

# 'Yay, a downhill!': Mobile preschool children's collective mobility practices and 'doing' space in walks in line

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*Abstract:* In the field of early childhood research children's mobility is usually discussed only in terms of physical activity in the preschool yard. More seldom is it discussed in terms of mobility practices and how young children move in public spaces. With unique detailed video-ethnographic data on mobile preschools and a new combination of theories on space, mobilities and peer culture this article analyses how young children negotiate mobility practices and engage in embodied learning in the collective preschool routine of walking in line. Two empirical examples of walking in line in contrasting public spaces show how the mobile preschool group moves in space as a collective body co-produced by children's and teachers' individual bodies. It is argued that walks in line are not merely a form of 'transport' between places but are important as social and learning spaces. While walking in line, children collectively 'do' space in diverse ways depending on where and how they move, and in relation to where and when teachers negotiate safety issues. In this process, the spaces, activities and routines alike are transformed.

*Keywords:* mobile preschool routines, young children's mobility practices, collective action in peer culture, doing space, embodied learning.

## Introduction

*It is a sunny afternoon in May. The preschool bus is parked on the large, gravelled area at Hammarskog recreational area. The children and teachers have just finished eating lunch in the bus, after spending the morning playing in the forest nearby.*

*'Those of you who are ready are welcome to put on your jackets and vests and go outside. Lisa's table, you can start!' a teacher says. The children sitting at Lisa's table slide off their adult-height seats and start putting on their jackets and orange traffic vests in the narrow bus aisle. They collect their hats from the shelves next to the stairs at the rear door. One by one, the children gather outside the bus and play or look for 'gold' in the gravel while waiting for everyone to disembark.*

*Jenny (bus driver and teacher) blows her whistle and tells the children to hurry and line up. The children line up behind Jenny, who starts walking. They all follow her. Another teacher joins the end of the line. As they walk the children discuss such topics as their favourite Pokémon cards, where they are heading, what to play and with whom.*

*Suddenly, Jenny raises her voice and instructs the children to focus: they have to cross a road on their way to the garden where they are to spend the afternoon. Once at the road, they all stop. The children and teachers turn their heads to look out for traffic, and chorus 'Left, right, left' before crossing. Sue and Leo exchange looks, giggle and keep turning their heads very fast while crossing the road. On the other side, they realise there is a gap between them and the children ahead of them. They race to the others to close the gap.*

As this vignette illustrates, mobile preschools – preschools in buses – imply mobility practices that both resemble and differ from mobility practices in 'regular' preschools. Mobile preschools travel to various locations roughly 30 minutes away by bus from the 'home preschool', allowing children to move around in a variety of public spaces on a full-day, everyday basis. Without bus access, children in 'regular' preschools usually spend most of their days within the confines of the preschool, indoors and outdoors in the preschool yard; they remain comparatively 'immobile' and spatially confined, with only occasional visits to spaces outside the preschool for play or educational activities. The extended activity space of the mobile preschool approach changes the spatiality of children's mobility, allowing the children to visit various 'learning environments' in public space (Gustafson et al., 2017).

In our ongoing ethnographic research on mobile preschools, we investigate how children and teachers in mobile preschools participate in a variety of public spaces and what this means for children's learning and sense of citizenship. In this particular article, we analyse how mobile preschool children negotiate mobility practices and engage in embodied learning in the collective preschool routine of walking in line. We argue that our unique data on this new preschool pedagogy, along with an original combination of

theories on space, mobilities and peer culture, provides new knowledge on young children's mobility practices and embodied learning in early childhood education settings. The specific spatiality and mobility of mobile preschools call for in-depth consideration of the role of space in this preschool practice. Geographer Doreen Massey's (2005) conceptualisation of space helps us to understand space as a product of interrelated practices and processes. Although Massey's theorising takes place on an overall, abstract level and makes no mention of children, it helps us to think about how space is 'made' through the practices and processes associated with people (children and teachers) and things (preschool buses). Theories of children's mobilities (Mikkelsen & Christensen, 2011; Nansen et al., 2015) are helpful for considering the interdependency of children to move around in space. Sociologist William Corsaro's (2018) theory on interpretive reproduction and young children's interaction and collective action in peer culture facilitates understanding of how young children engage in collective routines, in order to share play and take control over things important to them in their everyday lives. By combining these theories and adding 'children' to Massey, 'young' to children's mobilities and 'space' to Corsaro, we contribute to and expand the theory in these areas.

## Space, Place and Mobilities in Mobile Preschools

With the rise of the Children's Geographies field in the late 1990s (Holloway & Valentine, 2000), and as part of a more general 'spatial turn' in the social sciences, emphasis on space and place has steadily increased in the field of childhood studies. In our research on mobile preschools and children's mobilities, ways of conceptualising space and place are important for understanding the spatio-temporalities of mobile preschool practices and children's mobility practices. Massey (2005, p. 9) conceives of space as 'a sphere of multiplicity; a simultaneity of stories-so-far'. To Massey, space is the product of interrelations, where 'relations' are understood as embedded practices, and space is to be imagined as open and always in the process of being made. This view is in sharp contrast to a view of space as an empty container within which life takes place. Massey views *space* as just as full as life as *place* and imagines places as 'events' in space, 'collections of trajectories' that meet up in a particular time-space. The uniqueness of place can be imagined as a 'thrown-togetherness' of trajectories. Massey (2005, p. 64, 83) underlines that power relations are always part of how agents negotiate relations with trajectories, thus of 'doing' space. In different spatial configurations, varying forms of power – such as exclusion and/or inclusion or confinement – are articulated.

This conceptualisation of space and place assists our understanding of the spatiality of mobile preschools as comprising interwoven practices and processes associated with the trajectories of mobile preschools, children and teachers. The relational aspect of space helps us to understand how the various spaces to which the preschool travels are not bounded and static but interconnected through practices. The latter include mobile preschool children's mobility practices, such as walking in line. Conceiving places as 'collections of trajectories' (Massey, 2005, p. 130) helps us think differently about what happens when mobile preschools travel to different places and engage in activities there. Instead of viewing the places visited by mobile preschools as bounded, static 'learning environments', and journeys to and from these places as merely travel by bus or on foot, Massey's conceptualisation of space allows a different focus. It enables us to focus on how children's trajectories 'link into' the bundle of trajectories that make up these places and how they (are allowed to) take part in and negotiate their making. According to Massey (2005, p. 119), on arriving in a place we engage in '(p)icking up the threads and weaving them into a more or less coherent sense of being "here", "now"'. With our ethnographic data, we can capture and empirically bring these concepts to life in children's experiences in the mobile preschool. How do children pick up the threads and weave them into their play routines and mobility practices when they move through, or arrive in, a (familiar or new) place as a mobile collectivity?

In the context of mobile preschool practice, the conceptualisation of space as relational helps us grasp that what happens in one place is to be understood in relation to what happens in another, owing to the social practices connecting the two. In mobile preschools, spaces are connected through mobility practices – movements of bodies in space, inside and outside the bus. Another example is the connectedness of space through the practices of play. Children in mobile preschools engage in play on and off the bus, at home, in the yard of the 'home preschool' before and after spending the day with the bus, and so on. Play practices are performed, experienced and imagined in places in relation to how play is performed, experienced and imagined elsewhere.

Viewing space as a product of interrelations, we can see that a place like Hammarskog is a collection of trajectories, a thrown-togetherness of human and non-human trajectories. In this place, non-human material trajectories, such as natural elements (soil, sky, rocks), built material (benches, public toilets) and the technology of the parked preschool bus, converge. These material trajectories intersect with other trajectories through social prac-

tices when the area is used by people like the mobile preschool children and teachers, families, dog walkers and other visitors, or through the practices and processes associated with insects, plants and other non-human living things. Together, these trajectories make up the socio-material space of Hammarskog, which is more than a mere geographical location – a dot on a map.

Massey's conceptualisation of space enables us to see how the mobile preschool group is part of and negotiates the space through its practices. Being in space is 'encountering' and 'making' it, and children and teachers are co-producers of space through their practices. The Hammarskog space changes when the preschool group is there, as does the space of the bus. When trajectories meet up, the event of place changes as space is made differently. Similarly, children's and teachers' encounters with new spaces alter their practices through the meeting up with other human and non-human trajectories that make up that space. Massey points out that not only 'culture' but 'nature', too, constantly moves and changes, but that there are strong notions of nature as 'staying put' (Massey, 2005, p. 98, 137) in society. This also has implications for our analysis of bus travel to the venues where the activities of the mobile preschool take place. Since place is a collection of trajectories, Massey argues that travel does not happen across space. People (and mobile preschools) travel 'across trajectories' (Massey 2005, p. 119), and in the process of travel, people (including children travelling by bus) also slightly alter space. In research on mobile preschools, this conceptualisation of space thus helps us to understand how the mobility practices of the preschool group 'do' space while travelling by bus and on foot.

Theories on mobilities (Cresswell, 2010) help us understand the bearing of mobility on how we interact with the world (Sheller & Urry, 2006) and, in line with Massey's discussion on travel, to conceptualise mobility as more than mere transport or 'crossing space' (Cresswell, 2010). Mobility research concerns the movement of humans and non-humans, ideas and objects; how these move in space; where they move and do not move; how they move in relation to other (non)moving things; and the experience of moving, stillness and/or 'mooring' (Cresswell, 2010; Hannam et al., 2006). A (preschool) bus not only moves; it is also stationary in a car park or garage. Similarly, a walk may include pausing to tie shoelaces, or have a picnic. Mobility, in terms of the movements and moorings of the preschool bus and the children and teachers, is central to an understanding of mobile preschool practices. These practices, including standing still or being a passenger, are always active and embodied (Cresswell & Merriman, 2016).

Few studies from the ‘mobilities perspective’ (Cresswell, 2010) have focused on children’s mobilities (Barker et al., 2009; Horton et al., 2014). In their review of the literature on children’s mobility/mobilities, Christensen and Cortés-Morales (2016) perceive a rise in interest in theory on mobilities. This has led to a shift in focus from children’s *independent* mobility – opportunities for and constraints on children’s unsupervised mobility (e.g. Hillman et al., 1990) – to ‘the complexity of the *interdependent* and *relational* aspects of everyday mobility practices’ (Christensen & Cortés-Morales, 2016, p. 2). Mikkelsen and Christensen’s (2009) critique of the independence of children’s independent mobility has led to new ways of conceptualising children’s mobilities. One way is the notion of mobility as *companionship* – moving about with friends, adults and pets (Mikkelsen & Christensen, 2009). Nansen et al. (2015) highlight the notion of *composition* – children’s mobility practices as ‘enabled and configured through a diversity of relations and materials’. They also highlight the notion of *collaboration* – ‘children’s mobility as assembled through the cooperation and assistance of a range of people, objects and environments, working in concert with children to enable them to move about in public’ (Nansen, 2015, p. 9).

The concepts of companionship, composition and collaboration assist understanding on how children and teachers move and moor by bus and on foot; how this enables them to move around in new and familiar places and encounter other trajectories; and how this changes how children in mobile preschools interact with the world. Very few studies have focused on very young children’s mobilities and on what happens in mobility practices (but see Cortés-Morales & Christensen, 2014). Our ethnographic research on young children’s mobilities contributes to this field by focusing on children aged four to six in an early childhood education context.

## Children’s Interaction and Collective Action

To analyse young children’s mobility practices and collective action in the various spaces the mobile preschool visits, we need concepts to help us understand their social interaction. For this purpose, we use Corsaro’s (2018) theory of *interpretive reproduction* and *collective action* in children’s production of peer cultures. Instead of viewing socialisation processes as children’s individual internalisation of adult culture, Corsaro sees children as becoming part of the adult world and adopting adult cultural routines through the process of interpretive reproduction. This view recognises children as social agents in their own everyday lives, and is thus crucial for our understanding of children as co-producers and co-organisers of mobility

practices in mobile preschools. Children collectively reproduce and extend adult routines 'through their negotiations with adults and their creative production of a series of peer cultures with other children' (Corsaro, 2018, p. 43). *Peer culture* is defined as a 'stable set of activities or routines, artefacts, values and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers' (ibid, 2018, p. 18). Activities and routines that children produce and share in interaction are observable in time and space, and thus central to our analysis. While not engaging explicitly with issues of space and place, Corsaro (2009) underlines the usefulness of spatial theories for understanding children's peer cultures. We see children's mobility practices as integrated in the collective action and social interactions that children engage in within their peer cultures.

## Methods and Data

The article is based on ethnographic research<sup>1</sup> in which fieldwork was carried out in a mobile preschool practice, the 'Pippi Longstocking bus'<sup>2</sup>, for 14 months, including 44 days and 150 hours of video-recorded observations. We conducted a '*mobile ethnography*' (Cresswell, 2012, p. 647), moving around with the children and teachers, taking field notes and video recordings to analyse the where and when of children's mobility practices and time-spaces of the mobile preschool's everyday organisation and activities.

The bus is based in a medium-sized Swedish city and connected with a stationary preschool as one of its divisions<sup>3</sup>. The bus is used by 20 children aged four to six and three teachers, two of whom also drive the bus. The children are on the bus Monday to Friday from 9 am to 3 pm and, depending on parents' work schedules, at the stationary preschool before and after bus hours. The bus has been remodelled and equipped with a toilet, a kitchenette and seating arranged in fours around small tables. The preschool travels to various locations where the children and teachers move around and moor up during the day.

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<sup>2</sup> For reasons of confidentiality, the names and details of places, children and teachers have been changed in the text as well as in the photograph captions. The project has been approved by the Ethical Review Board.

<sup>3</sup> Mobile preschools are primarily a Scandinavian phenomenon, and in 14 municipalities around Sweden there are currently 40 preschool buses, mostly organised along the lines of the Pippi bus (Gustafson et al., 2017).

## Walking in Line

Peers, teachers and a bus are part of the *composition* of mobile preschool children's mobilities, and as such the people and 'things' *collaborate* in enabling children's mobility practices, activities and routines in a variety of public spaces on an everyday basis (Nansen et al., 2014). One consequence of the bus's mobility is the need to *walk in line*. Walking in line is, in fact, a particularly prominent feature of mobile preschool mobility practices. Because of the need to park the bus appropriately on arrival in a space where they can engage in preschool activities, the children and teachers recurrently walk to and from the bus and the various places where the group engage in ECEC activities. Walks in line are thus routinised mobile practices occurring several times daily in and among a varied range of public spaces. Along with the mobilities of the bus and the fact mobile preschools can visit different public spaces on a daily basis, walks in line are an essential element in the spatiality of mobile preschools. On location, the bus is parked and stationary, transformed from a transport unit into a preschool on wheels. The children and teachers, however, continue to move around (and moor), both inside the bus and in a variety of places outside it. On arriving by bus at their destination for the morning and/or afternoon, the group walk from the parking space to an area chosen by the teachers where they will engage in different activities. After a while, they may walk elsewhere to engage in other activities. When it is time for lunch or the afternoon snack, the children and teachers return to the bus. These walks are always collective and performed in line. In observing numerous walks in line, we have come to view these as *collective bodies* – composed of children's and teachers' individual bodies – whose spatial movements are a mobile choreography both orchestrated and improvised by teachers and children alike. On these walks, just like everywhere else, the children interact with one another, the teachers and the surroundings. The children also often carry small items (stones, toys) that they discuss, play with, or show one another, or plan to show other children at the 'home preschool' or parents and siblings at home. The notion of *companionship* (Mikkelsen & Christensen, 2011) is therefore useful for viewing not only mobile preschool children's mobilities as performed with their peers and teachers, but also the material objects that accompany the children as they walk in line (Nansen, 2014; Rautio, 2013).

Below, we give examples of how we combine these theoretical perspectives with the analyses of the Pippi bus and group walking in line in two places. The first is an ancient natural area of uneven, hilly terrain covered with stones and ice, adjacent to a large road. The second is an indoor shopping

centre with a moving walkway (a long escalator without steps), and many other people around.

## Walking in Line on Icy, Stony and Steep Terrain

The mobile preschool group has spent a cold December afternoon playing on a large shingle flat that formed 7,000 years ago, when the area was part of the seashore. Today this place is in the middle of a forest, 75 metres above sea level. The bus is parked at the foot of the hill, about a 10-minute walk away. On the shingle flat the teachers explained to the children how the stones ended up in this particular place. After this teacher-led educational activity, the children played with the natural material – round stones of varying size, branches and twigs. These material objects become part of the children's many different play activities, such as Allie's (girl, 4) project of trying to lift up a large stone with a branch.

Now it is time to return to the bus for the afternoon snack. Jenny (teacher) takes her whistle out of her jacket pocket while talking to Karen (teacher). Immediately, two of the children position themselves closely behind Jenny, forming the start of a line. The whistle is the signal for this routinised activity of walking from one place to another, and just spotting the whistle is enough to tell these two children what to do: to show that they are prepared for the walk back to the bus. Jenny blows the whistle and all the children now quickly position themselves in a long single-file column behind Jenny. The children know that whenever a teacher blows the whistle and silently adopts the 'waiting position' – facing in the walking direction and looking slightly downwards – a single-file line should be formed. Collectively, they coordinate their body positions to create the shape of a line. As soon as Jenny sees the children approaching her, she starts walking slowly. In following her, the children form a growing line. Another teacher usually waits until every child has joined the line and then brings up the rear. They now form a collective body in motion.

The walking-in-line routine is the teachers' means of controlling the group of children while walking from one place to another, in this example, from the shingle flat back to the bus. Keeping together as a group is a skill that children starting mobile preschool need to learn. The children show that they know what is expected of them, and quickly respond to the whistle, lining up behind the teacher and walking. While performing the learnt choreography in the collective, moving body, the children engage in multiple bodily improvisations, such as jumping, bumping, speeding or lagging behind. They have

clearly appropriated the preschool walking-in-line routine; having learnt to perform it, they feel secure enough to engage in their own improvisations (Corsaro, 2018). While walking in line, the teachers and children engage in ongoing negotiations regarding which trajectories the children can relate to. 'Linking into' trajectories the children find interesting is allowed as long as they keep moving within a certain bodily ordering and spatio-temporality (Massey, 2005, p.119).

On this particular day, the teachers are somewhat dissatisfied with the children's earlier performance of the line routine. This has been something of an issue all week, with too much bumping into one another. Now Jenny (the teacher at the front) stops walking and starts instructing the children on how to keep the child in front of them at arm's length (holding their arms at a right angle) to avoid bumping into him or her. However, this teacher-led educational activity fails to achieve the intended effect. Instead, some children start playing by bumping into one another while others raise their arms as if playing zombies. Standing very close to one another is part of the children's embodied knowledge of how to coordinate and create a line. When the teachers direct the children's attention to the positions of their bodies and arms, the children's collective focus turns to how they can play with their bodies. They are quick to exploit the space of the line in play routines of 'bumping' and playing zombies, indicating their shared knowledge of these practices and collectively turning the line into a play space.

The walk to the bus starts on the shingle flat. Crossing an area of large, rounded stones requires the children to balance on them, treading carefully to avoid slipping and falling. Some children spread their arms out to keep their balance. The children focus on the terrain. The walk proceeds into the woods, and as soon as the terrain transitions from the shingle flat to the relatively even ground of the woods, the line's spatial grouping changes. The single-file line breaks up in places and broadens as the chatting children form pairs or threes. The terrain is now easier, and, since they do not slip, requires less concentration. This immediately shifts the children's focus from the terrain to one another. Whenever the terrain gets rougher or the path narrower, the line formation changes and narrows again. This, in turn, modifies the children's interaction. This is an example of how the trajectories of the line, the terrain (stones, shrubs, trail etc.) and the social interaction among the children, and between the children and teachers, are intertwined in this particular walking situation (Massey, 2005).

Our ethnographic data contains numerous examples of how children

share play and talk while walking in line and keeping up with the collective pace. In this specific situation, in the relatively smooth terrain of the woods, Erik (boy, 4) is interacting (talking, laughing, gesturing) with the boys behind him in the line. While walking, Erik turns his upper body backwards to create face-to-face contact and talk, or see what is going on behind him. Turning backwards, he slows down or pauses his sideways walking to include himself in the 'interactive space' (Corsaro, 2018 p. 56) created by the boys behind him. This shows how mobile preschool children collectively organise their peer culture in relation to the trajectories of the terrain, as well as to the mobile spatiality of the walking-in-line practice (Massey, 2005). After a while, Erik speeds up again and runs a little to catch up with Jenny (teacher) and Iris (girl, 5) in front of him, and close the gap in the line. Closing this gap by speeding up and running to 'touch' the bodies in front again is also part of the mobile practice of walking in line, and the children enjoy it. The spatiality of the collective body is thus shaped by the material aspects of the space (Massey, 2005), as well as by the grouping and coordination of the children's bodies aimed at creating a social space (Corsaro, 2018; Massey, 2005).

Depending on the terrain, the pace of the line and the conversational rhythm, the shape of the line follows a certain choreography and pattern. Children both adjust to the rhythm and choreography of the line and co-create it. In observing walking groups, Lorimer (2011, p. 29) describes how 'the linear quality of the walk and of the walkers' own formation is rhythmic; encouraging participants to keep plodding onwards.' Our many observations of children walking in line show that when it becomes a routinised daily activity, the line's space and rhythm are conducive to the children's playful interaction, as well as to a quasi-meditative state. As we have observed many times during fieldwork, some children – often roughly mid-line – may walk silently, apparently daydreaming, reflecting or listening to other children or teachers talking, with their bodies closely following the rhythm and pace of their peers in front. They then somewhat resemble a boat floating on the sea or what Sheller and Urry (2006, p. 214) might term 'dwelling-in-motion'.

While the walking-in-line routine is an adult-imposed spatial routine to which children must adapt, we found that it may also enable them to take advantage of the spatial arrangement of bodies by assuming control of a specific situation (Massey, 2005). While walking in the woods, Iris (girl, 5) approaches teacher Jenny, who heads the line, and starts a conversation while remaining behind her. Iris then speeds up, and she and Jenny form a pair at the very front of the line. Iris wants to talk to Jenny about what

starting school may be like, and does most of the talking. Jenny listens and comments now and then. As they talk, both Iris and Jenny look forward and slightly downward at their feet to see where to step next. Whenever the terrain gets particularly difficult, they slow down slightly to focus more on where to tread. According to Lorimer (2016), this kind of ‘mobile-social arrangement’, where conversation and embodied gestures happen side by side instead of face to face, resembles a conversation between a passenger and a driver. However, while Jenny’s occasional talk ‘happens outwards’ (Lorimer 2016, p. 29) most of the time, Iris – doing most of the talking – is looking sideways up at Jenny (Picture 1) for much longer periods. Iris is active in maintaining the social space she has created with Jenny, and coordinates her pace and body position to achieve this. Thus, Iris is able to manoeuvre the spatial configuration of the line to create a space in which she can get the teacher’s full attention (Massey, 2005).



**Picture 1:** Iris looks sideways up at Jenny.

There are some felled trees on the path, and Iris and Jenny (followed by the rest of the line) jump over them. Some children crawl over them. The walk continues from the woods into the more open moor landscape, with low-growing pines, along the slope of the hill. While most of the snow has thawed in the surrounding vegetation, the stony trail is covered with ice and is also quite steep in places. Iris slips, slides and falls several times, but neither she nor the teacher comment on this except to utter an occasional ‘Oops!’ and perhaps giggle. Iris keeps talking while getting up and maintaining her pace and spatial position beside Jenny. Falling, getting up again and moving on happen all the time in all sorts of terrain and are part of everyday walking in line, at least for the children. It usually passes uncommented by

the children and teachers.<sup>4</sup> For Iris, keeping up the conversation, as well as her position beside Jenny, is a way of ensuring she can protect the mobile interactional space she has created – and continuously re-creates – during the walk. Overcoming difficult terrain while walking in line is a physical skill and the mobile preschool children get ample training and consequently learn to master it. During our fieldwork, we observed many instances of children creating space for one-to-one time with teachers, as Iris does in this example. Walks in line thus give mobile preschool children the opportunity to 'link in' with and negotiate other children's and teachers' trajectories (Massey, 2005) in a given mobile social arrangement, to share play or talk (Lorimer, 2011; Corsaro, 2018). Thus, children engage in embodied processes of learning how to retain control of shared interaction in elements important to them while walking in line (Corsaro, 2018 p. 169).

Further along the line, the children talk about where to put their feet to avoid constantly slipping and falling. The unusually slippery, steep terrain leads them to have a conversation on how to avoid stumbling. One child (Lasse, 4) leaves the trail and instead makes his own way through the vegetation, where there is no ice – just stones, shrubs and small trees. Now he can move faster. Other children follow his example and have soon caught up with Jenny and Iris, who are still at the very front of the line on the trail. Usually, when walking in line in open areas, children are allowed to run ahead of the teachers, but only if they stay in the teachers' field of view. Teachers thus sometimes allow children's creative negotiations in relation to the spatial configuration of the walking-in-line routine (Massey, 2005 p. 91). However, in this particular place there is a large road near where the bus is parked. Jenny therefore tells the children to stay behind an imaginary line. 'You can walk there at the side but you can imagine a line next to me,' she says, showing the direction of the imaginary line by lifting her arm outwards (Picture 2). This is in line with what Corsaro says about rules needing to be understood as situational (Corsaro, 2018, p. 45). In mobile preschools, children learn to understand rules in relation not only to specific situations but also to particular spaces.

Several children start to move off the trail and into the terrain for shorter or longer periods. They stay within the imaginary line, although some need reminding by Jenny once or twice. The children's initiatives, engaging with the terrain differently so as to move faster, change the shape of the collective

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<sup>4</sup> The children wear snow suits and boots that protect them from getting cold and wet if they fall.



**Picture 2:** Teacher Jenny indicates the imaginary line.

body of children and teachers. While Jenny orchestrates the body's choreography, the children's bodies create improvisations. When the first group members arrive at the car park, Jenny instructs them to wait until the whole group have got down the hill. Most of the children remain behind Jenny, but three run a little further on. When called back again by Jenny they run and deliberately slide on the ice down into a ditch, and laugh as they crawl back up to the waiting group. We see how the children, in their interaction, both follow and challenge the teacher's instructions and negotiate the rules on how far they can move around in this specific place – Corsaro (2018), in line with Goffman (1961), refers to this as 'secondary adjustments'. While secondary adjustments are usually seen as circumventing rules, in this example – and in Corsaro's work – they are more about subtly and creatively negotiating rules.

## Walking in Line in a Shopping Centre – The 'Downhill'

This warm and sunny day in May it is 'Preschool Day', an event initiated by the municipality, which has arranged an exhibition of photos of local preschools in a large shopping centre. The Pippi bus is one of these preschools. The teachers decide to go and visit the exhibition so that shoppers can see the photos of the preschool practices accompanied by 'real' preschool children. This shopping centre is a familiar space to the children, who have all been here before with their families. Viewing the photo exhibition does not interest the children much, and the teachers decide after a while that the children can play in the small indoor playground (on the second floor), which they also know well.

The play space, some 30 square metres in size, has a spongy coloured surface, hillocks with a slide and several small climbing frames. After some fairly wild physical play involving climbing, sliding and running, Jenny whistles through her fingers and tells the children to put their shoes on. It is time to go back to the bus. The children put on their shoes while discussing such matters as shoe size. Those who are ready position themselves behind Jenny. Katja (girl, 4) takes Jenny's hand. Whenever walking in places where they are surrounded by crowds, or in traffic, the children are instructed to hold hands with one another. This is a way of coordinating the children's bodies in controlling the spatial formation of the collective body for safety reasons, ensuring it remains complete and intact. 'Do we hold hands with the one we walked with when we came here?' Natasha (girl 5) asks Jenny. 'Find a friend whose hand you can hold!' Jenny tells the group, and starts walking. The children follow her. The teacher's answer makes the children responsible for organising the pair formation. From our ethnographic fieldwork, we know that the children in this mobile preschool are used to this.

Creating access to interactional space with other children is an essential part of children's peer cultures, as is protecting the interactional space they have gained (Corsaro, 2018, p. 56). Whom a child holds hands with in the line is important, since walking together offers many opportunities for social interaction. Anna (girl, 5) tries to pair up with Elsa, asking 'Will you walk with me, Elsa?' Elsa shakes her head, turns around and positions herself at the end of the line, alone. Anna starts following Jenny on her own. Karen (teacher) ensures that every child joins the line. After a few metres, Jenny stops walking to make sure every child is ready to go and has someone to hold hands with. She calls to Elsa, telling her to walk with Anna, and with no further discussion they now make a pair. While forming pairs, the children discuss what will be the next activity and stop. The children's visits to the shopping centre with their families often include shopping, playing in the playground and visiting a café. Starting to walk, one boy says he is sure they will have something sweet at a café. Previous mobility practices and experiences of spaces are frequent topics of discussion among the children, and this is a sign that the boy is ready to 'link into' the trajectories that meet up in this place and pick up a thread in the 'collection of interwoven stories of which that place is made' (Massey, 2005, p. 119).

As soon as the preschool group have left the playground, other children enter the play space and start playing. The preschool group seem to have dominated the space because of their group size and wild, intense play. The group form a long line, with pairs of children holding hands while walking,

hopping and running whenever they perceive a gap in the line ahead. People in the shopping centre observe the line of walking, hopping and running children.

The line approaches a moving walkway that leads to the ground floor. 'Yay, a downhill!' a child says. They step onto the walkway in pairs. The children place one hand on the railing and hold the child next to them with the other. Other children just hold hands and not the railing. Fjodor (boy, 5) is the only child not holding another child's hand. His hands are inside his traffic vest, but he takes them out when stepping on the moving walkway. 'Downhill!' a child says again. Suddenly, a pair of children somewhere in the middle of the line sink down and squat. Charlie (boy, 4) sees this, turns to Leo and starts giggling, holding his hand (the one not holding the other child's hand) in front of his mouth while making eye contact with his walking friend.

Now another pair descend into a squat, followed by another (Picture 3). Like dominoes, the children squat and sit on the moving walkway. Charlie and Leo do the same. The children look at one another, smiling and giggling.

Sixteen of the 19 children are now sitting. Three girls are standing with Jenny at the front (Picture 4). The squatting started behind them and they did not notice.



**Pictures 3 and 4:** Showing the 'domino effect'.

'Thanks for the ride!' a child at the front says. Harry (boy, 5) turns sideways and backwards and says: 'Soon we have to get up, otherwise we may get stuck.' Two children get up immediately. The rest remain sitting. Some children say 'Hi' to a family standing on the moving walkway going in the other direction. Other children do the same: 'Hi!'

Jenny (still at the very front of the line) says: 'Just so you know, when you get to the end you have to stand up – otherwise you'll get your bum pinched!' 'And then we could get stuck,' Harry adds. 'Then you could get stuck,' Jenny confirms. 'Stand up, stand up!' says a child at the front, approaching the end, 'Otherwise you could get stuck!' The children, still holding hands, are now moving up and down from squatting to standing and back again, and at the end of the moving walkway they all get ready and take a big jump off it. 'Now, now, now!' Harry says to his pair-friend, just before they both jump (Picture 5).



**Picture 5:** Now, now, now!

'Fun!' Fjodor says while turning to Katarina (researcher), who is holding the camera. He then puts his hands inside his traffic vest again and walks on. The children lined up in twos, holding hands, now keep jumping – out of the shopping centre into the car park where the bus is parked.

The sequence on the moving walkway is a good example of the notion of interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2018 p. 18). The children collectively turn the mobile practice of walking in line into a play activity in which they integrate the material, social and imaginative aspects of the moving walkway space (Massey, 2005). This is interpretive reproduction in the sense of, and in line with, peer culture: the children transform the collective moving-in-line routine in the preschool culture into their own collective routine in peer culture. Thus, the children reproduce and extend adult culture, creating a new routine in their peer culture. Even before the line steps on the moving walkway, a child calls out that it is a 'downhill', transforming the moving walkway space into a slope, like a sledding hill or the artificial hill-ock at the playground. Thus, the children have their own creative name

for the moving walkway – a name directly connected with the social practice of squatting and sliding in other places (playgrounds and icy, sandy and/or stony hillsides). This is an example of a relational space and the children's active 'doing', using the moving space as a hill or slide (Massey, 2005, p. 179, 118). When a pair of children sink into a squatting position, this signals 'play' to the surrounding children, who immediately imitate the movement and body position. In terms of mobile choreography, this is an example of children's collective improvisation of walking in line, using the spatiality of the moving walkway and its related spaces, as well as the moving walkway's specific material qualities – its smooth surface, movement and slope. The collective body remains horizontal, but for a moment or two the depth of its shape changes because of the children's collective coordination of their bodies.

Charlie is one of the first to notice the first pair of children squatting, but not the first to follow suit. Instead, he looks at Leo, seemingly astonished at what is happening, and giggles with a hand-on-mouth gesture towards Leo. When more pairs of children squat, Charlie and Leo do the same. Being part of the collective body appropriating the moving walkway seems to give Charlie and Leo the courage to join in the challenging of the norms of walking in line in public areas.

## Conclusion

This article has discussed the benefits of analysing unique ethnographic data on activities and routines in mobile preschools using a combination of theories of space and mobilities and theories on children's collective action and routines in peer culture. We have analysed how mobile preschool children negotiate mobility practices and engage in embodied learning in the collective preschool routine of walking in line. Using two empirical examples of walking in line in contrasting public spaces, the article has shown how the preschool group moves in space as a collective body, and how this collective body is composed of the children's and teachers' individual bodies, closely coordinated in relation to the positions and movements of other bodies.

Walking in line is a mundane routine in mobile preschool culture and an important tool for teachers, enabling them to control the group and keep it together for safety reasons. Mobile preschool children have appropriated this routine through collective mobility practices and learnt to coordinate their bodies to adjust to the spatio-temporality of the collective body in mo-

tion. Depending on where they are moving, the children carefully adjust their movements to the quality of the terrain or floor. They collectively engage in the continuous embodied and social learning processes of how to manoeuvre difficult terrain, traffic situations and crowded places. However, the children not only adjust and conform to the mobile collectivity of the walks in line; they actively negotiate the spatio-temporal configuration of the line, in terms of re-ordering their bodies and increasing and decreasing their pace and rhythm.

Children's mobility practices are thus to be understood as active and collaborative: they negotiate mobilities with one another, teachers and the other human and non-human trajectories they intersect with. These insights change the view of walks in line conducted within the context of educational settings. Instead of viewing these as mere disciplined 'means of travelling to 'cross space', they should be seen as dynamic time-spaces in which children and teachers actively engage in activities and routines important in preschool as well as peer culture. As such, walks in line are also important as learning spaces. Walks in line are co-produced by children and teachers in terms of orchestrating and improvising the mobility practices that make up the collective body. While walking in line, children collectively engage in the creative transformation both of spaces and activities and of routines central to preschool and peer culture alike.

Mobile preschool children relate to space, as an integral part of their peer cultures, actively, constitutively, creatively and collectively. How children 'do' space differs according to where and how they move, and in relation to where and when teachers negotiate safety issues. In 'doing' space, children engage in activities and routines important in their peer culture, transforming them in relation to the nature of the public spaces they move in. In this process, *the spaces, activities and routines alike are transformed.*

Since walking in line is also a common activity in regular preschool practices – especially in inner-city preschools without enclosed yards – it is key to understanding children's mobility practices and embodied learning in preschools generally. However, the recurrent nature of the walking-in-line routine in mobile preschools, in a variety of spaces in and around the city, shows how mobile preschool children's appropriation of the routine and the spaces they occupy (and have moved in before) in their peer culture enables them to play, interact and thus 'do' space more flexibly and creatively. Since mobile preschool children move in and through a variety of spaces, they have the opportunity to encounter and 'do' space in many different ways

and link into the multiplicity of the human and non-human trajectories that make up these spaces. As the examples show, the children do this in creative ways and it is something they enjoy doing together, jointly. Compared with the more spatially bounded ‘stationary’ preschool pedagogies, the mobile preschool pedagogy provides children with a greater variety of spatial encounters through its mobility. Extending the results from the analysis in this article, we suggest that mobile preschools provide children with a larger palette of agencies and creativities for transforming spaces, mobility practices and play and/or educational routines, resulting in various embodied and social learning processes.

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