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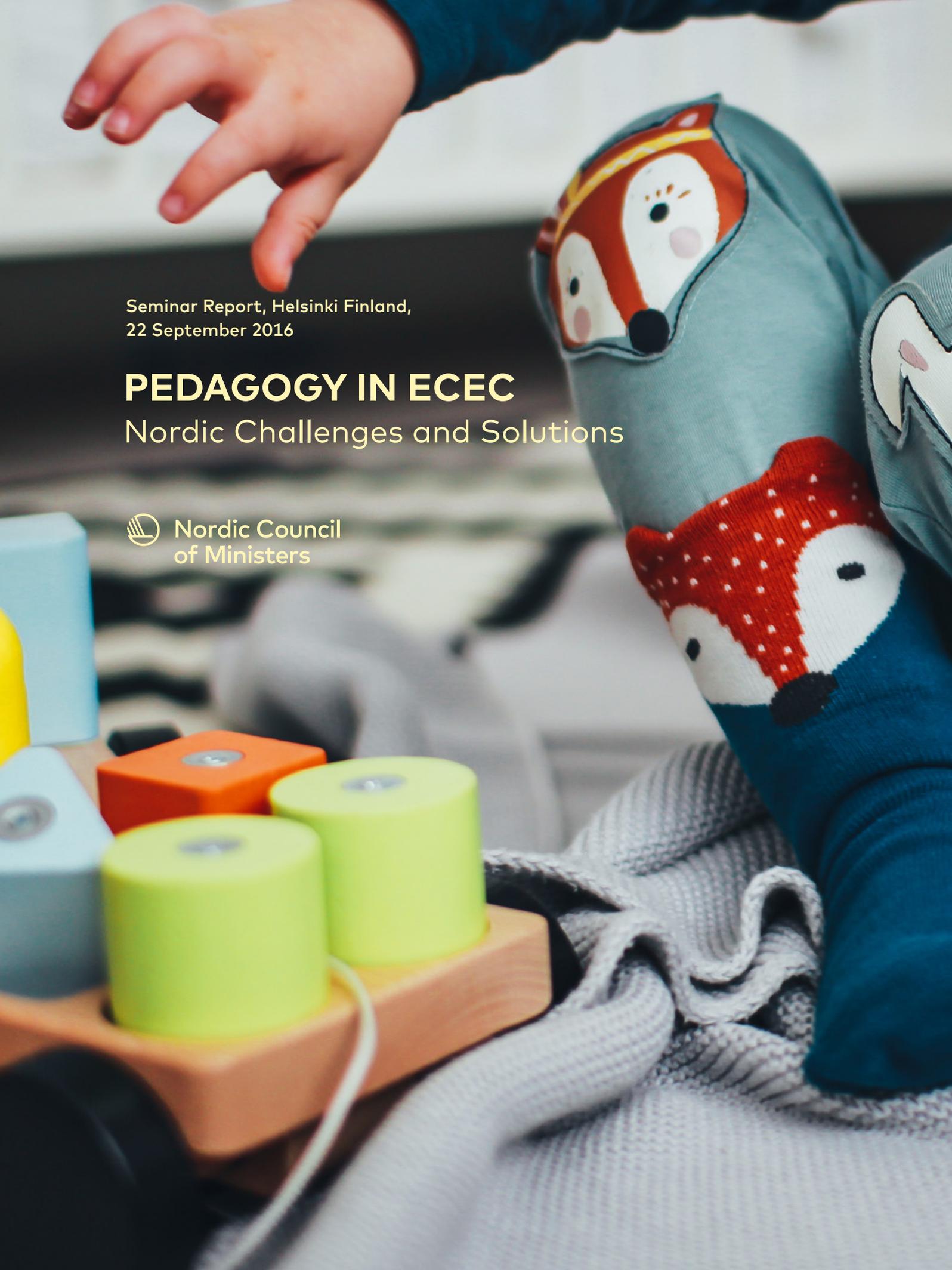
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A child's hand is visible at the top left, reaching towards a collection of toys. In the foreground, there are colorful wooden blocks (blue, orange, green) and a grey knitted blanket. To the right, there are several socks with animal patterns, including a blue sock with a white and red fox face and a red sock with a white and blue fox face. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a play area with a patterned rug.

Seminar Report, Helsinki Finland,  
22 September 2016

# PEDAGOGY IN ECEC

## Nordic Challenges and Solutions



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

## **PEDAGOGY IN ECEC**

Nordic Challenges and Solutions

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### **Nordic co-operation**

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

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Seminar Report, Helsinki Finland,  
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# **PEDAGOGY IN ECEC**

## Nordic Challenges and Solutions



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**Sanni Grahn-Laasonen**  
*Minister of Education and Culture*

# A word from the Minister of Education and Culture

With Nordic co-operation, we can build a brighter future and find solutions for dealing with social change. Perhaps the most important thing the Nordic countries share is our values: social cohesion, wellbeing, democracy and equality. Education and early childhood education and care (ECEC) are valued, and the Nordic model ensures that all residents have equal access to them.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body for inter-governmental co-operation in the Nordic region. All the Nordic countries fall within the purview of the Council of Ministers: Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark, as well as the autonomous territories of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. The countries co-operate in the fields of politics, economy, education, research and culture, as part of European and global co-operation.

Finland held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016, with the main themes being water, nature and people. During our Presidency, we examined the entire continuum of education and competence, from ECEC to higher education. The lifelong learning of adults and maintenance of working life skills were also addressed, as was the basic training and professional development of teachers in the Nordic countries.

High-quality ECEC and basic education promote equality and social cohesion, and provide a sound foundation for future learning. ECEC must respond to social change and keep up with developments in pedagogy.

International comparisons consider the strengths of ECEC in Finland to be the integrated service system and legislation that safeguards its quality. However, ECEC is facing significant challenges and development needs – it is affected by the weak state of the national economy, the increasing number of refugees and immigrants, services becoming more customer-oriented, and changes in the focus areas of pedagogy.

In Finland, ECEC is now part of the education and training system, where work is ongoing to build a seamless path to lifelong learning. Changes are needed in the operating culture and methods of both ECEC and basic education to ensure a smooth learning path from ECEC to comprehensive education and on to upper secondary education. Despite positive developments, Finnish children participate less in ECEC than their counterparts in other Nordic countries.

ECEC is being developed and legislation amended on an incremental basis. The new National Core Curriculum for ECEC, with which education providers must comply, will be implemented no later than August 2017. Client fees will be reduced for low-income families. A new appropriation has been granted for the development of ECEC and the number of preschool teaching university degrees will be increased. The provision and statistical compilation of national data on ECEC will also be developed.

Researchers, policymakers and ECEC professionals from all Nordic countries were invited to a seminar held in Helsinki in September 2016. We asked them how ECEC pedagogy was being managed at the moment and how it meets current challenges; what kinds of changes are needed; what kinds of solutions and practices are being employed in changing conditions; and what are the most important future needs when it comes to ECEC research, administration and routines. The seminar was an invaluable forum for sharing knowledge and experiences.

I hope that this seminar report will also help to share information on ECEC between the Nordic countries.

**Sanni Grahn-Laasonen**

*Minister of Education and Culture*

# Introduction

Finland held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016. The Ministry of Education and Culture organised the seminar, *Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care – Nordic Challenges and Solutions*, as part of the sectoral presidency programme for education and science. The seminar was held on 22 September 2016 at the House of the Estates in Helsinki.

This report comprises a series of articles about the presentations held at the seminar. Participants represented ECEC administration, research, and other professionals involved in ECEC from each Nordic country and the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

ECEC is now high on the political agenda in many countries. Research has shown us that high-quality ECEC has positive effects on children's welfare, learning and development. The Nordic countries are working through many different activities to develop ECEC, and exchanging ideas between the Nordic countries is always fruitful.

Cultural diversity is also now a central topic on many platforms. Integration, inclusion and the refugee situation has been on the agenda throughout the Presidency year at various meetings and seminars in Finland. On EU level, in June 2016 the European Commission issued a Communication on an *EU Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals*, in which ECEC is identified as one means of integration. The Member States are encouraged to promote and support the participation of migrant children in early childhood education and care.

At the seminar, participants discussed possible solutions for including and involving the growing number of immigrants and asylum seekers in our societies, and how to strengthen and support the culture of openness and mutual respect. This is where ECEC and education can play a crucial role. We see a special added value in Nordic cooperation and a Nordic dialogue on these issues.

The general view is that the Nordic countries have a lot in common in terms of ECEC and, in international contexts, people often talk about Nordic ECEC. But is this a myth, or do we have a shared view of ECEC? The seminar examined the Nordic values behind ECEC pedagogy – what are the shared and distinguishing features in ECEC between the Nordic countries, what are the particular challenges faced by each country, and what kind of solutions have been found?

The first article, written by Professor [Kirsti Karila](#), briefly introduces the Nordic ECEC pedagogy, its socio-historical roots and close connection with the development of the welfare state. The article also points out that, although the Nordic ECEC model is seen as homogeneous, each country has its own political, geographical and economic history that has shaped the development of ECEC. The Nordic countries are facing their own specific challenges but also have common issues to resolve.

In the second article Professor [Eva Johansson](#) and Adjunct Professor [Anna-Maija Puroila](#) take a closer look at the values guiding ECEC as they present the joint Nordic project *Values Education in Nordic Pre-Schools – Basis for Education for Tomorrow*. This project raises the question of what kind of future citizens we need to foster in early childhood education to build cohesive pluralistic societies in the Nordic countries. In an increasingly diverse society, this question is highly relevant. The project focuses on issues such as how the national educational policies frame values education in preschools, and the similarities and variations in values and values education between the Nordic countries.

The third article of the report was prepared by Professor [Maritta Hännikäinen](#) and Professor [Lasse Lipponen](#). It is a summary of participant country responses that were requested in a survey ahead of the seminar. In addition to identifying general development needs, the responses were to focus on the issue of immigration. What kinds of solutions and practices have been adopted in different countries? What can we learn from each other?

The final article is a summary made by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the presentation held by Professor [Edward Melhuish](#). Professor Melhuish presented his views about the Nordic ECEC when compared to the rest of Europe.

The seminar programme is presented in Annex 1 and the keynote speakers are presented in Annex 2.

# ECEC Pedagogy in the Nordic Countries – Its Roots and Current Challenges

**Kirsti Karila**

*Professor of Early Childhood Education*  
University of Tampere, Finland

## Introduction

This presentation briefly introduces the Nordic early childhood education and care (ECEC) pedagogy, its socio-historical roots and current challenges. The Nordic ECEC model is widely known and often cited. Descriptions of the model vary. Some focus more on the policy perspective, while others consider the model from the pedagogy viewpoint, but the close connection between these two model elements is significant. The Nordic pedagogy cannot be understood without understanding the societal context in which it has been constructed and developed.

In the Nordic countries, ECEC policies have developed in the context of the welfare state. Nordic ECEC policies have been closely connected with the other welfare policy areas, such as social policy, family policy and education policy. Another close connection is that with labour policy. During the 1970s and 1980s, in the early stages of ECEC policy development, the Nordic countries invested in the expansion of childcare to enable parents to combine both family and working life. The focus of investment was on labour policy orientation: public daycare services allowed Nordic women to participate in working life.<sup>1</sup> This is considered to have brought about economic gender equality as well as economic welfare for society.<sup>2</sup>

In the past decade, the investment orientation has changed, and the focus is now more on children and their education as future citizens. This trend, including the idea of lifelong learning, is common internationally.<sup>3</sup> Today, the Nordic countries are

strongly established within the European and global community, and international and European policies therefore have a strong influence on Nordic ECEC policies.

One key aim of the Nordic welfare model has been to produce democracy and social cohesion, which is promoted through state-funded welfare service systems. In the field of early childhood, this has been implemented by the provision of universal, centrally organised and integrated ECEC services. One significant aspect of Nordic ECEC policy has been the idea to share education and care between families and public institutions. Women's participation in the labour market has been seen to be the original driver of this practice.

This agenda also laid the foundation for the process of ECEC institutionalisation.<sup>4</sup> Young children were expected to be educated and cared for in public institutions in which qualified professionals organised stimulating activities and opportunities for children to develop their social skills, nowadays more often their learning abilities. Today, the concept of institutionalised childhood has become a part of the cultural belief system in the Nordic countries, where many parents take it for granted that public institutions are required for the appropriate education of young children.

## Nordic pedagogy

Policy aspects underlie Nordic ECEC pedagogy. Well-trained staff has been the key element when organising ECEC services. Members of the ECEC workforce are the main resource for these servic-

<sup>1</sup> Karila, 2012; Korsvold, 2011, pp. 19–37.

<sup>2</sup> Sipilä, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See Naudeau et al., 2010.

<sup>4</sup> See Kampmann, 2004, pp. 127–152.

es, and they are seen as essential to their success. There is increasing recognition that they require improved training and higher-level qualification,<sup>5</sup> and this is broadly accepted in the Nordic countries. The widely-shared assumption is that quality derives from well-trained staff with ongoing access to professional development opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

The Nordic model of ECEC is commonly described as integrated. Education, teaching and caring form an integrated unit and the term “early childhood education and care” is therefore typically used when describing the Nordic model of ECEC. The model is based on humanistic values, more precisely a child-centred, holistic approach with an emphasis on children’s and parents’ participation, democracy, autonomy and freedom.<sup>7</sup> The Nordic ECEC pedagogy and interpretations concerning the curriculum have been classified as belonging to the social pedagogical tradition, which encourages play, relationships, curiosity, and the desire to find meaning using activities valuing both children and educators in a co-constructing environment. Free choices building on children’s interests are negotiated in processes between the children and teachers. The Nordic countries’ holistic approach to early childhood education resists the “school preparation approach”.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the Nordic countries have often opposed introducing formal learning standards too early.

### Various Nordic models

The Nordic ECEC model is often regarded as homogeneous, but each Nordic country has its own political, geographic and economic history that forms the basis<sup>9</sup> for its national ECEC policies and for the pedagogical practices emphasised in the country. This variation between countries must be taken into account when analysing the

Nordic ECEC model. The Nordic network NECA, run by Professor Susan Garvis from the University of Gothenburg, has discussed and reflected the very essence and status of the Nordic model. The common view is that many shared ideas, but nowadays more often also variation, can be found. Consequently, the variation in pedagogical practices, both within each country and between the Nordic countries, must be carefully analysed. National curricula and policy documents have been the key sources when analysing Nordic pedagogy. These documents often represent the ideals concerning ECEC, so we must ask how these ideals are implemented at the local level and transformed into everyday practices. What really happens in the everyday pedagogical practices? We already know that we have local traditions and practices, deriving from various roots. For example, the ECEC professionals from different generations or educational background may attach different values to various forms of knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

The Finnish CHILDCARE study (see <https://www.jyu.fi/edu/tutkimus/tutkimushankkeet/kotisivut/childcare/en>) clearly illustrates the variations in local (municipal) practices and policies. For example, various interpretations of the function of ECEC and ways of organising ECEC services can be found in Finnish municipalities. The situation is similar in other Nordic countries.

A local level of decision-making produces a context in which the professionals develop the pedagogical practices. It also provides a certain context in which parents participate in the ECEC practices. Therefore, more research and other attention must be paid to the local level.

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<sup>5</sup> Moss, 2006, pp. 30–41.

<sup>6</sup> Karila, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Jensen, 2009, pp. 7–21.

<sup>8</sup> Jensen, 2009, pp. 7–21.

<sup>9</sup> Kristjánsson, 2006, pp. 13–42; Einarsdóttir, 2006, pp. 159–182.

<sup>10</sup> Karila & Kupila, 2010.

## **Nordic ECEC in the global world – encountering new challenges**

The Nordic countries are developing and redefining their ECEC policies and pedagogy in the global economic and cultural context, in which governments have to choose their priorities. Pressure to standardise ECEC services is evident, and signs of erosion of the key elements of the Nordic model have been seen in recent policy debates. On one hand, standardisation can be seen as an ideal goal, in that it takes seriously every child's right to receive quality ECEC services wherever she/he lives. On the other, standardisation has brought about an increasingly evaluative system, which has been criticised widely in the Nordic countries. In the international context, quality assurance through standardised testing or similar has become very common. Some critical voices have been raised in the context of curriculum development in recent years.<sup>11</sup> One key question has been whether the trend is a signal of a gradual move towards more academic ECEC and its "schoolification".<sup>12</sup>

The Nordic idea of universal, publicly funded, institutionalised ECEC services is firmly rooted in Nordic legislation. However, recently, the ideas of marketisation and privatisation have spread to the Nordic countries, and we do not yet know what kinds of influence this trend will have. More research is required.

Although each Nordic country is facing its own specific challenges, the countries also have shared issues to resolve and practices to develop. Increasing migration and multiculturalism form one area of the new challenges. New modes of culturally sensitive participation are required. Current systems and practices must be analysed, and the question must be asked whether they exclude

certain groups of people. This requires developing awareness of the values. The pedagogical and working practices need to be revised from this perspective.

In the context of travelling discourses and policies,<sup>13</sup> the Nordic countries must carefully reflect on the very essence of the Nordic model. Even though we may criticise the implementation of the model in many ways, it is good to remember its successful influence. In the complicated world, social cohesion is very much needed. This is not the time to abandon the key elements of the Nordic model, but to revise and elaborate them.

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<sup>11</sup> Bae, 2010, pp. 205–218; Pramling-Samuelson & Sheridan, 2010, pp. 219–227.

<sup>12</sup> OECD, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Penn, 2011, pp. 94–113.

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# Values Education in Nordic Preschools: Lived Values in Educational Practices

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## Background

This presentation is based on a research project on values education in Nordic preschools.<sup>1</sup> In this project, the term "preschool" refers to early childhood settings in which the children's ages range from 0 to 7 years. Preschools are important societal sites for the communication of values. Every day, a variety of values are more or less consciously communicated in pedagogical practices.<sup>2</sup> However, values education has remained one of the most neglected areas in early childhood education research and practice.

In previous educational research, the common ideological basis of the Nordic countries has been emphasised.<sup>3</sup> The Nordic countries share the ideas of the Nordic welfare model, which has shaped the policies, practices, and ideologies of their educational systems. Democracy, equality, freedom, and solidarity are considered characteristic values of the Nordic societies.<sup>4</sup> The Nordic societies are acknowledged as the world's most equal, from both economic and gender perspectives. Nonetheless, we know little about how these values are articulated in the educational policies of early childhood education and care (ECEC), or how values education is realised in encounters between young children and educators in Nordic preschools. These were the central notions on which the research project was developed. In what follows, we will briefly introduce the project, give an example of a sub-study within the project, and present some findings.

## Overview of the project

What kind of future citizens do we foster in ECEC to build cohesive pluralistic societies? This question has formed the basis of this action research project on values education in five Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Our goal has been to deepen understanding of the institutionalised fostering of values in Nordic preschools at the theoretical, methodological, and empirical levels. We wanted to explore what values education is like in some preschools in the Nordic countries. What kinds of values are communicated between educators and children? What kinds of values are prioritised by the educators? What kinds of gender patterns may occur? We also wanted to study how the national educational policies frame values education in preschools and what kind of commonalities and variations in values education could be found among the Nordic countries.

The researchers and educators worked together for four years on the project. The project received funding from the NordForsk research programme *Education for Tomorrow* for the years 2013–2015.<sup>6</sup> There were 24 preschools, approximately 491 educators, and 1940 children involved. In total, 25 researchers from the Nordic countries worked in close collaboration with the educators, sharing and building knowledge together. One important cornerstone of the project was to live out the value of respect and to show respect for the educators' knowledge. This meant, for example, that

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<sup>1</sup> Johansson, Puroila, and Emilson, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Emilson and Johansson, 2009; Johansson, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2008; see also Karila, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Moss, 2007; Vallberg Roth, 2014; Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Values Education in Nordic Preschools – Basis of Education for Tomorrow (project number 53581).

we did not impose any educational programme on the educators for use. The goals and methods for developing values education were based on the educators' own choices and their own knowledge. The researchers' role was to support and challenge the educators' work with values.

Research material was gathered through multiple methods: policy documents, individual interviews, group interviews, (video) observations, narratives, and written diaries from the participants and researchers. The research design and participative action research methodology enabled us to work at different levels, ranging from the Nordic level to specific national policy documents in the different countries involved, to preschool communities and individual educators.

### **Example of a sub-study: Interpreting ECEC practices from the perspective of values**

*Imagine a dressing situation in a preschool setting. There is a long narrow cloakroom and the children are getting ready to go outside: Johan (3:1), Edit (3), Bella (2:6), Nosse (3), Amalie (1:2), Silva (1:4), Mehmet (2:9), and Tina (3:7). There is also a teacher. The teacher talks with Johan (3:1) about the pictures hanging on the wall. They are hung there so that Johan can understand what is happening during the day. The adult asks what the pictures are showing and where they are now in relation to the time schedule, but it appears that Johan does not understand. Edit is sitting on the floor and trying to get her outdoor clothes on. Bella gets her coat from the adult and starts to put it on. Nisse is sitting on the floor; he is already ready to go out. Johan sits down right beside him and Nisse shouts loudly. Amalie, who is near the adult, gets upset. "No, Johan!" says the teacher decisively. "Now Amalie is upset. Look!" Johan leans forward and gives Amalie a hug. Immediately afterwards, Amalie moves away, complaining. When the children*

*are ready, they stand in a queue by the door. Johan is angry: he wants to be in front of Nisse. "No, Johan. Wrong!" says the teacher and holds her arm between them like a barrier. Johan complains. "No, now Nisse stands in front of Johan," continues the adult. She sounds friendly but decisive... (continues)*

This episode is from a Swedish preschool, observed by Eva Johansson in her previous study.<sup>7</sup> In our Nordic research project, we used this episode with the aim of deepening the cross-cultural understanding of how educators interpret early childhood practices from the perspective of values in Nordic preschools.<sup>8</sup> We asked the educators in the participating preschools to read through the description of the dressing situation. We then organised group discussions in which educators had an opportunity to talk about the dressing situation with their colleagues and with researchers. We tape-recorded the group discussions and transcribed them. In this sub-study, we used group discussion material from ten preschools, two from each Nordic country.

#### ***What did the educators talk about?***

We found that the educators drew attention to four aspects of the dressing situation. First, they talked a lot about the atmosphere of the dressing situation. Many educators said that they viewed the dressing situation as chaotic by nature. For instance, an Icelandic educator described how people "criss-crossed" in the cloakroom. Second, the practical organisation of the dressing situation raised a lot of discussion among educators. The educators wondered why such a large and diverse group of children was dressing with so few adults and in such a long and narrow cloakroom. Third, the educators paid attention to the nature of the communication between the teacher and the children. The educators felt that there was a lot of negatively oriented interaction: the teacher was forbidding, correcting, and even shouting at

<sup>7</sup> Johansson, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Puroila, Johansson, Estola, Emilson, Einarsdóttir, and Broström, 2016.



the children. Fourth, the boy called Johan was in the forefront in the group discussions. The educators recognised that he was a child who had some special needs. Many educators connected the chaotic atmosphere with Johan and noted that a lot of the negative communication was addressed to him.

However, the educators did not only talk about the dressing situation. The dressing situation inspired the educators to reflect on their own practices. Many educators said that they could imagine themselves being in similar situations, and they described how they would act in such situations. Some educators found things that they felt were strange. For instance, the Finnish educators marvelled at the staff structure, which seemed to differ from that in their own country; there was one teacher and three assistants working with a group of 14 children aged 1–4 years.

#### *How did values emerge in the group discussions?*

Some educators mentioned values explicitly. For instance, a Danish educator said that the teacher "...disciplines him (Johan), or she instructs him. But it is not wrong to discipline." More often, the educators used indirect means to express their value judgements. They used expressions such as "this is

poor pedagogy" (a Danish educator) or "I regard this as a very bad situation for children" (a Norwegian educator). Moreover, the educators showed their values by criticising the teacher's behaviour or suggesting alternatives that would improve the dressing situation for both children and adults.

Even though the explicit expressions of values were rare, we could identify a variety of values from the group discussions. The educators mentioned meeting the children's needs, empathy, physical closeness, eye contact, and listening to children – themes that are connected with caring values in previous research.<sup>9</sup> As in previous studies, harmony was widely seen as an ideal state when working with young children.<sup>10</sup> The educators also talked about children's ages and developmental needs and how dressing could be a potential learning situation for children. These themes have a connection with Competence values.<sup>11</sup> The educators also considered aspects of democratic values and equality by addressing children's opportunities for participation, and wondered whether children were treated fairly in the dressing situation.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Similarities and differences in interpretation*

The four main topics (atmosphere, the practical organisation of the dressing situation, the na-

<sup>9</sup> Broström, 2006; Estola, 2003; Taggart, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Emilson and Folkesson, 2006; Puroila, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Johansson, Fugelsnes, Mørkeseth, Röthle, Tofteland, and Zachrisen, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Broström, 2010; Emilson and Johansson, 2013; Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala, 2014.

ture of communication, and Johan) were talked about in all group discussions in different Nordic countries. The educators' criticism focused on similar aspects in the dressing situation, such as the chaotic atmosphere, particular neglect of the youngest children's needs, the lack of dialogue, and the negative tone in child-adult communication. The educators' suggestions about how a dressing situation ought to be organised were also very similar. Regardless of national context, the educators preferred working in small groups, distributing tasks among adult educators, and using spaces differently.

There were some differences between the educators' interpretations of the dressing situation. Most of the differences, however, occurred between the individual educators or preschools rather than between the Nordic countries. For instance, in a Norwegian preschool, many educators agreed that the dressing situation seemed chaotic, but one of the practitioners expressed the view that "this is just life going on." The study therefore provides clear evidence that the practitioners in these Nordic preschools shared some core pedagogical ideas and values. On the basis of this study, however, we cannot conclude that this is because of a common values basis of Nordic ECEC or because of a more broadly shared view of what ECEC is about.

## Findings from the project

### *Pedagogical practices in ECEC are essentially value-bound*

In accordance with some recent studies, this research project highlights the cruciality of values in education. Biesta,<sup>13</sup> among others, argues that education is a teleological practice framed by a variety of purposes, implying that educators' decisions and actions are intertwined with assumptions about what is good for children. Education is legit-

imated by the purpose of promoting a good life for children. The questions "What is good for children?" and "How do we promote what is best for children through education?" are related to values.

### *Values education is a significant but under-represented area in ECEC*

Although a values perspective is embedded in the core curricula and legislation regarding ECEC in all the Nordic countries, professional, political, and scientific discussions tend to overlook values. Previous research indicates that values are often regarded as a difficult area for practitioners to manage, and that the work with values is often intuitive and not consciously addressed. It is often hard for the educators to verbalise and identify values on a conceptual level; there is a lack of language for values. Consequently, there is a risk that values remain invisible, left within the domain of "the hidden curriculum".<sup>14</sup>

The educators in the ValuEd project described their own process in conceptualising and developing a language for values. This process took time and effort. At the beginning of the project, many discussions concerned how to grasp what values are all about. Educators and researchers struggled to unpack the concept of values and to analyse how values could *be lived* in practice. As the project proceeded, the educators expressed a growing confidence in their own relation (approach) to values and values education in the everyday life of preschools. They described their own empowering processes when reflecting on values alone or together with colleagues. Living and talking about values became part of the curricula. It seemed that the educators created a collective space<sup>15</sup> for reflecting on values together with their colleagues. They expressed a sense of professional familiarity with values as an important and constant lived content in early education, and they felt comfort-

<sup>13</sup> Biesta, 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Colnerud, 2014; Lunn Brownlee, Johansson, Walker, and Scholes, 2016; Thornberg, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Kemmis and MacTaggart, 2005.



Photo: Steinar Figved

able discussing them together. Trust between colleagues and tools for identifying values were essential in this process. A variety of tools were employed in different sub-studies, such as analysing narratives or small stories from the everyday interactions in preschools, interpreting video observations of the educators' own practices, and using value concepts as tools for the analyses.

#### *What kind of values appeared to be important in the study?*

The study shows that a variety of values were communicated in the everyday lives of early childhood settings. These values can be connected to several "value fields":<sup>16</sup> Ethical values, Democracy values, and Competence values. Ethical values refer to the concern for the wellbeing of oneself and others. This means, for example, how to care for others, being available for children, listening to children, respecting children's initiatives, physical closeness, comforting, and helping. Democracy values refer to the rights and responsibilities afforded children as members of the preschool community. This means, for example, values for participation, belonging, and inclusion; how and who is allowed to influence the community and how values for sharing, equality and justice are being prioritized. Competence values refer to different competences prioritised in the different value fields. This means, for example, learning

caring skills, learning to be (in)dependent, learning how to raise one's voice, and learning when to be silent. These value fields appeared to be prioritised and lived out in the everyday practice.

In a global framework, the shared cultural heritage and the shared values of the Nordic countries have been emphasised. However, our study shows that, for instance, the values of democracy are articulated differently in the Nordic ECEC core curricula.<sup>17</sup> Democracy and Competence values appeared to be emphasised in the Swedish curricula and in the interviews with the educators. In contrast, we found that caring values were at the forefront in the Finnish and Norwegian curricula and in the interviews. How can this difference be interpreted? Can these be regarded as national patterns, at least on a discursive level? Can it be that caring values are less prioritised in Swedish contexts in favour of competences and democracy? What does it mean in Finnish and Norwegian early childhood contexts if values for democracy are diminished?

Other value fields were also communicated in the preschools. Disciplinary values refer to the institutional order and the rules, such as maintaining order, avoiding chaos, setting limits, and creating structures. The project reveals that these values were often communicated implicitly, through

<sup>16</sup> Johansson et al., 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Einarsdóttir et al., 2015.

(small) gestures and rules that children were expected to make their own. There were also Efficiency values, referring to the functioning of the institution, the use and distribution of economic and human resources, and working effectively. The educators constantly met tensions between the different value fields and their own priorities – Efficiency values, for example, turned out to be in conflict with other value fields – and the educators described how institutional demands put pressure on them. They sometimes felt trapped between their own prioritised values and Efficiency values. Lack of time, for example, could hinder educators in involving children in participatory practices, such as giving children opportunities for choice or creating play communities during circle time, when the teachers intended the children to listen.

One value field of importance across the countries was the value of individuality. This value field refers to how the individual's interests, priorities, and needs are highlighted. The educators seem to embrace an ideal: to meet the need of each child every day. They also communicated values individually to a large extent. In spite of the fact that the educators joined a group of children, the communication pattern was often from the educator to each individual child, rather than building communities among the children. This value could come into conflict with the value of community, implying that collective values are at risk of being marginalised.

#### ***Values education in early childhood is a matter of pluralism***

In the everyday lives of ECEC settings, a variety of values are communicated both explicitly and implicitly. This pluralism is something educators have to live with. It is not a matter of advocating total relativism, more of accepting the embodied and fluent character of values, while acknowledging that values are being prioritised. Being aware of the grounds for justifying values is significant.

Our studies show that values do not exist as a distinct but rather an entangled element in educational work. For educators, promoting values education in the early years means engaging in a constantly dialectical relationship. It means being *between the personal and professional, between the individual and the collective, between theory and practice, and between knowing and uncertainty*. Values are embedded in personal and emotional experiences; these experiences need to be welcomed. However, there is also a need to leave the personal in favour of the professional. This means facing one's responsibility as an educator devoted to the values of the curricula, knowing the research in the field, and knowing how to support children to identify values and solve value conflicts.

Working with values is a crucial area of professional competence in ECEC. In this time of globalisation and increasing value pluralism, the competence to identify, reflect on, and discuss values is becoming even more important. For educators, being between theory and practice means residing in the concrete lived and embodied world of values communicated between educators and children, *and* to interconnect this world with theory in a dialectical process. The challenge for educators is to identify and relate to value conflicts in relation to parents, colleagues, and children.

Working with values also means having the courage of not knowing how to proceed. Values are difficult to grasp; they are intertwined in time and space. There is no straightforward road to follow, but there is a need to gain knowledge of the values to prioritise and to make decisions about how to work.

#### **To sum up**

In this presentation, we have described some tentative results from the study of values education in Nordic preschools. We have shown how values are constantly communicated in ECEC practices and that early childhood education is a value-loaded arena.

### *Values in a time of efficiency and individuality*

We have identified similar value fields in the participating preschools throughout the Nordic countries. However, the dominance of values may differ among preschools and between different countries. Our study has shown how values for individuality appear to be of high priority across the countries, which implies that collective values are at risk of being marginalised. If this is correct, we need to ask ourselves why this has happened and on what grounds, but we also need to examine how such values may be recaptured and reconstructed in ECEC. How can we create preschool as a cultural meeting place for collective relationships in a time of individuality? Both individual- and collective-oriented values are important in ECEC. In addition, the value of efficiency seems to cause dilemmas for the educators across the countries. Such values sometimes force them to disregard their own value priorities. We might ask whether values connected to production, efficiency, and strategic goal orientation are becoming more important values in the ECEC of today.

We have also identified some differences when prioritising values for democracy and care. In the Swedish curricula, caring values are almost absent. We might question whether the realisation of caring values is possible in a time of emphasising effectiveness. What happens with values for democracy in a strong caring culture, as seen in the Norwegian and Finnish contexts? If the adult remains the most important factor in a caring relationship, the children's potential for caring may be reduced. The balance between different values in ECEC is a significant dilemma to reflect on and an important issue for educational policy, teacher education, preschool practice, and ECEC research.

### *Concluding remarks*

What conclusions for policymakers, teacher training programmes, and preschool practice can be drawn from the study so far? Our project calls for recognition of the importance of values and values education at many levels in ECEC. At the

policy level, policy documents are permeated by a variety of values. Values are present in the policy documents not only in the paragraphs where values are explicitly addressed but also throughout the documents. However, as a conscious area of children's learning, values are largely ignored and, in practice, values appear to be more or less taken for granted. Policymakers need to highlight values education as a significant and multifaceted area in teacher training, in preschool practice, and research.

The project challenges us to reconsider how values education is addressed as an area in and across training programmes. What kind of competences do teacher educators and students need to develop for working with values? What kinds of tools for identifying and analysing values are available to students? Teacher educators require an awareness of values education as much as their students do.

Values education is an area that needs to be developed in *ECEC settings*. Our study has provided concrete means for this developmental work. Our study illuminates empowering processes and how educators created spaces for community, open for collective learning and reflexivity. These collective spaces need to allow for both personal and professional values. This is a process of re-evaluations, of reconsidering decisions and exposing oneself to critical points of view. A variety of tools, of both concrete and conceptual character, have been shown to be useful. These tools must, however, reflect everyday practice and the lived and multiple characters of values. Reflexivity is central at all levels, in teacher training and in preschool practice.

In contemporary pluralistic societies, values are being implemented more than ever. This calls for policymakers, educators, and researchers to promote values education in their own work and in collaboration with each other.

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# The Nordic ECEC Pedagogy: Current Challenges and Good Practices – and Key Areas for Development in the Future

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In September 2016, The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, hosted a Nordic seminar, *Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) – Nordic Challenges and Solutions*. One of the main aims of the seminar was to learn about current understanding of Nordic ECEC pedagogy, and its challenges and solutions, interpreted and defined by the Nordic countries. To meet this aim, a survey was sent to the Ministry of Education in all Nordic countries, and here we present the results of the survey.

Despite variation between the Nordic countries in terms of, for example, politics, geographical and economic history, numbers of staff working in ECEC, and the number of immigrants/asylum seekers, the Nordic countries are said to share common features of pedagogy in early childhood education and care. The Nordic ECEC pedagogy has been classified as belonging to the social pedagogical tradition that encourages play, relationships and curiosity, builds on children's interests, resists the "school preparation approach", and harnesses a holistic approach to early childhood education.<sup>1</sup> Another characteristic of the Nordic countries is that ECEC has had no strong "investment narrative", and educational practices have in many areas contradicted the mainstream, test-based, top-down accountability, and standardisation and uniformity in education. This has given the Nordic countries more freedom to develop their ECEC system, and the possibility to develop pedagogy based on children's needs.<sup>2</sup>

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### Aim

The aim of the survey was to find out more about the current challenges and practices in ECEC pedagogy in the Nordic countries.

The survey (see Appendix 1) involved three main questions:

1. What challenges and needs for change are there in current early childhood education and care?
2. What types of good practices/methods have been introduced to enable responses to the challenges or needs for change?
3. Which are the key areas for development in the future?

The three questions each had sub-questions concerning administration (such as which challenges and needs for change are there in current early childhood education and care regarding administration), everyday activities, research, and what is highlighted by the research. All the questions and sub-questions related to two dimensions, "in general" and "in the case of immigrants/asylum seekers".

### Respondents and data

The survey, prepared by The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, was sent to the Ministries of Education in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway,

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Karila, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Paananen, Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2015.



and Sweden. The responses from Greenland and the Faroe Islands were included with the responses from Denmark and the responses from Åland were included with the responses from Finland, but Greenland and Åland submitted their own responses.

The respondents were from the Ministries of Education. The survey produced 43 pages of written text, but it should be noted that not all countries responded to all questions. There was also variation in the length and depth of responses, depending on the questions. The respondents found the survey rather hard to complete. No precise conclusions can be drawn or generalisations made from the responses, but the survey does provide some insight into the current challenges facing the Nordic countries and some examples of how to resolve them.

The data was coded in two phases. In the first phase, the data was coded by question (24), and each question-response was coded separately. The "general" and "immigrant/asylum seekers" responses were coded separately. In the second phase, bearing in mind the questions, the responses were read several times in an attempt to identify common patterns across the data source (common topics for all countries).

## Challenges and solutions

This section considers the challenges and solutions, illustrated with quotations embedded in empirical data. The quotations are followed by the country submitting the comment.

### 1. What challenges and needs for change are there in current early childhood education and care?

#### *Challenges and needs for change in the administration*

The main challenges and needs relating to the ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general were:

1. Strengthen pedagogical leadership. *Increased demands on pedagogical skills in leadership to lead and develop education in the ECEC. (Åland)*
2. Teachers' professional development (working with children), and lifelong learning.
3. Strengthen and implement curriculum work. *Implementing fully the Icelandic national curriculum guide for preschools. (Iceland)*
4. Focus on quality issues. *Quality varies considerably between nurseries, in terms of staff: children ratios, group sizes, staff competencies and qualifications, interactions between staff and children and among children, and the pedagogical activities and content. (Norway)*

The main challenges and needs relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation were:

1. More resources (places for children, funding). *The increasing number of refugees arriving in Denmark in recent years has generated economic and practical challenges in the municipalities, e.g. in having enough places in ECEC for the children.* (Denmark)
2. Inclusive practices for children and parents (understanding diversity). *Economic and cultural issues may hinder participation in preschools.* (Norway)
3. Cooperation between education, and social and health sector.
4. The need for competent staff to work with immigrants/refugees/asylum seekers. *Recruit more specialists in the field and make better use of the specialists in immigrant children's needs that we already have.* (Iceland)

#### **Challenges and needs for change in everyday activities**

Responses relating to the ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general were grouped in four main categories:

1. The need for professional development, more knowledge and expertise about children and process factors of education.

*[need to] shift the spotlight away from diagnoses and assessment into increasing the preschool teacher's knowledge on appropriate practices, especially with regard to language and literacy, and getting the universities to incorporate this in preschool teacher training programmes.* (Iceland)

2. Challenges for change regarding structural factors and preconditions of education.

*... the great difference in quality between different preschool settings. The number of preschool teachers, group sizes, resource allocation, support to children in need of special support, etc. Altogether, this is about creating a preschool that is equal.* (Sweden)

3. Concerns about quality of education or setting.

*... to continuously and systematically work with quality aspects.* (Sweden)

4. Specific individual issues such as quality of leadership, exclusion and bullying in preschool, and implementation of curriculum.

*Recent surveys indicate that some children experience exclusion or bullying in preschools. It is therefore crucial to be aware of this and work systematically to ensure good wellbeing and a good learning environment in preschools.* (Norway)

Responses relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation were grouped in two main categories:

1. Need for sufficient number of teachers with knowledge of working with children of immigrant/asylum seeker background, especially regarding linguistic issues and children and families in crisis.

*It is imperative that preschools know how to support children in language development, supporting children's development of identity and mother tongue as well as acquiring skills in Norwegian, thereby laying a strong foundation before starting school. This will help integration in the longer term. This requires skilled staff equipped with knowledge of language development and second-language development, as well as multicultural understanding and pedagogical strategies to support the individual child and the*

*group of children. It is a challenge to ensure that all preschools can provide a good language environment and good teaching approaches to fulfil the aims. (Norway)*

2. Lack of knowledge, resources and ability to meet and collaborate with parents, and ensure inclusive practices for children and parents.

*More knowledge and work on how to meet the parents of immigrant children. Preschool has a key role in inclusion of families. (Åland)*

The need for cultural understanding, learning about different ethnic groups, traditions and religions, working against prejudices, and the need for competent staff to work with immigrants/refugees/asylum seekers were brought up. The need for cooperation between the education and social and health sectors was mentioned.

#### **Challenges and needs for change in the research activities**

Few needs were identified for research activities, either in general or in relation to the immigrant/asylum seeker situations. Challenges and needs relating to the ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general were as follows:

1. Need for collaboration between researchers and teachers/teachers as researchers, and challenge to implement research-based knowledge in practice.
2. Evaluation of implication of framework curriculum/specific educational programmes.
3. Lack of reliable and valid research evidence of quality of education, need for longitudinal studies.

More research is needed in some specific areas, e.g. children under three in preschool, horizontal and vertical transition, children's play, children and families in risk, early intervention. Specific

challenges were reported in Greenland and Åland. Åland: *We don't have any research of our own but would love to be a part of ongoing projects relating to various forms of play, possible advantages and disadvantages of early intervention.* Greenland has a constant lack of people to analyse the existing data, such as different screening materials already collected in the country.

Challenges and needs relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation included the following issues:

- a) The overall need for research on language learning and linguistic development. Examples:

*More research is needed about the education of children with immigrant background, multilingualism and learning Icelandic as a second language. (Iceland)*

*A contested issue is how mother tongue proficiency influences learning and development of Norwegian as the second language, or development of multilingualism (in the Norwegian context). Some studies indicate the importance of mother tongue first, others indicate the need for immersion or even systematic programs. US studies have been carried out under different circumstances. There is need for research taking account of the situation in Norway (full-day, in multilingual groups, with multilingual or monolingual staff). (Norway)*

- b) Research is also needed on education of immigrant children, and cooperation with parents in multicultural and diverse situations, e.g. on how to approach children and families in a crisis. More research is needed on quality issues, but with focus on the immigrant/asylum seeker situation.

#### **Challenges/needs for change in the ECEC pedagogy as highlighted by research**

There were few responses to this question. Chal-

allenges and needs relating to the ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general were as follows:

- a) Promoting quality of interaction and communication between teachers and children.
- b) Developing pedagogy for younger children, and supporting play of children with special needs.
- c) More emphasis on didactics and diverse subject areas, especially mathematics, science and technology.

Some individual challenges were brought up regarding the important role of parents/families in supporting children's development and learning, and the need for competent teachers for research activities.

Challenges and needs relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation could not be classified, as each challenge was mentioned only once:

- Training of staff in how to work with children and parents of immigrant backgrounds.
- Inclusion, equity and equality in ECEC for all children, e.g. to meet school expectations.
- Intervention programmes on second-language learning before school entry.
- Importance both of teacher-led talk and peer-talk as well as the neighbourhood in predicting the development of second language.
- Attention to quality issues.
- The concept of a multicultural preschool, what the implications of such research are on practice.

## 2. What types of good practices/methods have been introduced to enable responses to the challenges or needs for change?

### *Good practices/methods in the administration*

Good practices/methods in administration relating to the ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general included the following:

1. A variety of policy making practices are used to develop ECEC and to raise the quality and improve the image of ECEC. National policy making often falls into three types of actions: 1) regulations (new bills and frameworks etc.), 2) national funding (financial support for different kinds of projects, training of staff or development work), and 3) strategic development and information steering (collaboration with stakeholders, campaigns, networks).
2. Professional development/teacher training (a need for high quality staff): *Current staff in preschools are being encouraged to become qualified teachers. Municipalities have provided funds to support preschool staff training to become preschool teachers by allowing them to attend university in work time and/or providing textbooks and arranging study leave. (Iceland)* *Professional development for preschool head. (Sweden)*

Good practices/methods in administration relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation included the following:

1. Specific concrete practices. *The National Board for Education has surveyed existing materials for ECEC. Special attention has been paid to what material is available for immigrant children. (Finland)*
2. "Clubs" for children in reception centre.
3. Cooperation between education sector and social and health care sector.



### *Good practices/methods in everyday activities*

Good practices and methods in the everyday activities relating to the ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general were grouped in four main categories:

1. Recruiting experts and assistants at national, local and setting level to provide guidance and help in different areas of need.

*The county governors will, as always, be crucial in the development of measures locally in cooperation with municipalities and preschool owners, and establishing partnerships with universities/university colleges in the region. (Norway)*

2. Introducing and providing methods and observation material for staff, e.g. external evaluation, systematic quality assessment, reflective practices, child-centred education, children's development and pedagogical documentation.

*A broad spectrum of methods used in systematic quality assessment: interviews, observations, enquiries, quality evaluations, like ECERS, pedagogic documentation. (Sweden)*

3. Co-operation between preschools and teacher training, good contacts between preschools and municipal leaders.

*We have been working with the Social Education College, which trains preschool teachers in making teaching materials for the students and for employees in preschools. We have built good relationships with local leaders in municipal pre-schools and childminders across the country. (Greenland)*

4. In-service and customised training for staff's professional development.

*Preschools throughout Greenland need highly trained preschool teachers, so we have customised training courses for teachers, first at bachelor level and then at master level. We also have different levels of courses with instructional coaching. (Greenland)*

Responses gave other examples of good practices, such as regular meetings and dialogue at staff meetings in preschools, a national trade journal, and national prizes for excellent work.

Only one country answered the question about good practices/methods relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation. The responses were:

- a) Employing interpreters for all parents, language facilitators working in all preschools, offering parents information translated into different languages.

b) Organising courses, consultation and support on multicultural issues, and working with immigrant families.

c) Providing material resources, including web-based, for working with multicultural issues.

### **Good practices/methods in research**

There were only two responses to this question about ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general, one from Greenland and the other from Sweden.

The response from Greenland concerned screening material to be used and utilised for early intervention: *In 2013, we were given a political task to make screening material for the health, wellbeing and development of 3-year-olds, and school readiness for 5-year-olds. These materials are now soon finished and will be tested throughout the country. We are holding courses on pedagogical approaches to screening, and compiling ideas for educational initiatives to support employees and parents in their early interventions for children with areas of concern.*

The response from Sweden referred to the broad spectrum of methods used in systematic quality assessment: *interviews, observations, enquiries, quality evaluations, such as ECERS, pedagogic documentation.* (See also the Swedish response regarding good practices in everyday activities.)

There was only one response to the question concerning good practices/methods in research relating to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation: *Some research on the development of bilingual and multilingual children's phonological awareness.*

### **Good practices/methods highlighted by research**

The responses in this section could not be classified due to their varied nature. Some of them are presented below:

- *Advanced, continuous skills building for practitioners so that they may follow and adopt new*

*theories on children's development, etc. in their work.* (Sweden)

- *Training schools where universities and pre-schools can cooperate to improve and develop student training and the preschool teacher training.* (Sweden)

- *The methods used in everyday life (e.g. work in communities, helping each other, and inclusion) to be shared with partners throughout the country.* (Greenland)

- *Development of the preschool as a learning arena through innovative collaboration between (teacher) education and practitioners.* (Norway)

- *Longitudinal studies on quality and effect of preschool, including developing a tool for preschools to develop their practice.* (Norway)

Only one country gave an example of good practices/methods highlighted by the research regarding the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation: *The implications of studies on children's language development and multilingualism should be clarified, second-generation immigrants' culture.*

### **3. Which are the key areas for development in the future?**

#### **Key areas for development in administration**

All countries responded to this question, and responses were grouped in five categories:

1. Reform of ECEC legislation, reforms, development and evaluation of framework curriculum

*The new core curriculum for ECEC will be launched at the end of 2016 and the local authorities must implement local curricula based on the core curriculum from August 2017. The National Board of Education will support the local authorities by arranging training, producing support material and coordinating the devel-*

*oping network. However, main responsibility for implementing the new curriculum lies with the local ECEC providers. (Finland)*

2. Improving and securing staff skills, including preschool leaders

*Knowledge on how to identify good preschool teacher competence in order to offer appropriate professional training, and to know which persons to employ. (Sweden)*

3. Attention to teacher education: researching what kind of education needed, increasing intake of students.

*How to attract more students to the preschool teacher education, especially men. (Iceland)*

4. Development of adequate quality assessment systems and methods.

*Development and implementation of a System for Quality in Preschools: The system has been under development for the past four years and will be launched in four regional conferences this autumn. The system will provide the sector with information, knowledge and tools to promote good-quality dialogues between parents and preschools (owner, pedagogical leadership and staff) and between the authorities and preschools. (Norway)*

Other key areas were only mentioned once, such as maintaining the debate on child-centeredness, ensuring work/life balance, bridging the gap between parental leave, and attendance in preschool.

Responses on key areas for development in the administration in relation to the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation were diverse, so can only be listed individually. Some of them are presented below:

- How to implement the school of diversity that takes into account that all children are the same and also different.
- How to see children's different backgrounds as an asset rather than a problem, and focus on children's strengths instead of weaknesses.
- The emphasis on early intervention.
- Focus on language development of children with different language backgrounds, and on all children attending preschools.
- How to meet the changing needs of society, and ensure that all institutions concerned with education and welfare of children and families with immigrant background take their responsibility.
- Proposal [in a White Paper to the Parliament] that the Framework Plan is to be more specific on the obligations for preschools to work with language, and to describe more clearly the outcomes of the preschools' work. The government wants to support preschools by initiating work on the development of a guiding norm for a children's language level after attending preschool.

**Key areas for development in everyday activities**

ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general:

1. Collaboration between ECE and different stakeholders (researchers, parents, school):  
*Collaboration between preschools and compulsory schools to make the transition between the school levels smoother. (Iceland).*
2. Systematic quality assessment. *Systematic quality assessment to follow and support children in their learning; focus on both their weaker and stronger sides, and to allocate resources to strengthen the weaker sides. (Iceland)*
3. Curriculum implementation.

Current immigrant/asylum seeker situation:

Responses were grouped in three areas:

- a) Increasing teachers' intercultural competence.  
*How to develop the intercultural competence of all teachers.* (Sweden)
- b) Understanding diversity, and needs of children and parents from different cultural backgrounds.
- c) Resources: *How to ensure sufficient finance for ECEC centres working with diverse groups of children and families.* (Sweden)

#### **Key areas for development in research**

ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general:

There appears to be a need to expand the research volume at least in terms of ECEC quality issues, comparative studies, and longitudinal studies. Research on the current immigrant/asylum seeker issues is insufficient.

#### **Key areas for development in ECEC pedagogy as highlighted by the research**

Research highlighted the following topics as key areas for development in ECEC pedagogy:  
ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general.

- a) Research on future competences.
- b) Transition from preschool to school.
- c) Research on toddlers.
- d) Research gap concerning immigrants and refugees.

Current immigrant/asylum seeker situation:

No key areas were identified for development in the ECEC pedagogy.

This final section is a collection of **good practices and methods**, one from each country.

In general:

**Denmark:** A new Government Bill was presented in Parliament 2016.

**Finland:** Efforts to increase preschool teacher training and availability.

**Greenland:** Customised training to produce highly trained preschool teachers.

**Iceland:** Preschool teacher education on the same level as other teacher professions (master degree).

**Norway:** Development and implementation of System for Quality in Preschools.

**Sweden:** A broad spectrum of methods used in systematic quality assessment: interviews, observations, enquiries, quality evaluations, like ECERS, pedagogic documentation.

**Åland:** Pedagogical competence in administration, supported by a planned leadership training 2017.  
Immigrants/asylum seekers:

**Denmark:** Organising the context of language stimulation for refugee children who are not enrolled in ECEC.

**Finland:** The new core curriculum for ECEC will incorporate immigrant children more thoroughly than the current guidelines for ECEC.

**Greenland:** NA.

**Iceland:** Policy on multicultural education in preschools with multiple resources and ideas on how to work with immigrant children.

**Norway:** Different policies and measures for refugees/asylum seekers in a first phase and for

immigrants/migrant children in general. While the family is living in an asylum centre, the Directorate of Immigration states that children from 2 years up to school age will be offered a place at a "child base" at the centre for minimum three hours daily Monday to Friday.

**Sweden:** Professional development of heads of preschools.

**Åland:** Early interventions.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have reported on and described the current challenges and good practices in ECEC pedagogy in the Nordic countries. The report is based on the results of a survey, prepared by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and sent to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The responses give some views on the current situation and challenges in the Nordic countries.

The following topics represent common challenges and needs, and key areas for development across the Nordic countries: collaboration across settings/stakeholders; professional development of ECEC staff; quality of ECEC; developing and implementing curriculum; and the need to conduct longitudinal studies on different areas of ECEC. In the case of immigrants/asylum seekers, the common themes were collaboration across settings/stakeholders; need for interculturally competent teachers; more resources; need of research; and inclusive practices.

In general, the most frequently discussed topics were 1) professional development of ECEC staff and the need for highly qualified teachers, and 2) quality issues in ECEC.

Despite differences between the Nordic countries, they share a lot of common features in pedagogy in early childhood education and care, and many of the current challenges are similar. Sharing expe-

riences and views between the Nordic countries is useful and will help each country develop their ECEC.

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## References

Karila, K. (2012). A Nordic perspective on early childhood education and care policy. *European Journal of Education*, 47, pp. 584–595.

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## Appendix 1.

### 1. What challenges and needs for change are there in current early childhood education and care ...

#### ... in terms of ECEC pedagogy/ECEC in general?

- Challenges and needs for change in administration:
- Challenges and needs for change in everyday activities:
- Challenges and needs for change in research activities:
- Challenges/needs for change in the ECEC pedagogy as highlighted by research:

#### ... in terms of the current immigrant/asylum seeker situation?

- Challenges and needs for change in administration:
- Challenges and needs for change in everyday activities:
- Challenges and needs for change in research activities:
- pedagogy as highlighted by research:

### 2. What types of good practices/methods have been introduced to enable responses to the challenges or needs for change?

- Good practices/methods in administration:
- Good practices/methods in everyday activities:
- Good practices/methods in research:
- Good practices/methods highlighted by research:

- Good practices/methods in administration:
- Good practices/methods in everyday activities:
- Good practices/methods in research:
- Good practices/methods highlighted by research:

### 3. Which are the key areas for development in the future?

- Key areas for development in administration:
- Key areas for development in everyday activities:
- Key areas for development in research:
- Key areas for development in ECEC pedagogy as highlighted by research:

- Key areas for development in administration:
- Key areas for development in everyday activities:
- Key areas for development in research:
- Key areas for development in ECEC pedagogy as highlighted by research:

# Reflections from Europe on ECEC Pedagogy in the Nordic Countries: A Critical Friend's Views on the Way Forward

**Edward Melhuish**

*Professor of Human Development,*

*University of Oxford & Birkbeck, University of London, United Kingdom*

The Ministry of Education and Culture had invited Professor Edward Melhuish to make a presentation at the seminar. This article is a summary of his presentation, prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture with the consent of Professor Melhuish.

## **Nordic approach to ECEC pedagogy**

Professor Melhuish opened his presentation by discussing the Nordic approach to ECEC pedagogy. He shared some key findings of two Finnish researchers, Lipponen and Hännikäinen, to describe the characteristics and current state of ECEC in the Nordic countries. The Nordic approach to ECEC builds on a child's interests and encourages play, relationships and curiosity. Play is considered an educational method but it also has an intrinsic value. The Nordic approach belongs to social pedagogical tradition and in the Nordic countries, and schoolification is taboo. This means that ECEC in the Nordic countries adopts a holistic approach to early childhood education, resists the "school preparation" approach, and avoids introducing formal learning standards too early.

Professor Melhuish pointed out that a great challenge is the big division between the policy makers and the field. Other overall challenges are staff's professional development, quality of ECEC, developing and implementing curricula, and the lack of longitudinal studies. Immigration adds its own challenges. Interculturally competent teachers and inclusive practices, as well as sufficient resources and research, are very much needed. Challenges presented lead to a conclusion that central issues for pedagogy are quality and professional development.

What is pedagogy? Professor Melhuish explained that pedagogy is different from a curriculum. Pedagogy is not the ideal; instead, it is how educating actually happens. In other words, pedagogy is what a teacher does to influence learning in every day practices.

Children's capabilities are shaped by the quality and range of early experiences and interactions at home and in the ECEC environment. The nature of interactions between ECEC staff and children, between peers, and with the environment, are all factors in process quality, and explain the effects of ECEC on children's learning and development. Learning through play, which is emphasised in the Nordic countries, is highly effective for development. Children learn new skills when an adult helps them to practice tasks that are just beyond their current ability. This is called scaffolding, and is an example of interaction that drives development. Children learn important skills in ECEC, so pedagogy matters.

The quality of ECEC in the Nordic countries is considered to be high, but Professor Melhuish posed a question: could it be improved and, if so, how? Research shows that ECEC staff skills on stimulation of development and fostering peer interactions would be important targets for improvement.

## **Improving ECEC pedagogy: language development and self-regulation**

The question that probably everyone in the audience had on their minds was how to improve ECEC pedagogy. Professor Melhuish recommended concentrating on two key factors: language development and self-regulation.



Advancing language development and self-regulation in the early years seems to be particularly important for long-term outcomes, and these skills develop through interactions. These interactions fostering language development and self-regulation are particularly important aspects of quality in ECEC. Interactions both in the home and in ECEC have effects on developmental outcomes.

Interactions between adults and children are vital for early learning. In high-quality interactions, adults are genuinely interested in what the child is doing; adults are listening, are helping to extend children's thoughts and knowledge, and implementing sustained, shared thinking. In settings where such sustained shared thinking is more common, children make greater developmental progress.

As interactions are the key to improving ECEC pedagogy, Professor Melhuish gave the audience one take-home message: interactions drive development.

In trying to explain the importance of language development, Professor Melhuish shared fascinating knowledge on brain development in the early years. Most synaptic connections have been made by the age of three. Synapses must be used, otherwise they will lose function. The critical period of language development is between the ages of nine months and four years. Higher cognitive

functions follow close behind language development. Language development underpins cognitive, educational and social development, so a child with poor language at the age of three is at risk of falling behind in all important aspects of development. Educational background of the parents is a major influence on child's vocabulary and language development.

Non-cognitive skills, such as social skills, are individual attributes that are not derived from cognitive abilities. Of all non-cognitive skills, only self-regulation affects educational outcomes. The learning of regulating behaviour and emotions starts early in life. In practice, it means that a child becomes capable of thinking before acting and controlling their anger or needing to cry. By the end of the ECEC years, the well-regulated child can, for example, wait their turn, resist the temptation to grab an object from someone else, and persist at a challenging task (Berk et al. 2006, p. 74). Besides the home learning environment, both quality and duration of ECEC have significant effects on self-regulation. Self-regulation is also influenced by age, gender, birth weight, siblings (1 or 2 is ideal), poverty, parental education, and socio-economic status.

### **Quality of ECEC important**

According to Professor Melhuish's own research (Melhuish et al, 1990), language development is linked to quality of care between the ages 0–3.

The number of communications and responses is essential to language development, and these effects persist to the later stages of development. Stability of care is associated with quality of care.

The findings of the UK project, EPPSE (Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education) speak strongly in favour of high-quality ECEC and preschools. From the age of two, all children benefit from preschool. Part-time preschool has the same benefits as full-time. Preschool effects are more persistent for numeracy and in general, the effects persist until teenage years. High-quality preschool can protect a child from the effects of a poor-quality school. Secondary school effects are strong. The research data indisputably shows that quality of preschool matters, and high-quality ECEC also has a positive effect on self-regulation and pro-social behaviour.

International evidence on benefits of preschool or ECEC is consistent. In Norway, France and Switzerland, population studies have confirmed that all preschool improves education and increases employment and incomes. In Denmark, high-quality preschools were found to secure better learning outcomes at the age of 16. In Northern Ireland, high-quality preschool significantly increased grades in English and mathematics.

High-quality ECEC not only benefits individuals but also society. ECEC adds to education and social adjustment and therefore reduces depression, substance abuse, behaviour problems and crime. This reduces societal costs and increases general wellbeing. ECEC is therefore an essential part of the infrastructure for optimising global wellbeing.

## Conclusions

At the end of his presentation, Professor Melhuish discussed learning through play. Play can be a powerful tool in learning, but it cannot be any kind of play. It requires the right amount of adult support and structure. Most learning is achieved somewhere between child-initiated play and focused learning. Adults can support child-initiated play by giving little hints and helping the child forward. Focused learning on the other hand means adult-guided, playful and experimental activities in which an adult enables the proper environment and sensitive interaction. Play can develop cognitive, social and emotional skills, such as empathy.

In conclusion, the early years are very important in a child's development. High-quality ECEC boosts a child's development but parenting is also important. One way to improve ECEC pedagogy would be a greater focus on professional training of ECEC staff on fostering language development and self-regulation. The core message of Professor Melhuish's presentation was *interactions drive development*.

# Annex 1

# Seminar Programme

## Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care – Nordic Challenges and Solutions

22 September 2016

The House of Estates (Hall 15), Snellmaninkatu 9-11, Helsinki, Finland.

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### PROGRAMME

**9.30 Refreshments, Registration**

**10.00 Welcome and opening of the seminar**

Minister of Education and Culture *Sanni Grahn-Laasonen*, Finland

**10.15 ECEC Pedagogy in the Nordic Countries – Similarities and Differences**

*Kirsti Karila*, Professor, University of Tampere, Finland

**10.45 Values Education in Nordic Preschools – Lived Values in Educational Practices**

Central findings from the Nordic research project "Values Education in Nordic Preschools – Basis of Education for Tomorrow"

*Eva Johansson*, Professor, University of Stavanger, Norway, Project Manager of Values project  
*Anna-Maija Puroila*, Adjunct Professor, Senior Lecturer University of Oulu, Finland

Discussion

**11.45 Lunch**

Served at the House of Estates, Hall 20

**13.00 Performance: Pädi – Show me!**

Onnela preschool, pre-primary group "*Hamsterit*" with pre-primary teacher *Janne Myllylä* and childminder *Iina Miettinen*

**13.15 Current perspectives of Nordic ECEC Pedagogy – Challenges and Solutions**

**Summary and Reflections from the Country Responses**

*Lasse Lipponen*, Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland

*Maritta Hännikäinen*, Professor, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

**A Nordic Panel Discussion with Voices from the Field, Administration and Research**

Chair: *Lasse Lipponen*, Professor, University of Helsinki, Finland

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**Panelists:**

- *Tomas Ellegaard*, Associate Professor, Roskilde University, Denmark
- *Kirsi Alila*, Counsellor of Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland
- *Jóhanna Einarsdóttir*, Professor, University of Iceland, Iceland
- *Mari Fagerheim*, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Education and Research, Norway
- *Christer Toftenius*, Senior Administrative Officer, Ministry of Education, Sweden
- *Susanne Arvidsson Stridsman*, Preschool expert, Department of Education, Nacka municipality, Sweden

**15.00 Coffee Break****15.30 Reflections from Europe on ECEC Pedagogy in the Nordic Countries**

*Edward Melhuish*, Professor, University of Oxford, UK

**16.45 Closure of the day****Chair of the day**

Tarja Kahiluoto, Special Government Advisor, Ministry of Education and Culture

**Moderator of the online board**

Maiju Paananen, Researcher, University of Tampere

**Online board**

<https://padlet.com/nordicecec2016/seminar>

**Online streaming**

[http://www.oph.fi/saadokset\\_ja\\_ohjeet/opetussuunnitelmien\\_ja\\_tutkintojen\\_perusteet/varhaiskasvatus/paikallisen\\_tyon\\_tuki/koulutustilaisuudet/pohjoismainen\\_seminaari](http://www.oph.fi/saadokset_ja_ohjeet/opetussuunnitelmien_ja_tutkintojen_perusteet/varhaiskasvatus/paikallisen_tyon_tuki/koulutustilaisuudet/pohjoismainen_seminaari)

## **Annex 2**

## Keynote Speakers

**Eva Johansson** is Professor of Education at the Department of Early Childhood Education, University of Stavanger, Norway. She is an experienced researcher in the field of early childhood education, with an extensive research and publication profile in the area of values education, issues of democracy and children's morality. She is leading the Nordic project: *Values Education in Nordic Preschools. Basis of Education for Tomorrow*, supported by NordForsk. She is also engaged in international collaboration in Australian Research Council-funded projects investigating how early years professionals' epistemic beliefs influence children's moral learning and active citizenship. Her recent research concerns values education in early childhood settings, with a focus on the communication of rights in everyday practice, conflicts as potentials for democracy, and toddlers' relationships as a matter of sharing worlds.

Adjunct Professor Anna-Maija Puroila works as a senior lecturer at the University of Oulu, Finland. She has extensive experience in research and developmental work concerning Finnish early childhood education. She has participated in several national and international research projects. She has also served as the principal investigator of the Finnish research team in the Nordic project *Values Education in Nordic Preschools: Basis of Education for Tomorrow*. Puroila's research interests cover institutional early childhood contexts from different angles. Her recent research has focused on young children's narrated wellbeing and values education in early childhood education settings, and the influences of the renewed legislation in Finnish early childhood education.

**Kirsti Karila** is Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Tampere, Finland. Her research areas include professionalism, parent-practitioner collaboration and institutional cultures and institutional change in ECEC. Karila is currently investigating municipal-level ECEC policies, parents' choices and children's early childhood education trajectories in the *CHILD-CARE Consortium – Finnish Childcare Policies: In/equality in focus*, funded by the Strategic Research Council (Academy of Finland). Karila has held an active position with regard to developing early childhood education in Finland, e.g. as a member of working groups evaluating Finnish ECEC training and education, and preparing national policy and information policy documents.

**Maritta Hännikäinen** is Professor in Early Childhood Education at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research interests focus on children's wellbeing, learning and development in early childhood education settings. She has participated in several cross-European research projects examining, for example,

quality issues in early childhood education, relational approaches in early childhood education, development of learners' communities, and children under three in daycare centres. The most recent project is an EU/FP7 project on *Curriculum Quality Analysis and Impact Review of European ECEC (CARE)*. In addition to research activities, she is involved in many international networks; for instance, she is editor of the Nordic Early Childhood Education Research (*Nordisk Barnehageforskning*) Journal.

**Lasse Lipponen** is Professor of Education, with special reference to early childhood education, at the Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki. His research work focuses on children's agency, cultures of compassion, and teacher education, and has been funded by the European Union, Singapore Ministry of Education, Academy of Finland, The Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation, and the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Lipponen has authored over 100 research articles on teaching and learning.

**Edward Melhuish** is Professor of Human Development at the University of Oxford, and at Birkbeck, University of London. His studies contributed to social policy in the UK in the area of families with young children and early years services, including the 1989 Children Act, the 2005 Children Act, 2006 Childcare Bill and policy on childcare, early education, child poverty and parental support in the UK and other countries. He has undertaken research in 12 countries. He has been an expert witness to House of Commons Select Committees, and a scientific advisor for the European Commission, OECD and WHO. In 2016 he was awarded the OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to social science.





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## **PEDAGOGY IN ECEC**

Finland held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016. The Ministry of Education and Culture organised the seminar, *Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care – Nordic Challenges and Solutions*, as part of the sectoral presidency programme for education and science. The seminar was held on 22 September 2016 at the House of the Estates in Helsinki.

This report comprises a series of articles about the presentations held at the seminar. Participants represented ECEC administration, research, and other professionals involved in ECEC from each Nordic country and the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

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