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**To cite this article:** Anna Kristiina Kokko, Maiju Paananen & Laura Hirsto (2024) Micropolitics in smooth and sticky events of mundane school life, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 10:1, 73-82, DOI: [10.1080/20020317.2024.2344460](https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2024.2344460)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2024.2344460>



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Published online: 22 Apr 2024.



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## Micropolitics in smooth and sticky events of mundane school life

Anna Kristiina Kokko <sup>a</sup>, Maiju Paananen <sup>b</sup> and Laura Hirsto <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland; <sup>b</sup>Faculty of Education and Culture, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

### ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the discussion of children's participation in educational practices. In particular we are interested from the moments that reach beyond formal modes of participation. For this purpose, we use the concept of micropolitics and examine happenings in which children's actions collide with everyday school practices and larger social and political surfaces. The data consist of one year-long ethnographic fieldwork produced in two Finnish comprehensive schools. Based on the analysis, we identified two different types of events – 'smooth' and 'sticky' – to which micropolitics entangled. Identifying these two types of events aids us in understanding the kinds of situations in which children have or do not have political power in their everyday school lives. Our analysis show that children take part in discussing wide societal issues, such as social class and local education policies, but it raises questions about the ability of schools as institutions to recognize children's initiatives. Based on the findings, we propose that the concept of micropolitics can be particularly useful in understanding why some modes of participation become difficult and stay hidden while others are easier to recognize.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 July 2023  
Accepted 15 April 2024

### KEYWORDS

Micropolitics; participation; ethnography; comprehensive school

## Introduction



Children's active participation has been promoted for quite some time in official policies, regulatory frameworks and school practices. This stems partly from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), in which children's right to participate is one of the core principles. This ideal has become an important part of the national political agendas of Nordic countries. They have strived to establish educational framework rooted in principles that emphasize democratic ideals and widespread children's participation in general, resting on fundamental virtues such as fairness and equality, highlighting the aspiration that education should encompass all children (Telhaug et al., 2006; see also Buchholtz et al., 2020). This study contributes to the discussion of children's participation in educational settings.

Although widely recognized, participation is also an elusive concept that can be understood in different ways in different contexts (e.g. Horgan et al., 2017; Perry-Hazan & Somech, 2023). Indeed, there is a danger that 'opacity' and loose definitions of participation may eventually lead to limited modes of participation that are, at the same time, 'passive or active, inclusive or exclusive, forced or voluntary; it may be an enabling and liberating force and thus empower, or it may be a restrictive force and

disempower' (Lund, 2007, p. 145; see also Raby, 2014), thus excluding certain children and modes of action (e.g. Kauhanen et al., 2023; Lanas and Brunila, 2019; Rautio et al., 2022).

In educational practice, participation typically refers to 'formal' practices and decision-making forms, such as class councils (e.g. Lelinge, 2011), other models of classroom democracy (e.g. Männistö & Moate, 2023; Raiker & Rautiainen, 2017). However, if restricted only to existing modes, we may overlook some important initiatives by children themselves (Luoma & Kosunen, 2024; Vandebroek and Bourverne De Bie, 2006). Therefore, in addition to the formal ways of participating, we need to also sensitize ourselves to non-linear and more surprising modes of participation and to the complex nexus of relations through which knowledge (Kraftl, 2020) and participation are formed (Tammi & Hohti, 2017). To dive more deeply into elusive – and maybe still unknown – modes of participation, we follow a line of research that focuses on children's political activity and considers opportunities to act not only democratically but also in ways that may not even exist yet (e.g. Kallio & Häkli, 2011; see also Grindheim, 2014; Paananen, 2017).

An illuminating example of what such political activity can look like can be seen in work by Millei

**CONTACT** Anna Kristiina Kokko  [annakristiina.kokko@uef.fi](mailto:annakristiina.kokko@uef.fi)  School of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education, University of Eastern Finland, Yliopistonkatu 2, Joensuu 80100, Finland

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et al. (2018). Using childhood memories as data, they suggested that children's actions on school premises can be political. Political activities became visible when the children interacted with an innocent-sounding but highly political object – a hair bow – that was sometimes required as part of a school uniform. By using or not using a bow, the children could align with or against the operational discourses of the school system. The children thus did not openly resist or oppose the formal school system; instead, their political activity was more indirect.

In line with this example, researchers have demonstrated that, when we take children's political activity seriously, we see that their activities are not restricted to their immediate environment, such as school decision making, but encompass larger and more complex local and global issues, such as nationality (Millei, 2019), urban communities (Horton & Kraftl, 2018) and climate change (Kraftl, 2020; Rajala, 2016). In this article, politics is understood as an activity that influences or aims to influence the distribution of resources (i.e. power, money or other material resources). These activities happen in dynamic relations between various socio-material actors; in other words, the political is not only about human actions but also the entanglements of human and nonhuman entities, such as plants, animals (Hohti & Tammi, 2019), snow piles (Rautio & Jokinen, 2015) and activity trackers (Paakkari et al., 2023).

We are particularly interested in how to identify and examine situations and things that are not only political but also mundane – that is, not easy to recognize as political in everyday situations. For this, we use Felix Guattari's concept of micropolitics and the closely related concepts of friction, molar and molecular. In the following sections, we introduce these concepts in more detail; then, using ethnographic data generated in two Finnish primary schools, we portray how these concepts help us to tease out not only the situations where children did not only engage to the obvious routines of the day, but also to the larger societal issues. We also point to how some events in which micropolitics occurred are 'smooth' – that is, easy to recognize in mundane school life – while others are 'sticky' and difficult to observe. We aim to illustrate how these concepts might widen the view of what can be considered as children's participation. This can enable teachers to better recognize the moments children make important initiatives related to issues that matter to them.

### **Micropolitics and friction in molar and molecular relations**

Micropolitics is a concept developed by Felix Guattari, Sweet, et al. (2009, 2009b) in his solo writings and in collaboration with Gilles Deleuze

(Deleuze et al., 1987) and Susan Rolnik (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). Typically, researchers have used Guattari's conceptualization of micropolitics to observe how certain actions do not fit neatly into the flow of events in institutional life and thus create the potential to transform the relations occurring in that context (e.g. Fairchild, 2019; Leppänen, 2020; see also Webb, 2008). Notably, micropolitical actions are embedded in the larger environment in which they occur, and the prefix 'micro' does not denote something limited in size or restricted to the actions of individuals. Instead, micropolitics describes a relational ontology that begins with very immediate, daily concerns yet still remains connected to what happens at the wider social and societal aspects (Guattari, 2009b). In other words, larger societal issues become visible locally in small events, and what happens in everyday situations is fundamentally interconnected with the wider environment.

To gain a more nuanced understanding of what actually happens in these local situations, we refined the concept of micropolitics using the related concepts of molecular and molar (Guattari, Sweet, et al., 2009, 2009b, 2016; see also Strom & Martin, 2017, pp. 59–78). For Guattari (2016), molar refers to rigidity or large-scale stability and order. For example, in school systems, there are elements that are molar and stable, such as laws or regulations. Molecular, in turn, refers to variety – mundane changes and variations – in everyday life, such as spontaneous actions of various types – saying 'good morning', for example, rather than 'hello' in otherwise identical situations. In other words, the molecular represents micropolitical potential – that is, a potential for change that is always ready to be activated in different situations, even if it ultimately remains dormant (Guattari, 2009b; see also Massumi, 2015). In the context of education, this might mean that, although we are seemingly free to choose how we greet others when we arrive at school, we are still bound by much more static cultural – molar – expectations of how we interact with each other in different spaces and places. In other words, although interaction can be predictable in molar situations, molecular interaction always brings instability and variability to those same situations. It 'constitutes instability relative to stable' (Lenz-Taguchi, 2013, p. 1105).

Although the concepts can be described separately, entities in the world cannot be divided into molar and molecular; rather, they are both present at the same time. A good example is the school system, which may appear to be a stable entity limited by laws and regulations but in reality, includes elements that vary. For example, Finnish education is highly decentralized, which means that municipalities have considerable autonomy to choose the organization of schoolwork, which thus brings variation to the school

system; that is, schooling does not look the same in all contexts within the country.

To recognize the micropolitics in mundane school life, we follow happenings that involve friction (see Tsing, 2005) Friction refers to situations in which two ‘surfaces’ rub against each other. An illuminating example of what this can look like is given by Kokko et al. (2023): a child hides behind a partition in a mundane classroom situation. Hiding behind a partition does not directly disrupt or resist any general instruction or situation, but it is still recognizable as rubbing against something – not aligning with the general code of school life (see also Blaise, 2013; Coleman & Ringstone, 2013; Mulcahy, 2014). In other words, while friction may include direct actions and suggestions, it does not have to be direct opposition, loud resistance or open fighting against the norms and codes of social life. In this example, the child does not directly oppose the conditions of classroom activities, even though such a conclusion could be reached by analysing and tracing the situation and environment in which the action occurs; that is, micropolitics can be seen by following the friction, which in turn allows us to grasp mundane and indirect situations.

### Ethnographic methodology

To investigate micropolitics in educational settings, we draw upon ethnographic methodology. Ethnography in general describes a holistic data production process in which the researcher(s), with the help of the participants, produce and collect various kinds of data (e.g. Gordon et al., 2001; see also Hall & Holmes, 2020). We also use socio-materiality as a lens to guide the researcher’s observations. Inspired by Anna Tsing’s (2015) work, this means mapping and monitoring socio-material events and asking ourselves what else might be associated with those moments – what happened before and how the events developed. It is therefore a process of knowledge co-creation that is affected by the power dynamics between the researchers and not only the environment but also the aims of the research and whatever emerges within their encounters.

The first author spent a school year divided between two medium-sized urban Finnish comprehensive schools – one in an area characterized by a socioeconomic status lower than the average of the municipality and the other in an area with less poverty among families with children than the Finnish average. Although the schools are located in rather different areas, both schools’ classrooms are inclusive and, at least to some extent, culturally and socioeconomically diverse. By engaging with two contexts, this study uses multi-site ethnography, which means that the observations are not of

continuous everyday life but are distributed more sporadically, focusing on individual days or periods of observation (Marcus, 1995; Niemi, 2015). Importantly, although we investigate two schools, the purpose here is not to compare them but rather to use the two contexts to analyse a wide range of circulating micropolitical potentials in different situations. In other words, we aim to treat the knowledge produced as situated in its contexts but at the same time to focus on the issues that flow within them. To protect the anonymity of the schools and the people involved, we do not name the schools or provide identifying details; instead, we refer to them as ‘Naava’ and ‘Nila’.

Both schools operate in flexible school facilities in which it is possible to adapt the larger physical space to suit activities, such as using partitions or moving tables. Although these kinds of spaces are not frequently encountered in Finland, they have become increasingly popular in school architecture (Saari, 2021). In schools with this type of architecture, two teachers typically work with a single class, so the number of children (38–45 in one classroom) is higher than is usually found in Finnish classes taught by a single teacher (a mean of 19.6 children per classroom; OECD, 2021). Schools also cater for smaller groups of children with special needs, operating in more enclosed school spaces and sometimes integrating activities into general education facilities.

As is common in these kinds of spaces, during the period of the study, the work of the teachers in grades 1–6 (children aged 6–12) in both schools was arranged so they could teach in pairs or teams. The children in each age group were therefore not divided into multiple classes but instead formed a single class, and two teachers thus had between 40 and 50 children in one class. Furthermore, four or five teachers could, at times, share responsibility for all the children in two age groups, bringing the total number of students in one ‘class’ to about 80. The teaching would then be arranged so that the teachers divided the larger group of children into smaller groups using different criteria.

### Procedure

Various kinds of data were produced throughout the research project. The main data source is the first author’s observations of everyday school life. To better understand what was happening in the mundane school life various kinds of supplementary data were also collected and produced: notes at staff meetings and daily meetings of principals with partners and stakeholders (such as municipal officials); photographs; national, school and municipal policy documents; and interviews, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with three principals and 31

teachers, including 11 from Naava School and 20 from Nila School. At each stage of the study, special attention was paid to the ethical recommendations of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012) and practical ethics. Only observations and general conversations in everyday classroom situations were documented. According to the committee's recommendations, when the purpose is to observe the everyday life of a school, municipalities or school principals grant research permits, and no separate ethical approval is required.

School staff, children and their parents were informed about the nature of the study, its objectives, the use of data, the voluntary nature of participation and the participants' right to withdraw from the study or exclude observations about themselves at any time and without explanation. It was specified that the children would not be officially interviewed or photographed during the year. In addition, all interviewed participants gave their written informed consent. In accordance with the code of conduct, we have been particularly careful about anonymization and the use of data. The examples presented here do not include details about the schools, and we have modified scenes and quotes to remove sensitive information that could compromise the anonymity of the persons concerned. In addition, all names presented in this study are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants.

### Analysis: mapping and tracing micropolitics

Tuning into the mundane requires two analytical strategies: mapping and tracing. In the current study, this meant focusing on the point where theory and the written ethnographic information intersected (Mazzei & McCoy, 2010, p. 504). The first stage of the analysis began with a careful reading of the ethnographic observation notes. The first author mapped out all the events where micropolitics could be identified. In this study, that meant moments that involved friction (Tsing, 2005). In the second phase of the analysis, there was a greater focus on friction itself and the specific question, 'How is friction formed and what does it open?' During this phase, the rest of the material (interviews, informal discussions, documents and photographs) was included in the analysis process. By analysing all the data, we gained a more comprehensive understanding of the overall formation and unfolding potential of the previously identified events.

Further examination of the events that involved friction required a detailed and comprehensive analysis of documents, photographs and interviews, which aided us in understanding the sociomaterial elements involved in the events. We used the concepts of molecular and molar to better understand

why, in some cases, friction was navigated smoothly while in others it was resolved less easily – that is, the events were stickier. To access the molecular aspects of the events that involved friction, we focused on the flow and on the more intense elements of the events, which in this study were transformative events. To identify the molar features of everyday life, we focused on everything that seemed more static. Eventually, as previously mentioned, two types of events in which micropolitics occurred emerged from the data: smooth and sticky.

### Micropolitics in smooth and sticky events

As a result of the analysis, we identified two types of events in which micropolitics occurred: smooth and sticky. In the first part, we talk about the smooth events and micropolitical actions within it focusing on the schools' everyday tasks and regular ways of participating. In such situations, the schools seemed to find it easy to provide opportunities for children to participate. However, we will also portray what happened when the children's initiatives rubbed up against (i.e. created friction with) more stable molar elements, such as social categories or decision making guided by numeric data – policies that affect school life more broadly. These events seemed to be sticky; notably, these moments were not as easy to recognize, nor was it easy to resolve the issues that arose within school practices.

### Micropolitics in smooth events

Micropolitics can be identified in the events in which the children's actions rubbed against specific classroom- and school-related issues during the school day. In general, these smooth, easily changeable events occurred when the children chose a working space or materials in their classes or participated in school-level decision making concerning, for example, the menu of the school canteen or how recycling is implemented in the school. Shared within all these situations is that the children's actions were rather direct: they either verbalized their intentions and justified their suggestions or their physical actions made their point clear.

One vignette that illuminates what micropolitics in smooth events looks like happened on an ordinary school day:

The lesson is coming to an end. Teachers begin to give the children homework. The children remind the teachers of the agreed homework policy. The teachers nod to the children and confirm, 'the new homework policy is in place'. After class, the teacher clarifies this situation to the researcher; she explains how it all started at recess, when the children negotiated taking turns using the popular skipping rope.



When the teacher asked the children about the rules being negotiated, the children said that they agreed that it depended on how well they could jump. In practice, this meant that children who found jumping difficult had more 'tries' to accomplish the jumping task. They were thus building what the teacher called 'fair play rules'. Later that day, the same kind of discussion emerged with respect to homework. The teacher first gave the same homework to all the children. The children reminded her of what happened in the school yard and suggested that the teachers should use the same 'fair play rules' – that is, give less homework to children for whom reading is hard.

In this situation, the micropolitics and molecular aspects of it became visible through the friction in which the children point out the 'problem of fairness' in classroom policy and proposing a new way to allocate homework. It is important to see here that the children's actions in this situation direct: they directly and verbally expressed their concerns about fairness in homework practices. Furthermore, as we can see from the vignette, micropolitics that occurred in smooth events rarely entailed formal suggestions in classroom situations. Quite contrary, it was rather common in these situations that the friction began informally, as was seen when the children negotiated turns with the skipping rope. In this case, the new practices were developed before later being spread to formal school practices – specifically, practices related to homework.

The molar in this situation can be seen in two elements. Firstly, molar discourses on learning can be seen in the way in which the children referred to fairness based on how easy reading might be for each child: that is, each child should do the same things in school. This is reified, for example, in the curriculum guidelines and the objectives that are set to provide criteria for children's learning. Secondly, molar can be seen in the rather stable structure of homework itself. Even though, in Finland, teachers typically have the authority to decide homework policy, the practice of issuing homework is typically rather unquestioned. Furthermore, the way in which the children could quite freely take a stand on issues related to learning activities in schools was regularly discussed between the teachers and in staff and teacher team meetings. Thus, micropolitics in situations like this was well recognized and even cherished in the schools, creating the potential for them to be activated. Notably, the molar' in this situation might have related to school policy, if the context had been slightly different, but in this instance, the friction was in relation to classroom policy.

In other words, although molar aspects were involved, potential often activated to actual changes in practice. In other words, the environment was responsive to the emerging friction, and the teacher was easily able to recognize and implement the children's suggestion. Thus, here micropolitics occurred in somewhat smooth

events; responses to the friction can often be easily enacted with small changes, and the potential within the micropolitical situation can be realized as actual change.

### *Micropolitics in sticky events*

In this section, we portray what happened in the situations in which potential did not produce change; in other words, the events to which micropolitics entangled were stickier. In contrast to micropolitics in smooth events, when it comes to micropolitics in sticky events, the friction is related to more difficult or complex issues, such as the socioeconomic status of families, the activities children usually do in their free time or, more generally, to larger policies. Thus, they relate to molar – stabilized – ways of doing things within the school and to molar issues beyond the school.

Moreover, in these sticky events, the children's actions that rubbed against different surfaces were often indirect, and the children rarely verbalized the issues against the surface on which the friction occurred. Similarly, the environment was unresponsive to these indirect actions. Thus, these situations were not easy to recognize and required different ways of identifying political activity. Put differently, focusing on the friction that occurs at the intersection of children's indirect actions and large and molar societal issues helps us to recognize children as a part of political activity, and sensitizing ourselves to frictions allows us to politicize these issues. To illustrate what micropolitics in sticky events look like, we provide three vignettes.

First, we delve into situation in which micropolitics occurred when the children's actions rubbed against not-so-visible molar formal educational politics – in this case, the numbers used in decision making and the spaces in which education is arranged. Importantly, although these policies appear to be local, they are connected to more molar trends in policies, such as governing by numbers. The following vignette illustrates such situation:

The children, the teachers and Mikko (the teaching assistant) are about to begin a lesson. The teacher asks the children to move to their own places. Veera looks at her backpack and has a worried expression on her face. The teacher starts the morning activities and asks Mikko if he can go to help Veera. Mikko usually works with another group but is with Veera's group today because, a few weeks earlier, after it was decided that more adults were needed in this group, Mikko's job description was changed to encompass several classes rather than just one. In a friendly tone, Mikko asks Veera if he can help her in any way, but she retreats to another part of the class. When the teacher asks Veera why she did not answer Mikko's question, she replies, 'I didn't realise he was the adult in our class. They are never the same'.

As we see from the vignette, Veera first retreated – an indirect action – from a situation in which the school's practices required her to be flexible in cooperating with an adult she did not know. Here, we have the first signs of friction: the child decides not to cooperate with an adult she does not know. At the same time, defining who can be part of the classroom (and who cannot) creates a category in which only some people are included. Later, when Veera verbally (but still indirectly) expressed discomfort using hyperbole, stating that the adults 'are never the same', we can get closer to the surface at which this friction is taking place. Thus, as is typical for micropolitics that occurred in sticky events, understanding the surfaces at which the friction is rubbing against demands that we trace the situation further. We therefore return to the events of a few weeks earlier:

The teachers in Veera's class told the principal that more adults were needed in Veera's class. The principal explained to the researcher how 'the resources are tight, and extra help is not easy to arrange'. In the following days, the principal spent time on this problem; by reviewing various documents – legal requirements, the working hours of the teaching assistants and the number of children recognised as having difficulties engaging in school activities – the principal was able to reorganise the daily schedule of the teaching assistants so that Mikko could also spend a few hours in Veera's classroom. Consequently, Mikko, who usually works in another grade, started to work with Veera's class as well.

According to the school's principal, the decision to distribute Mikko's working hours more broadly was related to legislation intended to ensure support for the individual needs of each child (Basic Education Act, 1998/628, §3). The principal gathered this information from the documented numbers of children who, according to the principal's knowledge, 'needed support for participating in school activities'. In addition, the distribution of working hours was related to the need to conserve resources, which was materialized by a prohibition on hiring substitutes. Thus, decisions were made using numerical information related to Mikko's working hours and the number of students in need of additional support. However, although according to the principal the intention was to act in the children's best interests (i.e. to get more adults and thus support in the classroom), this resulted in Mikko's working hours being divided between multiple locations. Mikko therefore did not spend much time in any one classroom, which meant that the children were expected to trust and cooperate with an adult they did not know. Thus, the surface against which the child's actions rubbed in this case was formed from larger policies related to the use of numerical data in school decision making.

Another vignette illustrates how micropolitics can be related to larger molar developments of physical spaces in schools. The vignette begins with the children, teachers, teaching assistant and researcher walking to the classroom:

The children observe the spaces while walking and begin casually discussing the 'school of adults'. When the children are asked what they mean by that, they respond with counter-questions: 'Are you seeing us here somewhere? Or is it fancy spaces?' At that point, it is not entirely clear what the children mean. Later, the researcher notices that the children are running, holding drawings they have made. When asked about the drawings and running, they say that, in this way, the drawings can be seen.

(they are typically placed in the children's personal lockers)

The first signs of friction can be seen at the point at which the children explicitly refer to the 'school of adults' and how they cannot be 'seen' in those spaces. Their drawings then demonstrate that the school is not just for adults. To understand this situation, we need to back up a little and talk about the spaces in these schools. Although children's drawings are commonly hung on school walls, in this case, the drawings were in the children's own lockers, partly because of the lack of walls and partly because the walls, whether permanent or movable, were built with materials with soundproofing or other special features and to which paper could not be attached. Such echo-preventing materials, though crucial for schoolwork, prevent the hanging of objects, like children's drawings or commonly used plastic letters and numbers. New ways of presenting the children's drawings must therefore be devised.

Returning to the vignette, we can now understand that the children's actions rubbed against a molar policy of space that resulted in them having no say in what the spaces looked like and whether their own work was displayed. One teacher explained it in the following way:

I have been thinking about this. ... During those times when we got a chance to have the pictures on the wall, we kind of ... I noticed how, through their drawings and paintings, the [younger] children usually talked about their lives in a positive manner. I mean, it is good to remember that how we speak about these neighbourhoods is just a general view for this area.

Here, we can see that the children's actions also rubbed against the molar aspects of their neighbourhoods, in which they enjoyed playing, and of the activities they pursued in their free time but which, in adult terms, were categorized as difficult.

The final example concerns sticky events in which the children's indirect micropolitical actions rub directly against molar categories related to broad

societal structures. This was often seen in mundane situations related mainly to social class, particularly the requirement for the children to divulge their free-time activities or plans for the future, as we see in the following vignette:

Hanna (the teacher) asks the children to sit in their places as she starts the lesson. The children are instructed to write about 'what you would wish for if you could wish for absolutely anything'. Hanna instructs the children to begin and goes around the classroom helping those who, in her words, 'usually need help getting started with work'. Onni sits in his own place and covers his writing with his hand. When the children seem to have finished their writing, Hanna asks them to form groups and share their wishes with each other. Onni does not go to a group and avoids contact with the other children. He wanders around the class, eventually ending up back in his own place. At this point, Hanna notices that Onni hasn't finish the assignment. Despite Hanna's requests, he refuses to complete the assigned task. Hanna asks Onni to stay after class. After class, Hanna talks to Onni about why he did not follow the instructions. After a period of silence, Onni throws a notebook at Hanna and runs outside for playtime. Hanna looks at the book and tells me [the researcher] that Onni wrote that he wishes his family had money.

Here, friction occurred when Onni, through his silent actions, refused to share his writing with the other children. The task taken from the book being used in the classroom seems, at first glance, to provide an opportunity for the children to play an active and creative role. At first, Onni followed the instructions and wrote down his wishes. However, when the demand for social sharing became part of the scenario, he refused to share his thoughts with his classmates; that is, friction emerged. The other clear sign of friction can be seen when Onni threw his book at the teacher. We can interpret from this that he did not want to share his wish (i.e. money for his family) with the other children. However, the potential to perform the task in another way had already passed unnoticed; that is, the friction was not recognized at the time, and the potential for change in the situation was not realized.

Most of the situations relating to micropolitics in sticky events in our data were, at least at first, somewhat difficult to recognize. In other words, situations within this thread either passed by without receiving much attention or were interpreted as misbehaviour. Thus, the potential in these situations was not usually activated nor did it cause a change in practices. However, although the situations may have been difficult to notice, they were not necessarily things that were unchangeable. For example, after noticing that the physical space demands

special consideration of the placement of the children's drawings, the principal of one of the schools allocated money to creating solutions to display the children's artwork. That is, the situations were noticeable but in a very different manner to the micropolitics in smooth events.

## Conclusive discussion

In this article, we have dwelt upon and delved into the mundane and seemingly insignificant events that connect to, but also go beyond, existing participatory pedagogical agendas, such as the class council (see also Kallio & Häkli, 2011; Luoma & Kosunen, 2024; Millei & Kallio, 2018). We in particular contribute to the earlier research that has emphasized the importance of acknowledging such everyday politics, including children's political activity, which begins from the children's own starting points and is constructed from their influence on larger societal issues (e.g. Horton & Kraftl, 2018; Kraftl, 2020; Millei & Kallio, 2018; Millei & Lappalainen, 2023). We complement this body of research with Guattari's (2009a, 2009b, 2016) concept of micropolitics and the related concepts of molar and molecular). The concepts were particularly useful for noticing why some situations were more open to children's participation than others.

Our analysis suggests that micropolitical often occurs in smooth events – that is, events that are open to change. These situations were easy to recognize as children could take part in decision-making processes in mundane school life. However, some situations in which the children acted to influence things that were important to them were stickier and more difficult to recognize. In other words, although some initiatives and participation were directed towards activities that changed the everyday life of the school, other kinds of potential participation remained unactivated. Micropolitics in smooth events occurred when children's activities rubbed against surfaces related to ordinary tasks in classrooms or against formal aspects of school-level activities, and the molar in these situations therefore related to formal decision making in the schools and classrooms, with much more room for molecular movement within such molar school-related categories. Importantly, in these smooth events, the teachers and school principals recognized them and could modify existing formal practices or structures by negotiating with the children regarding how things could be done in the future (see also Männistö & Moate, 2023; Tammi, 2017).

In contrast, micropolitics that occurred in sticky events are much more difficult to recognize in mundane school life. We saw how children's molecular



activities rubbed against stable molar societal issues, such as the wider national or municipal level policies followed in the schools (see also Paananen, 2019, Siippainen et al., 2023) or the socioeconomic hierarchies in society (see also Fox & Alldred, 2022; Oittinen et al., 2022; Vandenbroek & Bouverne-de Bie, 2006). Thus, in those situations, the molar categories extended beyond the school walls to wider educational policies and socio-political issues. In contrast to micropolitics in smooth events, children did not purposefully or seemingly try to influence national or municipal policymaking.

Therefore, concept of micropolitics can also bring to light molar aspects that create hierarchies in everyday school life and may be hidden in plain sight. Although societal molar issues may not be entirely solvable in school and given place and time, by sensitizing ourselves to such issues, we can deal with them in mundane school life (see also Hannus, 2018; Luoma & Kosunen, 2024). In other words, the concept of micropolitics offers us the opportunity to identify situations that are difficult to talk about or in which there may not even be words to deal with the issues at hand.

Overall, the concept of micropolitics changed the way we see children's participation. It shifts the focus from verbally expressed, arranged or otherwise already known ways of participation towards sensitivity to moments that may have the potential for change but could easily go entirely unnoticed. In this way, we could engage with and contribute to the wider discussion of 'rethinking the means of participation to better respond to children's ways of being and knowing' (Rautio et al., 2022, p. 777; see also Skelton, 2008). Moreover, the notion of stickiness is useful because if we take it seriously, we scholars, teachers, principals and policymakers are enabled and forced to slow down – to stick with the event. In doing so, we might better identify moments that matter to children. This allows widening our perspectives on participation, particularly the possibilities for having influence and getting one's point heard.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Funding

This work was supported by the OLVVI-Säätiö [201820042].

### ORCID

Anna Kristiina Kokko  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0907-7413>

Maiju Paananen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1072-1923>

Laura Hirsto  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8963-3036>

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