Process report

The golden age group

*Experts in teamwork, spring 2013, NTNU.*

*Childhood village*

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Children be heard

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*”No man is an island, entire of itself.”* John Donne

# Introduction

In any organisation, group work is inevitable, but also necessary for effective functioning of the particular organisation and society at large. Much as conflict, disagreement and differences most likely arise in the working process of the group, it is how members learn to resolve them and in the end achieve their aims and goals that are paramount. To effectively prepare its students for work life, NTNU, through Experts in teamwork (hereafter: EiT), facilitates an environment through which students work in groups, acquire skills and gain experience in dealing with diversity of academic disciplines, personality, cultures and even nationality. The Rector, commenting on the aims and benefits of EiT in the *Book of Reflections* (p. 3)writes,

*People with teamwork qualities are on demand in the working world. Success with complex tasks depend on effective cooperation....Teamwork skills help to realise the full benefits of the team members collective knowledge.*

This report will deal with group development in the group “The Golden Age” of the Childhood village, a village of EiT in the spring 2013. The report will start by shortly looking at different views of what a group actually is. Thereafter the group members will be presented, one by one. The individual presentations will say something about age, academic background and how the members look upon themselves in a teamwork situation – before going through the three weeks of EiT. These presentations are included so we are more able to show what prerequisites each member had both for the academic topic of work and also group/team work. This will make the conflicts and misunderstandings in the group situation easier to understand while reading the process report. Also we choose to include this personal information in the beginning so that each member can reflect on their learning outcome at the end of the report. This is to clarify one of the goals of EiT: “The student will gain insight into how his or her behaviour and attitude can influence teamwork”[[1]](#footnote-1), and to see whether the individuals in the group have gained new insight or not.

The main part of the report is called development. This is where different situations from the teamwork are presented. We have chosen to present three main situations that we feel have been some of the most important for the group, for the development and for the understanding of the teamwork process. In addition to presenting these main situations we will, where it is natural, include references to similar situations that have occurred, to give a broader picture of the teamwork in terms of whether we have experienced similar situations and behaved differently in them, and hence reflect more deeply upon our experiences.

The situations will be presented using the SiTRA-model we have learned through the EiT course. This model includes situation, theory, reflection and action. All of these four factors will be part of the development-presentations. Also we will evaluate the actions to see whether it was followed through or not, and if it changed things for the better.

The report will be rounded off with final remarks and reflections. Here we reflect individually, and use the initial presentation to see if we have developed as individuals in a group situation, and whether our competences have come to use. We will also reflect upon the group as a whole, and its development.

# What is a group?

Johnson and Johnson (2006) focus on groups as something universal and inevitable; we are always a part of a group. They say that our family life, leisure time, friendships and careers all consist of groups. In other words; “*Who* we are depends on *where* we are” (Hylland Eriksen 2005, our italics), because sometimes we define ourselves by gender, sometime by age, occupation, where we live etc. These are both very wide definitions of, or ways to view, groups.

Expert in teamwork is more specifically about a different kind of group. First of all it’s a small group. The typical EiT group is a unit “composed of two or more persons who come into contact for a purpose and who consider the contact meaningful” (Mills 1967), and therefore it is a group where the members wish to achieve a goal together, like making an EiT project. The EiT group can also be classified as one where the members are interdependent, meaning that what affects one individual affects the whole group (Lewin 1951; Johnson and Johnson 2006). Further on a typical EiT group is based on motivation; the individuals try to satisfy personal needs through a joint association, and also it is based on structured relationships where the interaction is structured by a set of roles and norms (through for example cooperation agreements and such, as will be written about in this report) (Johnson and Johnson, 2006).

It is important to note that a group is not where individuals are present at the same time without collaborating or working towards a common goal, as these are called aggregates and pseudo-groups (op.cit:8).

# Short presentation

## Berit

Berit is a master student in art history at NTNU. She has also studied fine art at Oslo National Academy of the Arts. She has studied pedagogics at the University of Oslo, and has worked both as an art teacher in high school for several years and as a museum educator. The combination of writing something on the topic “the presentation of children in fine arts” for her master in art history, and being a mother herself, made her curious about the Childhood Village. She had a wish to contribute with her experience with working with children both in school and at an art museum, and might also contribute with some different perspectives, thinking both as an artist, teacher and mother, and so being familiar with the visual language through her background.

## Fridah

Fridah, a parent and teacher in secondary school in her home country, is a master’s student at Norwegian Centre for Childhood Studies (NOSEB). Her academic background as a teacher is in pedagogy, social science, biology and language. Her current study deals with the sociology of children and how children can be incorporated as active members of their society. By especially being in the Childhood Village, Fridah feels that it is important to consider children as humans with rights to be respected and therefore their voices and views should be considered in decisions and policies that are made on matters that affect them. This is in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 principle of participation and taking the “best interest of the child”. (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003:151). She brings to the group, knowledge in research methodology with, getting their perspectives and how these relate to the topic on children’s physical health. She also believes social sciences equip her to understand diversity and respect for members’ perspectives in the group process.

## Tadiwos

## Furqan

Muhammad Furqan is 27 years old and comes from Pakistan. He is doing a master in molecular medicine from Norwegian University of Science & Technology. He has educational background of Pharmacy as he did Doctor of Pharmacy from Pakistani University in his bachelor degree so he has a strong Educational background related to Drug use, control, Preparation, storage and overall he is the “Drug Expert”. After completion of this degree he worked in a Multinational Pharmaceutical Industry and in Pharmacy store for 2 years where he was in direct contact with the patients regarding their medication and prescription handling.

He felt that he could contribute with his competences to project work on the theory part, because of his medical background he could find out about and write about obesity prevalence. By using his professional skills he knows how to work in a group. He is good in presenting unique ideas. He also has the courage to talk against any point if he feels that it is not good and explain his point of view regarding that point within the group irrespective of whether the idea is good or bad.

## Christina

Christina is 22 years old, comes from Norway, and is doing a master degree in Molecular medicine. Her previous academic background includes a bachelor degree in Biomedical Science from an English university, as well as sports science from high school. From her academic background she felt that sports science would be the most useful in relation to the topic of the village “children and physical health”. She also felt that she could contribute to the group when it comes to the molecular understanding of the body in relation to physical health, and in the understanding of how diseases may be related to physical activity (or the lack of it) in children. After living three years in England she also felt that she could contribute with good communication in English, both in the writing of reports and oral communication within the group. Looking at Johnson and Johnson’s (2006) criteria for self-diagnosis in group dynamics she felt that her position is usually a followers position, where she contribute to conversations and discussions, but usually do not have a leader role, as well as rarely facing conflict with other group members.

## Tina Louise

Tina is 24 years old, from Norway, and is doing an MA in Scandinavian language and literature. She has an academic background in cultural studies, as well as in language and communication plus literature. She felt that from her academic competence she could especially bring the cultural understanding, and her knowledge about communication and writing into the group/project. With this she would be able to understand different people, to do written assignments and to apply her knowledge in communication both to communicating with the informants and to write good reports. In accordance to Johnson and Johnson’s (2006) criteria for self-diagnosis in group dynamics, she felt that she was always behaving like a leader, and rarely facing conflicts with other group members. In addition, she felt like she seldom or never facilitated communication, but rather advocated her views in a too pushy way.

# Development

## Situation 1

*”Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers”.* Voltaire

On day 8 all the groups in the village got a group task related to roles. We were each given a schema with six different statements on it, and the purpose was to give grades to each member of the group according to which extent we felt the statements applied to the specific person. We also had to give grades to ourselves. The values we could use for grading were from 0 to 9, where 0 was “not at all” and 8 was “a lot”. After writing the grades down, we discussed each statement and gave reasons for our assessment. Defining or clarifying roles like we did in this exercise is a part of looking at group structure. Group structure can be easily defined as the way group members act and relate to each other (Tuckman and Jensen 1977).

There was a consensus within the group that everyone was anxious both to give and receive grades, because the statements were quite personal. Therefore we saw this assignment as related to, and a development of a task we had gotten previously; discussing Schwarz’ (2002) ground rules for group work. During that task we had to explain which of the ground rules we personally felt was most challenging. Almost everyone chose the same one; Christina, Berit, Tadiwos and Fridah felt ground rule 8 was very challenging; “Discussing undiscussable issues”. Furqan and Tina also agreed that this was challenging, although they chose other rules as even more challenging; Furqan chose ground rule 2 (Share all relevant information) and Tina chose number 4 (explain your reasoning and intent).

With the task about giving grades, the group felt we had to push ourselves to discuss undiscussable issues, and so we looked upon this exercise as developing ourselves according to our biggest challenges in group work. Among the reasons for finding this challenging, were that discussing such issues could hurt others (Tadiwos), that it was difficult to present one’s views in a good manner (Fridah) and that it could create room for conflict (Christina). Everyone therefore had their challenges to work with once we started the task of discussing and grading the others’ personality and contribution to the group.

Both Fridah and Berit mentioned that they were anxious to be graded, in case there was a big gap between the grade they gave themselves and the one they received. Fridah put it this way:

*“You might find out your self-perception is different from how others see you. There is always a possibility that you either over- or underrate yourself.” (*Group reflection, day 8).

There were some incidents of what they feared. For example on the statement “Assumes leadership, has a major influence on the groups’ direction and activities”, Fridah gave herself the value 6 (some), while Tina rated her 0 (not at all). The reasoning was given afterwards (following Schwarz’ 2002 ground rules) and helped clarify the gap. Fridah felt what she said during working with the project was taken into consideration of the group, and thus that she had an influence. Tina had interpreted the statement as to whether the person had a demand to be heard, which she didn’t think Fridah had. On the other hand she did agree to that Fridah had an influence when she said something, and so the reasoning proved to be very important for avoiding misunderstandings. Tadiwos agreed to this, and said that “the numbers were useless without explanation” (group reflection, day 8). Wheelan (2009) says it’s common for all groups that it only takes a short time before the communication patterns of the group is set; this meaning who talks a lot (or gets to talk a lot), who gets more attention, who talks to whom, and so on. She explains that once a person is assigned a position in this communication pattern, it’s hard to break out of it. Our group clearly fits in to this, as also this task showed; some group members got a high score in talking a lot/getting or taking a lot of attention, while others got a low score. But for us it was not a completely suitable description that it was frowned upon to try breaking one’s place in the pattern; an example is that both Tadiwos and Fridah were encouraged to take more attention because the group wanted to hear more of their good ideas. Thus they were encouraged to break out of their place in the communication pattern.

There can also be difficulties in this grading due to expectations of behaviour. Johnson and Johnson (2006) explain that “once a rule is assumed, (…), the members is expected (by other group members) to behave in certain ways”. It means that the group could perceive a member in a certain way and hence expect a certain behaviour, while this member has perceived his/her role or personality in a different way, and so a conflict is created between expectations of a certain behaviour and the actual behaviour. For example it revealed through this task that the group members gave Christina a generally high score for the claim “Assuming leadership”, and so expected her as a leader to behave in a certain way that is connected to this particular role. Christina gave herself a high value for this as well, but as she normally doesn’t assume a leader role she was unsure of how the others would describe her. She was pleased that she perceived herself in the same way as the rest of the group did.

Furqan was nervous that this task might create disturbance within the group. This can be because as Schwartz (2002) said : “We may be assuming that others will get defensive, we may be feeling defensive ourselves, and we may believe strongly that we know what the truth is”. Christina agreed to this statement as she felt it’s easy to get defensive if someone criticises her. Still both Furqan and Christina felt the experience was overall good, because he got to see himself in the eyes of the others, and he would now be able to focus on the areas he was not good at. This was generally what the group members felt, several members said explicitly that they now had good pointers as to which qualities about themselves to emphasize more, and which qualities they could work on to improve.

At the same time we discovered that according to Tuckman’s (1965) description of different stages in small groups, we had come quite far, what roles are concerned. Tuckman’s third stage, “norming”, is the one where new standards evolve and new roles are adopted (1965). This was just what we were doing, as the roles and contributions of each member were both defined and developed through discussing them in the group.

All in all, the group felt that the common experience was; it is no longer so scary to discuss undiscussable issues, and we learned that everyone in the group has the ability to handle feedback given in this manner. This proved Fridah's point as mentioned earlier; the important thing is not which issue you want to discuss, but in which manner you do so. Through this group task, all the members got good practise in expressing their views in a proper way that wouldn’t insult others, and in addition learned to deal with problems instead of blaming someone or something for the problem, as described by Wheelan (2009). In our group we learned that the problems could arise because someone see themselves different than how others perceive them, for example. According to Wheelan (2009) that is how one should be working to be an effective group member, because one should look out for blaming others for problems without trying to see how oneself also contributes to it. An example of this is if we graded Christina (the group leader) low on number 1 “assuming leadership”, and felt that she should be taking more responsibility, we should tell her instead of thinking “Our meetings are a waste of time. I wish the leader were stronger” (op.cit.). Exactly for the reasons mentioned above, the group felt the task was useful.

Because this exercise turned out to be so useful in terms of learning more about how one is seen by others and also clarifying which role one has in the group, we decided on doing this kind of thing more frequently. This was also due to that we were more comfortable about discussing undiscussable issues. We agreed to discuss undiscussable issues more openly, to prevent the group from getting into a situation where information is withheld and thus effects the performance of the entire team (Schwarz 2002). In addition to this we also felt that by feeling safer within the group, was easier to adopt a more flexible role; for example by both assuming leadership and at the same time having the ability to be submissive from time to time. By internalising more flexible roles and trust we agreed that it was easier to channel the group energy into our tasks (mainly our project), as described by Tuckman (1965).

As mentioned, we also encouraged Fridah and Tadiwos to speak up and take more attention, because the group felt they had a lot of good ideas and smart contributions that we didn’t want to overlook. This could in fact help the group performance as a whole, as this performance suffers if contributions from one or several members are overlooked (Wheelan 2009).

“When all members take responsibility to ensure that everyone is heard from and that they are all clear about and comfortable with their roles, the chances of group success increase” (Wheelan 2009:60). Taking this action meant for us as a side effect that we were really working towards our goal as stated in the cooperation agreement, point 3: “Goals: We agreed that our aim for the mark is a minimum of B, and to put the time, work, and effort required to achieve a high mark”.

When it comes to the action of not being uncomfortable by discussing undiscussable issues, we got to test this during a group exercise on day 12. There we were to give feedback to each other on which cooperation qualities we could improve and which ones we should keep. *“Several group members have previously expressed that this is something they have problems doing, and this was a good opportunity to do so in a good manner, where everyone were open and honest, also when it came to receiving constructive criticism from others.”* (group reflection, day 12). As is expressed here, the group felt this task was a good way of giving feedback, and reading further in the group reflection from this day one can see that the group members mostly felt it was quite easy to talk about these issues in these encouraging surroundings – meaning that we had developed our abilities in discussing undiscussable issues since the last task and during the whole EiT-programme. Another development was that during the last mentioned feedback task, it became clear that several of the group members had improved on some skills that were pointed out in the grading task, which was also the action we wanted to take.

## Situation 2

*”I love argument, I love debate. I don’t expect anyone just to sit there and agree with me, that’s not their job”.* Margaret Thatcher

For the next situation we are looking at the production of the cooperation agreement, which was done on day 2 (first day with the group). We will also look at the revision of the agreement after a week of working together in the group, to underline development and changes of group dynamics.

In the making of the cooperation agreement we had to agree on all point as a group. The cooperation agreement consists of a set of rules or norms. Norms are, as described by Johnson and Johnson (2006), rules established by groups to regulate the behaviour of all members, and describe the group’s common belief regarding appropriate behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions for its members. Furqan was positively surprised when he learned that we were making a cooperation agreement. This was because he has had positive experiences with these kinds of agreements in previous group work settings. He believed that the agreement would unite the group in a good way. He also believed it would help us later during our professional lives. Tadiwos in the other side, had never made a cooperation agreement like this before, and was unsure what to contribute with, and how to proceed.

As the group was newly formed, and we didn’t know each other, several group members were unsure about how this would go. The group quickly agreed upon points such as meeting time, absence, what group roles were necessary etc. for the agreement. The group roles specified in the agreement were the group leader (Christina) and a secretary (rotation throughout the project). Tina believed that much of what was written in the agreement was obvious and unnecessary. She therefore felt that this was a situation where she “gave more than she took”, as she did not feel this was important. Berit stressed that it was important to keep up the spirit and work in a good atmosphere, as she felt everyone agreed this team work was going to be hard work for three weeks.

The group agreed that the group leader’s role would not be to be in charge of the project/process or make important decisions, but simply be the person to contact if group members were coming late, if they were sick, or knew there were times they would not be able to meet the group as agreed upon. All members agreed that the responsibility for the project and its progress should be equal amongst all the group members. Tina stated that she would like to not be the group leader, as this is a role she would usually have. She therefore felt that to challenge herself, and learn from the EiT experience, she would take a different role in the group. Christina, who felt that the leader role would challenge her as this is not a role she would usually take, agreed to take the group leader role. As everyone in the group had equal responsibilities for the group progress, she felt this would be a manageable task.

Most of the time making the cooperation agreement was spent discussing how to handle a conflict, should it arise. We reflected upon why this might be, and agreed that a possibility might be because of the different backgrounds, as we in the group have different nationalities, genders, academic background, ages, etc. The different backgrounds might give different views on one question, and the question of how to handle conflicts seemed to evoke many different opinions among the group members. Tadiwos thought that due to our different backgrounds we have different ways of expressing ourselves, and this may be a cause of misunderstandings, and hence cause further discussion. He was right and an example of this was seen on day 3, when we were making the questionnaire: “A lot of time was spent arguing on the nature of the question and how it was to be phrased. Cultural differences also arose on the understanding of organised sports and the unorganised” (for the whole situation see appendix 1 day 3). The discussion went on for a long time, but was easily solved once Furqan and Tina (The people discussing) both explained what they meant with the words, and how they were used in the two different cultures. This is also Wheelan’s (2009) advise; “when you don’t understand what is going on, ask questions until you do”.

In chapter 10, “*Valuing diversity”*, in Johnson and Johnson (2006) it is discussed how diversity affects groups, and how member diversity can be made a strength. One of the main points here is to “create a superordinate group identity that unites the diverse personal identities of the group members, and is based on a pluralistic set of values”. For our situation the making of the cooperation agreement ensured that we all had the same set of values concerning this project, and writing this should minimize any confusing around this theme in the group. We are all working towards a common goal using everyone’s different competences, and hence we are all under the same superordinate group identity. Johnson and Johnson (2006) also state how clarifying miscommunication is important to make diversity a strength. Our group have experienced how important this is in some situations. The situation about organised and unorganised sport (see above) is suitable as an example again. This shows how language confusion caused difficulties within the group. We learned from this that it is important to communicate in a clear way and explain the meaning of important words. This also relates to Schwarz (2002) ground rules for effective groups, rule number three: “use specific examples and agree upon what important words mean”, by that all members must have the same understanding of the word to make an informed decision on the same basis as the other members.

The discussion about decision making and conflict solving in the cooperation agreement was solved when Furqan suggested making a flowchart with a series of steps that would be followed in order to solve conflict and discussions. All team members agreed to this, as their ideas were also heard, and the flowchart steps were a combination of several ideas. Fridah was still a bit unsure about the democratic way we decided on for solving discussions (see appendix 2). She expressed worry that people might just follow what the majority of the group means, but do not really agree to it (surface agreement). If this occurred she was worried that the people not getting their way would lose interest and motivations, and hence slow down the progress of the group.

By making a flowchart in this way we managed to solve the conflict by combining several different ideas. This early discussion, or small conflict, could have been seen as a negative experience for the group. However, we managed to turn the situation around to something positive. It turned to a positive experience as we learned that by talking about, and discussing a specific topic of disagreement, we could solve it in a good manner, meeting all or most group member’s suggestions. We saw that by discussing and trying to see the issue from other points of view, we could all agree upon a solution in the end. This was a great experience for all the members of the group so early in the process as we learned that cooperation is not always give and take, but by using reasoning and explanation we can all agree upon a solution. This wisdom was great to obtain so early in the process, because the diversity of the group will most likely lead to different views on a range of issues.

Action to take from this situation included to keep up the good level of communication during discussions, as this gave us a good experience of accomplishment on this first day of cooperation in the group. We also agreed that keeping in mind that communication may cause misunderstandings is important, and that important words must be explained. The members tried hard to fulfill this action, and Tina later mentioned she felt she had learned a lot from this experience and also tried to carry out the good communication. For example she felt that she got better at remembering how the members came from different academic backgrounds, so she kept in mind that she should ask if those from social science agreed to, and understood, her way of thinking. Also for Furqan it was pointed out later (during the feedback task on day 12) that he was very good at explaining his way of thinking and hence communicating in an open and understandable way. We could therefore conclude that the action of good communication was carried out in a quite satisfying way in our group.

Johnson and Johnson (2006) states that: “Norms cannot be imposed on a group. Instead, they develop out of the interaction among group members”. However, as we got the task of writing the cooperation agreement (containing the group norms) on the first day of group cooperation, the norms we wrote were in a way imposed on the group as a whole. There was no way for us to know how the group would develop through interactions throughout the process. And maybe for this reason, we got a chance to review it on day 7 of the group process. By revisiting the agreement at this later stage we realised that several of the set norms in the first agreement had to be changed in order to comply with the group’s dynamics. Three of us (Tina, Berit, and Christina) were not present at the time of reviewing it, as they were at Bispehaugen School to collect data for the project report. Tadiwos, Furqan, and Fridah did still go through the agreement, though they felt it was a waste of time as they could not make any changes without the rest of the group, and that their time therefor could have been used in more productive ways. During the process of discussing changes the group of three were facilitated, as they were loudly discussing one of the points. This facilitation led to a change in the agreement about letting people present their ideas and views without being interrupted. One issue in the group work has been several long discussions (some caused by misunderstandings), where group members have been talking all at once, and not really listened to the other members points of view. This point can be emphasized by other people outside the group have pointed out that our group sometimes is very loud during discussions (due to members trying to detract other members).

Tadiwos, Furqan, and Fridah presented their suggestions for changes of the cooperation agreement to the rest of the group when they returned the following day. It turned out everyone agreed on the suggested changes, and the group felt better about the time spent revising the agreement even though half the group was gone. The fact that everyone agreed on the changes shows how norms unconsciously have been developed in the group. This is in accordance with what Johnson and Johnson (2006) states about norms and how they develop through interactions, as mentioned above.

## Situation 3

*“A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”.* Margaret Mead

For our last situation we have chosen to look at the development of which methods we were going to use to collect data about children’s attitude towards physical activity. The first part of the day was spent looking at ways to incorporate Berit’s competence within the field of art. Tina was not present for the first part of the day, for personal reasons, and was hence not present for this part. Berit presented some different ideas she had about using art as a way of collecting data, and explained how it would be carried out. She had different options, such as presenting pictures, and making the children choose the one they liked best, or let the children draw pictures themselves. She decided that it would be best for her to use her academic background in art pedagogy, which is more practical, instead of art history, which is more theoretical. She still decided to present both ideas in order to get the other group members input, and test her idea on art history.

After Berit presented her ideas we went around in the group allowing each group member to giving input on the ideas, and let her know our thoughts and opinions. Berit thought it was very productive to get everyone’s thoughts and concerns, so that she could adopt her idea to the group. She felt that it was good motivation in the group, and everyone had opinions, as opposed to people being indifferent as this is a field most of them didn’t know much about. As everyone contributed she also felt that her work was being appreciated. This is a situation where the group shows how we use our diversity as a resource for increasing achievement and productivity as we used our wide range of resources, in accordance to Johnson and Johnson (2006).

In the end everyone agreed to the decision about letting the children draw themselves, and give expression for their favourite activity. Fridah though Berit’s idea about presenting the children with pictures was good, but that it might influence the answers later given in the questionnaire, and was therefore happy about the decision about letting the children draw themselves, whit no other direction than “Draw your favourite activity”. She also felt that it worked well when we let all group members say their opinion in turn, although she was worried that Berit’s idea was being supressed by all the other ideas in the group. Hence she was worried that Berit was not happy with the decision, even though this was her field of interest. Berit however, assured the group that she was happy about the decision made, and that she agreed that this would be the best way for the children to express their attitudes towards physical activity. Furqan found it hard to understand how the children’s views would be expressed through drawing, as this is far away from his field of competence in molecular medicine. He felt, however, that Berit was confident in her explanation of how it would work, and he therefore believed that it would work the way she explained. He agreed with the rest of the group that the decision made was the best one. Tadiwos agreed that it was difficult to understand how the drawings would express attitudes, and he was worried about the practicality of the task. However he also agreed that letting the children draw would be the better solution. Christina was also unsure about how we would be able to use the drawings in our final results, but believed that Berit, who have more competence in the field, would be able to interpret the drawings and explain her findings to the group. Tina, who was not present at the time of the decision, was happy about the way Berit’s competence had been incorporated into the project. The whole process of deciding on the drawing was relatively quick and did not cause a lot of discussion. The group agreed that the way of presenting ideas and letting people come with their opinions worked well, and as an action we agreed to continue this good trend. This way of working is in accordance to Schwarz (2002) Ground rules for effective groups, rule number six: “combine advocacy and inquiry”. This rule has, as described in situation 1 of this report, been decided to be the most important for the group as a whole, and we therefore want to keep up this work method.

Looking back at the whole process we see that the action of keeping up rule number 6 has both worked and not worked. This became clear especially through the feedback exercise on day 12. Here Tadiwos, amongst others, got the feedback that he had good ideas and was good at advocating them, but that he could come with them earlier in the process; *“He got some feedback about how he should join discussions more and come with suggestions and ideas himself earlier in discussions, as he often waits until the end with contributing with his suggestions.”* (group reflections, day 12). Furqan got to hear that he was very good at standing up for his ideas, but that he shouldn’t give up in trying to explain them when trying to get the others to agree.

The second part of data collection would be through a questionnaire, designed to get an understanding of children’s attitude towards physical activity. The development of this took time in the group, although the outline of starting with the school day and ending with after school activities (free time) and holidays, was agreed upon relatively quickly. The first part of this process was also carried out without Tina. It was confirmed that we would be able to give the questionnaire to two 5th grade classes at Bispehaugen School, where the children would be between 10 and 11. The formulation of the questions to cover the previously agreed areas was found to be challenging by several group members.

A lot of time was spent arguing on the nature of the question and how it was to be phrased. Berit found the situation challenging and demanding, and it took a lot of energy. Fridah agreed, and felt it took a long time to figure out how to include everyone’s views and disciplines, and that it was hard to agree upon how to phrase questions. She felt that everyone mostly agreed upon the general idea of each question, but how to write it caused more discussion. Christina agreed to this perception, and she felt that a lot of the discussion, and hence the time spent, was pointless as the questionnaire would have to be translated into Norwegian before given to the children anyway. She tried to express this, but felt that she was not heard, and the discussions went on. When Tina came and joined this discussion, she felt it was particularly important for her to contribute with her competence in communication, so that the questions could be phrased in a way understandable to the children. She was also happy that she could use her competence in language for translating the questionnaire from English to Norwegian. Furqan also felt that the making of the questionnaire was difficult at first, and that there were a lot of ideas, but that it all in all ended well and he was happy with the questionnaire. Furqan had a lot of ideas when I came to the questionnaire, and Christina felt that she was “shooting down” a lot of these. She was trying to think how to make it simple and practical, while Furqan had a somewhat different and broader perspective and understood things from his own background. Christina felt that many of his ideas were good, but that they were not practical or easy to follow through, and she felt that due to the short time available things should be done easily and effectively. Tadiwos felt that the process of making the questionnaire went smoothly, but that when Tina returned, there were more discussions in the group. This shows that what happens among group members is dynamic and not static, because groups have a structure that develops as members interact (Johnson and Johnson, 2006). Hence when Tina was away the interaction among the remaining group members develop in a different way than it would have if she was present. In accordance to Johnson and Johnson (2006) individuals drift into various roles on the basis of their interests and skills. As previously mentioned Tina usually assumes the leader role, and when she joined the group again this behaviour shone through. This might be the reason for more discussion after she returned. The fact the group rapidly changed their dynamics showed that we quickly activated a new group function to meet the new situation. This is one of the criteria for being a mature group, according to Sjøvold (2006).

Cultural differences arose on the understanding of organised sports and the unorganised. This was a topic that the group spent a lot of time discussing, as we had two questions, one regarding organised sports, and one regarding unorganised (see questionnaire). How to phrase these questions, and what was included in the words “organised” and “unorganised” caused a lot of debate, especially between Tina and Furqan. They debated back and forth about what words to use, if the children would understand, etc. However, the discussion was quickly solved when it became obvious that Tina and Furqan had different understanding of the words, and what they included. Tina had her understanding from how organised sport is seen in Norway, while Furqan had his perception from Pakistan. We here see the importance of explaining the meaning of important words, as described in Schwarz (2002) rules for effective group work, rule three: “use specific examples and agree on what important words mean”.

The group perceived this misunderstanding as a positive thing in the end, as we learned to embrace different views and cultures, and it helped us in understanding individual group members better. This was a good beginning to learning to embrace diversity, and we later learned this was a good action, when we read Johnson and Johnson (2006) about valuing diversity, and how this would help the group in achieving the best possible result. We also learned that we must continue to be open, and also be careful in explaining the exact meanings of what they say, and give reasons for their views. In the future this may lead to quicker agreements and avoidance of unnecessary discussion and conflict. It has already been mentioned in situation 2 in this report that members felt almost from the beginning that they learned the necessity of very open and clear communication. Still, it turned out towards the final stages of making the project report, that for example Berit had thought about this action several times, in terms of that it needed rephrasing. She felt it was not one persons’ responsibility to explain themselves and their reasoning, because it was just as much the others’ responsibility to ask if there was something they couldn’t understand. Berit also meant we could have been better at communicating openly, because it turned out when all the individually written parts of the project report were to be put together, that it was very difficult to understand each others’ reasoning.

# Final remarks/reflection.

## Berit

Even though I have been working in team for several years during my working career, I still think I have learnt something new during these intense and exhausting weeks at the EiT course. The situation has been very different from what I´m used to, as we didn´t know each other, we came from different cultures and with very different backgrounds. This way of working forced me way out of my comfort zone, and I sometimes really missed someone who understood my background and could share my perspectives in a familiar way. But being in a group with such smiling and hardworking persons really helped a lot, and often saved my day. I have learnt that working with persons with different backgrounds is hard, but not impossible. The hardest part is to balance when to listening to others and get involved in their ideas and work, and when to look after your own. In our group, we were focused on the work and our differences became functional instead of conflicting. Diversity became a resource (Wheelan 2009:64).

I think I ended up with a somewhat different perspective than I first expected. One very interesting and challenging aspect several of the group members presented for me as feedback one afternoon, was that they missed that I stayed focused during group work, and that I had a tendency to stop being focused after presenting my own ideas. Not a very charming one, I must admit. Also, that I worked slow, except from when planning. A lot of nice things were said as well, so I was all right with the constructive feedback. Both the lack of focusing on other´s ideas and the slow writing are aspects that I need to give some thought. The missed focus didn´t happen because of lack of motivation or interest, allthough I did sometimes feel exhausted. But one reason that has occurred to me, is that although I really can´t say that I wasn’t heard when speaking – because I was – I didn´t always feel invited to speak either. In no way do I think this was something personal, but I was around 15 years older than the other group members, and combined with my somewhat different background in art, it might be that the other group members didn´t see any need to invite me to talk, and I can see I sometimes felt a bit “left out” (Wheelan 2009: 58).This might have affected my motivation a little.

## Fridah

Everybody else has expectations of a particular encounter or situation before they actually experience it. This could either be negative, positive or mixed. For Fridah, the expectations from Experts in Team (EiT) course were mainly negative and full of anxiety in relation to what kind of people she would meet and how they will get along and work together. This anxiety was mainly from the past student’s accounts who had ‘bad’ experiences in their groups. However, the first day in the village proved that the initial fears were unfounded, basically because the nature of the experiences has to do with the personalities in the group and how you resolve to work and abide by such an agreement from the start. The Cooperation Agreement exercise helped so greatly on how the members were to interact and mostly resolve disagreement or conflict. It was easy resolve disagreements and conflicts as most of the group members are good listeners and therefore gave chance for all views to be heard. Fridah came to the group and the Eit course with her attribute of good listening and it worked well much of the time. This therefore promoted a good working environment with very little disagreements and therefore more time was dedicated to working on the project and generally achieving the group’s goal.

However, this listening attribute proved negative in some cases as the members felt that Fridah was not always putting across her ideas and sharing sufficient information. Although her work as a teacher mainly involves taking a leadership role among the children, it was challenging for her to assume such a role in the group. The group experience therefore brought Fridah to the realisation that she was able to assume a leading role in the former case not necessarily because of personal qualities but authority considering the power differential between children and adults. Fridah therefore emerges from the Eit course with a new understanding that there is need to strike a balance between good listening and sharing relevant and adequate information with the team members to ensure group effectiveness. Being in a diverse group in terms of nationality, academic, cultural and personality taught Fridah to be even more open and self-revealing in order to be clearly understood by others. She discovered that even if she has a social science background and respects other people’s views, the embracing of diversity in reality is something that is challenging. Through the course and the group interaction however, she adopts to focus on the advantages and not the disadvantages of diversity as advocated by Johnson and Johnson (2006). This is especially important for her as diversity in many aspects, including personality, in business and industry is inevitable. Another skill acquired and that needs to be frequently practised is the discussion of What Schwarz (2000) calls the ‘undiscussables’. Coming from a culture where people are not very frank especially with negative criticism, she particularly felt uncomfortable to talk about such matters. Fortunately, the group exercises on roles and feedback offered a great opportunity to discuss such matters in reality. Fridah intends to employ the strategy of inviting comments and evaluation from others as well as being frank but still polite in evaluating others in her work life.

## Tadiwos

## Furqan

## Christina

Experts in teamwork (EiT) was a completely new situation for me, and I did not know what to expect walking in to it. I have worked in teams before, but not interdisciplinary like this course is. It has been an educational experience to work in teams with student from so different disciplines as molecular medicine, art history, Scandinavian language, and Children studies, and it has been interesting to see how different disciplines can be combined in order to achieve a common goal. We have used our different knowledge as a strength, to achieve the goal, as described by Johnson and Johnson (2006), Valuing diversity.

I have learned a lot about my own behaviour in team work through this experience. I have never thought of myself as a leading person, but I agreed to take this role in the group as it was formed. I feel that I am now able to be more of a leader in the group, that when I was when we first started. The course has shown me that I am able to take charge and be a leader when it is appropriate, but I have also learned that it is important to listen to other peoples points of view, as other people might have a better insight into the subject. Through feedback exercises in the group I have also gotten some insight to how the other group members perceive me. This has given me more confidence when it comes to team work, as group members have told me I am creative and take initiative, but it has also given me some pointers as to what I should work on, such as not getting so frustrated and stressed in situations with discussion and pressure.

Working across such a wide range of disciplines was challenging at times, as everyone had different ideas about how to do things. On top of this we had different cultural backgrounds that also led to some disagreements and misunderstandings. The main thing I learned from this was to always explain your reason or view, and do not take for granted that people know what you know. Many discussions in the group were solved using this logic, and allowing everyone to present their views, and explain how they understand things. This in accordance to both Schwarz (2002) Ground rules for effective team work, and Johnson and Johnson’s (2006) valuing diversity.

Through writing group reflections several times, and personal reflections every day, I have gotten an insight into basic group theory, and how this can be applied when working in teams. Much group theory was applied in our group throughout the process, both consciously and unconsciously from different group members.

I have also gotten a new insight into how my academic competence can be incorporated and applied into projects that are far away from the areas I am used to work in. This interdisciplinary cooperation has also shown that much of what think of as common knowledge, is something very much related to my academic background, and I have therefore learnt the importance of explaining what is meant by statements, and use simpler terms if people have trouble understanding what I am trying to communicate.

All in all, EiT has been a positive, although exhausting and intense, experience that have taught me a lot about how I work in a team, and has also helped me to improve my team work skills. I believe much of what I have learned during this course can be transferred to future work situations, and I will bring many positive and educational experiences from the course.

## Tina Louise

As mentioned in the beginning of this report, Tina’s main goal for participating in EiT was that she would learn to listen better in teamwork situations instead of always trying to get her way by assuming leadership. This means she already had the metaperspective of her role in a group, which is one of the learning outcomes of EiT. Even though she thought she knew everything about her position in a group, through EiT she has learned how she communicates, solves tasks and handles in a group. She has for example learned that she can get better at communicating her thoughts, because she has a too individual way of thinking when she should be focusing on the group as a whole. She has also learned that she often takes too much initiative in solving tasks (meaning that she pushes the others away and decides to do it her own way without listening to the others). EiT has given her the means to change this behaviour, but she does not feel she has been able to change it yet, even though she is well aware of it. Hopefully she will take action the next time she is in a group situation, and try to assume a different role than the leader role from the very start (as she has learned from relevant group work theory that once a role first is assumed, it is very difficult to change others’ expectations to you in that specific role, and hence you are more or less locked in that role for the rest of the groups’ existence).

Tina was convinced that she would not be able to use her competence in a satisfying way. After EiT now is over she has changed her view on this. Just like EiT states in their learning outcome, she has gained new insight in how to use her academic competence. She thought a lot of what she knows was also knowledge that others had, but she has now learned that she had a lot to contribute with. First of all she got to contribute with her communication competence, but this was quite expected. Second she got to contribute also with her competence in methods and child research, which she had not thought about as not common knowledge. She had not considered that her competence in methods was gained though human sciences and that this differed some from methods in social sciences, and thus she could use her competence on this field. It was a great experience for her to see that she could use so much of her academic background in ways she had not thought about, and also as a contribution to a bigger project where interdisciplinary knowledge made it all possible.

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**Appendix I** – daily group reflections

**Appendix II**  - cooperation agreement

**Appendix III** - questionnaire

1. http://www.ntnu.edu/eit/formal-documents [Read January 20th, 2013] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)