Rasmusson, 2006). At the same time, the researcher account for several objections to the proceedings from the children’s perspective. Were these voices heard only in the aspect of listened to but not paid regards to? Were there other stronger voices drowning the voices of the children?

5.4 Emphasising children’s strategies and perspectives in use
Children, as well as adults, have concerns and strategies of their own in coping with their situation in life (Brannen et al., 2000, Bäck-Wiklund and Lundström, 2001, Dencik and Jørgensen Schultz, 1999, Qvortrup, 1999). These concerns and strategies, the social worker and the children might be able to share and reflect on, creating responsive understanding (Bakhtin, 1991, Shotter, 2004e) of the child’s situation, from within the child’s perspective and position, in the investigation. Otherwise it might become an investigation with only representative understanding of the client, a monological account from the
social worker’s point of view without mutual involvement. The investigation then gives only a picture of the client’s situation, a picture from an outsider’s point of view, about the child but not from an inside position (withness) (Shotter, 2004e, 2005f) with the child. The social worker’s consideration and respect for a child’s own strategy could be crucial if the child is going to feel that the investigations have been conducted with and from the child’s perspective. What is more, without the child’s participation neither the investigation nor the decisions based on the investigation are likely to include the child’s own strategies and priorities. The question then becomes: How impressive and effective will this kind of investigational work be?

5.4.1 Children as agents and actors
A fundamental view used in this study was the view on children as actors and agents in their own lives. Seen as actors and agents, it became a matter of course to invite the children to participate. This view is an emerging view on children in the post-modern world (Bäck-Wiklund, 2001, Dencik and Jørgensen Schultz, 1999, James and James, 2004). It includes children’s right to be heard and listened to, stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which Sweden ratified 1990 (Utrikesdepartementet, 2003, 2001)44.

Article 12 of the Convention states that any child who is capable of forming his or her own views should have the right to express those views in all matters concerning the child. Particularly, the child should be heard and his/her point of view be considered in judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child as well as in the process of service delivery (Freeman, 1996, Smith, 2005).

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44 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. The CRC emphasizes the importance of international cooperation to ensure respect for the rights of the child. The CRC has thus illuminated a central dimension in development cooperation: the child-rights perspective. Since Sweden ratified the CRC in June 1990, Swedish legislation and practice is adapted to its intentions and spirit (Utrikesdepartementet, 2001).
The Swedish Social Service Act is only explicit about the importance of the child’s participation and the importance of considering the child’s point of view in key decisions on children aged 15 and older. Younger children should only be heard if it is benefiting the investigation and if the child not is going to be hurt by it (Social Service Act Chapter 11 10§) (2001, 2005).

**Chapter 11. Handling of business** (2001)

**Section 10**

Children aged 15 and over are entitled to represent themselves in judicial proceedings and other matters under this Act.

Children under this age should be given a hearing if this may help the investigation and may be presumed harmful to themselves.

In the beginning of The Care of Young Persons Act (1990) about the introductory provisions:

**Section 1**

Measures for children and young persons within the social services are to be undertaken on basis of agreement with the young person concerned and his or her custodian, as provided in the Social Services Act (2001:453). All measures shall be characterized by respect for the human dignity and integrity of the young person.

[…]

The best interest of the young person shall be of vital concern in decisions under this Act.

The young person’s point of view shall be made clear as far as possible. Account shall be taken of the will of the young person, with due consideration of his/her age and maturity. … (1990)
Since 2002, the Administration of the County of Scania has employed a special co-ordinator for implementing and developing the ideas of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the administration. For example, the county, in cooperation with the Swedish Children’s Ombudsman, has conducted a project where children’s possibilities to make their voices heard and participate in decision-making about their every-day lives in institutions (care home or hostel run by private persons) were explored (Barnombudsmannen, 2004, 2007). Children’s rights to participate are both about the right to be informed or consulted in decision-making and the right to autonomy, that is, to make decisions (Brandon et al., 1998). They have the right to become:

- Participants
- Information-receivers
- Consultees
- Consenters
- Initiators
- Complainants

In publications on children’s participation, Roger Hart’s “ladder of participation” has been an influential model (Hart, 1992, 1997). The ladder has eight levels:

**Hart’s: The Ladder of Participation**

8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adult
7. Child-initiated and directed
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children
5. Consulted and informed
4. Assigned but informed
3. Tokenism
2. Decoration
1. Manipulation
Levels 8 – 4 are different degrees of participation and 3 – 1 different degrees of non-participation. Harry Shier has presented another model with five levels. In addition, three stages of commitment are identified at each level: ‘openings’, ‘opportunities’ and ‘obligations’ (Shier, 2001):

**Shier’s model for enhancing children’s participation**

5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.
4. Children are involved in decision-making processes.
3. Children’s views are taken into account.
2. Children are supported in expressing their views.
1. Children are listened to.

The minimum if you want to endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is between 3 and 4 according to Shier.

The coaching also support to develop a dialogical style of collaboration including all five levels in Shier’s model and concentrating on level 5 and 6 in Hart’s ladder of participation with level 7 and 8 as an end-in-view.

The legal framework presents a balanced approach to children and family, combining participation and protection, non-discrimination and best development. The challenge for social workers is that this balancing act is often in their hands (Brandon et al., 1998) and in this they can feel, as they said, abandoned and very alone with the power to decide whether to carry through the investigation or not and how, whether to involve the child or not. The coaching offered the social workers support in this balancing act and opened up doors on how to go on with both an adult and a child perspective through the dialogue with the children:
… if we are going to take children seriously, it is first when we discover that we do not understand children that we have done a part of the way.

Then we have to question our own interpretations of the children’s realities, we are confronted with our adult perspective. Our only possibility after that is to go into dialogue with the children. (Hessle, 1997, p. 27) [my translation]

5.5 Children from a social constructionist view

… childhood and children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy study in their own right, and not just in respect to their social construction by adults. This means that children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. They can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinations. (James and Prout, 1990, p. 4)

From a social constructionist point of view we construct our views and knowledge in a joint action and interaction in language and communicative acts. From this way of thinking, no conversation or meeting follows a predestined map or form but are co-created in communicative cooperation between us, others and otherness. Then, we always have unique meetings and conversations in a unique world, which have never been seen or heard in this way before and never will be. Every dialogue is unique and specifically formed for its participators, in what you may call an interplaying teamwork. At the same time, no conversation stands alone – separate from anything else. Conversations are dynamic and fluid. Each conversation is situated within other conversations, and each mutually influences the other – past, present, and future (Anderson and Levin, 1997).
As a professional, the task is to get into the interaction and responsiveness in the meeting and learn to know the individual child as we do with everybody else, hopefully, and let the dialogue emerge in the mutually spontaneous responses in the meeting.

Once a therapist diagnoses and therefore labels a client, he/she then knows what to do. This modernist "knowledge” directs a therapist’s thoughts and actions and leaves little room for alternatives. Labelling a child, for instance, carries implications that limit the kind of interactions most therapists would have with him/her.

We do not believe that therapy relationships require using labels and categories, nor do we approach therapy that way. We do not think of our work with children as any different from work with any other age group. The word "child” may come up in conversation with clients or colleagues, as it is a commonly used shortcut, but it does not carry any special predeterminations for us about that person or how we will work with him/her. We want to learn about persons from themselves and from the others who are involved in their lives, whether these include biological family members, child protective services workers, school counsellors, or best friends. (Anderson and Levin, 1997, p.259)

When we decide to put a special label or sort a child into a special category, we also decide to take a risk. We risk approaching and responding to them with focus on the characteristics of the label, or if we call it diagnosis or story about how children in a special age group are supposed to act, instead of their uniqueness. We risk thinking that we "know” them already. In this we risk using our “prior knowledge” instead of approaching them with curiosity and a readiness to learn to know their unique persons using a curious not-knowing position (Anderson, 1999, 1990, Anderson and Goolishian, 2001).
What do we do by categorising them, by defining them as something special, maybe even difficult? Do we still marginalise them but differently? Is it useful to them? How do we begin to interact with them if we make them special rather than people whose voices we should hear and pay attention to like any others? By making them special, do we isolate them? Children feel passionately about belonging – belonging to their families. Their class, their friends. They are rarely left alone, so they are always in relationship to someone. There is the mother/child relationship, father/child, sister/brother, sister/sister. When distressed we often take them out of these relationships and focus on them as having problems rather than focusing on them in relationship to important carers. When we identify individual children as problems, we reify them and disrupt their relationships. We do not hear the relational voice.

In systemic or social constructionist work, we want to re-connect children with others and hear all the voices of the child and those of his/her relationships. (McAdam, 1995, p. 2)

However, the way in which childhood is understood and socially institutionalised vary across and between cultures, generations and in relation to adults’ engagement with children’s everyday lives and actions (James and James, 2004).

… the twin recognition that ‘childhood’ is, at one and the same time, common to all children but also fragmented by the diversity of children’s everyday lives. That is to say, childhood is a developmental stage of the life course, common to all children and characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns. However, the way in which this is interpreted, understood and socially institutionalised for children by adults vary considerably
across and between cultures and generations, and in relation to their engagement with children’s everyday lives and actions. Finally, and most importantly, as we are going to see later, childhood varies with regard to the ways in which concepts of child-specific ‘needs’ and ‘competencies’ are articulated and made evident in law and social policy, as well as in the more mundane and everyday social interactions that take place between adult and children. Here, then, is the social construction of childhood, depicted as the complex interweaving of social structures, political and economic institutions, beliefs, cultural mores, laws, policies and the everyday actions of both adults and children, in the home and on the street – and herein, therefore, lie the essential ingredients of the cultural politics of childhood … (James and James, 2004, p.13)

I wanted the social workers to meet a child and get to know this child with curiosity in the child’s unique own relations and narratives, in the same way I hope we come to learn to know others – young and old. The crucial point seems to be how we approach each other, talk and give meaning to the words we use and the narrating we create. All the phenomena (including those we sometimes choose to call problems) are included in someone’s story/narrative. In the frame and context of that story or these stories the phenomenon is given its meaning. Nothing could be understood without the narrative context – the child’s surroundings and network or rather the communication and relationships in the network (cf. Forsberg and Wallmark, 1998, Seikkula et al., 2003, Seikkula and Arnkil, 2005)). Change could be to develop new meaning and to create new stories and narratives, opening up new possibilities to new understanding and new ways of acting (Lang and McAdam, 1994, Cronen and Lang, 1994). For this, the persons involved have to participate. No one else can tell what meaning he or she would use and bring further.
5.5.1 Investigations from a social constructionist and narrative view – to join the client’s arena of communication, co-creating new life stories

From a social constructionist perspective, language plays an important part in creating our social world (Gergen, 2001, 2002, Shotter, 2008a).

Perhaps the most generative idea emerging from constructionist dialogues is that what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships. (Gergen, 2006, p. 18)

In this view, the social worker invites the client into the client’s existence of weaving communication, which is creating the client’s social world. In this, the narratives are evolving which may help the client to re-orientate himself/herself in his/her life, co-creating his/her identity (Morgan, 2004). Social life is itself \textit{storied} and the narrative is an \textit{ontological condition of social life} (Somers, 1994). We become in narrating, our language (Crafoord, 2003). We construct our identities, multiple and changing, in locating us in narratives and narrating – \textit{in narrative identity} (Adelswärd, 1996, Ricoeur, 1984, 1985, 2000). We are co-created in communication and in relations – continuously co-creating ourselves and one another in reflexive communication and interactions in different contexts (Cronen, 1994) – in the present, in the past and in how we imagine the future – the end-in-view (Dewey, 2007). We construct ourselves through conversations and narratives in interviews (Mills, 2001). We have the power to change and create changes in communication through the language (Watzlawick et al., 1996). Conversations create new understandings and meanings, new relationships and actually re-create people to new people (Seikkula, 1996).

Both the communication taking place within the investigating process and in the written texts of the investigation, could be seen as participating in co-creating, constructing the reality of its participants (Shotter, 2000), their identities and increasing their self-awareness (also as clients and social workers) in new
narratives (or life-stories (Lundby, 1998, Linde, 1993)). The social worker’s documentation could be seen as co-creating new life stories/narratives of the clients (Hydên, 1995) and as biographical (Bernler and Bjerkman, 1990, Bernler and Johnsson, 1993).

From the first moment of contact, the social worker’s communication in a case starts processes. New connections and relations in the social world of the client are created in the client’s network (and vice versa for the social worker and other contexts). In the new relationships, the participating persons become unique in relation to one another, including themselves. Even if you have heard and have stories about yourself being so and so this does not necessarily have to be repeated in new stories as something you are, I am, we are, he, she, it is. Thus, instead of thinking and saying, for example: “The child is troublesome”, this will be seen as something created in relation to somebody or something and expressed: “The child becomes troublesome when…” as a message or a sign to be noticed, for example, for the social worker and the parents. Another example: The person with a complicated relationship with drugs will then not be told about nor seen as being “the addict” but as having an addiction to drugs that resulted in his/her becoming in a special way. This, what we become in responsiveness and relation to others and otherness, opens up variation of possibilities how and who to become in different relations and communications. It opens to create new life-stories and narratives about the past, in the living and in the future, creating new and leaving the old (Lang and McAdam, 1994, 1997, Morgan, 2004, White and Epston, 2000, 1990, White, 2000).

Every creation is unique. The reality is not waiting out there, outside the social office, for the social worker to catch and collect information about, even though some instruction books for social workers and manuals in investigating seem to assume that that is the case. The reality, someone’s life story, his or her living conditions and relationships, the communication in his or her life continuously grow and change, especially perhaps when social welfare decides to start an investigation in his or her individual life and the social worker starts to move
into the client’s communicating network and narratives – both perhaps stories in old documents in the social office and in new stories created when the social worker starts to inquire.

5.6 Mutual personal involvement = dialogical investigation?

In one of the first coaching sessions in this study, the participating social worker told me how a little girl, whose parents, together with the social worker, had worked out and reached an agreement about how to participate in a family-based treatment, burst out, when the social worker happened to mention the plans to the girl:

– But what about me? Who is going to help me?

Approaching the daughter in the family, the social worker had been rather pleased with the result of the investigation. However, seen and heard from a child’s perspective, this became something quite else.

– This is how we have worked. We have turned to the parents and hoped that this will lead to an improvement – the best for the child – through the parents.

This girl had not seen family treatment as something that was concerning her, or something she was assisted by, the social worker continued. The girl had felt that this was only something for her parents, which it probably also would have been, said the social worker. The girl felt that she once again was abandoned and the social worker had to re-open the investigation, make a new start in relation to the girl. The social worker had had conversations with the girl in the investigational process but had not, so far, invited the child to participate and influence the investigational work to the full; on the whole: how to conduct the investigation, for example, who to invite, when and where and how to hear, listen, assess and write, as well as what is going to happen further on, the suggestions, plans and
decisions – listening to the children’s view in every phase and step as well as keep the children informed in every aspect of the investigation. To put the matter in a nutshell: to keep a living dialogue as partners in the investigations. This was what the social worker, who participated in the whole study, and her colleagues, on the whole developed in relation to DC during this study. They started to involve both the parents and the children in the investigations and, as they realized further on, also became more and more involved themselves with increasing awareness about the importance of their own participation and contributions.

Extract from coaching session [my translation] (Olsson, 2005a pp. 139-141)

Coach: This shows that you are enormously involved.

Social worker: Yes, this is hard work – to enter into partnership with the child in this way awakes things in me also. It becomes so obvious to me …

Coach: Could this be something that makes social workers defend themselves against?

Social worker: I believe … I believe there is much in this that makes you as investigator defend yourself. You can choose to put it on any level you choose. Also when you have a conversation with a child you can defend yourself, use templates, use bear cards and refer to the Family unit [treatment programme] – and everybody will be pleased. To invite the child to participate demands very much more – even if you are unaccustomed – it is not great big things I do but it feels like a huge responsibility that I have started to look after that the boy is invited to take part in everything the whole way. We are poor in conducting the final parts of the investigations. We have also verified this in our team. We only send them [the documents] at home. We don’t take the time for the most crucial of all, to sit down
with the parent and the child and make a summary and go through what has happened, especially as we in [documents of] objectives have said that we are in a process [conducting investigations]. It’s like two different levels of commitment. I am terribly involved in all my cases but this [DC] has given additional dimensions – I cannot say I am less engaged in the other cases, that would be wrong to say, this has given it a new dimension … to start as we have done with our agreement, to approach the child in extremely respectful ways which I got as feedback from the team when I told them. They thought this was super – they became enormously enthusiastic – this is not a huge, complicated thing – it’s only to say that if there is something you want to talk about give me a sign, we take a break whenever you want, tell me. Nothing special. In this case, where the parents left me with the child, I do not understand, probably a coincidence – no, it was not just a coincidence – it is something different going on in this – perhaps a lucky chance that it happened in exactly this family …

Coach: What would you call this dimension?

Social worker: That they have complete confidence in me. I am telling them all these difficult things, for example about the report to the police and they got upset with me, but it is something, this with confidence, that they are invited to involve themselves and work with me … that I am narrating [involving them in dialogues] what I am doing …

Coach: You have narrated more and created ... ?

Social worker: That is what my colleagues are going after: What is it that makes the difference? What have I done this time compared to what I usually do?
Coach: In involving communication [dialogue] you share so much more of yourself, you mutually move each other …

Social worker: That is the feeling ... it is about to involve … for example the parents accused me of being like the day-care services when I made the report to the police – to go behind their back. I felt somewhat unfairly attacked. And I chose to tell them how I felt – that also created a difference in our interaction: Now we were able to leave this behind us – to go on …

In the meeting above, the social worker, both in the coaching and in the meeting she talks about, she shows how personally involved she is and was. In a later coaching session, she returned to this and explores how earlier she had been trying (and trained) not to show or talk about her own participation. She had exerted herself earlier not to pay any attention to her own feelings in the meetings. Now she was surprised in her awareness about her own responses and how her relation to the parents emerged when she, as she first thought, gave herself away in front of them. I am hearing that the social worker is succeeding in conducting dialogues and a dialogical interplay where they are mutually involving themselves and each other. In her narrative, she shows how she has uncovered her personal involvement in relation to the family when she exposed how their accusation moved her. Usually she would not have told them or showed them this. Instead she then had made efforts, as she said, to become the neutral representative of the authority – the investigator. Perhaps it was the mutual personal involvement which in the study became the key to the social worker successfully making invitations to the child as well as to the parents to participate in the investigation?
5.7 Emerging mutual partnership

Dialogues and dialogical interaction require (at least) two partners – being on fairly equal footing with one another and mutually involved. If the social workers had forgotten or not fully realised earlier the importance of the child’s participation in all aspects, they also seemed to have done something similar with their own contributions and mutual involvement. However, the participating social workers pointed out that they were not used to seeing themselves as contributors. As one of them said:

– We do not look on or understand ourselves as important for the children.

In the beginning, the participating social workers could express themselves like this:

– We are not the ones who should come into sight, who should be visible or in focus.

The investigating social workers had traditionally been trained to strive for an objective or neutral approach, and were not used to having attention put on their own contributions and participation in relation to the clients. They were very unaccustomed to what we did in DC, highlighting and exploring their own participation, focusing on the importance of their own involvement as an absolute condition for a living dialogical interaction to emerge.

In talking to me in the coaching session, social workers mentioned how they even made efforts to be as invisible as possible because they wanted to avoid the children being exposed to more new short-term relationships than necessary. Some of these children, they said, were abused in this way as well, a lot of adults “coming and going” in their lives. These children already had a vulnerable living situation, which the social workers did not want to add to, make worse, through introducing another new person, the child’s social worker. That is to say, they saw children in investigations primarily as victims who needed protection. That
was the social workers’ reason for not involving the children (cf. Eriksson and Näsman, 2008, Eriksson, 2009). In these social workers’ view, the most important thing was to try to attain changes for the children through the parents or other persons who normally were in the child’s environment. That’s why their contacts concentrated on motivating and in supporting the parents to create changes, the social worker said. In a coaching situation, I would ask the social worker for example:

- Who do you think you have become in the eyes of the child?
- How do you think they are talking about you in the family?
- If they are talking about you with the child – who have you become in the child’s perspective, do you think?
- Who do you think the parents want you to be in relation to their child?
- Who do you think they tell their child that you are (and their meaning of this)?

And so I did. With these or similar questions, I wanted the social worker to reflect on how the invisible social worker probably was present for the child anyhow. Perhaps the social worker also became one of those adults who came and went without noticing the child or bothering to hear or see the child or bothering to explore the child’s situation, neither with respect to the everyday life of the child nor with respect to being approached as an object in a social investigation. Why not invite the child to be a subject, an actor in his or her own investigation? Hear and consider both the child’s ideas and point of view in how the investigation is going to be conducted, how the child wants the social worker to get to know the child and the family, and what narratives the child wants to be highlighted in the investigations – both in the process and in the text. And the child also wants to be informed, and have the right to be informed, about what is happening and about the progress, to be respected as actor and agent with strategies of his/her own and a contribution in the society (James and James, 2004). Children are also an influence on the family dynamics (Crouter and Booth, 2003).
Children not only react to parental behaviours and choices, but also actively contribute to family dynamics, creating new contexts and responding to other family members in their own ways. (Shanahan and Sobolewski, 2003, p.249)

Children, as well as other family members, bring reflexive qualities to their relations. When it comes to assessing the influence of parents and children on each other there will be, as in any pair or larger group, elements in the interactions that cannot be attributed to the influence of any one member of the dyad or group, taken individually (Maccoby, 2003).

They are properties of the dyad or group taken jointly, and the dyad or group becomes the proper unit of analysis. Why is this important for our efforts to understand the effects of children on their parents? Because, I would argue, certain emergent properties of the parent-child relationship cannot be labelled as either an effect of the child on the parent or an effect of the parent on the child, so we cannot say that either member of the pair is “driving” this emergent aspect of the interaction. (Maccoby, 2003, pp. 195-196)

In this, children attach status of their own as “other” human beings with human rights, and are reckoned as actors in their own rights in a context the adults should have made secured for the children to act within (Bäck-Wiklund, 2001).

It was with this view in mind we approached the children’s participation in the projects of the County. However, in this, we also experienced that in some cases working through the parents and other persons in the child’s context was the only accessible way to voluntarily reach the child (without using the compulsory
legislation). The parents could be guarding their children or protecting them from contacts from the social welfare for different reasons.

Extract from one of eight social workers’ written narratives connected to the participation in the coaching. It is here to be noted that this is in cases where already the social worker has done a pre-assessment that no immediate danger is threatening the child’s welfare. (Olsson, 2005a, pp. 170 - 171) [my translation]

… The family has had earlier bad experiences with the social welfare and a lot of time was spent dealing with this. The mother hesitated a lot about having contact with [the colleague’s name] because she came to be a representative of the mother’s experiences with the social welfare. At the same time, it became so clear that there was a strong bond between the mother and [the colleague’s name]. The mother had strong needs to talk about her earlier experiences and no one but [the colleague’s name] had been able to create these opportunities for the mother in a way she wanted and needed. The work with this family became quite different than all the investigations I have worked with before this. We had to devote a lot of time to enable these meetings. The family was unwilling to come and it was not easy to make appointments. Every meeting opened with the parents making it clear that this was not a meeting they wanted to attend and did not want it to be prolonged. Every meeting lasted at least an hour and ended with us almost having to turn the family “out of doors”. The parents did not want the children to meet the social workers because they assessed that should be injurious for the children, an assessment based on the experiences they had had earlier with the social welfare. I and my colleague spent a lot of time to motivating the parents, inviting them to take part in the investigation, inquiring what we could do differently in this

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45 The investigations in question in the projects are either based on compulsory legislation or on voluntary legislation. These aspects have been in our consideration in the coaching but have not been registered as key data in the research.
investigation saying that they could decide where and how we should meet the children, etc. Many times we felt these were very frustrating because we never seemed to meet the children. How could we have the children in focus when we never met them? At the same time, we knew there were strong relations in the family. From the child’s point of view, we were probably were connected to the same bad experience as their parent’s. For me, it became very clear that sometimes it is about having the children in focus and sometimes about having the parents in focus. We had never been able to carry out any conversations with the children, we would not have heard their narratives, if the parents had not involved us. It was only when they got positive and convinced that the investigation could lead to something good that we could have a dialogue with the children, and their needs were in focus the whole time.

Both parents and children, as we are going to see in a case below, can have preconceived ideas about social workers and social welfare. Here is an example that highlights both the children’s understanding of the social workers’ arrival and investigating task as well as their (earlier) unawareness of how children hear and understand the social workers interfering in the children’s lives.

5.7.1 The social secretaries are coming

Coming is an extract from one of the interviews I did with children in relation to this study. But first some words about the “study in the study” where I asked the children about their experiences of investigations and meeting social workers.

5.7.1.1 The interviews with children

I interviewed 12 children in all, 5 boys and 7 girls, and wrote about the children’s narratives and create dialogues with children in one of the books published by the County (Olsson, 2007b). The youngest of the participants was 5 years old, three
were 7-8 years old, two were 10-11 years old, four were 12-13 years old, one was 15 years old and one was 20 years old and had just moved from a foster home.

In the book I explore both the social workers’ interaction, as it was told in the children’s narratives, and my way of interviewing children and how I could have improved my way of making conversations with them, offering suggestions and presenting different techniques. Some of this emanated from coaching sessions.

5.7.1.2 Social workers paying an Easter visit on Sister and Little Brother
Below it is two of the children narrating on and from within their contacts with two social workers, which have both participated in DC, conducting social investigations on children.

The children are using the word ”the Social” as a collective name for the social welfare services as a whole; the law, the office, the staff and other aspects. TV and movies were mentioned as important sources for the children’s ideas and experiences of social welfare. TV programmes with so-called Nannies (American programmes), uniformed ladies bringing order into noisy children families, seem to have co-created new stories about how social work can unfold for the participating children. They are imaging that somebody might enter their home bringing order and keeping a check on them. The Nannies encourage all the family members to take responsibility and contribute to changes, including involving the children. The children connect rigour and strictness to the Nannies they are shrinking back from. At the same time, they seem to like the Nannies’ methods in making agreements about clear rules for the interaction of the family life. The children talk about how they appreciate when adults ask for their views and ideas. Their experience is that social workers ask “good” questions and show an interest and understanding of children’s perspective, also in communication with persons in the children’s network. However, in TV and movies, the children have noticed that when social workers enter their lives the children risk being taken into custody and forced to move to foster care homes if there is trouble or problems in their families. Their friends’ stories have the same theme according
to the children. Some of their friends live in foster care homes or know somebody who has moved to a foster care home. One of the children I interviewed had lived with his family in a treatment home. Two of the twelve children had experiences of dramatic transportations to and between foster care homes. Those three children who had lived or were living in foster care homes when I met them, had all met social secretaries and foster care homes secretaries which they liked more or less. All twelve had positive narratives about their present social workers. These, they seemed to see as proven exceptions to the otherwise dominating stories about “the Social” as “destroyers”.

In the following interview I meet two siblings. I call them Sister and Little Brother. They have experiences from a dramatic start to an investigation. The two visiting social workers have themselves described this first visit with the siblings as one of the striking moments and learning examples in the action projects (cf. (Shotter, 2004b, 2000, 2008b)). For example, the event shows how important it is for social workers to make agreements with children about the context, set the context, especially in the first meeting but also in all the other meetings and, as in this example, both for the meeting, here and now, as well for the investigations in general.

This is about taking professional responsibility, taking initiative to reach agreements and clarifying, setting the context and doing this in time, avoiding that children (and adults) should feel more anxious than necessary before meetings and through out the investigation. It is also about opening up a dialogue and partnership in every meeting, inviting into agreements about what constitutes good interaction in relation to those participating in the meeting(s), here and now, and in the investigation in question: Who are we? Where do we meet (place, room and space)? How are we going to do this? Who are we becoming in relation to one another? Time for breaks and other conditions of the meeting? What are we doing (content)? Our hopes and dreams for what this should become and result in?
Sister is 11 years old and Little Brother is 8 years old. To make it possible for me to separate them in the text I use S for Sister and L for Little Brother. I am AM (Ann-Margreth). Participating is also the family’s dog. He walks in and out, sits for a long time on one of the chairs and in the end I record a small show with the dog and Sister showing how well trained the dog is. He showed different tricks, obeying orders from Sister. After a while Little Brother leaves for his sport exercise. 6 months has passed since the investigation started and the first meeting with the social workers took place. The children’s narrative follows in the form of my transcription:

Extract from my transcriptions (Olsson, 2007b, pp.37-45) [my translation]

S: – It was Easter and we were sitting painting the Easter eggs.

L: – Yes, yes.

AM: – Precisely.

[...]

L: – Then S in any case says.

[At the same time S said:]

S: – It was I who most of all …

L: – They are going to take us – they are going to take us and separate us from each other …

[...]

S: – So did you think also.
L: – Mmm.

S: – You can’t deny that.

AM: – Can’t you tell us L; what did you think before they arrived?

L: – Before?

AM: – Mmm.

L: – I didn’t know what to believe. At first I was thinking like – they can not take us for so little …

AM: – No?

S: – No.

L: – It was rather small – it was an only a quarrel.

[…]

AM: – When they arrived what happened?

L: – Ah, we went in here in the kitchen. Then we were supposed to talk about the quarrel and such. Then we talked about how we were feeling.

AM: But the whole time you were sitting there thinking that perhaps you have to move?

L: – Mmm, roughly.
AM: – Who was most worried?

S+L: – I[[both answering].

S: – No, it was probably me because I thought – I had already packed my bag […] when it all happened I was completely “cool” [calm] when it happened while L was running around and he was so nervous while I was completely calm during the occurrence. I thought what happens happen. The only thing I was concerned about was to protect the dog and L. I wanted to protect everybody.

AM: – When the social workers arrived, you were the most concerned?

S: – Mmm, I thought we were going to have to move because that’s what a friend of mine had to …

AM: – Yes [turning to L] how did you get to know about your sister’s worries?

L: – Ah, it had gone far when she told me that she was afraid that they were going to take us into custody and such things …

S: – Mmm.

L: – Then so she was a little bit shaky.
S: – You could feel it during their visit.

L: – Mmm.

AM: – Was it noticed before also?

L: – Yes – mmm – it was noticeable before also. I was going to be at a friend’s home but S said that we were going to move … so I went home and was going to talk to them. It took perhaps 50 minutes or so …

AM: – Now I am asking, I am going to ask these questions because you can help social secretaries improve their work with children and what they should consider in talking to children so other children don’t have to be worried unnecessarily.

S+L: – Mmm [both answering].

AM: – You would not have to be as worried as S was.

S+L: – Mmm [both answering].

S: – You were ”cooler” then [when it all happened] anyhow.

L: – Yes.

S: – I thought “the Social” was going to come and take us away – and then he was completely calm.

L: – They could not take us for so little.

S: – I said: Yes they can.
AM: – You thought anyhow … you did consider?

L: – Yes, I wasn’t sure.

AM: – No, what do you think they should do so that children get to know what this is all about then?

L: – Actual roles in the house …

AM: – What did you say?

L: – Roles in the house.

S [laughing]: – He is making a mistake – he did hear something else.

AM: – How would you put the question so L understands?

S: – What question?

AM: – This about what you think they have to consider who meet children; preventing children from being worried unnecessarily.

S: – Yes, perhaps what shall “the Social” do so other children not need believe that they also have to move from their parents?

L: – I don’t know. They could show kindness and such things.

S: – What are they doing when they are friendly?
L: – Then the children want be so worried – are they sitting there looking hard or very strict, then you think: – Ah, he is very hard. Then they are also going to ask good questions.

AM: – What are the saying then?

L: – Mmm, as they usually do: – How did it feel?

AM: – Is that a good question?

L: – Yes, when something has happened.

AM: – So you want them to ask about the occurrence?

L: – Yes, roughly that.

AM: – … did your worries reveal?

L: – Yes.

AM: – Did you get a good question?

L: – Yes, first I did ask if they were going to take us away.

S: – No!? [looking at her brother]

AM: – You asked?

L: – Mmm – or was it you? [to S] – yes, it was me.

S: – We did not ask. They were leaving. L, it was actually then that I realized that they were not taking us away.
L: – I asked.

S: – Did you ask?

L: – Mmm.

S: – Ahha, that was why, then they – I thought that when they were leaving … that was when I realized that they were not going to take us away.

AM: – How did you notice?

S: – They went away. Otherwise they would have brought us with them.

AM: – So you were sitting the whole meeting believing that perhaps they were going to …

S: – Yes mm.

L: – Firstly, now you ask, they should have told us how it was and such things. Then you [the child] could have asked: – Are you going to take us? If so, if we are going to think about that they are going to take us or not. And then perhaps they are saying so: no, we are not or yes, that is what we are going to do. Then that’s that – the that is over and done. Otherwise you sit there worrying about if they are going to take me – thinking if they are taking me and then [showing the nervousness with his fingers drumming on the table].

 […]
AM: – I’m wondering – another question is now, if you were talking with your friends about meeting social workers, what would you say?

S: – Mmm [to L], but I don’t think you have any friends that you would tell about this.

L: – I haven’t told anybody.

S: – You aren’t meeting “the Social” as I do – but my friends, they also have someone in “the Social” who they are seeing …

L: – Mmm.

AM: – But if you would hear about somebody’s parents having a fight or …

L: – I would keep it to myself, be silent. If you tell everybody it would become very embarrassing and then you become sad and so …

AM: – Mmm.

L: – When somebody else has said, my mother is quarrelling with my dad almost every day, I would say: Keep it a secret. Then he probably would tell another friend and even though he is asking for this to be kept as a secret, he will tell the next and the next, next, next.

AM: – So it becomes …

L: – It becomes rumours.

S: – Yes.
AM: – Are there any adults you can talk with then?

L: – If it has happened so …

AM: – Mmm.

L: – Yes, if “the Social” doesn’t know perhaps you would have given them a call.

AM: – So now you would have been considering to give a call?

L: – Yes, perhaps I would like to but I …

S: – That was what you wanted actually – You wanted to call the social or the police when they were fighting but I said: – No, do not ring those – it will become worse.

L: – Mmm.

AM: – Actually, you would like the social secretaries to be able to be the children’s social secretaries as well.

L: – Mmm.

AM: – That’s exactly what the project I was talking about earlier me being a coach for social workers, was all about with …

L: – Okay.

AM: – Exactly as you have a coach in your training [football]?
L: – Mmm.

AM: – So they have a coach for training [all laugh] in investigating and talking with children so I recognise … but I did not know you were the children they were talking about when they talked about two siblings being worried about being taken away…

[At the same time:]
S+L: – Mmm.

AM: – They had not imagined that you had thoughts like this …

S+L: [both laughing]

AM: – Already then you taught them that they have to remember to ask the children about what thoughts, worries and fantasies they are having – It was very good that you dared to ask [to L].

Later when L has left:

S: – All my friends said the same when I told them that “the Social” had been here: What, are you going to move? That was their first sentence. You think that you are going to move into custody when “the Social” comes – that is what you think.

AM: – But now when your friends and you talk about Social Welfare Services and social secretaries, what do you above all tell them?

S: – For example my friend, her dad beat her …

AM: – Mmm.
S: – She doesn’t like to talk about this.

AM: – Mmm.

S: – She can talk to me about it but she’s not talking when somebody else is in the context. She is very afraid and careful about what she is talking about because she knows that it will be spread around and everybody will know.

[…]

AM: – Do you want to talk about her experiences?

[…]

S: – She didn’t say much. She said both that it was awful and that she was nervous the entire time because all the time she thought they were coming to take her away.

AM: – She had the same worries?

S: – You think like this because that’s how it looks on TV so when “the Social” arrives you keep out of the way. They destroy everything. That’s what you expect. Have you seen Capricciosa46?

AM: – No.

S: It’s a movie; so “the Social” comes and destroys everything.

AM: Is it a TV-movie or?

46 Capricciosa is a Swedish movie by Reza Bagher about a family in Malmö with Linus Nilsson, Rolf Lassgård, Noomie Rapace, Matias Bergsten and Morea Myrgren-Johansson (Bagher, 2003).
S: – It’s like, about some children. Their dad becomes an alcoholic and so the dad runs away leaving the children alone to take care of themselves and everything is going smoothly until the social arrives. They come and destroy everything and take the children into custody in a new family and everybody becomes sad and … They had so terrific before … and yet they interfere – then you get like … why is “the Social” making such blunders?

AM: – I think I recognise this story – sounds like, similar to Pippi Longstocking\(^47\) – the lonely child managing by herself without the parents.

S: – Mmm.

AM: – And she is strong and a good girl and …

S: – Everything is going well for her …

AM: – Yes, exactly.

S: – Then they come interfering …

AM: … exactly the same story?

S: – Mmm.

[We laugh]

AM: – Is it a series on TV now?

\(^{47}\) Pippi Longstocking (Swedish *Pippi Långstrump*) is a fictional character in a series of children's books by Swedish author Astrid Lindgren (2007).
S: – No, it’s a movie called Capricciosa.

AM: – Mmm, I’m going to find this movie and watch …

S: – It’s so good.

AM: – I will do this. Perhaps something for the social workers to watch in this coaching?

S: – Mmm, so good. There “the Social” appears as a bad hard thing.

AM: – Yes, it often does.

S: – Yes, that’s a problem.

AM: – But that’s not what you are telling me about [the social secretary’s name] you said [earlier] that you wanted even more contact.

S: – Mmm, if she only had had more time. It feels like if I ask her I would take time from other children she also has and needs to talk to so I can’t take up all of her time.

AM: – Then it will be the same solution that you are writing down [the social secretary has given the girl a notebook].

S: – Yes, I will.

A little bit later:
AM: – What has happened when you aren’t going to meetings any more?

S: – I don’t want to think about that.

AM: – For how long will …

S: For along time. She is like a friend. We will have contact anyhow.

The siblings’ narratives contain many very important aspects. Here is a lot for social workers and other persons in authority to consider in meetings with children. How do we support children in preparing them for different meetings? Who is doing what and how? What do the parents and other adults tell children when they talk about social welfare and social workers? If the stories appear scary, frightening for the children – what could happen if they then do not dare take the contacts needed – if they do not dare tell that they are ill, are badly treated? What do children risk if they become frightened away from the social workers who society expects should be within reach for the most vulnerable children?

5.7.2 Children’s voices about investigations and investigating social workers

Children can be afraid of what is going to happen. The twelve children I interviewed, for example, told me that you as a child have to be careful what you say to social workers because you can never know how things you say are going to be used and heard in new contexts and by new listeners/readers. Even if you trust your own social worker, you never know about others further on. These children had realised that they were not only addressing the listening social worker but also their parents and others. They narrated on why children could feel fear in relation to social workers as well as why children can put their hopes and dreams to social workers. They can help children, give them assistance and make a difference for the children’s lives and living conditions. The interviewed
children wanted the social workers to open themselves up even more to the children and let them take part in what the social workers notice, have concerns about, think – take part of the assessments from the social workers’ perspective. For example, one child asked:

- What is my social worker’s opinion about my chances?
- Does she think she is successful with me?
- How successful is she [the social worker] usually in her work with children?

Very relevant questions approaching and challenging the social workers’ own self-awareness and evaluation of their work, efforts, contributions and results.

Did the children want to take part in the investigations? If yes, how? What would they recommend other children to consider in their contact and dialogue with Social Welfare Services?

In the interviews, children told me about how interested they were in taking part to be involved and understand a little bit more from the social worker’s perspective what this was all about, what was happening, going to happen and why. The children seemed to look at investigations first of all as a helping process (cf. the example above with the sister and the little brother). They seemed to not have noticed or expected that there was going to be an investigation first and then an assessment followed by plans and decisions about measures and help.

They were willing to accept and ask for immediate help and assistance if necessary from the social workers. At the same time, they expressed an opinion about giving the following advice to other children:
You have to be careful when you talk to social workers. You never know how they and others will understand the meaning of what you are saying and the consequences of that (Olsson, 2007b).

However, if the children are worried about a child or themselves, really fear that something bad or dangerous is happening, then they say that they are ready to recommend and take a renewed contact with the social workers and ask for help. However, said Victoria (fictitious name) aged 13 (Olsson, 2007b, p. 21):

At the same time you have to be aware of what you are saying. You never know how it will be in writing …

The relationship with their “own” social worker seemed to be the most important and guiding principle of their trust and faith in the social welfare system. However, their concerns were very much also directed towards future readers and listeners of what they had entrusted to the social workers. The children showed and told that the social workers have to pay attention to and care for both the interplay here and now in the dialogue and for the continuation – care for the children about how to go on after telling. I summarized this as:

I cannot tell any more than my parents allow me to and if I would tell you anyway I don’t know how it will be and what will happen when I return home … (Olsson, 2007b, p. 64)

The children had concerns about maintaining a good reputation in relation to friends and others, worries about rumours and changes in relation to parents and others.

They had received their social worker’s calling card and knew how to reach and get in contact with them even though they seldom did so:
– I never phone him/her but I always know where I have the card. I know he/she will welcome my call or a letter by e-mail (Olsson, 2007b).

They told me about how interesting it was to be informed of notes and other writings from meetings with the social worker but they did not show any interest at all in the final written investigation. That was something for adults to read, they said, if they had at all noticed that there was a paper in the end. One girl, 11 years old, gave the following answer to my question about what an investigation was for her:

– An investigation is like a tangled skein that you disentangle in the investigation. My mother and I had a large skein of problems. Now, with help from the social worker we have only a few small one’s left, she said showing, as if there was a thread between her hands, now with small skeins (Olsson, 2007b).

She used the skein as a metaphor and told me about how she in a movie had learnt how to use metaphors in her language. Others of the children saw the investigation process as an opportunity to make their own voices heard mostly in relation to their parents but also in relation to the social worker.

To sum up; the children’s answer was that they wanted to be reckoned upon, to be allowed to participate and given opportunities to understand what was going on, about where, what, how, who, when and why is going on, have been done and was going to happen in the investigation. Most of all they were asking for their social workers’ own opinion, the child’s social worker’s assessment and ideas about the conversations, about the progress and the future. Yes, they want to be treated and heard as actors in their own lives.

But how about very small and young children? Can social workers meet them as actors? One of the participating social workers told this story about how her
manager had asked her to tell the newborn baby about what she was going to do. She was going to take care of the child according to the compulsory legislation and put the child into foster care. The social worker thought that her boss had really asked her to do a strange thing but she went to the baby’s bed and told her directly about all she was going to do, her aims with this and all her considerations. Afterwards, she said, I got very amoved in talking with the child and afterwards I felt as if I had a relationship with the child. I will always remember this child, she continued. After this, no child has been too little to have a dialogue with or to involve in the process – even though the dialogue with the baby looked like a monologue, the feeling and her story was about how this had been a dialogical involving conversation with the child. When the social worker became amoved in relation to the child, as she told it, the conversations had not seemed like one-way-communication.

5.7.3 Becoming both the parents’ and the child’s social worker

Extract from written contributions of a social worker in the first group/phase (Olsson, 2005a, pp. 175 – 177) [my translation]

Another question arose in the project about what is happening with the parents when we involve the children more. The answer, so far, is that it does not seem to create any conflict of interest, rather the contrary. The parents seem to have appreciated how we have approached the children and they have never questioned us making the child the principal actor in the investigation … 

[…]

… here probably somebody will object that it is the responsibility of the adults to protect the children from ”adult information” and from becoming involved in ”grown-up matters”. What we forget is that what we are going to investigate is that part of the child’s reality, which the child is already very much involved in. What we forget is also that the child already has heard about the social welfare office and different (horrible) things we can do. Children
talk with each other, have dialogues, about the social welfare services and even play computer games where the social welfare office sometimes intervenes the children are not taken care of in the right way by their parents. We grown-ups are not to say that children, who are already in a vulnerable situation, will be more vulnerable when we give them information and make them participate and involve themselves in their own investigation. On the contrary!

In earlier dominating discourse the living idea had been to give priority to the parents. The motive for this had been the need for the parents’ participation, both in investigating the child’s situation and needs and taking measures if any deficiencies are discovered. As Kari Killén Heap expressed this [my translation]:

… we have omitted to help the child both in its experience of the investigating situation and in the insufficient care. The same restraint is also shown in using children to give information in research (Tiller 1989) In both situations we chose to believe that this is about protecting the child. But to a higher degree this is about protecting ourselves. Children often know much more than the grown ups would want them to know. This is probably also about a lack of trust in what children say. (Killén, 1994, p. 275)

In approaching a child Kari Killén asserts that it is important to [my translation]:

1. alleviate the child’s inner chaos and share the child’s pain.
2. make life more understandable.
3. make life more predictable.
4. reduce the child’s experience of being responsible and blaming itself for the lack of care.
5. support the child in mourning.
6. make the child visible.
7. give the child a new and different experience of contact in the relationship.
8. support the child in being competent. (Killén, 1994, p. 406)

It was attention like this that was the essence of the County projects – to see and approach children as competent actors and support them from and with their own perspective. Most of all, the issue became to invite the children (and other clients) to participate and create different forms of partnerships and to stand up for these ideas in different contexts and relations – to share your active interest in this, listening and respecting the child’s integrity and contexts. This will reflexively create a mutual space for partnership (Claezon, 2004) [my translation]:

What do we do in exposing that empowerment or partnership is not only a politically correct concept – how can we together actually make clear to the young person and the family the existing possibilities of participating? It is my conviction, in these approaches, that to listen to and show respect for somebody else’s integrity and participation in the invention, we show that commitment which is sought after and in turn will create mutual trust. For the young people to understand that this is built into the interventions probably demands an over-explicitness on the social worker’s behalf, which also exposes their active interest in this. (Claezon, 2004, p. 213)

Here, one of the participating social workers’ voices about the change-over to both involving the parents and the child through the social workers participating in DC and the County’s action project:

Extract from one of eight social workers’ written narratives. This is from a participant in the first group/phase (Olsson, 2005a, pp. 176 – 177) [my translation]
The parents were [earlier] closely informed of what was going to happen between our meetings, who we were going to be in contact with and of course that they were welcome to phone us as much as they want if they have questions or standpoints between the meetings. In the end, the parents get document, summarizing and analyzing the child’s (!) situation taken together. We have dialogues with the parents about what the family and the child might need and start different supporting achievements, hoping that this will benefit the child [without involving or asking the child].

As time goes on we follow-up together with the parents and other actors, The children participate and are given opportunities to give their views on the changing (?) situation far too seldom.

We often also ask the parents to choose, not only on behalf of themselves but of their children as well. We ask the parents where they think the child would prefer to meet and have a conversation. The parents have an idea about this and we follow this without making any consultation with the child in question directly. Nor do probably the parents. Instead they decide what they think is best for the child. No doubt it is something sympathetic with making the parents experts on their own voices heard – that is, in many different contexts.

As we all know, adults have an adult perspective. In our work we are supposed to use a children’s perspective, which most of us try to do, but the question is how successful we are.

If we instead start to meet and approach the child (not the parent or other adults) as our true commissioner and see ourselves as the child’s ”consultants”. How do we approach other (adult) commissioners? Well, we are talking about what we can do and
not do. We present ourselves and what competence we offer. We inform them about the project and make agreements between us about how the projects should be conducted. We make appointments, book times for follow-ups and which steps should be fulfilled. In the end of the project we make an analysis of the whole situation taken together and check with the commissioner if we grasped it in more or less the same way. Together we make an agreement about any contributions that might be needed and make clear the aim and objectives. After this we evaluate the process and finish up.

My feeling is that we tend, in the whole of society, to see the child as a second-class citizens. We who work closely with vulnerable children have to take this very seriously and listen to their narratives exactly as we do with an adult. To make it possible for a child to narrate their stories it is necessary to approach the child with professionalism and respect. We shall not approach the child in any other way than we would want ourselves.

After the initial phases of the study I designed the table below in an attempt to illustrate the emerging different strategies in conducting investigations – the difference between not only becoming and acting as the parents’ social worker but also becoming the child’s social worker. See below. The use of tables easily leads you to the impression of dualism, which is not what I want to emphasise, neither here nor from within this study. On contrary, I want to bring out the circular epistemology. To illustrate and describe circular ideas in a language which in itself has a linear structure is not easy (Bilson and Ross, 1999). So, I have tried to overcome this by putting a ”midfield” in the table with a reflexively joining ”both – and”.

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### Table 5. Perspectives & the social worker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To become the child’s social worker</th>
<th>Reflexively co-creating each other.</th>
<th>To become the parents’ social worker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social worker as the child’s consultant. Social worker works from the child’s position.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Social worker as the parents’ consultant. The social worker works from the parents’ position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in direct contact with the child from the very beginning.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Informing (the parents) about the plans to talk to the child in the investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child is the most important person to keep informed and involved with what is going on and the progress.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Await the family’s invitation on how to contact the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the child want the social worker to get to know the child and his/her family?</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>How do you want us to get to know the family? The family’s responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parents receive information about the child’s agreement with the social worker.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Reach an agreement with the parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach the parents through the child.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Reach the child through the parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact according to the child’s terms/conditions – an agreement with the child.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Contact according to the parents’ terms/conditions – planning together with the parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness in relation to both the child and the parents.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Openness in relation to the parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child’s network in focus.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>The parents’ network in focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilisation of the network from the child’s point of view.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>Mobilisation of the network from the parents’ point of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child is involved in both the investigational process and the written text.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>The parents are involved in the investigational process and the written text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The social worker is involved in the child.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>The social worker is indirectly involved in the child – others are expected to involve the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child is protected when needed through the agency of the social worker in mutual relationship with the child.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>The child is protected through the agency of the social worker on the initiative of others in relation to the child.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The child is approached as an actor and agent in his/her own life.</td>
<td>both – and</td>
<td>The child is approached as an object and as a victim in his/her own life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.8 Different communication in the social welfare organisation

In the coaching, I tried to make the professional involvement, influence and co-creation both more transparent for the participating social worker and to become more aware of its importance. In this, I encouraged the social workers to ask for assistance from the most obvious source, namely the clients. The social workers started also to invite clients more and more, also children, to talk about and give feedback on what they had done so far, how they had experienced the process and how they would prefer to continue. In this, the participating social workers also developed a good grasp of how to conduct reflecting dialogues and use the communications in meetings to do more than collect information. In DC and in written contributions in the study, participating social workers, in the latter phase of the study, narrated more and more about an increasing co-creation of new opportunities, together with participating clients, colleagues and others, in an emerging more explorative and dialogical communication. Here are some examples:

Extract from writings in the third phase from a social worker working with foster care homes and children in foster care (Olsson, 2008a, p.56) [my translation]

My most emotionally overwhelming interview took place in a foster care home. The family had taken care of a younger sister who had difficult anorexia when she was placed [in the foster care home]. The girl had lived there for a couple of years and I had made a great many efforts to come and talk with her. The foster care parents felt that they had difficulty in creating what they felt as a genuine relationship with the girl. The relation was somehow imperfect and frequently frustrating. What was she saying from her perspective? What did she want? How did she understand what we were saying?

I interviewed the foster care parents and the girl listened. I asked how they had got on with the girl during the time she had
been living with them. What had been difficult? How they had experienced this in different situations.

After the interview, the girl was able to answer her sister on several of her worries and give comfort to her. I discovered that the girl and the father in the foster care home became deeply involved in a dialogical conversation which I don’t know the content of, but noticed that they were completely involved in each other. When I was about to leave, the mother in the foster care home and the girl told me that they wanted us to meet like this again but next time, we should work from the father’s perspective. The next time was about the father. Afterwards they could have a dialogue together about their experiences of the father. My reflections from their conversations were that there could be many points in common which I hope will lead to a feeling of intimate alliance.

I also felt as if the interview form in this context, where the girl was the one listening, gave her breathing space and paradoxly speaking space which she never had had before during the period I had had contact with the family. In all earlier conversations she probably had felt persistent, to answer all sorts of possible and impossible questions. She was put in focus and could not think any more. She is [otherwise] a quiet and reserved person.

Focusing on communication and interaction in relation to the child and the child in relation to others, the most important thing to be understood and assessed is laid out in the open – accessible and approachable. Focus is laid on the human – between interplay in different contexts, and how. As an investigator, you guide the participants, the child and his/her family and network, in understanding from
a child’s perspective and improving things for the child. The investigation’s directions change from the traditional versions of becoming investigations about the past, assessing and evidence and making prognoses about the future, to co-creating new understandings, skills and possibilities for the child’s family and network to approach, listening to and interacting with the child in new ways, empowering all the participators (including the social workers). Here is another example of the narrating social workers’ voices:

Extract from a social worker’s written contributions in phase two and three (Olsson, 2008a, pp.78 – 80) [my translation]

My case was about a girl L, 7 years old, when the case came to the social welfare in the form of a report from the police about violence from the father against the mother and problems with alcohol on the mother’s side.

My first meeting with the parents, I think, made the continuation good. In the introduction, both of the parents were given questions what they thought the other was expecting before and approaching the meeting. Circular questions. A “technique” I continue with during the whole investigation time, often henceforth, through asking what L would say, think or like – aimed at making her voice heard even when she was not present [physically]. In my first meeting with the parents, they also expressed a fear ”that L was going to be taken away from them”. When we parted after the first meeting, the parents were given the task to prepare their daughter before meeting me and that the best way for me to meet her was to visit their home the week after. We had also talked about them giving me their consent to use video in conversations with the family and I had given them information that I had a coach supporting my learning in their investigation.
There have been frequent meetings through-out the whole investigation; in the beginning once a week and during the latter part of the investigation every other week. I was convinced that frequent meetings were important – it made the process and the dialogue lively between the family and me as investigator. We have been able to continue our dialogue and our interaction in a natural way each time. We have met in the evenings at times, which the family thought best. This flexibility has been important and it has been possible for me to the meetings in late afternoons and evenings.

My first meeting with L was in her home. I was invited for coffee and L was a little silent and shy. I came closer to her through sitting on the floor beside her, looking at her drawing, which she was very skilful in. We talked about her drawings, who had taught her to draw, and much more. Then L wanted to show me photo albums with holiday pictures, and she told me about the persons in the photos. The parents were there all the time in the neighbourhood. At the same time they did not ”disturb” me and L. After a while L went out to the kitchen and made jewelleries with pearls. I went to her and the following dialogue emerged:

"Do you know why I’m here today?"
"Yes, dad told me."
"Do you know what I work with?"
"No."
"Well, I work with talking with children who have parents that quarrel a lot"
"That’s what my mother and father are doing.”
"And then I work with talking with children who have parents who drink too much alcohol.”
"My mother does that.”

Then we had a conversation for a while about me wanting to talk with her about this in a very special occasion, and L got to choose if she wanted to meet me in my office or if I should come to her home again. She wanted to come to my office – "that would be exciting". (It was something that also surprised the parents, that L choose the social office). We had a chat about the school and I wondered:
"Is there somebody at the school who knows how it is at home?"
"You couldn’t say that.”

During this short conversation, L had said three very important things to me which followed as a red thread in all the dialogue with the family: "That’s what my mother and father do”, "that’s what my mother does” and "you couldn’t say that”.

Another thing I was reflecting on together with the coach, was the significance of being alone as investigator. We often work in pairs. I am convinced that it has been of importance that I have been alone as an investigator on making the co-creation of dialogue possible and the interplay I succeeded in creating during the investigation process.

During the later phases of the study, the social workers more frequently reported on how they, with preparation, support and feedback in DC, dared to use and test new approaches and different ways of implementing and expanding on the ideas
in the action projects. I have already given some examples and here is more to come.

5.9 Creating “ripples on the water” – diffusion in the environments

This is a research study, where I as researcher worked from several perspectives (for example, social worker, coach, student, researcher, running my own business) and levels of contexts at the same time. When I invited the participating social workers to become involved in dialogical conversations in DC, as well as participating in the research, I, at the same time, expected to be invited mutually into different contexts in their work. And so I was. In a similar way, the social workers and the families became mutually involved when the social workers invited the families to dialogical interplay in the investigations. So, I see the examples of dialogical interplay between the social workers and the children and their parents in the social workers’ narratives, in relation to and connected to what emerged in DC and how DC was developed and conducted.

When the social workers invited the clients, and I the social workers, into dialogical interaction, we all became more involved and open in relation to each other, as I see it; the client in relation to the social worker and vice versa, the social workers and I and vice versa. In the narratives from the social workers about the increasing participation in the investigations, there also emerged stories about how parents became more participating both in relation to their children and in relation to the social worker. In the context of making children more participating in the investigation process as partners, others also became more involved – the parents as well as the social workers and others in relation to the child and the social worker.
Extract from a social worker’s written contributions in phase two and three (Olsson, 2008a, pp.70 – 72) [my translation]

For several years I have had contact with a girl who today is nine years old. After a number of investigations we have contact based on conversations. Some time ago she told me that it was not all that good at home. It was like this that her big brother (14) often became angry at her and beat her, and the children’s mother is not able to stop it. The conversation ended with the girl asking me to talk with her brother about this and see if it could make a difference. Already the same day I met her big brother, just for a while, in their home together with the girl and the mother. Before I had had a chance to tell the brother that I would like to talk with him, he anticipated me and said: "You, I know that you are my little sister’s social secretary, but I would like to come and talk with you once, if it’s possible. Would it be, do you think? The brother continued with "I have a problem getting cross with my little sister, but somehow it happens”.

We make an appointment for him to come to me for a dialogue. Everybody in the family likes the idea that he gets an appointment of his own with me, and I get the mother’s permission to videotape the dialogue if the brother gives his consent.

Two weeks later the brother arrives at the appointed time. He accepts that I make a recording and I tell him how I am going to use the movie. I feel a little insecure in how I am going to start the conversation and am thinking that I want to give the boy a good opening and also begin with carefulness. Somewhere I have a feeling that his beating his sister is difficult for him and perhaps a bit taboo.
So I start by saying: ”So … you wanted to come and have a dialogue of your own with me? I am very curious about what you want to talk to me about?”

Afterwards I see in the video how confused the boy looks and how he is looking around the room before he takes a run: ”Well … it’s like this, it’s difficult in school …” And the dialogue continues or rather the monologue does. Through being unclear, not setting the context or recognising what we actually were going to talk about, I made the boy so insecure (or relieved) that I was unable to return to a dialogue. For one hour the boy speaks fast and very much almost in a forced way without giving me the slightest chance to return the conversation in the direction to what it was supposed to deal with. When I at last managed to at least finish the conversation, I was totally exhausted and so was probably he. We made a new appointment two weeks later for a new conversation.

Not until I watch the tape together with Ann-Margreth, did I notice how it went wrong already from the beginning. In my own uncertainty and my own misdirected (adult) kindness in wanting to protect children, I treated him as feeble-minded.

Would I have done this to a parent? Did I pretend as if I did not know why we where there? Pretty respectless if you consider it.

Well, now that I had discovered my mistake, and determined not to make this mistake again I rig up the camera for the second talk with the big brother. As soon as he had settled himself comfortably, I said what I should have said the first time: “You, I’m thinking about what you said to me when I visited you at
home, you have a problem with becoming so angry and feeling that you are not able to control it and wants help. That is what I want to talk to you about today”. Watching this videotape and comparing it with the first you can actually not believe it is the same boy. In the latter we have a considerably more relaxed conversation. A dialogue that also contained silence and reflections. “The worst” is already named, so the boy can relax and speak from within about what he actually wanted to talk about.

**Externalisation**

In the second conversation with the 14-year-old boy, I use (sticky) taping dolls [Swedish *teepingdockor*], small wooden dolls where the children can choose one doll for themselves, one for mother, for siblings, and so on. I also choose a doll for myself as my alter ego. Together, the child and I [through the dolls] move on a stage on the table where different things can take place. In this case the boy and I talked about his anger. To illustrate and catch this feeling, the boy was asked to choose a doll as being ”the Anger”. He chose a small black doll. The boy showed me where “the Anger” was standing in relation to himself. It was revealed that “the Anger” was standing at a particular distance in relation to him at school and at another distance at home. At home, the small black doll was standing very, very close to him. I asked the boy where he wished “the Anger” to be, how he was going to manage to move “the Anger” to this place and who he thought could help him in this, and so on.

At the end of the conversation, the boy had put “the Anger” where he wanted it to be in relation to himself, at a good distance further away from him, however still not completely disappeared. He had discovered that “the Anger” could also become
something positive, a strength. The boy stopped for a while, watching and studying the scene [the dolls on the table] in front of him. Then he looked up at me and said: "But … where should it be now then (he points to the space between himself and “the Anger”), where it’s completely empty now?” Myself, I was dumbstruck, astonished at this child’s skilfulness in realizing and reflecting upon his own inner dialogue on a stage where he had got help externalising his feelings and reflections.

5.9.1 Reflecting dialogues in new contexts

The participating social workers became more and more accustomed to the use of reflecting teams, which I introduced in almost every group or team meeting we had in the study, and to a more exploring, inquiring approach in their practice. In the coaching they related how they had come to suggest and use reflecting teams in relation to both clients and colleagues. As a social worker, working with foster care homes and children in foster care, exemplifies:

Extract from writings in the third phase from a social worker in working with foster care homes and children in foster care (Olsson, 2008a, p. 54 – 55) [my translation]

After my conversations with Ann-Margreth, where I got the opportunity to ”get wind to” thoughts ”go on foot” in my head during many years, I started to test some of the techniques that systemic thinking has found so well-working, to contribute to people opening up to reflect on how another person can think and feel.

I am fascinated at how easy it has become for me to appropriate this and start to work with interviews and listening and reflecting teams.
In my work as foster care home secretary there is a continuously returning area of conflict. It is the foster care-placed children’s the social intercourse with their parents. If I remember correctly, this was the first matter I brought up in the coaching and managed with help and assistance from the coach. We [the working group] had planning days where this question became an interesting feature in the programme.

I wanted the investigating social workers [colleagues] to feel and experience how it can be to be a child in foster care. Before these planning days, two foster care families had visited us in the social welfare office. They had talked about their experience in dealing with children and their relationships with the biological parents. These two foster care families did in some aspects represent different views on how the social intercourse [child – biological parents – foster care family] should be conducted.

On the planning day some of the investigators imagined as if they moved into these families and how a morning when they as children were going to meet their [biological] parents, developed in respective foster care home. They [the investigating social workers] played the imagined dialogue and talked about their expectations and entertained apprehensions about the contact with the [biological] parents. Some in the group formed reflecting teams reflecting from each family’s perspective.

I did notice reflecting on the dialogue and on the reflections afterwards [in the group] how they emerged more openly and in a more explorative compared to the conversations we usually have had on this matter, which rather have been more polemic in nature. Of course, for different reasons the thoughts about the social intercourse differed, however, through this exercise the
feeling became that we could listen to each other, to one another’s reflections and ideas in a more free and open way.

The participants in the children’s group expressed how they became moved by the situation and felt that they more than ever were able to put themselves in the situation of the children. The reflectors thought that several things and aspects became clearer when they were listening from the perspective of the child compared to how it was in discussions in ordinary case conferences. They could also imagine some of the [family members’ including the child’s] feelings in this, which otherwise, if they just had read about this in a document, probably would not have been so clear. How does it feel to be afraid when meeting your father? How does it feel being homesick? How does it feel to have two families?

Continuously we/I noticed, from within DC, how the new systemic approach in use, the learning and knowing emerging in the study, became diffused in the environment as “ripples on the water”. Reflecting dialogues appeared in various colleague meetings and other meetings; for example, presentation in political meetings, meetings with collaborative partners as the police, public prosecutors and health care (for example, psychiatry colleagues). Here is a narrative from within the projects from a participating manager’s view:

Extract from writings in phase two from one of the managers (Olsson, 2008a, p. 57) [my translation]

The entire working group also had a meeting with the coach once a month, aiming at joint learning and changing experiences. On these occasions, we have been training reflecting dialogues with interviews and using reflecting teams. We have also had exercises with circular questions. This has helped us to integrate this
“technique” in client work. It has also resulted in us using reflecting conversations in most contexts nowadays, for example, in employment interviews. Then I, as manager, have interviewed the applicants for the job and the department manager and two co-workers or the staff have assisted as reflecting team. We have also used these forms – interview and reflections – when we have made presentations for others about different activities. We have also presented the project for the social welfare board in this way, where the politicians became a reflecting team. When somebody in the group has attended a course or education this person was interviewed and the group has been reflecting. This has become a good way of narrating from your own view from a course/education and not only give an account of what the educator said. This more personal narrative has increased the interest for rest of the group in listening. These days, this has also become our way of working in our case conferences. We take it in turns to interview colleagues who ask for help about a case and the rest of the group takes on the function of reflecting team. This has lead to that those who bring up a case experience and feel that they get more help from the group, are given more support when the group in their approach became more explorative and curious about what the social secretary wants help with. We leave the knowing-position, the advice giving, and the atmosphere in the meeting improves, becomes much better. In client work reflecting dialogues are frequently used in meetings nowadays. For example, the parents can become the reflecting team when the social worker is interviewing the child. Now and then I or another colleague is invited to be interviewer. The social worker/social workers can be interviewed, for example, about the concerns and ideas in use in the case and the family becomes the reflecting team. Reflecting dialogues increase and support a living curiosity in different narratives/stories in the case. It also opens up increasing
possibilities for both the person interviewed and the persons reflecting, for listening and then to catch what each one hears and from that creates new ideas, narratives and angles of approach.

5.10 New orientation in investigations – signs in the documentation

In the study of the text 10 of the investigations in the sampling of 181 investigations turn out to be conducted with the support of DC. What most of all appeared different in these ten documentations was the sections about and the accounts of the proceedings and processes, the considerations and used logic in the social workers’ participation. Below are three examples from those written investigations and these sections [my translations](Olsson, 2008c, pp. 24-25).

First an investigation about a boy aged 9:

… To make it possible to meet [the boy’s name] around the same time and the same place and to talk with him alone, it was decided with the mother and [the boy’s name] that the undersigned was going to bring him from school the same time [each week] and drive him to the social office where we could have a dialogue and afterwards drive him home to his mother.

[...]

In every conversation the undersigned has set the context for [the boy’s name] and read the writing from last dialogue with the purpose of getting [the boy’s name] consent and acceptance that this was heard as he meant. With setting the context means that the leader tells who she is: I am [the boy’s name] social secretary and I will talk with him with the purpose of exploring what he feels and understands his situation and his wishes for the future. I will also say how long we are going to meet
and what conversational tools we are going to use. I have asked [the boy’s name] for his view all the time or if he wanted to change anything. I have explained what we are going to do and what is going to happen at next step and asked for his opinion. He was given the possibility to influence the conversations and every situation. He has asked questions and joined in inquiries. He has read what was written about him in the computer.

In the meetings with [the boy’s name] [date] the undersigned met him at his school. He was with a teacher. Undersigned asked him about who he was with and [the boy’s name] then talked about how he had got in trouble with someone at school and had been waiting in the classroom until it was time to meet and that he then had asked the teacher to follow him to the social worker waiting in the car. [the boy’s name] was afraid that the boy he had made the fuss to, was going to take revenge on him.

When we arrived at the social office, we went out and bought chocolate and soft drinks. Then I showed [the boy’s name] my room and the documentation on him in the computer. I read out what I had written from our last conversation and [the boy’s name] said that it was okay. We talked for a while and the undersigned asked if we should bring in the Bear Cards and continue our dialogue with use of the cards. However, that was not what [the boy’s name] wanted. Instead the undersigned brought the tejing-dolls and together we went into the children’s room. There is a video camera and undersigned put the lid on the camera so it would become clear to the boy that we are not recording anything. [the boy’s name] says that he does not want to be video-recorded because that is something he had done earlier when his parents were in a dispute as to the custody of him. He has used the dolls before in one of our previous dialogues.
Further on in the investigation [date] a meeting was recorded. It was a meeting with him and both his parents. Before this meeting [the boy’s name] and I had met alone prepare this meeting. We talked about the arrangement and how to carry out the meeting according to the boy’s wishes. We agreed what to talk about and the rules for the meeting […] We decided to set a time limit of one hour for the dialogue and focus the dialogue with the parents on the future. [The boy’s name] got a piece of paper with the text: ”timeout”. He wanted to be able to give that to the social worker when and if he wanted to take a break or make his voice heard. We decided that if his parents came into conflict [the boy’s name] should hand over the paper to me and I would interrupt their conversation. I also promised to break off the conversation if a conflict emerged between the parents even if [the boy’s name] had not asked me to. We went through what we wanted to talk with the parents about and what the [the boy’s name] wanted to be heard from his point of view and perspective.

The next example of extracts is about how a social worker carried out investigations on two sisters, aged 5 and 9.

The first time I as investigator met [one of the sister’s names] I explored the meaning of an investigation and the purpose of dialogues with parents and children in investigations (See below [in the written investigation] ”[the child’s name]’s narrative”) It is also important that the child knows that there could be something the social worker has to consult the parents or another adult about. Each time I meet [the child’s name] I connected to this and made inquiries about what and how she remembered what had been said, who I am, my work and if there was something she had reflected on and wanted me to consider since the last time we met. I reminded [the child’s name] that I appreciated if she would ask me if there was something she did not understand ([the child’s name] did use this opportunity.)
She told me that the first time we met I had used the word “hard-handed” which she did not understand the meaning of).

[...]

All dialogues with [the sisters’ names] have been united into the child’s own “narrative”. I have then asked [the sisters’ names] to read their own narrative separately and give me feedback about whether this is what they wanted me to hear and expose. The girls were satisfied and approved their narratives to be shown to their mother and father. The mother respectively the father read the children’s narratives and reflected on what they had read and heard. Some of these reflections are reported at the end of this investigation in the section ”assessment/analysis”.

In another investigation on a child, 17 months old when the investigation began, the social worker writes under the headline *The processes during the investigation*:

… On the last visit to the family, the parents described how much their situation had improved. [The child’s name] now eats, sleeps well, plays, is lively and happy. She has started to walk. The modern has [...] When the mother is asked to describe the difference her answer is that she now understands her child much better and can hear [the child’s name] wishes. The father is pleased with the situation. The parents do not want more help. At the investigator’s suggestion the parents give their consent to a follow-up contact during the autumn. The purpose is to open up a possibility to assess the development in the family with a long-term view.

Conducting the investigation has been a balance between making the parents understand the task as social worker, my own ideas and the
parents’ point of view […]. As investigator I have tried to be distinct in relation to the parents about the child protection aspect in the social welfare commission, that I was the [child’s name]’s social secretary and that my task was to ensure that the child was living in good enough conditions. At the same time, it was very important to listen to and respect the parents, leave space for their views and pay attention to their point of view about what they needed …

5.11 A summary from one of the participating organizations

The participating municipalities and social welfare offices have held several seminars on their participation in the project *Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children* (for example, (Carlström et al., 2005) and (Fröman et al., 2006)). In the Research Conference of Forsa in March 2007, both representatives from the social organizations of the municipalities of Lund and Malmö participated in the seminar about Children’s participation (as stated earlier in this chapter). Lund had handed in the following application [my translation]:

The social welfare organisation in Lund has participated as one of five municipalities in a project where systemic theory and dialogical investigation have been given the opportunity to teach us and for us to learn something that gives a concrete meaning to the expression to make children heard and invited to partnership and participation in their own investigations. The project, through having methodical readiness in supplying the method and approach in use for the whole working group, also aimed at improving the competence and making children’s participation stand as a matter of course – to go without saying. Through the project we have found ways in everyday work, making children really participate in partnership in the investigations, which at the
same time increases the understanding of the importance of the child’s narrative. We have used individual coaching with the social secretaries in one working group, which has implied support in reflecting and developing and also emboldening social workers to dare test new approaches and methods than the traditional, aimed at making the children become more invited to and participate in the social work.

The project has led to a changing process, where the social secretaries work with more and more systematic methods and ideas in investigations, making the children come into view and making them more implicated, sharing and participating in the contacts with the social welfare.

5.12 Summarizing the chapter
The investigating social workers had traditionally been trained to seek an objective or neutral approach and where unused to having attention put on their own contributions in relation to the clients. They were not used to highlight their own participation and actions, as we did in the DC, or focus on the importance of one’s own involvement in dialogical interaction. The social workers talked about how they started to invite the children to participate as partners creating increasing mutual involvement in dialogical interplay. They were exposed to more of their own responses, they said, being more open and involved more personally in their work, feeling happier and more satisfied with their own contributions in meetings and interactions. They received positive responses from the children and their families, more openly responding and showing that they did care and were interested in listening and considering what the social worker wanted to contribute with. The families seemed to become more open and inviting the social worker into their lives with this more open and personal approach on the social worker’s part.
When the social worker invited the child, the parents and other people in the network into a mutually involving dialogical participation in coming to know each other, exploring and inquiring about both the risks and the strengths of the child’s relationships, the social worker wanted to obtain a responsive understanding (Bakhtin, 1991, Shotter, 2004c), that is, getting an understanding from within the family and the child.

In dialogical conversations with the child, where the child is invited to participate and his/her requests about and choices in the participation (for example, where to meet, with whom, how and other things) are respected, it becomes easier for the social worker to be invited into the narratives of the child from within his/her perspective. Hearing the voice of the child, in the way the child chooses to narrate and tell his/her stories, gives the social worker an idea of the lifestyle and conditions of this child, from the child’s point of view, including the child’s strategies in managing his or her life conditions and family situation.

In this, the social worker might also recognize, ask for and explore, how the child identifies the appearance of the social worker into the life of the family. For example:

- Who is the social worker becoming for the child?
- How is the child experiencing the investigation and/or the situation in the family from the perspective of the mother and/or the father? For other important persons for the child?
- What meaning is in use about the investigation and the social worker’s work?
- What is going to happen?
- Who is talking with the child about the progress and what is said and heard?
In the project, the social workers experienced that when the social worker keeps in touch and creates a relationship of his/her own with the child, it makes a difference that makes a difference for the child as well as everybody else involved. Among other things, the experiences from involving children were summarized as follows (Olsson, 2005a):

(1) Children are experts on their own situation and relationships and have their own rights as human beings to be heard and take part in what is going on and how the social workers are entering the life of the child (James and Prout, 1990, Bäck-Wiklund and Lundström, 2001, Verhellen, 2000, Barnombudsmannen, 2004, 2007). The social worker can create a picture about how the child experiences his/her situation without a dialogue with the child. However, the difference that makes a difference is that this picture is just telling something about the interpretation from a third person position, that is, from an outsider’s perspective. It has nothing to do with how the child experiences his/her relationship with others and othernesses.

(2) Very young children can also be invited to take part and manage to participate as the social worker takes different aspects into consideration in assessing individual needs and wishes of the child and making them come true in different ways.

(3) Both younger and older children have one or several narratives to tell. Whose version is more important than the child’s?

(4) Who could be the stand-in for the child’s social worker/social secretary? Who is in a similar position to the child and have a similar relationship with him/her? Who can be a substitute in the view of the child? I want to make the following statement: In a context of processing and writing the investigation, there is no one else but the social worker/social secretary who can invite and help the child to become mutually involved and participate in the investigation conducted by the social worker/social secretary. Social workers who think that
continuous contact and a relationship involving the child in the work of the social secretary could be replaced with somebody else, even if it is an important person for the child, diminishes the significance and the importance of their work as social workers/social secretaries. No one can expect the child to be aware of the special importance of the social secretary. It seems very rare that the child asks for contact with his/her social secretary before the child is invited by the social worker. This self-awareness of one’s own significance and importance in relation to the child in investigations and assessments, as the child’s social secretary/social worker, is an important and significant aspect of self-reflecting awareness in the profession as a social worker in a unique position of authoritative responsibility and community power and in relation to the child and his/her family.
6. Reflections and conclusions
This study of action research includes and has been conducted from many different aspects, dimensions, views, perspectives and positions, where ethics was the most important (see more about that further on in this chapter). Many people have been involved, many have been influenced and many will be.

Since February 2004, I have followed social workers closely. The research process raised concerns of how to authenticate the performance of our actions and inquiries, which the participating social worker also became involved in. Their participation in delta-reflecting teams, in DC sessions and in written narratives give evidence of what was co-created in this study and how.

The study also included interviews with 12 children, exploration of 181 written investigations and inquiries together with social workers working with measures for adults with misuse and dependency problems about their work and their clients’ participations. Here, I have only made some connections to these studies, further explored and accounted for in books published by the County (Olsson, 2007b, 2007c, 2008c), focusing on the emerging DC and on the contexts where the study started from – strengthening the voices of vulnerable children.

In this chapter, I make summarizing reflections about and from within the study. Reflecting is here used as meaning that I am reflecting both on something already narrated in earlier chapters or on something growing and expanding in the reflections here and now. It could sometimes mean that I repeat myself. That is what we often do in reflections. However, in the light of what has already been said, written, read and heard before, it could now be said, written, read or heard differently, with new angles of approach, in the new context in relation to the earlier utterances created meaning and influence. Any utterance begins, is preceded, by earlier utterance of others, wrote Bakhtin, and the speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make the room for the
other’s active responsive understanding (Bakhtin, 1986). So, when I write this I am following and responding to something already heard and at the same time orientating towards the responses of others, towards their active responsive understanding, I simultaneously imagine. This is not something you are/I am continuously aware of or sensitive to and …

… can assume various forms: educational influence on the readers, persuasion of them, critical responses, influence on followers and successors, and so on. It can determine other’s responsive positions under the complex conditions of speech communication in particular cultural sphere. The work is a link in the chain of speech communion. Like the rejoinder in a dialogue, it is related to other work-utterances: both those to which it responds and those that respond it. (Bakhtin, 1986, pp.75-76)

This is a chapter where the answers to the research questions are explored further. So far, mainly the chapter Dialogue Coaching (focusing on answering research questions 1 and 2) and the chapter Narratives from within DC (focusing on answering research questions 1 and 3) formed my answers to the three research questions in the study. I also connect other questions at issue in the section Questions, in the chapter on DC, to this chapter, as well as to emerging outcomes in the action projects, which I have accounted for in the two chapters referred to above.

This is also a chapter where I bring many years of work to a conclusion, summarizing and highlighting some of the drawn conclusions from within the actions of the study. I say farewell and express my gratitude to the participants and the commissioner as well as to all others involved.
6.1 Dialogical Participatory Action Research and DC

In participatory action research (PAR), some of the people in the organization or community under study participate actively with the professional researcher throughout the research process from the initial design to the final presentation of results and discussion of their action implications. (Whyte, 1991, p. 20)

As already stated in the introductory chapter, the commissioners expected me as coach to explore the progress and make both the process and the results as conspicuous and transparent as possible, exposed to a larger audience. The Idea Group took the first initiatives in designing the research study and the project leader, Eva Carlström, continuously supported me in designing and conducting the research together with the participating social workers and their managers. The idea emerged that the conducted research should have the same *style* as was expected from the social workers to involve and invite the clients into partnership and collaboration (cf. the County’s strategy – in the section *Different responses and strategies* in chapter *Narratives from within DC*).

All this became both about to create sustainable reflexively learning capacity and to infuse an approach of dialogue for everyday use and life. At the same time this was a direction of the diffusion. The original idea from the projects leader in the County was to create many small events (cf. the section about the County’s strategy – see above), with diffuse boundaries, hoping that the ideas that unfolded will become widely spread through creating ‘ripples on the water’, or as Björn Gustavsen calls it: ‘ripples in the water’ effects (Gustavsen, 2008). For example results from the action projects and this research study have been disseminated also outside Scania amongst social workers (Olsson, 2007a, 2008d) and other coaches (Danielsson, 2007), and given as a reference by researchers for example, Karsten Åström and Annika Rejmer (2008), Eva Friis (2008), Anna Sonander (2008) and Bodil Rasmusson (2009).
6.1.2 How the actions informed and developed my approach

The story about cycling in a peloton is metaphorically illustrating the dialogical interplay in the emerging DPAR in the study as well as in DC. This entangled and intertwined relational dynamic of actions, joints actions, became the characteristic style of the research in relation to the conducted coaching as well as my development. We were all learning by doing (Dewey, 2007) and inquiring (Dewey, 1938) and by reflections in and on our actions (Schön, 2002), testing and exploring (Dewey, 1991), developing and improving both the social work and the coaching as well as the research actions and processes. One of the core ideas in action research is to create a continuous and participative learning process (Greenwood and Levin, 1998).

In DC, we reflected both on the social work practice and the systemic coaching practice as well as on the dialogical practice in both. This became reflecting in an ongoing practice, including my actions as coach and researcher. So, becoming a researching coach meant for me to become involved in an ongoing process of improving our participation in DC and my contributions both as coach and researcher.

When I started as a coach in the context of social work (see the beginning of the first chapter) I brought many years of experience into this practice, as social worker and as leader and manager in the context of social work and in different other contexts. As a matter of fact, I had had the commission as handball coach for five years, three years with boys aged 11-13 and two years with a team of young girls. I have a life story of my own with a lot of stories from different sport contexts (handball, swimming, cycling and aerobics) with different coaches and ways of coaching.

The most important experience in my past as coach emerged when I was coaching the boy’s handball team. They were all much more talented in ball playing then I was. I was not able to show them those feints and tricks they
needed to learn. So, for teaching I approached their talents and used their own gifts asking them to learn by doing and teach each other. Often I had an idea into which direction I wanted them to develop. Perhaps I gave them a hint or showed some more appreciation when they succeeded in developing actions in that direction. I do not remember. What I do remember is the story about myself not being able to be a role model in whatever they were going to learn and develop. Instead, I supported them to imagine what I wanted them to learn or to change something they were already doing and test it. My support was mainly about confirmation, naming and giving appreciation to their learning. At that time I was thinking of myself as a coach with a handicap – a disabled coach. Now, in the context of new learning and insights in the context of DC, and in relation to DPAR, I have understood that I might not have been a skilful handball player but probably a fairly talented coach, making the participants develop their own learning to learn and teaching me how to go on. It connects to the style emerging in this study (cf. section Non-directive coaching in DC in this chapter).

To meet talented and experienced social workers in their everyday working life, listening to, reading, exploring and participating in their reflections in dialogues, have of course made an impact on me and my approach in many ways and many times during these years. In the chapter Dialogue Coaching, I have emphasized some important aspects and striking moments. I started as a coach meeting a few social workers often and how much as they wanted. This opened up the opportunity to really have a chance to get to know one another and for me to explore and learn a lot from the social workers about their work, methods in use, new techniques and ideas in fashion. Here, for example, I learnt the use of the Bear-cards and tejping-dolls, about BBIC and other new models in social work. The systemic curiosity and the ongoing DPAR created advantages for me in making inquiries, for example, when I positioned myself in a non-knowing position. However, the idea called non-knowing position is not after all about not knowing but to become aware of the importance of approaching each participant, situation and event as a meeting in a unique culture and with unique
stories, its own unique shapes and forms and ways of relating to one another and to responsive communication.

Besides daily reflections in DC, the delta-reflections in the first event in 2005, plus the written contributions with reflections from participating social workers, confirmed that we were on the “right track” in the co-creation of the dialogical coaching. The dialogical interplay was strongly supported by John Shotter, who was my tutor for three years (see the chapter on DC). He introduced me to the use of striking moments and search for examples to explore from within together with the participants (read more about this in the chapter on DC). Shotter inspired me to read Gallwey’s books on coaching, relating both to my earlier experiences as coach (see above) and how I was developing my actions here and now. From Gallwey I picked up ideas about learning, using an approach of fascination in relation to whatever you were doing and using (cf. for example, the section about Details from within and Curiosity and joy in the chapter on DC). This will increase your feeling for rhythm, timing, listening and the present (cf. the section In the presence, here and now, inquiring in the chapter on DC). Gallwey continues (Gallwey, 1997): There are also so many choices to pay attention to in the present, to start with observation without judgment and choose (only) one detail to change (the rest will also be changed in relation to the changing of the chosen detail)). Prepare yourself by imagining the change and let yourself go – let it happen – “just” let it go. Again, explore the results and the differences without judging, and so on. All this I found extremely helpful; the non-judging exploration, the preparation followed by actions with readiness for evaluation afterwards, again without judgement, and with focus on being in the moment – being in the present.

The above connects to the prerequisite of living dialogues where I became more and more aware of the importance of being in the present to make it possible to be responsive in relation to other participants, myself and otherness in the moment. The use of dialogue made the meetings between the social workers and myself easier, inspiring confidence and trust in the relationship between us. As
indicated in the chapter about DC, this for example probably had something to do with my earlier experiences, my age, my identity as a social worker and accustomedness to move in social organisations, talking the language in the dominating discourse – joining the grammar.

Sometimes we tested and trained new skills from within DC. The social worker decided to try an idea in his or her practice for evaluation together with the client and/or others taking part. Often this made me want to try it more somewhere or somehow. For example, it could be making drawings, using video recordings in new ways or using the language and myself differently. I gradually improved my skills in spontaneous adaptation, or, as I call it, serious play with different techniques and methods in the moment of use. For example, I adapted different sorts of questions in the interviewing in DC, as well as improved my way of facilitating open dialogue, reflecting teams and other network meetings and adapted them into new variants. I became more and more interested in inquiring, exploring and asking for details. By asking for details, step by step, I found that I could support the narrator as well as the listeners, including myself, to successfully enter into the matter or the occurrence in question and take us further with new orientation on how to go on. To support the social workers’ narrating and also bring others, including the narrators, to listen from within and/or from different perspectives, became something I gradually improved as well as keeping my and others’ attention, concentration, focus on and in the dialogue.

I tried to attain a “good enough” quality as coach using different sources and ways of improving my approach. The ongoing DPAR facilitated and increased my opportunities to hear the voices of the social workers, which was my most important source of improvement. The ongoing research seemed to authorize me to inquire more about DC as well as arrange special events as those in 2005, 2006 and 2007 where everything was documented by video recording. This gave me the opportunity to both alone and together with co-researchers listen to and reflect on what was heard in the delta-reflections and explore further whenever I
wanted to. The books, published by the County, dependent on the outcome of DPAR and what unfolded within DPAR and gave me other and new opportunities to involve the participants in further learning and teach me as coach how to become “good enough”.

At the 2006 event, two messages really struck me in relation to myself as coach. It was when one of the participants emphasized how I was using what she called *listening ears* and *listening questions* (see sections with the same titles in the chapter about DC). I found these expressions very nice, catching the response and interplay I was hoping to contribute within DC very well and strengthening me to continue in the way I now approached the participants in DC. Something had made the difference in our conversations which had made it possible for me as coach to ask a lot of questions and still make it possible for us participants to experience the conversations as dialogical and mutually involving. I had asked myself (see section *Questions* in the chapter about DC) how it could be possible to have a living dialogue in DC when new questions often became my way of responding. Why did DC not turn into Monological Coaching instead of a joint inquiry into dialogical interaction, for the participating social workers (cf. for their reflections on the three events), for me, from within the sessions or afterwards exploring tape recordings and other sources?

I think the social worker, in inventing the expressions *listening ears* and *listening questions*, captured what she perceived in my participation as a participation in a resonance. In *resonance* you not only listen but also try to be responsive on an emotional level and take in the whole context of the other person’s utterance being responsive to intonation, words, breathing, pauses, and bodily movements (Vedeler, 2008). It is about placing yourself completely at the other participants’ disposal, to live and act from within the responsiveness in relation to the others and otherness completely accessible in the moment, absolute presence.
After the event 2007 I started to write this dissertation. During these years of ongoing practice including writing about the study and what unfolded, I have noticed how my awareness of how I use social constructionist and systemic ideas has increased as well as my knowing and abilities to use these ideas in practice. I have continued coaching and supervising social workers, getting new commissions and learning more and more about social work, coaching and action research (involved in four new projects with action research). As I see it, the systemic and dialogical methods and techniques become *living* in use, changed and changing, reflexively influencing and being adapted from within the relational dynamic of joint actions (Shotter, 1984, 2005b) in use. Connected to this I more and more have found myself talking about using *living tools* in my practice.

### 6.2 Emergent themes in DPAR

In the conducted DPAR different themes unfolded that the participating social workers returned to in their reflection in DC and in the delta-reflections on special events. These were also highlighted from the co-researchers’ view as well as from my perspective. The learning and other results were expected to be disseminated through ripples on the water effects, creating curiosity and interest in how the participants’ social work, their working environment and their relations to clients and others had been improved.

- Paradoxes in combining a systemic with a uniformed model.
- Coaching in social work.
- Coaching in dialogical investigations.
- Becoming the child’s social worker – self-awareness as social worker.
- Impacts in working environment – pride in work.
- Non-directive coaching and more in DC.
- Emerging polyphony in the organisations.

Here follows an exploratory section for each theme:
6.2.1 Paradoxes in combining the systemic approach with a uniform model

A more uniform model or manual-based methods and interviews can also be coveted from a professional point of view, giving the professionals a feeling of greater security. Models and manuals, formed in advance, may give a feeling of foreseeable progress in future meetings, increasing the feeling of knowing how. However, what is going to happen in a meeting in relation to human beings and otherness is difficult, I would say impossible, to predict, even though the predictions and expectations will influence the process and the result reflexively. So what might from one perspective secure and assure good enough quality might from another perspective create limitations and risk the flexibility you need in adjusting the responsiveness in dialogical communication and interaction. The latter was an important aspect of the approach used and of the way work emerged in the study. Faced with the latter, the ideas in the more uniform models seemed to make the participating social workers confused (see section How to adapt prefixed schedules for questioning and manual-based methods into systemic practice in the chapter Dialogue Coaching. More on the use of ASI, a questionnaire with around 180 questions, in one of the County’s published books (Olsson, 2007c).) In 2008, this lead to my being asked to join two new commisions in two of the participating municipalities. One project was about the use of ASI in systemic practice with a solution-focused approach (Bjuv) and one project about combining the Minnesota Model Treatment for Substance Dependence (Bodin, 2006) and the Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA) (Meyers and Smith, 1995) in systemic practise (Svalöv) (Olsson, 2009).

The social workers raised questions about how to combine the systemic ideas of open dialogue, co-creation and living, spontaneous response in the moment – here and now – with manual-based and questionnaire-based communication. However, there were also examples of how strange the social workers could experience the meeting with these new, systemic ideas. They talked about how
this open, inviting approach initially gave a blurred or foggy impression in the, not telling what is going to happen and how but instead trusting the process (as the project leader of the County did) and focusing on how to create different meanings in different contexts and from different perspectives. New participants in DC were not served a complete definition of what DC was or how it worked, even though it sometimes felt that it would have been easier just to tell a fixed story. As a salesman and leader of a business in my profession as a systemic coach and supervisor, it would probably be easier, at least in the initial phase to promote these ideas to new customers, if I had one true story about DC and language systemic supervision. At the same time however, this would start with something not belonging in the concept, which I do not think would be advisable from an ethical perspective or for pedagogical reasons. For those who withstand the initial fog, that is, trust the process, will probably become rewarded listening to the participating social workers in this study.

In the coaching, the social workers, as well as I as the coach, have been anxious to train and prepare the social workers and increase their learning and how to learn from their own experiences and from the client’s view. Why not ask the clients? Is this okay? Is this how you want it? Is this what you want to talk about? In the study the social workers began to tell more and more how they screw up courage to involve the clients and ask for their assistance. All this, learning by collaborative acting, asking and exploring is living knowing and aimed at improving both present and future users. Is it possible to combine this living learning and developmental with, and in particular perhaps be useful in, an advanced designed model for conversation and interaction? These aspects are brought into new studies for further inquiry.

6.2.2 Coaching in social work

When the social workers participated in DC words flowed. They reported, commented and expressed their view in detail of occurrences, actions, reflections and actions. They emphasized what they had heard from different perspectives and from other participants including from different positions (for
example from a moral position or a not-knowing position). They reproduced the dialogues and depicted the progress as they had heard and experienced the conversations unfolding in meetings. Well, to be quite honest, this narrative from within DC is more justifying to how DC emerged after the social workers had participated in DC for a month or two. In the beginning, I was more active in interviewing, asking for details and so on. But, thereafter this was the dominating scenario in DC.

In the narrating, the participating social workers elaborated further on their use of systemic ideas and dialogical interplay, tested and explored alternatives, revised and adjusted their contributions and ideas on how to go on. From within DC the participants seemed to become more and more aware of their own talents, skillfulness, abilities, strengths and knowledge. They developed their learning on how to learn to learn, you could say, and to develop further according to what you experience in working both from you own view and the clients’. In the used ideas about focusing on the “here and now” in dialogues, staying and exploring the co-creation in the present, emerged mutual learning both for the clients and the social workers as well as for me, using our different perspectives and points of view.

Social work is a communicative practice (Kullberg, 1994) and social workers’ most important tool is communication. Thus, it is not a surprise that all the social workers I met seemed like very good communicators, delivering living expressing narrating in DC. They narrated about their inner dialogue (their thoughts) as well as their outer in meetings with clients. The challenge for me became how to hold this in trust and catch the essence of all this knowing and experience – to do justice to their work, for example, in this study and in this text. How does one do justice to the dynamic interplay in DC?

In the coaching, the participants have reflected on the approach, methods and techniques (cf AMT (Burnham, 1992)) they used and their reflexive relations, but also in relation to the client and, which the social workers were not used to
do, in relation to themselves. On the whole, the social workers’ own participation in relation to the clients, had seldom been in focus earlier nor had there been any expectations on the social workers to account for the interplay with the clients of what had emerged in the social worker – client relationship or the family – child – social worker relationship or to others in the child’s network. In the investigations (including the texts) it was not customary to give any account for either for the relations between the social worker and the client or what had unfolded in their interplay (or how). Some of the participating social workers started to include also these aspects in their investigations. However this was seen as very different. I connected this to how the social workers’ contributions seemed to be undervalued also in other aspects, especially by the social workers themselves. With increasing self-awareness in DC and how we in the systemic practice had focus on what we, ourselves co-created in the present – here and now – the social workers also began to highlight their contributions in relation to clients.

However, the absence of the social worker’s part in investigations, is probably also connected to other ideas in use. I am thinking of the idea of objectivity, which has dominated the investigational paradigm for many years. The most rational and effective may seem to be to collect information about the case in question, analyse the data and ”package” it in the customary way – that is, to account for the direction, give the reasons for the decision. In this tradition, the social worker becomes a neutral tool used as an investigational instrument. Nobody is seen as influencing or being influenced by the circumstances. This form of social worker-ship results in meetings other than dialogical.

6.2.3 Coaching dialogical investigations

In the study, not surprisingly, different meanings in use unfolded from within the investigational social work. In studying and developing investigations on children I summarized two dominating directions:
Investigations are mainly an instrument for social workers to get to know and understand a child, the child’s family and network, in a moment of the child’s life through collecting information, investigating the parent’s capability and child’s needs, make risk and safety assessments and prognoses for making proposals and decisions on how to assist/help the child and his/her family.

Investigations are foremost an instrument for social workers to facilitate for a child in relation to his/her family, family members and other persons in the child’s network, aimed at improving their understanding and communication so that those involved come to notice, understand and agree on how improve the conditions for the child and their own listening to the voice of the child.

The former is similar to the meaning used mainly in medicine/legal discourses (presented in chapter Language in use). The latter was the emerging meaning in use in this study.

When we talked about investigations from a systemic view it was not about collecting information about the child, submitting evidence, but to explore and improve relations and communication in the child’s/client’s network (see examples in the chapter Narratives from within DC for example in the section New orientation in investigations – signs in the documentation). The social workers asked to be invited into the child’s/client’s life of relations and narratives. For example the following questions could emerge in DC:

- Which stories were heard and told?
- What did the child/client and those nearest to the child/client tell and how and to whom?
- Which stories dominated and to whom were they told? What did they create? Who did the child/client become in these?
– Which stories did the child/client want the social worker to hear and which narratives were emerging in the interaction with the social worker?
– How was the social worker able to change and strengthen the communication in the system, improving the recourses for the child/client?
– How make it easier for the child/client and important persons for the child/client to explore and understand more about their mutual interplay and create new possibilities to succeed together?

The social worker approached in purpose to learn to know the child and his/her network, relations, conversations, story-telling and narratives – about his/herself and one another, about important occurrences and which different meanings they were using. In the best of worlds, the social workers’ exploring and inquiring bring and open up new possibilities for children/clients to re-narrate old stories of occurrences into new orientation, new adventures, in the future.

The social workers talked about how they had started to ask families if it was okay if the, they, social workers, reflected on what they had heard in the conversations with the family and if they wanted to listen to their reflections. Giving their consent, the social workers reflected on what had struck them about what they had heard in the interaction and in the narrating, what appeared to have been created in the room, what they had become curious and wanted to hear more about. They had created propositions and alternative stories to what they had heard and asked if there could be something fitting or useful in what the family heard in their reflections. Once, after hearing the reflections, when a father visiting the social office asking for help, stood up and said:

– Now I know exactly what I have to do. This was very helpful. I have now heard what I needed to hear. Thank you so much.
Afterwards he said that he was very pleased with the support. In another example, the whole family met the social worker on her first visit to the family home. In the beginning, the children seemed to act very discreetly so the social worker asked the parents if it was okay to talk openly. The parents verified that they wanted them all to talk fairly and squarely. The social workers started to ask some questions and introduced the Bear Cards\textsuperscript{48} to the family. First, the children chose some cards that they said illustrated themselves. They spoke about the feelings they connected to the chosen cards. There were little narratives about when, where and how it was when they felt those feelings visible in the Bear Cards. Amongst all this, the son told me how angry and sad he becomes, when he has tried to talk with his father about how strange his mother behaves when drinking alcohol. The father seemed to have avoided talking with his son about this. The son now said how much he wanted the father to take him seriously and listen to him and talk with him and his mother about her drinking too much. Later on in the conversation the whole family talked to one another about the mother’s alcohol abuse. Both the son and his sister asked questions to their father and mother about the alcohol and about the meaning and consequences for each of them in the family, and the parents answered both their children and one another. During the visit the social worker supported the children in bringing forth what they were worried about, to tell their parents and to make the parents more understanding of how this was experienced from the children’s point of view. Afterwards, the social worker chose to write letters, one to the father and one to the mother with the purpose of strengthening the new orientation on how to go on, for them as parents and wife and husband.

Here are some extracts from the letters to the parents [my translation]. First from the letter to the mother:

\begin{quote}
I am so impressed by the way you managed to be there for your children, meet them and listen to them when they told you about
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} The Bear Cards are 48 cards that can vividly describe a galaxy of feelings without any accompanying words (Deal & Veeken, 2005).
their feelings in relation to your alcohol abuse. It could not have been easy.

There was not much time for you to tell your story about how you feel and your view about the situation for you and your family. I am thinking of how easy it is, it often happens, that the one person in the family who has the closest relation to the alcohol abuse also becomes the person who has to carry a lot of other problems that are perhaps more is connected to other circumstances. It is very easy that the person who drinks too much becomes the scapegoat for everything that goes wrong. I write this because I wanted you to feel that your concerns and views about the children and your family are as important as your husband’s and I am going to listen to your voice and narrative as seriously as I will listen to his.

In the letter to the father:

Something I thought about when I returned home was that you mentioned that you wanted to have somebody to talk with. I think that was a good idea and a necessary step for you. You do need to talk about how this has affected you, what the situation does to you and how much you can stand and accept. It is not and will not be easy to set boundaries and be consistent with a person that is close to you, your wife and your children’s mother. You are carrying a heavy responsibility on your shoulders. It must be difficult to know what is best in different situations. It is also so important for the children that you manage to carry on.

As you already know, everything will not be solved when your wife stops abusing alcohol. There are, which she seemed to be aware of, a lot more to do before you all can trust one another again in the family.
With these letters the social worker continued the dialogue with the family. Later on, she met the family and the children once more and came to the conclusion that these steps, from within the investigations on the children, had made a difference that made a difference for this family.

From the above, a successful investigation could be seen as when the social worker successfully contributes to increasing dialogical interplay and understanding from within the child’s point of view both in the child’s family system and in the social welfare system of the social worker. To contribute to improvement in listening to the child’s voice and in understanding your own contributions in relation to the child, from the child’s perspective. To support the clients in developing collaboration in their network and in how, further on, they, in the network, can communicate and collaborate in a way to create a good life and future for the child/client. Here, the text of the investigation’s message can strengthen these opportunities. The text co-constructs the reality that its participants live in and can use for further constructions of new life stories, as well as creating new identities and increase the self-knowing (Lundby, 1998). The text opens up liberating resources, mobilizing and creating narratives, co-creating the child’s/client’s identity (Adelswärd, 1996, Ricoeur, 1984). The investigation could be seen as a biography – creating life-narratives for the participating client/child and new understandings (Bernler and Johnsson, 1993, Olsson, 2008c).

For example, for one of the children whose social workers participated in this study and in DC, in conducting this child’s investigation, the investigation text created a new relationship with his father. The father exclaimed upon reading the documentation:

– Now at last I understand my son …
During the process of this investigation, which was very outstretched also in time, many improvements were made. It started with the school’s story about a strange and problematic child and continued with a complex family story where the father did not want to hear all the voices in the family. The new story was about a living family with a more present and participating father, a mother who was given possibilities to realize her dreams and the child in a new school with new friends.

The investigation may focus on how the clients create his/her identity in relation to others, including the social worker. Relationships are living and changing in communication. The client’s and the rest of the participants’ identities do not exist isolated, ready for the social worker to catch, collect information about and give accounts for in the investigational text. The social workers become important persons in co-creating the client’s/child’s further identity, both from within the relation and the dialogues they have and from what, and how, the social workers choose to narrate in the written texts of the investigation. In a similar way, the relationship, the interaction as well as the text co-create reflexively the social worker’s identity.

We co-create each other – *becoming in relation to one another* but also in relation to other things in our surroundings. In this study, for example, both the client’s and the social worker’s identities were influenced and co-created by the investigational written texts, stories and narratives. Children *are not* troublesome – sometimes they become troublesome in relation to persons and otherness in the context. Or, using another example, people with addiction problems, they *are not* the addiction, as when we call them the addicts. They *become* addicted in relation to the alcohol or the drugs in their lives. Every creation as well as human being is unique. There is no finished or completed reality out there ready for us/me to discover in research (Bateson, 1990) or for the social workers to collect information about for analyzing, assessing, accounting and deciding about. The reality is co-created and re-created over and over again in our communication, not least when the social worker moves into the system, which
we have return to in the study continually. This could open up opportunities for improvements and collaborative work, which the social worker, being the person in authority, has to initiate. In the study, the social workers expanded their invitations to the children and their families, as well as to other clients, inviting them into full partnership in mutual dialogical involvement in the whole process in the investigations.

The social worker should be eager to listen for and to a child’s invitation or that the child and other clients accept the social worker’s invitation to collaboration and partnership. A person on the outside, as the social worker will become if he/she is not invited into the child’s and other clients’ perspective, notices and experiences something quite different from a person participating from within the communication, for example, in the child’s family. In purpose to hear more the social workers need to keep up the curiosity exploring, leaving the thoughts and ideas about they as professionals already “know” what is best for the child. When professionals approach and act as if they are the experts on and in the investigational work, they risk missing the unique and the investigators also risk working from their own notion of what we call the prejudices, understanding and pre-knowledge, not those of the participants in the investigations or the involved child which this was all about.

From a narrative view, our identities are co-created, as well as our world, in our narrating. In this, our stories and narratives, past, present and future, create our world. In this complex interaction between old and new stories and narratives, the social workers are expected to catch, or rather reflect the reality, in a few pages of investigational text about the client/child, compress his/her life story and narrative, and what’s more, give a prognosis about future risks and opportunities – assess the strengthening opportunities (Turnell and Edwards, 1999). The meaning of a text, the meaning created in an investigation, is not only created by the author. It is also very much created by the reader. The dialogue continues in reading of a text (Bakhtin, 1997). Readers will also
participate in the co-creation of meaning in a similar way to how we do in listening.

As interacting, living persons we do not carry around an absolute, uniform, homogenous, identity about who we become in different contexts and relations. In the same way the words are changing meaning co-created in the use (Bakhtin, 1986, Wittgenstein, 1992, Vygotskij, 1999, Shotter, 2005e). So, when the social worker writes and uses words in the way he/she is used to, somebody else may read the text in an unanticipated way and with other understandings than the social worker was expecting. For example, what meaning are readers with other professional or culture backgrounds than the social worker, linking with the words used in the investigations? Which meanings do those in charge, bosses and politicians, use? For example, which meaning do the social workers put on words like stability, safety, predictability, limitation, stimulation (all examples from vocabulary in BBIC)? Which meaning are the children, parents and others creating in reading and hearing these words? How does the child understand, now and in the future, the language in use? How can the social worker ensure that the meaning in use, in reading as well as in other forms of communication, is close to what he/she intended? The most obvious way seems to be to ask the child, the clients, and together explore the meaning created in the used language, listening to what other readers hear in reading the investigations. Perhaps the child or a parent wants to add something or, as some of the clients in the action projects actually did, contribute with their own text, which the social workers incorporated into their own text in a way similar to what I have done with the social workers’ contributions in DPAR in this dissertation.

A couple of parents chose to write parts of the investigations themselves, exploring their own capacities (according to the BBIC triangle) as parents and how they influenced each other, exploring their different relations to the children. They also explored their children’s needs and how they as parents managed to provide for their needs and how others and other things in their environment could work supplementary. The social worker had in earlier
conversations encouraged them to talk and write to each other and focus on appreciative aspects in one another. They sent their contribution to their child’s investigation as an e-mail file during a weekend. E-mail has become a new and important way for children to communicate with their social workers according to the participating social workers and the interviewed children in this study. The Child’s Book, the book which social workers in Hyllie created with the purpose of facilitating the mutual involvement and interplay between them and the children they meet in investigations, seemed to make it easier for the children’s narratives to be heard in the written texts in the investigations (Olsson, 2008c). It is a workbook where they can read about the investigation, who the social workers are, where to reach them and how and why. In the book, the children can draw and write about themselves and their network as well as about feelings, experiences, ideas and wishes. Every meeting with the social workers end with them writing together what they have been talking about and makes agreements about further use and how to go on. The social workers’ ideas were that this was the child’s book, so if the child wanted to bring the book home, they could. When the social worker wanted to have a copy of the writings and drawings, she asked the child for permission. In relation to the use of the Child’s Book, the written investigations emerged to include the children’s narratives and the children’s point of view, also to what was proposed as a final decision and orientation on how to go on (Olsson, 2008c).

6.2.4 Becoming the child’s social worker – self-awareness as social worker

In DC, and in relation to DC, the participating social workers, managers and I experienced that it made a difference that made a difference for children in investigations when the social workers kept in touch directly with the child and created a relationship of their own with the child in question. To keep in mind, for example when telephoning or e-mailing, not only ask the parents to inform the child but ask for and maintain direct contact with the child.
The following punctuations are some of the learning we had, the participating social workers and I, in the first two years of the study. This was later confirmed and reinforced over and over again (see the examples in earlier chapters):

(1) Children are experts on their own situation and relationships and have their own rights as human beings to be heard and take part in what is going on and how the social workers enter the life of the child (Olsson, 2005a, 2008c).

(2) The social worker can get a picture of how the child experiences his/her situation without dialogical interplay with the child. However, the difference that makes a difference in knowing how to go on and actually improve for a child is to listen to the child and really take the his/her experiences, living strategy and dreams into consideration (Olsson, 2005a, 2008c).

(3) The social worker has to be invited into the child’s world. The social worker can facilitate this by inviting the child into his/her working world from the child’s perspective, for example, by asking him/herself: – Who am I becoming for the child? (Olsson, 2005a) (Olsson, 2008c)

(4) Emerging dialogical interplay is also facilitated by the social worker approaching the child as if the child was the social worker’s commissioner – the child’s social worker (Olsson, 2005a).

(5) Very young children can also be invited to take part if the social worker is ready to adapt the situation and him/herself to the child (Olsson, 2005a). For example the youngest child participating in the investigations in this study was 4 years old and the youngest in the interview study was 5 years old.

(6) Both younger and older children have at least one narrative, probably several narratives, to tell – whose version is more important than the child’s? (Olsson, 2005a, 2008c)
The social workers expressed how much they enjoyed becoming aware of their own importance in relation to children and other clients, instead of acting and looking at their own issues as *nothing* and not being important as an investigating social worker for a child in an investigation.

(7) Who could become the social worker’s/social secretary’s stand-in for the child? Who is in a similar position to and relationship with the child? Who can be a substitute in the view of the child? The emerging answers to these questions became:

*In a context of processing and writing the investigation, there is no one else but the investigating social worker that can invite to partnership and make the child mutually involved and participating in the investigation.*

Social workers who think that a relationship between the child and the social worker could be replaced by someone else, even if it is an important person for the child, not only diminish the significance and importance of their own work and themselves as social workers but also minimize the value of the child’s view and the value of a relationship with the social worker from the child’s perspective (Olsson, 2005a).

No one can expect the child to be aware of the special importance of the social worker’s responsibility and commission asking for contact with his/her social worker before the child became invited into a relation by the social worker (Olsson, 2005a).

This self-awareness of one’s own significance and importance in relation to the child in investigations and assessments, as *the child’s social worker/social secretary*, is an important and significant aspect of self-reflecting awareness, in the profession of social worker in a unique position of authoritative responsibility and community power and in relation to the child and his/her family.
6.2.5. Impacts on working environment and pride in work

Several themes have been accounted for already about how the social work had developed. During the years of the study, the social workers have given different expressions to how the progress influenced and improved their working environment, the interaction in their working group as well as their relationship and interaction with others and otherness.

Extract  One of the social workers writings [my translation] (Olsson, 2005a p. 167)

… Besides all that has happened in the project for the family in the case, this has also brought me to more joy and devotion to my work, not only with this family but in relation to other families I meet. I feel how I can approach the children in a complete different way and make our contact and relation more understandable for the children. It feels wonderful!

… Thus my own results of participating are a different and successful investigation on a family, and hopefully an improvement for the children, and a method increasing the possibilities for both children and myself to understand more of the investigatory work, And I have found an appetite and devotion in myself I did not know I had! Not a bad result!

Here are some of the themes, which unfolded:

6.2.5.1 Curiosity and openness

One of the themes the participants returned to in these delta-reflections, were how they noticed that they are more open to new perspectives now, moving between other(s’) perspectives and different positions as well as creating new and different stories using systemic and narrative ideas. They narrate about how they are more and more aware that there could be other versions and alternative stories about persons and events, and that they depend on which position the
storyteller/narrator as well as the listener put themselves in and use. For example, from a moral position with the accent on assessment, suitableness, appropriateness and judgement, the stories and narratives became something quite different then from a more inquiring, exploring position where the narrator and listener open up to curiosity, questions and diversity. In an explorative approach, it can also be of interest to ask for and explore with which or whose voice the speaker is talking and narrating, both with the purpose of increasing the understanding and developing how different voices are heard and the meanings in use could be seen as coordinated from different contexts (Cronen and Lang, 1994). Instead of letting the language be dominated by conclusions and statements, and then become engaged in convincing the other participants in the conversation of the correctness of these statements (connects to production domain (Lang et al., 1990)), the participating social workers narrated about how they had started to search for other formulations that open up, create curiosity and exploration – inquiring response (connects to exploration domain (Lang et al., 1990)). Questions and hypothetic assumptions and stories usually open up to further dialogue (Lang and McAdam, unknown-b and 1994). The questioner shows from the beginning his or her interest in hearing the answers, stories and narratives from the perspective the answerer chooses. However, this also depends on how the questions are expressed, in which contexts and how the relations emerge. Questions usually give an indication and show the questioner’s interest in putting himself/herself as participants in the other’s perspective. However, if it invites to a more equal, democratic relationship depends on more than just the use of questions. Statements on the other hand work in the direction of the speaker strengthening his/her own perspective and used position. Both the addressee and the speaker are put in an explaining and defending position in arguing and claiming his/her point of view and opinions instead of becoming curious about the other’s view – mutual views and answers.

When dialogical interaction emerges fairly equal partners meet (cf. section Relationship on equal basis in the chapter about DPAR). They are mutually responding in ways that show that they are anxious for the more equal
relationship to survive. This mutual sensibility for, and keen awareness of, one another (responsiveness) carries the dialogue further. To be invited to listen to each other’s reflections, to participate in reflecting conversations in and on what have been said and heard and how in the dialogue/conversation, opens up and strengthens the dialogical interplay even more.

6.2.5.2 Reflecting conversations – democratic participation and learning

The participating social workers reported how they used reflecting conversations and reflecting teams in reflecting meetings more and more. Their way of practicing this connects to what Jaakko Seikkula and his colleagues call open dialogue (Seikkula, 1996, Seikkula and Arnkil, 2005). In meetings, they spontaneously formed different constellations of groups where the participants reflected and took turns listening, reflecting and talking. The social workers and their managers talked about how they “dared to” test and use open and reflecting dialogues and teams in new contexts:

- Working conferences
- Treatment conferences
- Supervision
- Employment interviews
- Committee meetings
- Conferences
- Client Dialogues
- Collaborative meetings
- Other meetings

Both the inner and outer dialogues in the social welfare service, which the social workers used to keep to themselves or at the very most share between colleagues without the client(s), became heard as more and more exposed and shared with the client(s) in question. The social workers narrated on how they “had the courage to” ask for feedback from the participants in their (experimental) new
ways of doing their work. They started to ask their clients more about their own context in meetings: Setting the context at the beginning of each meeting without taking for granted how the client wants it to emerge and for what. Checking with the participant/client during the meetings, for example asking: – Is this what you want to talk about/how do you want us to continue? – Am I asking the questions you want to answer or is it something else you want us to go on with? And in the end, asking for feedback, about the “here-and-now” situation, including asking if the client wanted to hear something more from the social worker’s perspective.

6.2.5.3 From production to exploration

Social workers are used to act in acute situations and emergency cases, where reflecting and careful considerations have to take place in the moment – in the action. In this, they take on huge responsibility in action. These situations demand speedy decisions, effective administration and well-implemented performances. This readiness for acute situations may influence them to expect of themselves to live and tell the stories of always being the ones who have to take measures, intervene and step in. Their working directions are mainly in actions and solutions, in doing, planning and taking measures rather than to dwell upon exploring these considerations, reflections and the learning by doing emerging in the actions.

With this background, their experiences and the effects of DC, were revolutionary: to get and give themselves permission to take time and space for their person and their own contributions in work. They had had group supervision earlier but never before had opportunities to stop – look – listen in inquiring and improving both their own working environment and their work in relation to clients and colleagues. It is true that the coaching focused only on one-three cases and during a limited period of time but the effects spilled over onto other cases and other contexts too, according to the participating social workers.
The coaching was also about how to increase your attention to and awareness that you do not need to know – it could even be more important, at least now and then, to use an approach of not knowing, remain in a not-knowing position and act from this position in an inquiring and exploring way. If not we do risk allowing ourselves to be influenced and lead by our own presuppositions, pre-knowledge and/or prejudices. This does not facilitate our curiosity and inquiring and, even worse, without using questions or invitations to joint exploration there will be no space for others or for new answers, different stories or alternative solutions. Then we risk not inviting the clients or other persons into partnership and joint action to a sufficient degree, and risk missing the clients as experts on their own lives, strategies, suggestions, ideas, alternatives and versions from other perspectives.

The participating social workers experienced the use of the not-knowing position as facilitating and increasing the invitation to clients into joint inquiries. At the same time, as one of the participating social workers expressed it: – As an applicant for assistance, who wants to meet a social worker that ”doesn’t know anything”?

**6.2.5.4 More personal narrating and increasing awareness of my own importance and influence in co-creation**

Another theme dealt with how, in DC, to co-create increasing skills and capacity of self-awareness and self-reflecting in and on your own actions and participation in different situations and relations. As already mentioned, the participants were not accustomed to having so much focus on themselves and putting words to their actions, contributions, measurements in meetings and dialogues. They had to build courage to be ready for all the light shining on them and their actions. In the beginning, there were social workers that spontaneously answered:

- I didn’t do anything, or did I?
- Did I do anything of importance?
In the social office’s culture and discourse, in the everyday narrating, for example in presentations of cases and in writing investigations, the social worker’s narrating is usually dominated by accounts of what the clients and other collaborative partners have said and done, and how they reacted. Usually, there was no connection to how this was co-created in response to and interaction with the social workers. In the coaching, we inquired and I asked questions about, for example:

- How did the situation and the interplay become from the client’s point of view, do you think?
- What was expected of him/her in relation to you, do you think?
- Who did you become for the client (from different points of view)?

These and similar questions sought to increase the participating social worker’s understanding of his/her own participation and impact in meetings: approach, positioning, expression, appearance, actions and responses in interplay with a client (and others and otherness in the surrounding contexts), shown for example in the written investigations in relation to DC (see examples in chapter *Narratives from within DC*).

These inquires usually became hard work of explorations sometimes for two-three hours of time. However, the participants talked about DC as a unique situation of “peace and quiet”, where they were given the opportunity to take an interest in whatever they themselves assessed as they needed for inquiry, to narrate on, put words to, turn over in their minds, reflect on and in ways of going on, their working environment and other things influencing them as, for example, their language in use.

**6.2.5.5 Language – changing discourse**

The participants in DC came to be increasingly watchful of the language they and others used and how different meanings were created and used in different
contexts and from different perspectives including the child’s. Using reflecting teams (in group meetings) facilitated the elucidation of different meanings from different perspectives and positions. Also when all of us seem to talk the same language (in this case Swedish), we discovered and highlighted how we were actually using the language differently and co-created different meanings in relation to different contexts. We co-created the language in use as well as the meanings in use.

In the working groups, new and other words became more important than before, words as reflecting, curiosity, exploration, inquiry, appreciative, carefulness and awareness, co-creation, different perspectives and positions, differences and especially the concept of circularity and the utterance “difference that makes a difference” from Gregory Bateson. The new use of new words – the changing language – the emerging changes of the discourse also changed the group’s way of acting and moving on reflexively.

6.2.5.6 Strengthening the collaboration in the working group – colleagues coaching

Some of the participating social workers were used to collaborating in pairs in casework or at least in the meetings taking place in a case. This was done for several reasons. There were safety aspects, the “two pairs of eyes see more than one” argument and that they were working with big families where they wanted to be in relation to all the family members and hear all the voices.

It was also about wanting to avoid the feeling of being alone in meetings, alone with the responsibility, not having anybody to reflect and talk to from inside the case. This brought about questions about and inquiries in: When do social workers feel alone in meetings and in casework? How do social workers approach other participants without feeling alone in meetings and in the casework? What are the other participants doing in relation to the social worker?
From the social workers’ point of view, they approach meetings with clients with responsibility for the meeting, responsibility for dealing with the processes emerging in the meetings. That is how the social workers usually talked about their task in meetings. Could this contribute to the feeling of loneliness? Did it make any difference when the social workers started to invite the clients into partnership and the colleagues began to support the dialogue in new ways?

All these situations and meetings, when professionals participate in pairs or more, open up several alternatives of opening up, reorientating and reorganizing the communication. For example, colleagues can contribute by using a third person position as “outsiders”, and reflect in and on what has been said and heard and how in the meeting. They can also invite participating family members or others to reflect with them or interview a family member, or other person participating, about reflections and delta-reflections in what has been heard and noticed.

The participating social workers started to use reflecting conversations and dialogues in different forms, where the participants benefit by being two colleagues in the meetings (see examples in section Different communication in social work and in the social welfare organisation and Creating “ripples on water” – diffusion in the environment in chapter Narratives from within DC). They could turn to each other, reflect together or ask for advice on how to go on after asking the other participants if they wanted to listen. They could divide and use different positions. For example, vary between interviewing and being interviewed, reflecting together with the other participants, including inviting the participating clients into reflecting (teams) or becoming occupying a more observing position and afterwards, before the next move, reflect in and on the imagined process. Using video recording conversations, which could be explored in different ways later on, could also do this. For example, a child’s voice could be strengthened through the parents watching and studying a recorded conversation between a child and a social worker (after the child has
given his/her consent together with the parents, and when the social worker is ready to follow up what emerges afterwards, further on in the parent–child relationship). To explore recordings (or to explore your own narrating from within an occurrence) offers new opportunities to discover, co-create, learn and “learn to learn” in exploring and reflecting on your own contributions and interplay in relation to other and otherness.

In the participation in DC also emerged a disposition, desire and ideas on how to change their own interaction as colleagues to a more coaching approach (Olsson, 2008a). They talked about this change as becoming more in focus, and staying in focus, as coachee/being coached and as coaching colleague, leaving out your own reaction and desire to narrate something and continue to explore, ask questions, interview the colleague about whatever he or she had in mind. To keep the colleague the centre of attention and support the colleague’s own exploration of experiences, responses and dreams. The coaching colleagues ask questions that support the colleague to bring him/herself into lived occurrences and narrating, exploring inner and outer dialogues (Andersen, 2003), now and in the future, creating new alternatives and narratives supporting further orientation and preparing for how to go on – as we did in DC. This coaching of colleagues also took more regular and arranged forms. For example, one social worker and one manager in Lund started to coach one social worker each in another team and I coached the coaches in their task. After that, a whole group arranged how they could coach each other. The manager wrote [my translation]:

Now we have started “collegial coaching” in the working group. Each member is coaching a colleague in a case and on his/her part becomes coached by another colleague in a case. (Olsson, 2008a, p.58)
6.2.5.7 To become aware of and improve your contributions and skills

The interviewing in DC supported the participant to put words on what they did when they conducted the investigations and how they approached their clients and others. They began to pay attention to actions and aspects they said they had never before noticed or put any emphasis on. As I mentioned before, the answer to my questions – How did you participate?” or ”What did you do?” – could be: – ”I did nothing”. When we inquired, the ”nothing” (I asked for details) revealed how the social worker had acted and responded (from their point of view). In this, they reported that they gradually became more aware of the impact of their own participation of; how they approached clients and of the language in use, and how this increasing awareness influenced to chances in their approach – in communication with clients and others.

Being devoted social workers they were used to putting the client in focus meaning talking about the clients and the development in cases. As I have returned to here earlier, the social workers were not used to talking about the interaction between themselves or in relation to the client or what they contributed with reflexively in different situations and relationships. Nor were they used to account for which approaches, methods or ideas they were using or why. It is noteworthy was, that the social workers talked about this as if it was of no interest to the clients. However, when I have interviewed clients, both in this study and in later studies, for example, in Svalöv (Olsson, 2009) and in Bjuv (still unpublished) and in, to this study connected project Solvera, Lund (Olsson, 2007d), the clients revealed how aware they were of differences in approach and use between different methods and techniques. And so did some of the children I interviewed in this study (about their meetings with social workers and participating in investigations).

While being unaccustomed to putting words on and giving account of what they were doing, how they were acting in their work in conducting the investigations
and their own relations to clients, the participating social workers exposed skills and uncovered capacity which they also seemed unaware of. They were accustomed to being quick on the uptake, to condense extensive and comprehensive courses of events into short summaries and to make speedy assessments, judgements and decisions about the clients’ actions and circumstances. No wonder it became important in DC to stop – look – listen.

6.2.5.8 Here and now – "The Unbearable Lightness of Being"

The importance of slowing down, putting a brake on staying – being – in the moment, in the present, unfolding for the participants in DC, to become accessible to each other – a fundamental requirement as well as an opportunity in the ongoing dialogue in DC. The attendance and presence we connected to and found necessary for the spontaneously living expression in dialogical interplay, as well as living in the mutual responsiveness, moving with your “gut-feeling”, embodied feeling in responding, addressing and anticipating how to go on. As participant, you are so embodied in the moment that your responses anticipate others’ responses as well as your own. In this, we actually also respond to voices we hear from the past as well as imagine hearing in the future (for example: Mother always told me … Or: If I do so I will probably regret it later on …). As if it all happens simultaneously, we adapt our utterances to several different voices heard in the present, past and future, interwoven in our utterances. In this, the dialogue continues as if it all happened and was created by itself when this co-joint co-creation of actions took place. In an exercise49, a group called this process “The Unbearable Lightness of Being”50 – hinting at their own uneasiness in being spontaneously present in the moment, moving further, exploring and inviting the complexity, daring to listen to, hearing and involving others, including children’s perspectives, even if it seems, at least in the short term, to take more time than just doing it yourself based on your own

49 From a seminar in 2006 in Ystad, about developing collegial coaching where I asked the groups to create and draw a film or TV manuscript about their successful conducting of collegial DC in the future and later perform the scenes to each other in an afternoon show.

expertise, or as we gradually came to understand, more from your previous experiences, prejudices and pre–understandings than from the actual client’s/child’s point of view – here and now. To support the DC participants in their movement from their usual manners, as they said, to being in the moment inquiring, I focused my questions as coach to:

- details and small, small steps and nuances in happenings, occurrences, changing moments and how to go on
- communication and relations
- different voices heard
- interaction and interplay
- network
- different views and perspectives
- (including) the social worker’s collaboration and participation
- the ideas in use – logic in use.

For example, we could explore why a certain place is used, the ideas in use in the choice of participants, including colleagues and their participation, use of approach, methods and/or techniques. There was no importance in searching for whatever caused what, but to focus on already chosen ways or strategies in emerging solutions, exploring alternatives, highlighting successful exceptions and searching for unique or striking moments and examples. Using AI, the working idea was that we improve and learn most of all in a spirit of appreciation and curiosity, exploring and examining successful experiences and examples. Gallwey has emphasized that the importance in development and learning is not at all is about identifying obstructing ideas of not being able to:

… children not only learn how to walk very well, but they gain confidence in the natural learning process which operates within them. Mothers observe their children’s efforts with love and interest, and if wise, without much interference. If we could treat tennis games as we do a child learning to walk, we would make more progress.
When the child loses his balance and falls, the mother doesn’t condemn it for being clumsy. She doesn’t even feel bad about it; she simply notices the event and perhaps gives a word or gesture of encouragement. Consequently, a child’s progress in learning to walk is never hindered by the idea that he is uncoordinated. (Gallwey, 1997 p. 36)

Lev S Vygotskij emphasized how the child learns something by actually doing the new thing first and not becoming aware of it until afterwards in relation to the adult – what he/she has learnt – by putting words to it. In other words, to become conscious and learn to be a master you have to have access to the new by already doing it (Vygotskij, 1999). I connect this to DC and the participating social workers. In DC, in relation to me, the social workers put words to what they already did, how they already acted, expanded their use and increased the awareness of the skills they were using and improved them by training and learning, developing their own professional skills in their socialworker-ship.

To raise the level of consciousness, that is, to transfer from the action domain to the language domain, to recreate in your imagination to be able to put it into words, is an arduous task that demands special attention (Vygotskij, 1999). When we are occupied with consciousness-raising of how and what we are doing at a particular moment, this holds our attention. In DC, we could devote our time to this act of consciousness-raising in piece and quiet – reflect in and on the actions. Paradoxically, when we are successfully conscious – aware – we also risk becoming so occupied with this that we become not present enough in the moment to be spontaneously responding in the present in relation to others and otherness. Furthermore, the more conscious we become, the more information we will be needing to keep up the awareness (Nørretranders, 1991). Thus, if we become too occupied with the map (or the technique, method, manual, plan) we risk to losing our attention in the present and spontaneous response in communication and interplay with other participants in the conversation and the meeting, letting loose and letting go. Free from these and from so called
conscious actions, follows the acting: – The trick, Gallwey said, was to let go and let what “will be will be”. In Vygotskij’s words you could say that Gallwey may say: – Let loose from the consciousness-raising. Trust your body’s learning and responsiveness in what is heard and needed in the unique contexts.

Remember you are not your tennis game. You are not your body. Trust the body to learn and to play, as you trust another person to do a job, and in a short time it will perform beyond your expectations. *Let the flower grow.* (Gallwey, 1997, p. 36)

I predict that this could be the essence of the social worker’s preparations and performances in social work – social workers act after preparations and training and after that they let go and trust their spontaneous participation in relation to others and otherness in different contexts and meetings. In this prepared spontaneousness, which might seem like a paradox, the social workers’ confidence and awareness in acting increase and they can trust themselves to *let go* into spontaneous responsiveness and *just* do whatever come sin mutual response and appropriate to the unique moment and relation.

### 6.2.5.9 Open reflections and reflections in action

In actions in the moment, the social workers as well as other actors in practice do not stop to observe, think and reflect as we did in DC in relation to the social workers’ practice. In everyday practice, practitioners do continuously spontaneously corrections in the moment as a result of *reflections-in-action* (Schön, 1987, 2002).

There are indeed times when it is dangerous to stop and think. On the firing line, in the midst of traffic, even on the playing field, there is a need for immediate, on-line response, and the failure to deliver it can have serious consequences. But not all practice situations are of this sort. The action-present (the period of time in which we remain in the ”same situation”) varies greatly from case to case, and in many cases
there is time to think what we are doing. Consider, for example, a physician’s management of a patient’s disease, a lawyer’s preparation of a brief, a teacher’s handling of a difficult student. In processes such as these, which may extend over weeks, months, or years, fast-moving episodes are punctuated by intervals which provide opportunity for reflection.

Even when the action-present is brief, performers can sometimes train themselves to think about their actions. In the split-second exchanges of a game of tennis, a skilled player learns to give himself a moment to plan the next shot. His game is the better for this momentary hesitation, so long as he gauges the time available for reflection correctly and integrates his reflection into the smooth flow of action. And we have observed how practitioners like architects, musicians, and therapists construct virtual worlds in which the pace of action can be slowed down and iterations and variations of actions can be tried. Indeed, our conception of the art of practice ought to give a central place to the ways in which practitioners learn to create opportunities for reflection-in-action. (Schön, 2002, pp. 278-279)

DC created space for concentrating on reflections raising the awareness of your own contributions and actions both for me and other participants in DC, but also for the social workers on the collegial coaching which they started to offer their colleagues. From within the projects, the participants also developed other ideas and forms, aiming to create space for careful considerations and reflections using open dialogues and reflecting teams in different shapes and forms. A group or pair of colleagues and/or clients can come together and have dialogical conversations while the rest of the group/family/network listens and later on reflects on what they have heard. Dialogues can be recorded and watch/heard by the participants later on or by somebody else important in relation to the participants. The reflections can be written down and explored further in different ways. The dialogue can continue in writing, for example, in letters (which both participating social workers and clients used in the projects).
Reflections can be developed and explored further on a whiteboard or on a large pad, in letters, diaries, notes and, of course, investigation texts. This different use of text, the social workers experienced as increasing the clients’ participation, into a kind of partnership. The client’s voice became more heard and the social workers’ awareness increased in of how different meanings are in use in language.

6.3 Non-directive coaching in DC

The coaching style and approach in DC is similar to non-directive coaching (Downey, 2003, Whitmore, 2003, Whitmore, 1997, Whitmore, 2002) However, the commission, and what was expected from me as coach to achieve and bring about, of course, influenced my style as well. So, from within the shape of dialogical, I also had in mind to move in directions responding to the voices of the commission and the aims. I was moving with the end in view, with a direction in mind. Thus DC could also have strands of directive coaching.

With the purpose of showing the differences between non-directive and directive coaching, Downey used a simplifying picture in the form of a diagram (Downey, 2003, p. 23). Below, I have elaborated on the diagram, bringing it a bit further and aiming to expose how DC appeared from a participatory point of view:

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51 In the book *The client’s social secretary from within treatment of persons with addiction problems*, I explored the use of whiteboard as an instrument to assist the social workers and the clients in dialogues in investigational work (Olsson, 2007c).
What makes so called non-directive coaching different is that it is not based or dependent mainly on the coach’s knowledge, experience, wisdom or understanding in the matter or subject brought into the coaching, but relying on the participants’ capacity and skill to learn, reflect, be creative, explorative and in open interplay and dialogue with others and otherness in the context. The coaching becomes a relationship and an interaction, created in communication between participants and the coach where it can assume very different shapes and forms.

Indeed, I was both an experienced social worker and acquainted with systemic ideas and different methods. This could be used for different purposes in the projects. However, I seldom moved myself in areas of more directive coaching. Rather, I moved more in the middle and upper areas of the diagram above. DC
is characterized by dialogical conversations, which means that the conversations were living in the relationship, in what was said, heard and created in the interplay. As coach, I participated wholeheartedly without reservations. I was amoved and carried away by listening to narratives and being in a living relation to devoted people. This increased my curiosity and encouraged me to go on inquiring, listening and reflecting together with the social workers.

6.4 Emerging polyphony in the organisation

The inquiries from within DC and the used systemic ideas seemed to have propagated and expanded as by themselves as an influencing undergrowth in the organisations where the participators worked and acted. The ‘ripples on water’ effect seemed to work. The social workers noticed, as did I, how the communication and the language in use changed in their organisations when they gradually changed their approach in interacting with colleagues and clients as well as in their use of methods and techniques in their everyday (working) lives. New words came into fashion, indicating an increase in their focus on and increasing interest in the impact of context, network, language, meaning making, perspective movement, narrating, stories told and lived, reflexivity, reframing (Watzlawick et al., 1996), circular questions and externalisation (White and Epston, 1990), indicating the emerging focus on and interest in systemic ideas and ontology. Being aware of how different views and perspectives influence the variation of meanings in use in communication, the ideas and beliefs in one true version, the truth, faded away. The imagination of diversity and complexity faded into a more polyphonic and multidimensional social world of ideas. The participating social workers did not report theses changes as making their work easier, but more interesting and joyful and, in relation to the clients and especially the children, they all became more involved and open to collaborative work. In this, they noticed, and accounted for how more dialogical, multi-voiced and democratic meetings in different contexts emerged.
6.5 28 verbal signposts of DIALOGUE COACHING

1. In interaction and communication, our social world and knowing are co-created.
2. The meaning in the language is co-created in use in the context(s).
3.Circularity and co-creation in relationships.
4. The creative power of narrating and narratives.
6. Mutual agreements. To set the context.
8. Openness and empowering participation.
9. Aesthetic including ethical views and considerations.
10. Open dialogues and involving dialogical conversations.
11. Dialogue as both means and aims.
13. Curiosity, exploring the logic in use.
14. Creating changes in language, moving to different perspectives and positions.
17. Listening questioning.
18. Exploring details in re-narrating striking examples and other examples.
19. Reflecting teams and delta-reflecting.
20. Attention to the differences in aboutness – withness and representative understanding – responsive understanding.
22. "Let it happen!" – "Let it go".
23. Joint actions in chiasmatical mutual interplay.
24. Differences and diversity. Different positions and perspectives.
25. *Learning by doing* – to dare to test and explore the result together with the participants. Learning to learn.
26. Development, learning and knowing in reflections in and on actions. Developing skills and increasing your abilities.
27. Professional and personal self-awareness and consciousness in what and how your contribute and participate.
28. Relationships characterized by involvement, enjoyment and courage.
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Appendix A

Voices heard in the delta-reflecting teams in the first network meeting, 14 September 2007

The account below is extracts from the recordings. The accounts and translations are done in a freely and comprehensive style.

**Increasing use and listening to narratives**

— I do think I notice it most of all in the new questions we use now. And in people’s own narration. Narratives get more space in my interpretation.

— I do think I am using other questions now and I do not assume, let my own ideas guide me as much as I did. Instead I listen more to people’s narratives than my own voice.

— That is to say, this allows more space for curiosity and to get other, new answers than you have expected. It does not emerge as I expected from the beginning.

**Increasing self-confidence**

— The relation to the clients is improving. Actually I think they experience me as more confident and that they can trust me and my way of doing things and acting in our meetings and in the investigations. I focus on, for them, more correct and important aspects and areas.

— Yes, I start with setting the context together with the clients. I have learnt that they feel they can have confidence in me, rely on me. Then they do not have to have unnecessary fantasies about what is going to happen and how.

**The importance of the first meeting**

— I also attach more importance to the first meeting and mark the context, why we are meeting and how they understand this. Jessica coached me in the collegial coaching that started\(^{52}\).

\(^{52}\) In the collegial coaching which started in three of the participating municipalities I coached some of the coaches in the coaching.
To be here and now, exploring and inquiring about details

— Something I have noticed is the words exploration and curiosity and to stay here and now, to stop in some of the cases and ask yourselves, are you going to continue differently? That is something I did not do before. To explore something you have heard … to listen.

— To hear something, see the patterns and explore this and look for the details. To focus on details, focus on the clients’ knowledge of how to go on.

— To focus on details make you enter more deeply into everything.

— I thought it was fantastic. If you are asking questions using these manners you cannot stop …

Increasing joy in the work

— I enjoy myself much more now. So egoistically, this becoming more curious in their narratives allows me to become more myself as a person than a social secretary. I become more interested in the client as a person as well. I can support them in reflecting in and on their lives. It is the [Just] joyfulness that has made the difference. And the interplay with the colleagues who have also joined in reflecting and talking about this.

Working with the child at the centre

— Now it feels as if it was long since I had the coaching. I was working in Tomelilla then. For me the coaching meant something different than other supervision I had done and participated in earlier. I think I would call the process supervision and the coaching is about what happens also with feelings and so and with me. We definitely saw the children more – the children became in the centre. That is what I remember especially with Ann-Margreth; that the children became the centre. Process is about what happens inside me emotionally.

— In the coaching I have been narrating from the children’s perspective and the parents and my own. It became more important to listen to the boy’s narrative and opinions, not only the mother’s and the father’s. To listen to the boy’s version, not only the school’s for example.
Do you believe the children noticed the difference?
Yes.
What did it mean for the children?
I believe he felt seen and heard. He had opportunities to get explanations on why we talked and so.
You get so many more ideas and other views and get more open minded in reflecting and inquiring.
Definitely.
New tools in meeting with parents and children. Yes, new and different questions. Not so much governing, more openness and more listening to each other in families through the circular questions [dyad and triad questions] when we ask the mother for example about how she thinks the father acts in relation to the children and then when she compares with the father’s answer she could be surprised as to the differences between them.
How do you experience the families and the parents?
They have become more committed and curious about what they have to tell about themselves and the children, also in relations to others. They do not have these conversations otherwise. Aroused a curiosity. Learning something new which they can use in their everyday life. Instead of saying; – You cannot do this! Instead they ask: – What do you think this is about? What do you think your father would say about this?
This is a change that sparkles with joy and gives something in return for the child. This is making social work more alive …

Learning to listen in different ways
Even when there is no third party in the room – they can become more present, the family or someone else, even if they are not in the room.
I think I have always been curious – for me this has been more about learning to listen, to listen more and to be able to give somebody else the space and time to reflect …

Increasing self-awareness in being interviewed and searching for a new orientation in the answers
— I think I ask about new things and other aspects which could be useful and pleasant too. The coaching has given me an awareness of what I am doing and that my contribution could be important, I didn’t think that was important or of any interest before ... I have become more conscious of this ... It is something about interviewing and being interviewed.

**Creating a partnership and inviting the network including the children**
— For those who work with children, the difference would be to invite the children and, when working on cases with adults, to involve their network even though it is not possible to have them in the room.
— To involve the client and create more partnership whoever they may be, children and adults and with their network,
— We invite much more and often the client. We did it earlier also but we do it more now.

**Inquiring what you earlier took for granted**
— To put words on what and how we are doing.
— Ask more about things we earlier took for granted. For example, where do you want to have the meeting? What do you want to do? It is the client’s investigations.

**To have the courage to involve and invite the clients in open reflections**
— To sit and reflect together or in front of the client is something completely new. With very good results I have to say – this has become completely different.
— I have for example asked the parents to reflect after I had interviewed the child, Became terrific and exciting. Became very open and the child felt safe and secure when the parents were listening to her. The child’s voice became heard. The child was of the opinion that this was very positive for her. They had been in a conflict and the child was not heard. She became the centre, in focus. Her wishes and what she thought. I will do this many more times.
I recognise this. To interview the child and have the parents listening. I have also done this. Once I had the teachers listening to a child I interviewed. With respect everything goes smoothly. You can do this in many kinds of ways – have you once started there is endless an amount of ways to try.

Time and space?

Conversations/dialogues you are going to have anyhow – it is only to ask the clients and your colleagues if they want to participate.

Does not take much longer …

No.

It is the process …

You need to have an instinctive feeling for what is suitable …

The only thing that is demanding is that you are not going to do as you always do – that you become aware of what you are doing and consider why you choose to do what you do and how …

Dare to test …

Yes, have the courage to test.

“Lust”-creating, involving dialogues

It becomes – it creates another atmosphere in the dialogue. Hard to say what it is but somehow it creates results, makes you get more, to hear more and things and aspects you never otherwise would have heard. It creates another atmosphere. More reflecting approach – more opening.

When you say atmosphere …?

In the dialogue?

Creates another atmosphere.

Also in new contexts.

As?

We have used it for example in the presence of politicians.

When we have submitted a case in the social committee we used the team. Became more active and you get more assisting help.

I feel that I get more energy. I want to do something.

[laugh]
— Feels directly [laughs].
— I recognise myself in this very much – I feel the same.
— Otherwise there could be so much of following the same old routine amongst colleagues and in meetings with clients.
— Lust-creating and creating.

**Releasing the prestige ghost**
— The eternal/never-ending exploration in which you keep yourself alive – after all there is something new in everything.
— You’re actually getting it – suddenly you get it.
— You’re allowed to be innovative – the response is not somebody puckering his/her brows. Instead you get affirmation.
— Also to explore what we did or didn’t do. So we do not fall into the trap of hunting the solution immediately. What did happen then? What was effective or impressive? We are all starting with Ann-Margreth. That will create changes?
— Then it becomes easier to release the prestige ghost?
— You get the feeling of becoming braver – to test and examine together with the client. The coaching put new hearts into us. To be prepared …
— With a client?
— Yes, it was terrific.
— Also the reflecting, which we used spontaneously. We did a U-turn and I had a colleague – spontaneously in 30 seconds we decided that we should reflect. And it worked because we had been practicing it.

**Reflecting team as a democratic process**
— The reflecting team creates more equal opportunities between the colleagues and the clients. Otherwise you become a persona of authority.
— In reflecting teams I also get the opportunity to ask questions. Very useful – learning – and the clients express something and I get the opportunity to listen. It both changes the roles and the power balance. We became of the same rank.
It is similar to when you have a very active manager. If he gets invited into reflecting team, he also becomes a member of the gang. Becomes more of a democratic process between colleagues.

[...] I was thinking, when you say: – I don’t know. First it doesn’t look so good. But in this you show that you are leaving the old and already on your way to something new. That is terrific. The feeling is there. No prestige.