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"Doing nothing all over again" - children's occupational participation in residential homes

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Introduction: Research shows that children living in residential homes develop slower than their peers and leave school with a significant lower education than children growing up within their own families and that these children seem to lack needed occupational competence when they reach adulthood.

Objectives: From an occupational therapy perspective development and learning takes place through engagement and participation in occupations throughout life. It therefore becomes important to look at how everyday occupations are being facilitated and supported in school, at home and in the children's recreational time.

Methods: The method used is action research, using participatory observations, interview and informal talk. The data were processed using a hermeneutic approach. In this paper the results from mainly one child is used.

Results: The child is understood as vulnerable and with a great need for care. Everyday life is focused on treating the child and helping it to gain a psychological understanding of the past. Almost all time is spent in the presence of an adult. The child is rarely asked to participate in everyday occupations but at the same time he is met with restrictions, eg. not being allowed to make his own arrangements with peers.

Conclusion: The possibility for development and learning through participating in everyday occupations seems not to be recognized by the professionals, who in order to care for and protect the child take responsibility for carrying out many of the child's everyday occupations. The child is thereby deprived from engaging in relevant occupations and peer participation.