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Noora Heiskanen

Children's Needs for Support and Support Measures in Pedagogical Documents of Early Childhood Education and Care

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

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In educational institutions, extensive documentation is conducted in order to plan pedagogical practices and support. However, documentation is not always a neutral and harmless practice, as it has potentially far-reaching and problematic consequences. Moreover, it is a process of creating and maintaining institutional realities such as responsibilities and rights. Based on the recommendations of developing functional pedagogical documents, multi-faceted and multi-voiced information about children's strengths, interests, and needs for support as well as specific, measurable objectives and rigorously recorded measures of support are described as vital in meeting child's needs, along with continuous assessments. However, in practice, pedagogical documents typically problematize the child by describing the child's need for support as an individual matter, and the role of pedagogy and professional responsibility remains weak. This research aims to provide knowledge about the functions, contents, and linguistic features of pedagogical documents in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In the inspection of the longitudinal document data (N = 312) from 108 Finnish children, the question of how well the documents meet the national regulations and research-based recommendations for drafting educationally meaningful pedagogical documents is discussed. In the analysis, Maurizio Ferraris' theory of documentality is used to observe in what sense the documents can be seen as weak or strong in orientating ECEC practices. Moreover, the positions of children, parents, and professionals are investigated. The results illustrate that the documents are strong in problem-based descriptions of children's needs for support and in professional dominance in planning, but weak in guiding the systematic development of pedagogy. Documents typically position children in troubled positions and label parents as informants lacking power to influence. To summarize, documents meet the recommendations and legislative requirements relatively poorly and consequently remain simple gateways to categorizing children instead of serving as cornerstones supporting their wellbeing, growth, and learning.

Keywords: pedagogical document, need for support, early childhood education and care (ECEC), documentality, discourse analysis, positioning theory

TIIVISTELMÄ

Heiskanen, Noora
Lapsen tuen tarpeet ja tukitoimet varhaiskasvatuksen pedagogisissa asiakirjoissa
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Pedagogisia asiakirjoja käytetään kasvatusinstituutioissa pedagogisten toimintatapojen ja tuen suunnittelun välineenä. Dokumentaatio ei ole kuitenkaan neutraali ja harmiton käytäntö, vaan sillä voi olla kauaskantoisia ja ongelmallisiakin seurauksia. Dokumentoimalla paitsi kuvataan myös tuotetaan ja ylläpidetään institutionaalista todellisuutta, kuten lasten ja aikuisten vastuita ja oikeuksia. Tutkimusperustaiset suositukset lapsen pedagogisten asiakirjojen laadinnasta korostavat monipuolisen ja moniäänisen tiedon tärkeyttä. Lapsen systemaattisen tukemisen lähtökohtana tulisi olla vahvuudet, kiinnostuksen kohteet ja tuen tarpeet samoin kuin yksityiskohtaiset ja mitattavissa olevat tuen toteuttamisen kuvaukset sekä jatkuva tuen toimivuuden arviointi. Käytännössä pedagogiset asiakirjat saattavat kuitenkin luoda lapsesta ongelmallista kuvaa kuvaamalla tuen tarpeita ainoastaan lapsen sisäisinä ominaisuuksinaan ja jättämällä pedagogiikan ja ammattilaisten vastuun sivurooliin. Tämä tutkimus pyrkii tarjoamaan tietoa dokumentaation funktioista, sisällöistä ja kielellisistä piirteistä varhaiskasvatuksen ja esiopetuksen kontekstissa. Pitkittäisen, 108 suomalaiselta lapselta kerätyn dokumenttiaineiston (N = 312) diskursiivisen tarkastelun pohjalta selvitetään, miten hyvin pedagogiset asiakirjat vastaavat kansallisia ja kansainvälisiä ohjeistuksia sekä tutkimusperustaisia suosituksia asiakirjojen laadinnasta. Lisäksi tutkitaan lapsille, huoltajille ja ammattilaisille rakentuvia positioita asiakirjoissa sekä hyödynnetään tulosten tulkinnassa Maurizio Ferrariksen (2013) dokumentalismin teoriaa (*documentality theory*) heikoista ja vahvoista dokumenteista. Tutkimustulosten mukaan pedagogiset asiakirjat toimivat vahvoina dokumentteina tuen tarpeiden ongelmakeskeisessä kuvaamisessa ja suunnittelun ammattilaisjohtoisuuden vahvistamisessa sekä heikkoina dokumentteina systemaattisen tuen suunnittelun takaamisessa. Lapset asemoidaan asiakirjoissa tyypillisesti haastaviksi ja huoltajat esitetään lähinnä tiedonlähteinä, joilla ei ole todellista valtaa vaikuttaa lapsen tuen suunnitteluun. Yhteenvetona todetaan, että asiakirjat vastaavat verrattain heikosti ohjeistuksia ja tutkimusperustaisia suosituksia. Tästä johtuen pedagogiset asiakirjat jäävät enemmän lasten luokittelun välineiksi kuin lapsen oppimisen, kasvun ja hyvinvoinnin systemaattisen tukemisen pohjaksi.

Asiasanat: dokumentaatio, pedagogiset asiakirjat, tuen tarve, varhaiskasvatus, esiopetus, dokumentalismin teoria, diskurssianalyysi, positioteoria

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While working as an ECEC teacher, I started to pay attention to writing as a professional duty and a skill that was hard to master for many. I realized that writings of professionals – including pedagogical documents – included numerous presentations about values and norms of ECEC institution, even though this often went unquestioned. For the past four years, it has been a great pleasure to immerse myself with the dissertation research that aims to study these practices. The journey has been inspirational, instructive, and enjoyable.

During this journey, I have had the most supportive supervisors, Docent Tanja Vehkakoski and Professor Maarit Alasuutari. Tanja and Maarit, you both have the great wisdom of guiding a doctoral student with encouragement and thoroughness. Moreover, it has been an enormous privilege to be able to learn from your extensive expertise. Tanja, your constructive and rigorous feedback as well as numerous encouraging words during these years have meant the world to me. Your door has always been open, and you have put your mind to my work with total dedication, for which I am forever grateful. Maarit, numerous times, your incisive questions have challenged my thinking toward a deeper understanding of theory, methodology, and research in general. In addition of being so supportive and believing in me, I want to thank you for not letting me to take the easy way out, especially regarding the theoretical aspects of my research. It has been a great honor to learn from and with both of you.

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Jyväskylä, September 2019
Noora Heiskanen

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Sub-study I	Heiskanen, N., Alasuutari, M., & Vehkakoski, T. (2018). Positioning children with special educational needs in early childhood education and care documents. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(6), 827–843. doi:10.1080/01425692.2018.1426443
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Considering the instructions given and comments made by the co-authors, the author of this thesis is the first author of all three publications. She has largely contributed to the study design, analysis, interpretation, manuscript preparation, and literature research of all sub-studies I, III, and III. She has also organized and conducted the data collection.

1 INTRODUCTION

In current educational practices, numerous documents are drafted and created, among them children's individualized pedagogical documents. Pedagogical documents, that in this research refer to individualized and structured education plans, are presented as a means of developing the overall quality of early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Alasuutari, Markström, & Vallberg-Roth, 2014, p. 17; Elfström Pettersson, 2018). Moreover, they are seen as cornerstones of support development and other arrangements for children with needs for educational support (see, e.g., Miller, 2014; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Existing literature states that the drafting of an individualized pedagogical document for a child has many positive consequences. When support planning occurs in a written form, it makes the support and later assessment more systematic and, consequently, helps professionals assure the functionality and individuality of support (Miller, 2014; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Yell & Stecker, 2003). In addition, drafting of a pedagogical document aims at giving a voice to children and parents (e.g., Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 2; Buldu, 2010; Elfström Pettersson, 2015; Lindgren, 2012) in order to achieve a multivoice and multiperspective understanding of a child's situation as basis for planning (Bayat, Mindes, & Covitt, 2010; Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003).

In this research, which can be located to the intersection of academic disciplines of special education and early childhood education, I investigate pedagogical documents drafted in Finnish ECEC. I pay special attention to the documentation of children who are considered to have needs for support. A pedagogical document, even though it is often referred to as a child's document, is not essentially about the child but about the pedagogy. The foundation of drafting pedagogical documents lies in the recommended practices of ECEC in general as well as in early intervention and early childhood special education. In these practices, along with psychological understanding, constructivist and ecological theories concerning the critical role of learning environments for adults, and pedagogical practices as mediators of children's learning and growth are often presented to be of key importance (Odom & Wolery, 2003). These

practices also present the aim of individualizing education based on children's needs as essential. As Odom and Wolery (2003) describe, early childhood special education and early intervention programs are inherently individualized in the objectives of education as well as in measures of support, which require constant assessments and reflection (see also Trivette & Dunst, 2000). In summary, the process of supporting a child in ECEC should be "the iterative and dynamic process of gathering, summarizing and analyzing, decision-making, implementing, and evaluating" (DEC, NAEYC, & NHSA, 2014, 5). In this process, the fundamental reason for drafting pedagogical documents is to use them as pedagogical tools for planning functional educational practices and support for children (see Parding & Liljegren, 2016).

1.1 Pedagogical documents in the middle grounds of Reggio Emilia and IEP traditions

In this research, I use the term "pedagogical document" when describing individualized and structured education plans drafted for a particular child, with the aim of taking the child's individuality into account in education and support planning. Even though terminology and regulations about the drafting of the documents differ internationally (see also Hirsh, 2014), these types of documents are typically referred to as individual education plans (IEPs) or individual development plans (IDPs). Typically, structured pedagogical documents are supposed to have certain areas of content based on the legislation and/or curricula. Moreover, they can be drafted with a fixed document form. Internationally, a document like this is most typically drafted for a child who has needs for additional or special support (see also Karila & Alasuutari, 2012). However, structured pedagogical documents can be drafted for all children, as in Finnish ECEC, where the document is called an ECEC plan (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018) and in the Swedish educational system, where the document is called an IDP (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013; see also Hirsh, 2015). As Korp, Sjöberg, and Thorsen (2019) describe, these kinds of plans typically have two aims: first, to summarize the student's or child's achievements and second, to plan the needed support measures and educational arrangements.

While using the term pedagogical document, I acknowledge that it may also have a different meaning in the previous research than of a structured document. The concepts of pedagogical documents and pedagogical documentation are often linked to the Reggio Emilia Approach to documentation, where the terms typically refer to process-oriented and child-led records with no structured form (e.g., Knauf, 2015; Rinaldi, 1998), and which are also emphasized in the different forms of documentation such as learning stories (e.g., Carr & Lee, 2012), portfolios (e.g., Knauf, 2015) or documentation panels (e.g., Kline, 2008; Liljestrand & Hammarberg, 2017). In the Reggio-inspired tradition, pedagogical

documents are connected to the fundamental ideas of giving children a voice and increasing their democratic participation (Carr & Lee, 2012; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Rinaldi, 1998). As Rinaldi (1998, p. 119–122) illustrates, instead of simply displaying documented contents, the focus of pedagogical documentation should be in pedagogical processes and in using them to develop the curriculum. Therefore, in order to be pedagogical, a document needs to work as a starting point for professional reflection (see also Rintakorpi, 2018).

Even though the aims of Reggio-inspired pedagogical documentation and structured pedagogical documents (such as IEPs) can be considered different (see Knauf, 2015), in practice, these two traditions also have significant similarities when drafted appropriately. The process of pedagogical documentation, in the Reggio-inspired sense, is meant to include the phases of 1) making observations, 2) constructing the documents, and finally, and perhaps the most importantly, 3) reflecting and utilizing the documents in the development of practices (Dahlberg et al., 2007; see also Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 30–31; Basford & Bath, 2014; Bjervås, 2011; Emilson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014; Krnjaja & Pavlović Breneselović, 2013). The last phase is said to be the cornerstone of the process, which separates other forms of documentation and recording from *pedagogical* documentation (see, e.g., Rintakorpi, 2018). However, it seems clear that the same characteristics are the ones that make successful educational support possible. Therefore, the process of pedagogical documentation resembles the process of supporting a child in ECEC, which is also said to be "a dynamic process of gathering, summarizing and analyzing, decision-making, implementing, and evaluating" (DEC et al., 2014, 5).

The importance of a reflective and process-oriented perspective in documentation is emphasized in the renewed legislation and curriculum for ECEC in Finland. In Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018), which regulates the ECEC services for children up to six years of age, pedagogical documentation is described as a central and mandatory practice of planning, implementing, evaluating, and developing ECEC (p. 41). Moreover, as stated in the ECEC curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018), "(d)ocuments collected over a longer period of time are an important part of the evaluation of pedagogical activities and self-assessment of the personnel's actions" (p. 42). In the curriculum, drafting of structured pedagogical documents is understood as part of the process of pedagogical documentation (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018, p. 37) and these documents are predominantly called children's pedagogical documents. Consequently, Reggio-inspired pedagogical documentation is united with the ECEC plan and IEP tradition of planning systematic research-based educational goals and support in the Finnish ECEC system. Even though I acknowledge the difference between these two traditions, with the use of the term pedagogical document I want to emphasize that structured pedagogical documents should also be, above all, pedagogy-oriented records as they also aim toward professional reflection and development of practices.

1.2 Prospects and pitfalls of documentation

Writing as a professional task and duty has become an increasingly important skill to master for ECEC professionals (Erixon & Erixon Arreman, 2017). Professionals report that time spent on writing documents takes away from time with the children (Hirsh, 2014)—these two tasks are often seen as discordant (Millward et al., 2002). Documentation is found time-consuming, difficult (Buldu, 2010; Kovanen 2002; Rantala & Uotinen 2014; Repo et al., 2018, 97), and unsuccessful because of lack of knowledge, time, or appropriate facilities (Rintakorpi, 2016, 2018). Hirsh (2014) illustrates one key area of struggle, that of how teachers face difficulties in deciding whether to use officially correct language or accessible language in their writings.

Even though documentation can empower children and help professionals to develop suitable educational plans (Alvestad & Sheridan, 2015; Emilsson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014), documentation is not a neutral and harmless process having only positive effects (see Miller & Rose, 2008; Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Sandberg, Lillvist, Eriksson, Björck-Åkersson, & Granlund, 2010). In fact, pedagogical documents are far from blameless (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 154; Osgood, 2006). As documentation makes institutional discourses materially replicable (Ferraris, 2013; Smith, 2001; Smith & Turner, 2015, p. 4), documented descriptions can direct the thinking and actions of numerous professionals reading the documents (Boyd, Ng, & Schryer, 2015; Farrell, 2009; Hjörne & Säljö 2008). This replicability is a key benefit of documentation as it makes writings last and allows for their assessment (see Smith, 2001). However, because of this, documentation can have far-reaching consequences as documented descriptions of children's individuality are recorded, transferred from one person and institution to another, and finally archived (Ferraris, 2013; Prior, 2008). Therefore, documents themselves can work in an unpredictable manner and consequently, possess power per se. As Prior (2008, p. 824) describes,

> (o)nce a text or document is sent out into the world there is simply no predicting how it is going to circulate and how it is going to be activated in specific social and cultural contexts.

The increasing demands of documentation in educational institutions (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Kalliala & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014) are a result of changed governance of both professional work and individuals in institutions (e.g., Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 33; Asp-Onsjö, 2012; Hirsh, 2015; Kalliala & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014; Parking & Liljegren, 2016). This process has raised critical discussions. Vigilance about the consequences of documentation is of great importance. In addition to—or even instead of—their planning purposes, pedagogical documents are said to work also as tools of governance (Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Hirsh, 2014) and to serve mainly the purposes of accountability, auditing, and transparency (Bath, 2012; Erixon & Erixon Arreman, 2017; Hirsh, 2014; Millwards et al., 2002; Parding & Liljegren,

2016). Moreover, they are presented as integral parts of current quality work of neoliberal ECEC institutions as well as the homogenization of children's characteristics and skills (Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 26; Schultz, 2015; Hirsh, 2014; see also Trnka & Trundle, 2014). This is linked to the institutionalization and regulation of childhood in current "audit society" (Vallberg-Roth & Månsson, 2009) as well as draws the line between what is considered normal and abnormal development (Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 78; Andreasson, Asplund Carlsson, & Dovemark, 2015; Esser, 2015; Franck, 2018: Kelle, 2010; Sjöberg, 2014). Because of this, Vallberg-Roth and Månsson (2009) have suggested that the main function of the pedagogical document is to be "an individual normal plan" (p. 4) for categorizing children in terms of normal development and understanding of suitable development (see also Kelle, 2010; Kelle, Seehaus, & Bollig, 2015). The same kind of normalization and governance also concerns parents, family life, and parenting (Alasuutari & Karila, 2010; Bollig & Kelle, 2013; Forsberg, 2007; Kelle et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, as Vallberg-Roth (2017) states, documentation and assessment, though often understood as two separated practices, are closely linked (see also Alasuutari et al., 2014). The reasons for assessment and the institutional functions of documentation can be multiple. For instance, the identification of children's needs for support often links to the allocation of resources in educational institutions, which can also distort the contents of the documents, as the detailed assessment of the problem needs to be included (Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson, Lindgvist, & Bergström, 2010; Sandberg et al., 2010; Thuneberg et al., 2014). In terms of writing, previous research suggests that the predominant convention is to mainly problematize a child in the documents and to include othering, problem-oriented descriptions instead of emphasizing detailed accounts of pedagogical work (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al, 2007; Pihlaja, Sarlin, & Ristkari 2015). This can, at worst, lead to the labeling of a child without any benefits. In order for professional writings to be ethically just, the benefits for the child should exceed the negative consequences (see Michaels, 2006). Despite this, extensive documentation is often justified by the need to conduct in-depth identification of children's needs as a basis for planning effective educational support and meeting the individual needs of children (Andreasson & Wolff, 2015; Franck, 2015).

1.3 Aims and research questions

In this research, I approach pedagogical document as an educational and institutional practice. My focal interest is on how pedagogical documents function in ECEC institutions. It is important to see that a document is not purely a result of the documentation process or a neutral piece of paper that records reality without having any consequences. This means that in addition to working as educational tools for planning, pedagogical documents are also a

consequential part of the social processes in which institutional reality is reconstructed via the use of language. Consequently, documents are powerful agents in institutional practices; they produce, maintain, and change discourses about children and their support needs as well as institutional reality in general. Consequently, I am specifically interested in what kinds of functions pedagogical documents perform in ECEC practices. Even though previous studies have approached documentation critically, additional research that addresses the question of how documentation works in educational institutions is needed (Alasuutari & Kelle, 2015). Moreover, as Forbes (2015, p. 28) suggests, even though the importance of language and the social production of disability and normative values is widely acknowledged in the fields of special education and Disability Studies, research that approaches texts as active or agentic participants in the production of disability and special needs is quite new.

There are several gaps in the research on structured pedagogical documents. First, inspections of longitudinal documentation datasets that capture the processes of documentation remain infrequent in previous research (c.f. Kurt & Mastergeorge, 2010). Moreover, investigations of the multiple actors in the process of documentation are needed, including children, parents, and professionals both in educational institutions as well as in rehabilitation, health care, and social work. Third, in inspections of support-related pedagogical documents, the main focus has been on the documentation of children in primary school, and the inspections considering documentation in ECEC settings are less frequently found (however, see Boavida, Aguiar, McWilliam, & Pimentel, 2010; Kwon, Elicker, & Kontos, 2011; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). Finally, elaborating information about the methods of writing ethically just and educationally meaningful pedagogical documents is still needed. This research aims to contribute to these gaps in existing research. Thus, my key aim in this research is to generate knowledge about the practices of constructing the text in pedagogical documents in a way that refrains from being stigmatizing, yet simultaneously constructs functional orientations for pedagogical practices.

In order to achieve these aims, I first illustrate the recommended practices of documentation as described in national and international legislation, curricula, and in previous research about the contents and language of pedagogical documentation. I illustrate *documentation as an educational practice of planning*. After that, I continue by picturing the fundamental role of documentation in creating and maintaining institutional reality, allocating rights, duties, and blame, that is, picturing *documentation as an institutional practice of orientating and positioning*. In order to discuss institutional agency and the power of documents, I apply Ferraris' (2013) documentality theory and especially the idea of strong and weak documents. In the social ontology of documentation, strong documents refer to the documents that have strong educational value, whereas weak documents are descriptions with no social significance or normative power. Moreover, I apply the positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) from the tradition of discursive psychology (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987) to investigate how documentation makes people responsible in regard to rights, duties, and

blame. In general, this research is a continuation of the recent research tradition that approaches documents from a critical perspective and that assumes them to be consequential and agentic in institutions (to mention only a few, see Alasuutari, 2014; Elfström Pettersson, 2018; Lehrer, 2018; Severinsson, 2016). In the inspection, I utilize longitudinal document data (N = 312 documents) of children in ECEC (children from zero to seven years of age) in order to investigate the chain of texts over the years. I aim at answering the following three questions:

1. How are children, parents, and professionals positioned in pedagogical documents drafted in ECEC?
2. In what sense can pedagogical documents be considered weak or strong?
3. How do pedagogical documents meet the recommended practices of documentation?

2 DOCUMENTATION AS AN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE OF PLANNING

2.1 Recommended practices of drafting pedagogical documents

2.1.1 Research-based recommendations

As the drafting of structured pedagogical documents such as IEPs has a long history, over the years, multiple researchers and educational organizations have given recommendations about practices of writing pedagogical documents. These recommendations often have their foundation in the ideas of early intervention/early childhood special education and IEP tradition. To summarize these recommendations, a pedagogical document should work as a tool or a frame for planning education and support for children. Consequently, a pedagogical document should capture the most important information that is needed in planning. It should also present the information in such a way that it benefits the implementation of a plan and leads to the individualization of pedagogical practices (see Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). Practices and instructions for drafting pedagogical documents vary internationally depending on the institution, systems, and the type of a document. Irrespective of the context, they often cover three key content areas (see Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Millward et al., 2002; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003):

1. Foreknowledge (child's strengths, challenges, interests, current achievement level, possible supports, and organizational arrangements);
2. Plan for the education and support (aims, objectives, support measures, individualized instructions, and cooperation) and;
3. Revision (assessment and evaluation of a plan as well as the child's situation)

Moreover, a plan is drafted in cooperation with children and parents and their viewpoints can also be recorded (see Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003). In early childhood settings, the role of parental participation is described from the perspective of successful planning even more critically than later in the child's life (Bayat et al., 2010). This is critical because in early childhood, a child's ability to become a self-advocate in the process of

planning their own education and support (see Pounds & Cuevas, 2019; Prunty, 2011) can be more challenging compared to the situation of older children.

For recording planning and support in pedagogical documents, thorough and multidimensional foreknowledge is needed. Therefore, it is important to observe and assess the needs of children prior to planning the support in multiple situations. The detailed descriptions of foreknowledge also build good premises for later assessment (Weishaar, 2010). In line with the ideas of the social model of disability (e.g., Oliver, 2013), the pedagogical and societal arrangements can cause disability and educational challenges (see also Vehmas, 2010). Consequently, a need for support can be seen, not only as an individual matter, but also as a social phenomenon that is created in interaction between an individual and the institutional conditions that construct these specific individual features as exceptional (Sandberg et al., 2010; Honkasilta, 2017, p. 9; Vehmas, 2010). Moreover, it is important to see that support needs are not stable but contextual and fluctuating: a child will occasionally get through an activity easily and then sometimes struggle considerably in the same activity. Therefore, when a need for support is observed, both the child and environment-related matters need to be considered (see also Franck, 2014). In general, in addition to identifying children's needs and challenges, the importance of identifying and utilizing their strengths and interests is critical (Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2009; Heiskanen, Saxlund, Rantala, & Vehkakoski, 2019; Hollingsworth, Boone & Crais, 2009; Laughlin & Turner, 2014). The contextual understanding should be extended also to the identification of children's strengths that can also vary in different environments and arrangements (Snyder, Ritschel, Rand, & Berg, 2006).

According to the principles of inclusive education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009), educational practices should focus on developing supportive environments and practices without stigmatizing children (see also Danforth & Naraian, 2015; Røn Larsen, 2012). This means that the identification of support needs should lead to benefits for a child that outweigh the possible negative consequences of labeling a child with support needs. In pedagogical documents, this means that the crucial areas of content are the ones focusing on what, where, when, and how professionals are going to do things with and for a child (DEC et al., 2014).

In order to guide pedagogical practices efficiently, objectives and measures should be written in an exact and measurable form (Boavida et al., 2010; Christle & Yell, 2010). For instance, the SMART approach is introduced in writing objectives—a practice that has been, according to Millward et al. (2002), required in some countries when writing IEPs. SMART objectives are specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic/relevant, and time-limited (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018; Rowland, Quinn, & Steiner, 2014; see Montgomery, Dyke, & Schwean, 2008) and can include both long-term goals as well as short-term objectives (Rowland et al., 2014; see also Millward et al., 2002). The same kind of approach can be applied when support measures are written. Previous research highlights the importance of focusing on describing meaningful, suitable, research-based support measures and interventions (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001; Gartin & Murdick, 2005;

Kwon et al., 2011). As Montgomery et al. (2008, p. 328) suggest, the given recommendations for practice should be "specific, measurable and meaningful, attainable, realistic, and timely." Moreover, following the idea of a child's needs as contextual phenomena, support measures should also be described from the perspective of the numerous environments they are applied in by describing both challenges and strengths of the pedagogical practices and environments (Boavida et al., 2010; Räty, Vehkakoski, & Pirttimaa, 2018).

As already emphasized concerning objectives and supports, a pedagogical document is above all a process of planning in which support should be regularly revisited. Consequently, a pedagogical document is never finished in a way that it could be left aside; at its best, it captures the continuous process of planning. First of all, this means that everything written in the document needs to result from or refer to something previously written. Michnowicz et al. (1995) describe how foreknowledge (strengths, skills, achievement levels, support needs) needs to work as a basis for setting objectives, which again form the basis for interventions and measures (see also DEC et al., 2014). Therefore, a pedagogical document should form a coherent unit. Moreover, the cohesion is important when considering consecutive documents (Rosas, Winterman, Kroeger, & Jones, 2009). There, the systematic development of pedagogy is of key importance (see Poppes, Vlaskamp, de Geeter, & Nakken, 2002; Wixson & Valencia, 2011). Regarding revisions, a document's objectives, goals, and interventions should be revisited and changed, if needed, on regular basis (Poppes et al., 2002; Severinsson, 2016) and these changes need to be explicitly described in the document (Rosas et al., 2009; Wixson & Valencia, 2011). This re-evaluation, as well as the reassessment of children's needs, is, at best, conducted as a multifaceted process where children and parents have valid positions as informants and co-planners together with professionals (e.g., therapists, psychologists, medical professionals) when required (DEC et al., 2014; Drasgow et al., 2001; Severinsson, 2016). Moreover, parents' participation and discussions with the child as well as the inter-professional team decision processes can help to assess the child from many perspectives (Bayat et al., 2010; Goepel, 2009; Karlsdottir & Garoarsdottir, 2010). The drafting of a pedagogical document and the assessment of it is a great way to make children's thinking and viewpoints visible (Knauf, 2015). Children's active participation in the planning of their education is found to be associated with better academic achievement later (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010). In addition, successful assessment is often described to be formative, constant, and often utilizing multiple assessment techniques (Christle & Yell, 2010).

As a conclusion, the recommended practice of drafting pedagogical documents can be summarized into six recommendations. According to these recommendations, when writing a pedagogical document, one should

1. Illustrate a multifaceted image of a child and utilize contextualized descriptions of support needs without categorizing the child
2. Set specific, measurable, and developing objectives and goals that are founded on identified foreknowledge

3. Agree on object-related, specific, and individual support measures that focus also on the environmental arrangements
4. Conduct regular revisions, formative assessment, and changes to the support when needed
5. Ensure multi-voiced planning and influential participation of children and parents
6. Write with specific, clear, and unbiased language.

Hirsh (2015) illustrates how, consequently, a pedagogical document has both summative and formative functions: On the one hand, it stores and presents information for basis of planning and on the other hand, it works as a constantly changing planning tool for teachers, where the profound understanding and translation of documented contents from the point of view of everyday practices play a key role (see also Alasuutari et al., p. 36–37).

Reflection on the aforementioned recommendations necessitates the acknowledgement of contextual factors. First, the focus of this research is in ECEC, which is a less studied context in terms of pedagogical documents and has some significant differences from other educational settings. As an example, in Finnish ECEC, the curriculum sets no specific learning objectives or subjects of learning for a child, but instead guides the implementation of high quality ECEC by stating the operational principles and learning areas that are aspired to in education. Moreover, in the Finnish ECEC system, pedagogical documents are drafted for all children and consequently, the recommendations need to be applied to all children irrespective of their needs for support. The aforementioned recommendations are for the most part founded on the IEP tradition as well as the documentation of older age groups, which is important to consider.

2.1.2 Overview of pedagogical documents and educational support in Finnish ECEC

Together with international guidelines, local context plays a key role in framing the practices of documentation. During the past few decades, the documentation practices in Finnish ECEC have been undergoing a remarkable change that has also affected the current documentation practices and possibly created tensions among them. Especially from the point of view of the children with needs for support, the recent change can be seen as a shift from a medical and rehabilitation-related documentation toward a more pedagogy-oriented one.

As a historical starting point, from 1973 to 2015, daycare act (36/1973, repealed) handed the key enactments about how to organize daycare services to the municipalities. Simultaneously, legislation on social services determined ECEC (referred to as "daycare") to be part of social services. The daycare act (36/1973, 7 a §, repealed) made it mandatory to draft a rehabilitation plan for all the children with special educational needs (SEN), constructing a medical approach as the focal point for documenting when a child had SEN. In 2003, a pedagogy-oriented individual education plan, *an ECEC plan*, was introduced in

the steering policy document of ECEC as a recommended practice for all children (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health, 2003). Regarding pre-primary education for six-year-old children, a similar suggestion of drafting individual *pre-primary education plans* had been made three years earlier with the provision of the first core curriculum for pre-primary education in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2000). Even though the drafting an ECEC plan and child's pre-primary education plan for all children was not required in all cases, they quickly became well-established practices. However, at the same time when these pedagogy-oriented documents were introduced in national guidelines, rehabilitation plans were required and the requirements of acts regulating social services still simultaneously were in place. Alila et al. (2014) illustrate the situation in 2014 in the following way:

> The drafting of a child-specific plan is based on the act about the customer's position and rights in social services, which obligates drafting a service and care plan or similar document or other similar plan unless in a case of temporary guidance and consultation or if drafting of a plan is otherwise obviously unnecessary. A child's ECEC plan is a pedagogical document, in which arrangements about the child's care, education, and teaching are recorded. The aim of the plan is to make sure that the child's individuality and parents' viewpoints are taken into account in organizing activities. In the child's ECEC plan, the child's needs, interests, strengths, and individual needs for support and guidance are taken into account. The rehabilitation plan, that is obligated in the daycare act, can be included into an ECEC plan as well as the support measures for a child with the need for special support. (p. 41)

When a steering policy document of ECEC was introduced in 2003, the key focus of the ECEC plan was recognizing children's individuality in planning of ECEC as well as educational partnership and cooperation with their parents (see Alila et al., 2014, p.40). Therefore, in practice, an ECEC plan had a function of working as a tool to structure cooperation and meetings between ECEC professionals and children's guardians (see Karila & Alasuutari, 2012). In 2015, the renewed legislation changed the documentation practices to their current form. The daycare act was repealed, and new early childhood education act (540/2018) was enacted. In the new act, the requirement of drafting rehabilitation plans in ECEC was removed yet an ECEC plan remained intact and was now made mandatory for all children (Early Childhood Education Act, 540/2018). Moreover, the key function of the ECEC plans was now described as an individualized and pedagogy-oriented action plan for children's education, which also emphasized children's own perspectives and voices (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018, p. 9). Moreover, an ECEC plan was also described as a tool of planning possible support for a child (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018, p. 57–58).

Regarding documentation of children with needs for support, the Finnish ECE system is still in the middle of an ongoing change. The most recent changes have their foundation in the nation-wide educational reform that has taken place in pre-primary and primary school education during the last decade. This reform introduced the three-tiered support model, including the regulations about arrangements of educational support as well as drafting of pedagogical

documents for children who have needs for support (e.g., Thuneberg et al., 2014). The aims of the model include the instant and constant evaluation of children's needs based on the ideas of earliest possible intervention. In order to achieve these aims, more detailed and numerous forms of pedagogical documents were introduced, which increased the amount of documentation in pre-primary education and primary school. One of the focal aims of the reform concerning documentation was to shift the focus from the medical and psychological approach and terminology to the pedagogical one (Thuneberg et al., 2014). As Thuneberg et al. (2014, p. 52) illustrate,

> This means that categorizing students or groups by diagnostic labeling should be avoided, and instead, focus should be given to identifying pedagogical needs and taking supportive measures.

Consequently, since 2010, the RTI model has been applied in Finnish pre-primary and primary school education (see Thuneberg et al., 2014), where it is said to work as an administrative framework (see Björn et al., 2016). In practice, the Finnish model introduces three tiers of continuous and intensifying educational support—general (tier 1), intensified (tier 2), and special (tier 3). Additionally, it emphasizes open-to-all arrangements of support, the provision of which is granted instantly once children's needs are identified without any prerequisites such as diagnoses (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018, 2016). The first tier is often described as high quality general education. When the child's needs require more long-lasting and multiple measures of support, this is arranged for a child first as intensified (tier 2) and if needed, special support (tier 3). The intensification of support typically means that measures become more individualized, long-lasting, and extensive and they are provided in multiple daily situations. Also, the amount of professional cooperation in planning and assessing the child's needs increases in the second and third tiers. Considering all the tiers, in ECEC, it is typical to provide pedagogical and instructional rearrangements in an inclusive manner in the child's own ECEC group[1] (Pihlaja & Neitola, 2017), following the ideas of the earliest possible intervention, preventive support, and inclusion[2].

Irrespective of the reform, changes in the ECEC legislation were not enacted. However, during the ongoing legislative reform in ECEC, a shift toward the application of RTI ideas (see Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2013) and the three-tiered pyramid model (see Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2010) has also occurred. However, the three-tiered model is currently more established in considering older children than it is in ECEC in Finland, which is in line with the international trends of applying RTI models (DEC et al., 2014). It is said that the application of RTI-based models in early childhood settings "requires rethinking and revisiting traditional assessment practices" (Snyder, Wixon, & Roach, 2008,

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1 In Finnish ECEC, the term group is often used instead of class. In one ECEC group, there are typically about 21 – 24 children (over three-year-olds) and three ECEC professionals, of which at least one must have a teacher qualification.

2 For more detailed descriptions of the current arrangements and the state of inclusive early childhood education in Finnish ECEC, see Heiskanen and Viitala, 2019.

32). In Finland, this is currently very tangible due to the diverse legislative and curriculum-related basis of ECEC services, which result in differences in the application of RTI. Finnish ECEC consists of mandatory pre-primary education for six-year-olds and ECEC services[3], which are regulated by different law and curricula. Pre-primary education is regulated by the Basic Education Act (21.8.1998/628) and the core curriculum for pre-primary education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016), which indicate the use of Finnish three-tiered support model explicitly. However, concerning other ECEC services, the Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018) and the core curriculum for early childhood education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018) lack the elaborate definition of how to arrange educational support as the three-tiered support model is not made mandatory by law. However, in Finland, municipalities are obligated to localize the national curricula at the municipal level by designing normative regional curricula. In these local policy documents, the majority[4] of Finnish municipalities have already decided to draw on the Basic Education Act (21.8.1998/628) also in ECEC and have developed an application of the three-tiered model for arranging educational support.

Due to legislative, administrative, and municipal differences, the requirements for documentation are diverse in Finnish ECEC. The legislation (Early Childhood Education Act, 540/2018) and curriculum (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018) regulating ECEC describe the drafting of pedagogical documents as a mandatory practice, including the drafting of *an ECEC plan*, irrespective of the child's needs for support (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018, p. 9). In pre-primary education *a pre-primary education plan* is typically drafted for all children even though it needs to be, by law (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, p. 14, 45–46), drafted only for children who have needs for more intense educational support.

Regarding children who are identified as having needs for educational support, the documentation is different depending on whether the child attends ECEC or pre-primary education and whether the municipality applies the three-tiered model in ECEC or not. In ECEC, an ECEC plan typically works as a universal document for children irrespective of their need for educational support. When a child is in pre-primary education and receives general support, a pre-primary plan is used to make an agreement of the support if needed. When support is intensified, especially in the three-tiered model, the intensity of the support-centered planning increases and consequently, different kinds of documents are drafted. These documents are in the second tier (intensified support) called *a plan for intensified support*, which can be integrated into a pre-

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3 ECEC services consists of ECEC arranged in ECEC centers, home daycare as well as open ECEC services such as weekly clubs for children and/or families. In ECEC centres, each group has a teacher with a higher education degree whereas in home daycare, home daycare nurses without any qualification requirements take care of children, typically in their own homes.

4 Recent estimations about the prevalence of applying the three-tiered support model in ECEC vary between 50% (Eskelinen & Hjelt, 2017, p. 68) and 70% (Vainikainen et al., 2018, p. 16).

primary plan (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, p. 47), and in the third tier (special support) *an individual education plan (IEP)*, which replaces the pre-primary plan (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, p. 50–51).

A key aspect of the Finnish system of educational support is the importance given to evaluation of the support prior to its intensification or reduction. For this reason, specific pedagogical documents are drafted in addition to the documents that aim at planning the support. When the start of intensified support (tier 2) is considered, a document called *a pedagogical assessment* is drafted in order to evaluate the already given support in the first tier and to plan how intensified support would benefit a child in the most functional way (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, p. 46). Similarly, prior to the transition to special support (tier 3), a similar kind of document, *a pedagogical statement*, is drafted (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, p. 49). These two documents differ from other pedagogical documents as they focus more explicitly on the phase in which the child's support is intensified. They should also include a more explicit assessment of what has been done for the child. Furthermore, these documents are drafted only once and are not typically revisited afterward, as the actual planning of support and revisions are done in other documents. Table 1 summarizes the types, aims, and target groups of pedagogical documents in the Finnish ECEC system.

TABLE 1 Pedagogical documents in Finnish ECEC

Document	Aim	Target Group
ECEC plan	To plan ECEC	All children in ECEC.
Pre-primary education plan	To plan pre-primary education	Typically drafted for all. Mandatory on intensified support in pre-primary education.
Plan for intensified support	To plan intensified support in pre-primary education	Children who are receiving intensified support. Can be either separate or included into a pre-primary education plan.
Individual education plan	To plan special support in pre-primary education	Obligatory when child receives special support. Replaces the pre-primary education plan.
Pedagogical assessment	To assess given general support and to plan intensified support	Children whose support is intensified from general to intensified tier.
Pedagogical statement	To assess given intensified support and to plan special support	Children whose support is intensified from intensified to special tier.

2.2 Previous research findings on pedagogical documents

Next, I will present a review of previous research on pedagogical documents. As I aim at investigating the positions of children, parents, and professionals as well as the function of the documentation, I will illustrate what is known about the descriptions of foreknowledge and pedagogy in the documents as well as the participation of children and parents in relation to the roles of professionals in the process of planning. In the previous research, investigations of structured pedagogical documents of primary-school-aged children are most often found. However, in recent years, the overall interest toward documentation in ECEC has increased and consequently, the number of studies focusing on documentation in ECEC is increased. In the review, I have focused on the research investigating IEPs, IDPs, as well as their counterparts. Moreover, the particular focus of the review has been on investigating the state of the aforementioned recommendations of drafting pedagogical documents.

2.2.1 Problematizing the individual characteristics

Previous research on the contents of pedagogical documents clearly shows that, despite the emphasis on pedagogy, the predominant convention is to include a lot of information about the child's individuality in the documents instead of emphasizing a clear and detailed description of the objectives and support measures (see Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007). Support needs are typically emphasized by describing what the children are lacking in their development or their unwanted behavior and other such characteristics (Andreasson, 2007), while the descriptions about child's strengths and skills are less frequently found (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Severinsson, 2016; Vehkakoski, 2003; see however Korp et al., 2019). When strengths are described, their role is mainly to diversify the description as they are not utilized in planning support for the child (Heiskanen et al., 2019). In comparison, support needs are typically identified and described in detail, while predominantly allocating the blame for the problematic situation to the child (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Hjörne & Säljö 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007, 2010; Pihlaja et al., 2015; Vallberg-Roth & Månsson, 2009). Moreover, the descriptions fail to identify the skills and abilities that are needed to be taught to the child (Korp et al., 2019). Additionally, the inspection of contextual factors influencing the appearance of support needs is typically dismissed (Røn Larsen, 2012; Parding & Liljegren, 2016). Therefore, the overall picture of a child can become reductive and mispresented (Alvestad & Sheridan, 2015; see also Vehkakoski, 2003). Overall, the descriptions typically lack the reflection of pedagogy and professional practices and illustrate a problem-oriented picture of children (see also Severinsson, 2016).

The influence of children's individual characteristics on the ways they are described in the documents and how their documents are drafted have been investigated in numerous studies. Gender and family background are stated to

be especially critical when differences in documents are reflected (however, c.f. Rakap, Yucesoy-Ozkan, & Kalkan, 2019). Korp et al. (2019) found differences between girls and boys in the quality and quantity of assessments in IDPs, whereas girls received more feedback compared to boys. As for boys, more negative descriptions were identified while the documents underlined more encouragement of girls. This finding resonates with other research findings about the traditional discourses concerning genders and their desired behavioral traits in documentation (Alasuutari & Markström, 2011; Andreasson, 2007; Hirsh, 2012; Sjöberg, 2015). Korp et al. (2019) also found that when the parents of the area had a higher level of education, the IEDs included less characterization about children's personal traits than in the areas where the educational background of the parents was lower. However, no differences were found based on the cultural background of the families (Korp et al., 2019). Differences in IDPs based on the area of living are also noted by Vallberg-Roth and Månsson (2009), who describe that IDPs in urban schools focus more on regulating linguistic and social aspects than those in rural schools.

2.2.2 Lacking the explicitness and development of pedagogy

Internationally, research about pedagogical documents and especially IEPs has focused on documented objectives. This is an outgrowth of the fact that objectives form a key component of a functional pedagogical document (Christle & Yell, 2010; Drasgow et al., 2001). Even though the measurability and functionality of objectives is often highlighted (Boavida et al., 2010), the quality and contents of recorded objectives vary greatly (e.g., Karvonen & Huynh, 2007). Research has shown that objectives in pedagogical documents are poor in quality especially in terms of measurability (Michnowicz at al., 1995; Rakap, 2015; Rubler, McGrew, Dalrymple, & Jung, 2010; Sanches-Ferreira, Lopes-dos-Santos, Alves, Santos, & Silveira-Maia, 2013), which means that objectives are hard to assess later on (see also Severinsson, 2016). Low quality can also mean that objectives are too broadly described or abstract, which is also found to be typical (Boavida et al., 2010; Drasgow et al., 2001; Michnowicz et al., 1995; Rakap, 2015; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Abstract and broad objectives are problematic as they offer less concrete instructions for pedagogical work (Severinsson, 2016). Moreover, documents include numerous objectives (Boavida et al., 2010), which, together with the abstract and broad descriptions, probably makes both the assessment of child's development as well as the implementation of a plan challenging (see also Boavida et al., 2010; Severinsson, 2016). Finally, objectives are often found to be set too low in relation to the child's skills and learning (Millward et al., 2002). As Korp et al. (2019, p. 233) summarize, pedagogical documents are "mostly too vague, too loosely connected to curricular targets, and too general to be useful as tools for learning and meta-reflection." Therefore, documentation loses its other function of acting as a formative tool for teachers' reflection and development of pedagogy (see Hirsh, 2015).

Systematic documentation of individualized instruction typically features descriptions that focus on interventions and instructions that are lacking or done

at a very general and abstract level (Espin, Deno, & Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998; Hirsh, 2011; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Moreover, the linkages between support measures and other parts of the document are predominantly weak (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Ruble et al., 2010). Similar to the descriptions of support needs, the descriptions of support measures focus on the child as an individual instead of also taking under consideration the contexts of learning, teaching, pedagogy, and environmental factors (Isaksson et al., 2007). Concerning the language, imprecise and inadequate writings are often found (Ruble et al., 2010; Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2013; Räty et al., 2018). Moreover, the writings often exclude the specific allocation of responsibilities related to the provision of support (Rubler et al., 2010; Räty et al., 2018). In previous research, documents are less often approached from the point of view of support measures and instead investigate objectives and goals.

The assessments and evaluations of written plans are stated to be the weakest parts of pedagogical documents (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017). Revisions are either left unwritten or they are written insufficiently, meaning that the documents include only general descriptions or leave the forthcoming support unverbalized (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017). Moreover, revisions often fail to link the assessment to pedagogical practices and previously written plans. For instance, it is found that the possible evaluation of objectives is not typically documented (Espin et al., 1998; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Instead, revisions include mainly summative assessment of the child's achievements and fail to assess the child's pedagogical environment and previous plan in a way that would benefit the further development of pedagogical practices and support (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013). Some studies have shown that some professionals even try to avoid documenting their own actions and especially unsuccessful practices (Löfdahl & Pérez Prieto, 2009), even though information about these contents would be beneficial from the point of view of support development.

Previously, pedagogical documents have mainly been approached by investigating individual documents instead of studying chains of documentation with a longitudinal research design. Moreover, the investigations of how children's individual characteristics and background are possibly associated with the contents of their pedagogical documents are less frequently found. As one of the few, Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) combined these two approaches and studied sequential IEPs of children with autism from ECEC to grade nine. They found that the repetition of objectives in sequential documents was typical and that changes were described more often in documents that were drafted in inclusive educational settings and for younger children than in those drafted in non-inclusive settings and for older children (Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Concerning the relation of personal traits and the quality of IEP contents, Boavida et al. (2010) found that objectives of children with disabilities were higher in quality than were the objectives of children without disability. However, Rakap (2015) did not find this difference (see also Rakap et al., 2019).

2.2.3 Exercising professional control over children and parents

The participation of children and parents in documentation is a recurrent topic in previous studies. In these studies, drafting of pedagogical documents are predominantly presented as a process of strong professional dominance in which professionals from both ECEC and other fields (e.g., therapy, medicine, psychology) play a key role (Asp-Onsjö, 2006, p. 216; Barnes & Turner, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Hjörne & Säljö, 2014; Lindgren, 2012; Kovanen, 2002). Isaksson et al. (2007) found that pedagogical documents are often drafted without parental participation or even such that the parents are not made aware of the existence of the plan. When parents and children participate in documentation, their positions in the process have been minor and powerless (Asp-Onsjö, 2006; Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Childre & Chambers, 2005; Goepel, 2009; Hirsto, 2010; Isaksson, 2009; Markström, 2015; Millward et al, 2002; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Salas, 2004; see however McCloskey, 2010). Children or parents can have an influence on less significant issues from the point of view of pedagogical planning and educational practices than ECEC professionals, who then reduce their power over significant educational decisions (Elfström Pettersson, 2015; Gallagher, 2008; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Thomas, 2007; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). Therefore, both children's and parents' participation remain mainly symbolic instead of being meaningful (see Skrtic, 2005) as children and parents have no real power over educational decision-making (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Isaksson, 2009; Karila & Alasuutari, 2012; Røn Larsen, 2016; Thomas, 2007; see however Norwich, Kelly, & Educational Psychologists in Training, 2006).

The child's background and characteristics are found to influence the ways in which ECEC professionals offer them possibilities to participate in development of pedagogical documents. Paananen and Lipponen (2018) found that children with identified support needs had had a say in different kinds of practices in the Finnish ECEC context compared with those children without any specific needs for support. Based on their results, children who had needs for support were allowed to reassert arrangements in ECEC, yet they had no power to initiate a change (Paananen & Lipponen, 2018). Further, especially in studies investigating the US context, culturally and linguistically diverse families face more barriers to participation than other families (e.g., Jozwik, Cahill, & Sánchez, 2017; Lo, 2008; Salas, 2004; Pang, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2018). However, more often parental dissatisfaction concerning their child's IEP is reported among parents with a high socioeconomic status in the US (Reiman, Beck, Coppola, & Engiles, 2010; Slade, Eisenhower, Carter, & Blacher, 2018; see also Rossetti et al., 2018; see however Fish, 2008).

3 DOCUMENTATION AS AN INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE OF ORIENTATING AND POSITIONING

3.1 Language as the origin of institutional facts

It is likely accurate to say that traditionally, documents have been seen as neutral records of the pre-existing world and reality in educational institutions and practices (Prior, 2003; see also Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 4). Then, when a document is written, it is assumed that objective facts about the reality are merely reduplicated in a written form. Consequently, documents would merely reflect something about external reality without influencing it. Therefore, they possess an instrumental value in information transfer and archiving. Documents are thus often considered as passive, neutral, and perhaps inconsequential storages of information. In this research, I apply a perspective that falls outside of this mainstream understanding of documentation that has often been discussed in recent years. Therefore, besides viewing documents as pedagogical and educational tools, I consider them fundamental to the existence of institutions; this idea is based on the ontology of social reality developed by John Searle (1995) and later for example Ferraris (2013) and Smith (2012; 2008).

The key basis of Searle's ontology of the social world is that language is central to the existence of social facts (Smith, 2003, p. 1). Searle presents two kinds of objects—physical and social. Social objects, such as money, marriages, contracts, and promises are created through certain institutional practices such as documentation (Searle, 1995). The theory has been fundamental to the understanding of institutions as it presents the basic formula for the creation of institutional objects, where documents can be understood as possessing power in some particular context (Smith, 2003, p. 9; 2008, p. 38). After they are created, these institutional facts possess deontic power, which is power to make people responsible as well as to allocate rights and duties. Institutional facts are always socially constructed as they need more than one person to come into being and for the establishment of deontic power (Smith, 2003, p. 18; 2008, p. 41). These powers can be positive or negative, strong or weak (Smith, 2003, p. 20). Where physical facts (piece of paper) are independent of language and social practices,

institutional facts (a pedagogical document) are spoken, written, and agreed into being (Smith, 2003, p. 11). As Barry Smith (2003, p. 14) describes,

> language enables us to bootstrap ourselves beyond the realm of brute facts in such a way that we can perform actions that we could not otherwise perform, actions whose performance belongs precisely to the realm of institutional facts. Language, above all, enables us to bind ourselves in the future, not only in acts of promising but also in a range of other ways.

Dorothy E. Smith and Susan M. Turner (2015, p. 5) illustrate further, how "texts enter into, organize, shape, and coordinate people's doings as they/we participate in the objectifying relation of ruling." This, according to Smith (2001), enables the existence of institutions.

Acknowledging the existence of physical and social facts is useful also when matters such as disability and (special) needs for support are investigated (Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2009a; 2009b; Vehmas, 2010). There, a document is understood as an agent that not only reflects the world as such but also participates in the process of constructing it in ontological and deontological senses (see Smith, 2014), since through documentation, professionals construct an understanding of children and support. Consequently, the reputed passivity, objectivity, and innocuousness of documentation should be questioned (see Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 154) and document can be understood to possess power per se. Documents and the language in them work in constructing institutional reality, which in the case of this research can mean, for example, ideas about children and professional responsibilities. As Vehmas (2010) notes, identification of children's needs is not objective, but "a matter of making normative value judgements of what is good and valuable for pupils, and people in general" (p. 91).

3.2 Documentality theory: the deontic power of documentation

This research is a continuation of the critical document research that has emerged during the last two decades in the field of education (Alasuutari, 2014; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Lehrer, 2018; Hirsh, 2012; 2014; 2015; Severinsson, 2016; Knauf, 2018; Rintakorpi, Lipponen, & Reunamo, 2014). Critical research does not take the contents of the document for granted or see it as presenting pure and objective knowledge but instead, aims to uncover what is and is not considered knowledge as well as discusses the consequences of documentation (Jupp, 2011, p. 21-22; see also Smith, 2001). The previous research committed to this consequential and agentic understanding about documents has had multiple theoretical starting points. In these studies, for example, the applications of Actor Network Theory by Bruno Latour (2005, see, e.g., Severinsson, 2016), the agential realism of Karen Barad (2007; see Elfström Pettersson, 2018), and the theory of documentality by Maurizio Ferraris (2013, see also Alasuutari, 2015; Lehrer, 2018; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018) have been applied. In this research, I have chosen

to apply the latter, the documentality theory presented by Ferraris (2013), which is referred to as the theory of the ontology of social reality and documentation. As compared to the other theories that approach documentation from a critical perspective and illustrate it as consequential, Ferraris' theory provides some benefits concerning the approach of this particular research. Instead of focusing on the networks or actors surrounding the documentation, his theory is presented as particularly useful in understanding the institutional, bureaucratic practices that directly apply to writing (Davies, 2014). Moreover, the theory is based on the idea that not all the documents and their consequences are alike; some are potentially more powerful than others (2013, p. 269; 2015b). In other words, there exist both strong and weak documents. Therefore, Ferraris' theory seems applicable in this research in which I aim to comprehend different institutional functions of pedagogical documents.

In his theory, Maurizio Ferraris (2013, p. 267; 2015a; 2015b) states that social reality is not constructed by creating social facts with physical counterparts, as Searle (1995) suggests, but with inscribed acts. In the theory, documents are not only seen as archives of information but also as fundamental prerequisites of creating social and institutional reality. In Searle's theory about the ontology of the social world, the key pitfall is the claim that social facts must have a physical counterpart (Smith, 2008, p. 44) and consequently, its inability to explain the origin of the negative entities such as debts (Smith, 2003; 2012). Consequently, Ferraris (2013, p. 318) presents the basic formula of his theory of documents as "(Social) Object = Inscribed Act." This means that where the physical world, such as a piece of paper, exists irrespective of documentation, a pedagogical document as a socially constructed agreement of child's educational support, potentially allocating responsibilities, rights, duties, and blame, that is indeed written on that same piece of paper, becomes an institutional fact because of documentation. Consequently, Ferraris (2013) states that "there is nothing social outside the text."

It is often acknowledged that the fundamental strength of the theory Ferraris presents is its illustration of the stability, distributability, and verifiability of the documents (Davies, 2014). Ferraris carefully describes how through documentation, social and institutional entities, such as needs for support and support measures in this research, become permanent and disentangled from one's memory and will (Ferraris, 2013, p. 267). For example, a pedagogical document stressing means of educational support attests to the actions of support even though professionals may not remember that something was indeed planned. A plan can be revisited and referred to and consequently, it can lead to a change that human agents do not directly launch. Smith (2012) reminds us that the permanence of documentation, however, comes not only with benefits but also with potentially far-reaching and unpredictable negative consequences (see also Cooren, 2004; Prior, 2008). A document attests, for example, certain images of children after it is drafted even if the image mispresents, misleads, or distorts the situation of a child. Nevertheless, it is easy to see that the nature of documents as stable, distributable, and verifiable is vital to the functioning of institutions: it would not be possible to maintain

institutional reality without documentation that attests items such as agreements and contracts.

Moreover, another fundamental strength of Ferraris' theory that I especially apply in this research is that documents can be categorized based on their characteristics. In describing the consequential nature of documents, Ferraris (2013, p. 269; 2015b) describes documents that are weak or strong regarding their social value or in Searle's terms, deontic power (see Smith, 2014). Strong documents have the power of making people responsible and of initiating social processes, whereas weak documents (or traces, as Ferraris refers to them) typically only register issues and have mainly informative, if any, power (Ferraris, 2015b; 2013, p. 267-269). However, the nature of a document as either weak or strong does not necessarily cover the entire document. A particular document can be strong in one sense and weak in another and also be transformed from weak to strong after it is drafted. In his later works (Ferraris & Martino, 2018, p. 22), Ferraris continues in defining the difference and relationship between strong and weak documents in the following way:

> The latter (a weak document) indicates something that is not produced with the intention of creating a document but can be used as such at a later time. For example, a murderer does not leave a trace for the purpose of creating a document, but the police, trying to identify him/her, can use his/her traces (fingerprints, i.e. a weak document) as evidence (and therefore as a strong document). The strong document, on the other hand, has very clear and precise rules. Although these rules may be different in relation to the case (if it is a testament or a degree certificate) and in relation to the culture in which the document is produced (in temporally and spatially terms), they have one thing in common: they are codified by the society.

The idea of the transformation of documents or parts of them is interesting in terms of this research. Moreover, it further emphasizes the unpredictable manner of the later use of documents as well as the ethical sensitivity of documentation. It makes sense to say that a pedagogical document can include weak descriptions when an ECEC professional writes a document but that are given normative meaning later on. For example, a description of a child's inattentive behavior in early years of childhood possesses mainly diversifying value at first, but when the child's difficulties related to attention become identified, a medical professional can use the documented traces in documents to evaluate the long-lasting nature of support needs. Then, a description that at first had little relevance is transformed into a valuable piece of information that for its part, with other observations and evaluations, attests the identification of the long-lasting nature of the challenges.

But while the documentality theory and the division of strong and weak documents is useful in studying institutional practices, it does not explicate the process in which a document becomes socially or institutionally validated (e.g., Alasuutari, 2015; Davies, 2014; Smith, 2014). The idea of Ferraris that illustrates how the entire social reality, irrespective of whether it includes institutional or writing-related practices, is constructed purely and only through documents is also questioned (Davies, 2014; Smith, 2014; 2012), often by stating that power of the documents, such as agency, is always a relationship: it's not something a

person or a document individually holds (see Gallagher, 2008; Smith, 2008, p. 40). Even though a document is strong in the sense that it attests to certain issues, if it is for example lost or archived in a way that no one is able to read it, the document no longer has deontic power. Moreover, *the meaning* of the writings can be different for different readers, as the meaning is created when the document is interpreted by the reader (see Smith, 2008, p. 40; Smith, 2001).

It is indeed widely agreed that in order for the document have social value, the attestation should be validated in institutional practices by human beings (Davies, 2014; see also Smith, 2005, p. 104-105). There, as Alasuutari (2015, p. 221) describes referring to Smith (2005), the reader becomes "an agent or a voice of the text" and the text-reader-conversation takes place, even though document as a side of interaction is obstinately unmovable (Smith, 2001). During this interaction, the attestations of documents can also be resisted, toned down, or abandoned (see also Cooren, 2009), which is indeed observed to often happen regarding the writings in pedagogical documents and the document forms (see Alasuutari, 2015; Alasuutari & Karila, 2010; Karila, 2005; Elfström Pettersson, 2018; Pawley & Tennant, 2008). Therefore, even though documents can be seen as institutional agents potentially possessing deontic power and social value, they are also context-bound and need to be put into operation by human agents (see also Alasuutari, 2015; Cooren, 2009; Smith, 2005; 2001).

Keeping this in mind, as my aim in this research is to investigate the educational value of pedagogical documents, I apply Ferraris' idea of strong and weak documents. The nature of pedagogical documents or their parts as either strong or weak is reflected in relation to recommendations and regulations. However, it is important to note that by solely reading written documents, it is impossible to say whether and how the possible deontic powers and attestations are put into operation. Consequently, in this research, I do not aim at finding what kind of social acts pedagogical documents bring into being. The only reachable features of the documents are *the potentialities* (see Smith, 2001) they offer for pedagogical work. As I investigate the written documents, I do not say that a particular attestation of a document, whether understood as strong or weak, would automatically lead to a particular kind of pedagogical practice. However, as a key aspect of drafting educationally meaningful pedagogical documents, I see that the issue of orientation of documents needs to be inspected as it has the potential to lead ECEC professionals toward the drafting of ethically just and educationally meaningful pedagogical documents. In this, I apply the theory of documentality to investigate in what sense pedagogical documents can be seen as strong and weak. To make this inspection more multidimensional, in addition to Ferraris' conceptualization, I also apply the concept of position from discursive psychology. This is done in order to investigate the processes of making people responsible and as possessing certain rights and duties through a detailed linguistic analysis of the documented text.

3.3 Positioning theory: linguistic allocation of reciprocal rights, obligations, and blame

Pedagogical documentation is an institutional practice but it is also a process of positioning, which means that various situation-related identities with specific reciprocal rights and obligations are constructed in the use of language (see Davies & Harré, 1990; Edwards, 2005; Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Koborov, 2010; 2013). In this research, I especially found the inspection of positions following the tradition of discursive psychology useful (see Edwards, 2005; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The discursive psychology framework is often applied in studying social practices, especially when the aim is to problematize them and to reveal the consequences of writing in a particular way. The fundamental assumption of positioning theory in the discursive psychological tradition is that in interaction, either spoken or written, the language users give accounts about moral rights, duties, and responsibilities, and simultaneously position themselves and others (Moghaddam & Harré, 2010, p. 2; Wetherell, 2003; Harré & Van Langenhove, 2010).

Positions are described to present the moral aspects of the interaction (Hirvonen, 2016; see also Harré et al., 2009), which are consequently social acts constructed through the use of language (Harré et al., 2009). While positions are constructed, they are also consequential in the sense that simultaneously, certain social acts are conducted (see Potter, 2000, p. 4) where one can easily see confluence with documentality theory (Ferraris, 2013). However, as a slight difference to the concept of document acts, positions are situation-related and changing. They also consider only a specific piece of the text or discourse where it is constructed and cannot be seen as a characteristic of the person in general (Potter, 2000, p. 7; Potter, 1996). Instead, they can be seen as socially constructed and momentary social facts that are constructed in relation to other people (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Moreover, as Hirvonen (2016, p. 2) indicates, "(p)ositions, unlike roles, can refer not only to human beings as social actors but also to institutions, social groupings, organizations, and even cultures."

It is indeed important to acknowledge the dynamic nature of positions as they are socially constructed in institutional practices and therefore, subject to constant change (see Tirado & Gálvez, 2007). Koborov (2010) refers to this idea as the action orientation to positioning, where a researcher needs to be aware of the nature of positioning and discourse in general as not presentation of the social reality but as an act of creating, maintaining, and changing it. Consequently, the idea of positioning resonates with the idea of documentality and the deontic power of documentation. Similar to attestations of documents, positions can also be resisted or accepted (Hirvonen, 2016). Therefore, positions can be seen as negotiable social characteristics. The usefulness of positioning theory is most noticeable when studying the changing institutional phenomena as the theory acknowledges the active role of different agents in creating, maintaining, and

changing the social reality, especially in terms of responsibilization. As Tirado & Gálvez (2007, p. 245) verbalize

> (t)he concept of positioning allows our analysis to go beyond the analysis of micro interaction alone. It has permitted us to define and understand how social order is managed, its general framework of rights and responsibilities, and how future interactions are prepared and past actions reinterpreted.

The concept of position can be applied by investigating positions in relation to certain characteristics or societal norms and values. For instance, following the earliest ideas of the theory (see Wetherell, 2003), Foucauldian analysis of positions links the acts of positioning to the acts of governing and problematizing particular characteristics of a person (see Foucault, 1977; Miller & Rose, 1999), where the values about institutionally and culturally normal and abnormal characteristics function as the basis of positioning. Moreover, the positions that are constructed as problematic can be inspected by applying the concept of anti-positions (e.g., Edwards, 2005, 2007) or troublesome positions (e.g., Staunaes, 2003; Wetherell, 1998). Epistemic positioning is related to knowledge and one's role as a (in)valid informant and possessor of (in)accurate knowledge (e.g., Bednarek, 2006). Finally, positions are individual-centered matters as well as shared matters when a concept of intra-group positions can be applied (Hirvonen, 2016).

Even though they are situational, through documentation, positions can be made replicable and permanent, even though the discursive event in which they are constructed is gone. For example, in pedagogical documents, children are referred to with different kinds of characteristics and descriptions and consequently, they are positioned as either having or lacking rights and duties in relation to the ECEC institution. In descriptions of children who have needs for support, the desirability of certain qualities is critical, as the identification of their needs is based on the extraction of what is considered as wanted and unwanted in an institutional reality of ECEC. In this identification, the institutional norms and values play a central role and, therefore, the positioning of a child is always dependent on culture and context (see also Koborov, 2013; 2010). Consequently, ECEC professionals and ECEC institutions are also allocated with positions (see Hirvonen, 2016). When documented, these characterizations become transferable and thus potentially permanent.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings

In the preceding chapters, I have described the theoretical commitments of this research as well as illustrated the existing gaps in research about documentation especially in the contexts of ECEC. As was described earlier, this dissertation is interdisciplinary in nature as it has its roots in the intersection of special education and early childhood education. Traditionally, in terms of theory and methodology, research in special education and early childhood education disciplines has been diverse and draws fundamentally from either psychology or sociology. This research is thus located in the sociologically-oriented research tradition. Moreover, my thinking has been largely affected by the fundamental ideas of Disability Studies (e.g., Oliver, 2013) and the sociology of childhood (e.g., Alanen, 2001). Concerning Disability Studies, this research draws especially on the research tradition that investigates the cultural discourses about deviance, normality, and disability (e.g., Thomas, 2007). Moreover, as an aim and research interest of childhood studies that this research also topicalizes, the institutional arrangements and practices that are part on the process of producing a cultural understanding of children and childhood are often investigated. Consequently, a shared idea of both of these research traditions – and the focal premise for this dissertation research – childhood and disability are seen as complex phenomena that are understood to be cultural and institutional constructions. Consequently, in childhood, children's needs, as well as the roles and responsibilities of adults in the lives of these children, are above all social and cultural constructions that are negotiated in institutional practices (see also Franck, 2014; Woodhead, 1997). This resonates with my approach to ontology *(beliefs about the nature of reality)* as well epistemology *(beliefs about the origin and acquisition of knowledge)* (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Consequently, in this dissertation, as a methodological and theoretical framework of approaching pedagogical documents, I draw on the ontology of the social world and documentality (see Ferraris, 2013) as well as the discursive psychological approach to positioning (Koborov, 2010). As I was interested in conducting detailed linguistic analysis, I followed the tradition of

discourse psychology and positioning theory. My ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinnings are presented in Figure 1, which I will elaborate next.

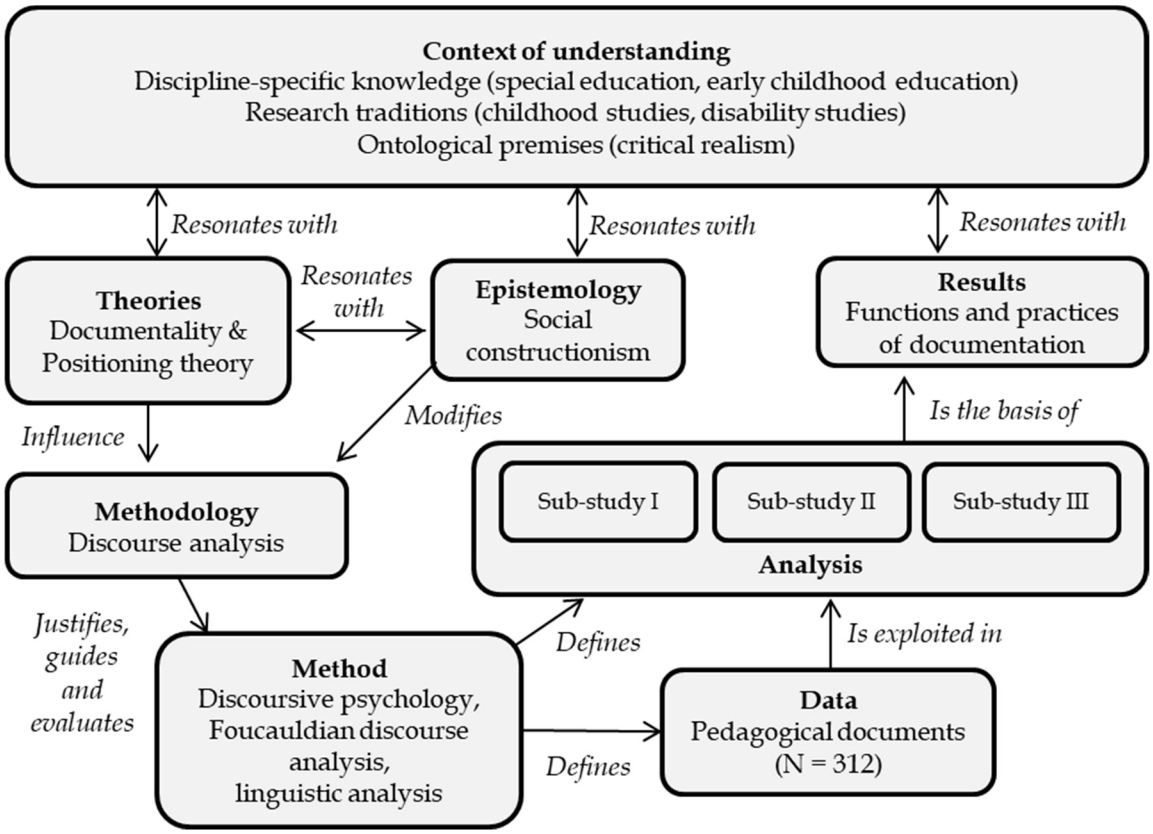

FIGURE 1 Research design

Positioning analysis is part of the diverse field of discourse analysis, which, according to Nikander (2008, p. 414), shares a constructionist epistemological orientation toward the analysis but is in other respects multifold. In fact, discourse analysis is often more of a methodology or paradigm of research than of a specific unambiguous method or analytical tool (e.g., Hammersley, 2003; Nikander, 2008, p. 414). However, two commitments are often shared to the field of discourse analysis: the abandonment of treating psychological features (such as roles) as substantive and focusing on purely what people say (Hammersley, 2003). In terms of epistemology, as Nikander (2008, p. 413) verbalizes,

> (w)hat discursive approaches in different disciplinary locations share, however, is a strong social constructionist epistemology—the idea of language as much more than a mere mirror of the world and phenomena "out there" and the conviction that discourse is of central importance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our social world.

However, even though constructionism is often taken for granted in discursive studies, Potter (1996) indicates that it is also a construct and therefore, it needs to be defined. The discursive psychological approach steps back from cognitivism where positions are seen as accounting directly for the pre-existing identities of a certain person (Koborov, 2013, 2010; see also Hammersley, 2003, p. 752). As Potter (2010) states referring to Potter and Wetherell (1989), "there would be a number of profound problems with treating these accounts [positions] as literal, realistic descriptions" (p. 657; see also Koborov, 2013).

Despite the social constructionist epistemology, following the Searle's (1995) social ontology, I acknowledge the existence of certain basic (or in Searle's terms, brute) facts that exist without the use of language or social constructions; this is ontological realism (see also Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2009b). To be more explicit, this means that everything that exists is not socially constructed through documentation, nor is it possible to remove all the existing facts and, for example, children's challenges, by speaking or writing about them in a different manner. Consequently, I see that the child's needs for support can have an individual basis outside the language and social constructions that are not produced by documentation, even though this is not always the case (see also Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2009a). Even though realist thinking could seem to be discordant with the documentality theory, Ferraris (2015a, p. 65), defines himself as a weak textualist, which he also describes as "weak constructionism" in the sense "that inscriptions are decisive in the construction of social reality but..., it excludes that inscriptions may be constitutive of reality in general" (p. 65). Ferraris (2015a) also continues to say that this weak textualism (or constructionism) is not, however, contradictory with realistic thinking. I do not see social constructions as entirely insignificant in the process of constructing reality. On the contrary, even though language does not construct everything that exists, the role of it is fundamental in the process of constructing especially what Searle (1995) has called social facts and Ferraris has called (2013) social acts in institutions. In other worlds, the role of language and documentation do not construct the reality solely even though, in line with Ferraris (2013) and Davies (2014), the existence of language and documentation is decisive in the origin, maintenance, and change of *institutional* reality.

Consequently, despite acknowledging the possible individual features, I see support needs as a socially constructed institutional categorization that is based on the values and norms of an institution and society (see also Franck, 2018; Hacking, 1999; Honkasilta, 2017, p. 9; Vehmas, 2010). Children's needs for support, either considered special or not, are not individual in the sense that the origin of them could be identified directly with the child as a division between normal and abnormal or normal and special (Davies, 1995, p. 11; Franck, 2018). Instead, needs are institutional facts even though a child can have, for example, physical or mental states that are linked to the identification of needs. The same goes when considering the responsibilities, rights, (professional) duties, and blame, which are all institutional facts: they become constructed though the use of language and, finally, are made verifiable, retrievable, and binding through

documentation. This also results in different positions for children, parents, professionals, and institutions in general. Even though these positions can have resemblance in the physical, psychological, or mental characteristics of actors, they do not directly represent and echo these characters; they are free-floating. Therefore, positions are also social facts and products of documentation that are independent from the physical world or cognitive entities of a person (see also Koborov, 2010; Potter, 2000). Consequently, following the idea of the discursive psychological approach to positioning, the critical question is not whether the orientations of documents or the positions represent the real characters of children or other actors. Instead, these social facts are considered true and, as a result, are potentially consequential in institutional practices. The critical question is how pedagogical documents orientate and position institutional actors and pedagogical work. In this inspection, these orientations for pedagogical work are understood as potentialities that can be utilized, echoed, or resisted but, irrespective of this, are important and potentially powerful.

4.2 Research data

This research focuses on investigating the pedagogical documents of children who attended pre-primary education during the school year 2015-2016. In the data collection, all the documents that were drafted for a particular child over the years were collected. Consequently, the research data is longitudinal as it comprises 312 pedagogical documents of 108 children. The documents were collected from 23 pre-primary education groups in five Finnish municipalities. As my aim in this research was to illustrate the current state and diversity of pedagogical documents, I applied purposive sampling to aim at the maximum variation (Patton, 2015, p. 267) when selecting municipalities and ECEC centers within them. Purposiveness meant that I sought research permissions from the municipalities geographically located in different regions, with differing sizes, and with varying pedagogical practices (such as those municipalities that utilized the three-tiered approach in ECEC and those who did not). My approach is in line with what Gobo (2011) calls "the social significance of the sample" (p. 2). This means that it focuses on the diverse presentation of the practices instead of aspires toward the statistical logic of sampling.

I reached the municipalities by contacting the administrative representatives who were responsible for research cooperation in early childhood education services. These representatives varied from the head teacher of an ECEC center in a small municipality to the administrative director of educational services in a large city. The research cooperation was first negotiated with these representatives and after that, written research permissions were sought from each municipality. In recruiting, the diversity of participating municipalities was somewhat achieved. Two of the municipalities (B, E) are large cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants whereas two are small ones (A, D) with less than 5,000 inhabitants. The fifth municipality (C) has less than 100,000, yet it

is over 50,000 inhabitants. Municipalities are located in four regions, yet all of them are geographically located in the southern half of Finland. Three of the municipalities (B, C, and E) implemented the three-tiered approach in ECEC.

After seeking research permissions from municipalities, I started to look for participating pre-primary education groups within them. As I understood that ECEC administrators were the ones with the best knowledge about the variation within the municipality, I preferred that administrators, or someone for whom they delegated the task, chose the pre-primary education groups. This practice took place in four municipalities (B, C, D, and E). In one very small municipality (A), the only pre-primary education group was chosen. Therefore, purposive sampling (Patton, 2015, p. 267) was also applied in choosing pre-primary education groups within municipalities. When applicable (municipalities B, C, D, E), the administrators were instructed to look for such pre-primary education groups that would have diverse pedagogical practices and that would be located in different areas within the municipality. I also asked them to pay attention to family characteristics in the area, such as socioeconomic background or the number of linguistically and culturally diverse families.

As a result, 23 pre-primary education teachers from 19 ECEC centers or schools agreed to cooperate and consequently, the data collection was implemented in 23 pre-primary education groups. The number of groups per municipality varied from one to ten. Before collecting data from pre-primary education groups, I asked for written research consents from the guardians of the children whose documents I aimed to collect. In this process, I applied two kinds of data collection techniques. First, in ten groups, I sought consents from the guardians of all children. In the rest of the 13 groups, I only asked for consents from the guardians of children with identified needs for support during pre-primary education. In this group, I asked the teachers to give the consent forms only to the guardians of the children who the teachers considered to have needs for educational support. This choice was due to my aim at investigating the documentation of children with identified needs for support, yet I wanted to make the selection based on the knowledge of the teachers and did not apply any pre-existing categorizations to the selection of children. As the number of children with identified needs for support is relatively low in ECEC and pre-primary education groups (according to National Institute for Health and Welfare [2017], approximately 7%), I wanted to collect data that would purposefully overrepresent the documents of children who had needs for support. This kind of group characteristic sampling aims at including specific groups to the data that are of particular interest (Patton, 2015, p. 267). Typically, parents were willing to give their consent for research. However, parents of children who had needs for support often declined, especially if the needs for support were intense and long-lasting. Consequently, in the research data, from some municipalities and groups I was unable to collect any documents of children who had needs for support. Therefore, I saw that it was important that in some municipalities and groups, I focused only on the documents of children with identified support needs as this approach ensured that I had a large enough

number of documents from those children as well, without requiring unreasonably demanding and extensive data collection.

When the parents had given their research consent, I approached the teachers of the pre-primary education groups in order to schedule the data collection. As I aimed at investigating the documents from the pedagogical perspective and with a longitudinal design, I wanted to collect all the documentation that aimed at planning or assessing the education and support for a child. Therefore, I collected pedagogical plan documents (ECEC plan, pre-primary plan, plan for intensified support, IEP) as well as the assessment documents (pedagogical assessment and pedagogical evaluation). I also collected some transition-related documentation as well as documents that aimed to inform other specialists about the situation of a child (e.g., statements for therapists or medical professionals). However, due to the specific focus of this research, these documents were not utilized in the three sub-studies. The implementation of the data collection in the groups was conducted in close cooperation with the teachers. In three municipalities, the teachers copied and/or printed the documents following my instructions. In two municipalities, I did the copying myself. Consequently, the data include the pedagogical documents of 108 children, of which 27% had needs for support: eight children received special, 21 intensified, and 79 general support. The majority of the documents were drafted by teachers in ECEC centers and pre-primary education groups. However, as the data is longitudinal and some children had participated in ECEC in-home daycare or club-based services before pre-primary education year, the research data also includes pedagogical documents that are drafted in home daycare as well as in ECEC clubs[5]. Research data is presented in the Table 2.

TABLE 2 Research data

Municipality	ECEC centers (N)	Groups (N)	Children, all (N)	Children with identified support needs (N)	Documents (N)
A	1	1	10	0	33
B	7	7	8	5	35
C	3	4	43	8	108
D	1	1	11	2	21
E	7	10	36	14	121
Total	**19**	**23**	**108**	**29**	**312**

[5] In ECEC centers and pre-primary education, each group has to have a teacher with a degree from higher education and additionally, up to two other educators with either higher or vocational education degrees. In home daycare, no qualification requirements are given. At the time the pedagogical documents in the data were drafted, in ECEC, all professionals could draft pedagogical documents even though in the renewed ECEC legislation, this role is allocated to teachers. In pre-primary education, only teachers draft pedagogical documents as in home daycare, home daycare nurses take care of the drafting of documents. Consequently, the data includes documents that are drafted by teachers and special education teachers as well as ECEC and home daycare nurses.

4.3 Analysis in the sub-studies

In the three sub-studies, I aimed at deconstructing the current practice of writing pedagogical documents by investigating the language in a detailed manner. With this, I open the possibility of recognizing the dominant writing practices and changing them. In all of the sub-studies, a detailed analysis of the peculiar linguistic features was conducted. With this, I aimed at receiving information from the methods of writing that produced certain discursive practices in the level of text. This linguistic analysis included, depending on the sub-study, observing word choices, sentence structures, tenses, causal relations implied in the text, references to other actors and texts, and the semantic roles of the actors.

In defining the research questions, specific methodologies, and analytical concepts for the sub-studies, I utilized an inductive approach, which is often applied in discourse analysis (Potter, 1996). This means that instead of fixed research questions, I started with a more general aim of the sub-study that I based on the theoretical and conceptual framework of the subject. After that, it was necessary to operationalize these different conceptual and theoretical frameworks for further analysis. For this, I made sub-study-specific choices considering 1) what kind of a data would present the key issue of a sub-study in the most practical way and 2) with which analytical concepts I could achieve information about this issue. Considering the first question, I made a choice of which children's documents as well as what documents from those children I should include in the analysis. After that, considering the latter question, I continued to define the analytical units and concepts based on the tradition of discursive psychology.

In the first sub-study, my aim was to investigate the ways to describe children's needs for support in the documents. In this inspection, I used the data of 143 documents from 29 children who were receiving either intensified (tier 2) or special (tier 3) support in the pre-primary year and, consequently, could be considered as having more long-lasting or diverse needs for support. In the selection of children, I omitted all the pre-existing categorizations of children's needs, such as diagnosis, and based the selection on the pedagogical evaluation of children's needs as presented in their pedagogical documents. The data included both plan and assessment documents from ECEC and pre-primary education. This choice was due to the fact that both of these document types aim at describing a child's situation as the basis for planning the education, although the aims of the documents differ. In this sub-study, all the documents from one child were included in the analysis and approached as independent documents without longitudinal inspection. The analytical unit of the study was a documented description of needs for support. In operationalization, the sections from the documents that, in the headline, requested a professional to write a child description were extracted for further analysis. Moreover, from all these descriptions of a child, I sorted out the ones that presented a child from a problem-oriented perspective. In the analysis, I utilized the concepts of (troubled)

position and function. In this sub-study, the concept of position was defined and applied following the Foucauldian understanding (see Foucault, 1977).

In sub-study two, I exploited the longitudinal nature of the data by investigating the possible change in the descriptions of pedagogy over time in the documents of 64 children. Therefore, for this sub-study, I chose the children who had at least two consecutive years of documentation. As a result, I found 74 children with longitudinal documentation. I wanted to focus on the development of pedagogy that was related to supporting children with identified needs for support with a wider understanding. Therefore, from these 74 children, I looked for those whom ECEC professionals described as having challenges in the pre-primary year despite the level of support the child was already receiving. Moreover, I required that the challenge was long-lasting, which meant that it had been described also in at least one earlier document before pre-primary education. As a difference from sub-study one, where I included the documentation of children receiving either intensified or special support, in this study, I did not apply any prerequisites. In this selection, ten children with longitudinal documentation but no descriptions of challenges were excluded from further analysis and so the documentation of 64 children (N = 257) was included.

After selecting the children whose documents I would examine, I continued with formulating the analytical units that, in the second sub-study, consisted of a set of longitudinal recordings related to a particular challenge of a child. In forming these analytical units, I combined all the recordings of support measures, pedagogical practices, and their assessments that were related to a particular challenge. These could be written in any part of a document. However, I only included the writings of ECEC professionals and excluded the writings of children, parents, and specialists. I read the longitudinal sets of descriptions multiple times and observed peculiar features of writing about the development of pedagogy. In creating the categorizations for different patterns of writing about the development of support, I utilized the constant comparison method (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). In this, I created the initial categorization based on the preliminary observations of the data and, together with the supervisors of the dissertation, revisited it before creating the final categorization (see Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). As a result, four patterns of writing were found that included all the longitudinal challenge cases (N=164) that were found from the data.

In the third sub-study, I utilized the documents of all 108 children in investigating how ECEC professionals utilize the voices of children, parents, and specialists in the documents. For that, I included the documents that aimed at planning the education and excluded the assessment-related documents. This was due to the key aim of the sub-study that focused on the roles of children, parents, and professionals in planning the child's education and support. However, despite my interest in other voices, I focused on the parts of the documents that were written by ECEC professionals and on the extracts in which they utilized the other perspectives. In selecting the sections that included the utilization of other voices, I used the concept of intertextuality as an analytical

tool. In the analysis, I examined the intertextual voices (children, parents, and specialists) separately and investigated what peculiar linguistic features the descriptions of these three voices had in the documents. After that, I continued the analysis by studying for what purposes ECEC professionals used the intertextual voices. In order to achieve this, I used the concepts of a linguistic function and an epistemic position. Moreover, I applied the concept of writer's stance, which included the markers of distance-taking, agreement, or neutral attitudes toward the information of another voice.

4.4 Trustworthiness and limitations

This dissertation aims specifically to create understanding about pedagogical documentation as an educational, institutional and discursive practice. To achieve this aim, the characteristics of writing in pedagogical documents were approached from the point of view of discourse analysis. This approach, as any other, comes with both benefits and limitations. Following the qualitative tradition, I utilize the concept of trustworthiness to observe the strengths and limitations of the research. I considered the question: "(C)an the findings be trusted?" (Korstjen & Moser, 2018, p. 121). In this, I refer for the most part to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of trustworthiness as described by Korstjen and Moser (2018), who present the key areas of trustworthiness as 1) credibility, 2) dependability, 3) confirmability, and 4) transferability. Moreover, I apply some ideas of trustworthiness from the definition of Patton (1999) and describe the limitations of document research as stated by Bowen (2009).

4.4.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to how confident a researcher can be about the truthfulness of results. To increase the credibility of this particular study, the key method I utilized was triangulation and, to some extent, member-checks (see Korstjen & Moser, 2018). The triangulation included mainly what Patton (1999) describes as analyst and theory triangulation, where multiple researchers and theories are used to decrease possible biases during the analysis. Theory triangulation is applied because all the sub-studies are based slightly different theoretical understandings and concepts. Furthermore, this compilation of the dissertation also sheds a different kind of a light to the phenomena. In addition to these traditional means of increasing credibility, I applied linguistic analysis (see Halliday, 2013), which helped me to execute a detailed analysis of the investigated features.

The use of analyst triangulation can be seen as the key element increasing credibility. The analyst triangulation was applied a bit differently in different sub-studies, yet cooperation between me as actual researcher and my two supervisors as other investigators was utilized in all of them. In the first sub-study, the implementation was perhaps the least fixed. The construction of

categorization was discussed together with all three authors based on my tentative suggestion and the numerous data extracts that I had chosen. As a result, the initial categorization was created, and the categories were named. After that, I finished the analysis with all the data. However, in the second sub-study, this cooperation was more organized. In creating challenge case categorization, I suggested the initial categorization for the data to other two authors based on numerous data extracts, which was developed in shared discussion. After that, my supervisor and I analyzed 66% of the individual cases by coding the continuity of the support measures related to each case into the final pattern categories. In this, we both made the categorizations and finally, compared them. We reported that the uniformity of our categorization was 94%. Regarding those we were apart for, we discussed and concluded the categorization together. For the remaining 34% of the data, I conducted the categorization alone, without further need to discuss with another researcher. In third sub-study, the process was similar to the first sub-study, with the difference that I also recorded the percentages of the categorization.

Despite analyst and theory triangulation, I did not use multiple methods (apart from different analytical concepts within discursive psychology) or data sources (apart from the slightly different documents used as data in the sub-studies), which could have increased the credibility of the study. Bowen (2009) states that one of the key weaknesses of document analysis is drawing upon document data without the triangulation of data sources or methods. Accordingly, the results may then be what Patton (1999) describes as "an artifact of a single method, or a single source" (p. 1197). However, as Bowen (2009) also states, with a specialized document analysis methodology, document data can be used as an individual data source when relying on a specific method, such as discourse analysis. There, Bowen (2009) mentions specifically the situations in which documents are investigated with a longitudinal design as sets of multiple consecutive pieces of documentation. Despite the possible entitlement for using documents solely, the use of other methods would possibly strengthen the credibility. For instance, quantifying the qualitative data (e.g., Potter, 1996) would be possible in order to do some statistical analysis, especially in the third sub-study, though I would have probably faced some challenges regarding the representativeness and randomization of the data.

The idea of member-checks was applied to some extent, yet the application was not organized. During the research process, I lectured and taught multiple times about the drafting of pedagogical documents to ECEC professionals in municipalities and to ECEC (special education) teacher students at the University of Jyväskylä. During these encounters, especially considering events of in-service training for teachers as well as unofficial discussions, numerous professionals have given me valuable feedback about the tentative results. Bowen (2009), referring to Lincoln and Guba (1985), sees the inclusion of both official and unofficial discussions as an integral part of a member-check procedure. For example, when I was doing the first sub-study about the construction of needs for support in the documents, I discussed with ECEC teachers about the

convention of describing the child's needs through "she/he is practicing" expressions. My first impression was that these expressions are euphemisms for a problem-oriented way of understanding needs for support. However, during the discussions, teachers predominantly explained to me that for them, these expressions are a way to see a child from a strength-based perspective, which is strongly emphasized in Finnish ECEC nowadays. Even though the idea of discourse analysis that I conducted in the first sub-study is not to see "behind the text" and to interpret the reasoning behind the acts of writing, this knowledge was important to me as it made me reflect on my thinking. After the discussions, even though I aimed to reveal the problematic practices, I discovered that I approached the data from an excessively problem-oriented perspective by looking at only flaws and difficulties that would distort my results—an issue that is also closely related to the confirmability of the study. Because of the discussions, I was able to acknowledge this and, consequently, I believe that applying member-checks have enhanced the credibility as well as confirmability of the results.

When research focuses on documentation from the viewpoint of social constructionism and discourse analysis, I see that it is important to critically reflect the traditional idea of credibility. The key limitations of the document research can also differ based on the methodological and epistemological commitments. In this research, the texts in the documents were the key focus of the research and my aim was to investigate how the text potentially functions in institutions and how it constructs social reality via the use of language. Therefore, the usual limitations of document research, such as the need for multiple data sources (Bowen, 2009), are not totally applicable even though they could have been if I had approached documentation as purely an instrument of information transfer. Moreover, according to Korstjen and Moser (2018), "(c)redibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from *the participants' original data* and is a correct interpretation of *the participants' original views*" (p. 121, emphasis added). The emphasis of achieving understanding about the original views of the authors of the documents is inconsistent with the key commitments to discourse analysis, according to which the intentionality of certain ways of writing are not interpreted (see Hammersley, 2003). Following the tradition of discursive psychology, in this research I did not attempt to achieve knowledge about the ideas of ECEC professionals, but investigated the text as such. Therefore, in terms of credibility, the criteria could be altered to highlight the findings that represent plausible information based on the documented descriptions, without connecting this to the character or intentions of the writer.

4.4.2 Dependability and confirmability

It is important to reflect on how consistent the results are and whether the study could be repeated; this is the dependability of the study (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). Alternatively, confirmability includes the reflection of possible biases or other researcher-related issues that may have caused distortion in the results (Korstjen

& Moser, 2018). It includes the inspection of whether the results are neutral—that they are based on the data and not solely on the ideas of a researcher. The key way to ensure both dependability and confirmability in research is a detailed reporting of the research process and the choices made along the way (Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Patton, 1999; see also Bowen, 2009). As a result, an evaluation of whether the study has been conducted in a suitable (dependability) and neutral (confirmability) way can be made. Most of the choices considering dependability and confirmability have been reported in the articles about the three sub-studies as well as in this dissertation thesis, especially in the chapter considering methodology. However, I see that a few decisions concerning particularly the data collection, conceptual choices, and the analysis need to be justified in a more detailed manner.

Some strengths can be identified in the research data. One of the key assets of the document data is the fact that when naturally occurring data, such as pedagogical documents, are utilized, the data is stable and not affected by a researcher in terms of reflexivity (Bowen, 2009; Edwards & Potter, 1992). As Bowen (2009, p. 31) states, "document analysis counters the concerns related to reflexivity (or the lack of it) inherent in other qualitative research methods" and continues to say that the reflexivity is typically not an issue in document research. However, it would be too simplistic to say that I have had no impact on the data, even though the data itself is stable and unchanging.

Considering Patton's (1999) emphasis on the key importance of data collection in trustworthiness of research, I see that sampling as well as the representativeness of the data are important to detail. First, my aim was neither to achieve an extensive amount of data nor the outstanding representativeness of it. This was due to the fact that while applying discourse analysis, only a limited number of documents could be investigated in detail. Moreover, I emphasized the inclusion of a wide array of documents instead of a statistical logic of randomization (see also Bowen, 2009), where the choices were made based on my understanding of the Finnish ECEC system and the municipal variances concerning policy and practices. However, to reduce the danger of too nested data where the documents would be collected from a very limited number of contexts, I made some randomization. The municipalities and ECEC groups differed based on their geographical location. In addition, I did not intervene in the choosing of groups or children. However, it is likely that all the variance of the arrangements that exists in Finnish ECEC is not reached.

On the other hand, I aimed at achieving somewhat biased data in order to be able to study the documentation of children who had needs for support. As children who are receiving either intensified or special support are a small minority in pre-primary education groups, I deliberately applied purposeful group characteristics sampling (Patton, 2015, p. 267), which increased the portion of the documents for children with identified support needs in the data. However, all the bias in the data is not deliberate. One limitation was that I struggled greatly to achieve the adequate amount of data because many municipalities refused to participate. As Bowen (2009) describes, referring to Yin (1994), documents can

sometimes be unattainable, which can lead to what Yin (1994, 80) refers to as biased selectivity of the documents. Moreover, Bowen (2009) illustrates how in this kind of biased selection, especially in documents with certain accepted qualities, can become predominant in the data. In the context of this research, the bias could mean, for example, the inclusion of primarily carefully drafted pedagogical documents from the municipalities that are devoted to developing documentation practices. As described in the next chapter, this is plausible and might have limited the variance of the data. However, even though I wanted to observe the challenges of documentation practices, my aim was also to point out functional and ethical ways of writing, and therefore the distortion might have helped me to achieve this aim.

Perhaps the most remarkable limitation of the data collection was due to the decision to collect the data in two rounds—a practice that afterward appears problematic. First, I collected the documents that were drafted for children before the pre-primary education year at the end of autumn term in 2015. Then, at the end of spring term 2016, I came back to collect the documents drafted for the pre-primary education year. This led to a slight waste in data concerning the pre-primary education, where the supplementary data from the spring of the pre-primary education year is missing from seven children. Moreover, the organization of two rounds was time-consuming and in relation to costs, inefficient. However, it allowed me to start looking into and to process the data covering the time prior to pre-primary education during the year 2015 – 2016, which was necessary due to the time limit of the dissertation research.

One key element of dependability and confirmability, unambiguity in reporting of research, is especially important. In this research, there are a few conceptual choices that can lead to confusion. The first of these considers the use of data and analytical units. In the first sub-study, I based the selection of the documents that I was going to study on the tier of support the child was receiving. This meant that each child had been provided with either intensified or special support in pre-primary education. Moreover, I treated each document as an individual piece of data that was analyzed separately. However, in the second sub-study, the justification was different as I chose the documentation of the children who had been described as having a challenge of any kind. In this, my selection criteria were based on the socially constructed categorization of educational needs instead of on formal institutional classifications. In addition, I formed another kind of analytical unit for the analysis and inspected all the descriptions related to an individual challenge as an ensemble. As for the third sub-study, I abandoned all the selection criteria for the children and utilized the entire data with the exception of the assessment documents that were used in the first sub-study.

Another conceptual choice concerns the naming of the documents. In this dissertation as well as in the first and second sub-studies, I use the term pedagogical documents—a choice that I justified in the introduction. However, I decided to use the term IEP in the article reporting the third sub-study. An alternative way of referring to the data as pedagogical documents would have

been possible in all the articles in addition to the use of the term IEP, which is in fact more established and recognizable in the field of document research, especially outside Nordic countries. This was the reason it was used in the third sub-study; it was also used to avoid possible confusion with the Reggio-inspired pedagogical documentation. However, I see that if the term IEP would have been utilized in this dissertation, it would have covered only a part of the variance in documents as, in Finland, a pedagogical document can be and typically is drafted for each child irrespective of their needs for support. This research focuses on the documentation of all children, which I wanted to emphasize with this conceptual choice. Finally, one of the pedagogical documents in the Finnish system is indeed called an IEP (Basic Education Act, 628/1998; Finnish National Board of Education, p. 50-51). Therefore, in order to prevent misunderstandings among Finnish readers, I have chosen another term in this dissertation.

In the analysis, a discursive approach is described to include a possibility of low trustworthiness through vague (or even lacking) execution of an analysis (e.g., Antaki et al., 2003). Therefore, the detailed account of the analysis is important (Nikander, 2008, p. 418; Patton, 1999; see also Bowen, 2009). Patton (1999) describes how an analysis should simultaneously be creative and methodically valid. Considering creativity, I have aimed at using the analytical concepts in a way that would both do justice to their previous developers but also apply them to the analysis in creative way. My understanding of the key concept of position has developed significantly along the way. I have applied the concept of position in differing ways, applying the Foucauldian conceptualization in the first and more discursive psychology-oriented version in the third sub-study as well as in this dissertation. I have explicated the use of concepts as well as the process of analysis in a way that allows a reader to make judgements about the quality of the findings (Patton, 1999).

4.4.3 Transferability

Transferability illustrates how and under what conditions the results can inform practices in different contexts (Korstjen & Moser, 2018). In this study, this can refer to ECEC practices in other countries, Finnish primary or secondary education, as well as in the Finnish municipalities that did not participate to this research. As a parallel concept, generability is often used, even though the concept is typically considered more suitable for qualitative investigations. Similar to the observations of credibility, when applying discursive approaches, the definitions of transferability/generability also need to be reflected by considering the characteristics of studying discourse (Goodman, 2008). Even though it is often said that the transferability of the findings is low in discursive studies and they are not generalizable, Goodman (2008, p. 268) elaborates that "discursive findings can be seen as highlighting *generalizable actions performed by a rhetorical strategy*." There, it is assumed that writing practices are not unique to all professionals, but they have a foundation in culturally shared ways of constructing text and use of language in general. Consequently, some findings can be transferable or even generalizable. Moreover, one key aspect that can be

seen to confirm the results from the perspective of transferability is that the results are more or less in line with the previous research conducted in other countries and settings. In this, the transferable aspects of the results are, in this research, the function of documentation (what is done with documentation) instead of what is actually written in the document.

The assessment of transferability is, however, eventually the responsibility of a reader of the study who, based on what Korstjen and Moser (2018) illustrate as a thick description—a detailed account of the research process—makes a judgement on whether the results are applicable to the reader's own context. Despite this, few suggestions about relevant matters are worth making. Naturally, Finnish ECEC has some unique characteristics that need to be taken into account while evaluating transferability. For example, universally drafted pedagogical documents make a situation different compared to the countries and contexts where they are drafted only for some children. The qualities of the research data need to be considered carefully when applying the results in other contexts, including sample size and over-representativeness of children with identified needs for support. Also, the municipalities that took part in the research were often the ones that reported the fulfillment of regulations concerning documentation, as some municipalities reported that as their documentation practices did not meet the recommendations, they did not want to allow the documents to be used in research. Finally, the professionals that had written the documents had varying educational backgrounds, which were not perceived in the sub-studies. Some of the professionals (teachers) had a degree from higher education, some had a degree from vocational education (ECEC nurses), and some lacked a degree (home daycare nurses). When these context- and design-related characteristics of the study are taken into account, I see that the results of this dissertation can inform the development of documentation practices and writing of pedagogical documents both in and outside the contexts of Finland and ECEC.

4.5 Ethical issues and research integrity

In scientific research, according to the Finnish Guidelines for the Responsible Conduct of Research and for Handling Alleged Violations of Conduct (the RCR guidelines), a researcher needs

1) to respect the autonomy of research subjects
2) to avoid harm
3) to secure privacy and data protection (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012).

4.5.1 Research permissions and the ownership of institutional document data

In order to respect the autonomy of research subjects, the questions of voluntary participation as well as the information of and consents from the participants are vital (Christians, 2011, p. 144; Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2019). In studying documents, however, there are no specific participants in the study, but rather the investigation focuses on written text. However, prior to the data collection, I considered the question of the ownership of pedagogical documents, which turned out to be complex. At the same time, the document belongs somewhat to the child, as it is drafted for his or her good. As legal guardians of an underage child, the parents also can be considered to have some kind of ownership of the documents. Simultaneously, a document is a work of an ECEC professional. However, professionals draft the documents in an institutional setting of ECEC as part of their professional duties. Therefore, it is possible to also see pedagogical documents as institutional property.

Keeping all of these perspectives in mind, when aiming toward voluntary participation through research permissions and informed consents, I decided from whom I would need to seek permissions or consents. Based on the preliminary discussions with municipal administrators, the first written research permissions were needed from administrative representatives of each municipality. During the tentative discussions with municipalities, the question of voluntary participation was raised for the first time as numerous municipalities decided to refuse to participate. In total, I discussed with fourteen municipalities but only five municipalities gave their research permission. The reasons of refusal included the great amount of ongoing research cooperation and teachers' lack of time. Furthermore, some municipalities replied that they acknowledged that their documentation practices did not meet the recommendations and, consequently, they did not want to allow the documents to be used in research.

When research permissions were obtained, I started to make contacts with administrators and teachers in pre-primary education groups—and faced more resistance. Some teachers told me that they were insecure about the state of documentation and the contents of the documents they had drafted. This led to the situation in which some teachers were unwilling to give pedagogical documents to me or to help me to reach parents. However, the same teachers explained that they thought they had no choice as the municipality had already given the permission for research cooperation and that the participation was part of their professional duties as teachers. In situations like these, I considered that prior to the continuation of a data collection, I had to strive for oral informed consent of a teacher, despite the fact that the participation was already set with the municipality. Therefore, before any further arrangements were made, I talked with reluctant teachers about the research design and the aims of the study. I described how I aimed to collect knowledge about the current state of documentation practices in order to make the development of these practices possible. Moreover, I emphasized that I would make no comparisons between

municipalities or individual professionals. In one municipality, this kind of a discussion in which I described the study was arranged as a shared event for all the teachers whose groups the documents were collected from. In the other four municipalities, I discussed the study with them on the phone or via email. In a few cases, the discussions were also continued when I met the teachers personally when I travelled to collect the data.

When I presented the study and discussed it with the teachers, many of them asked whether I was an ECEC teacher. Teachers wanted to know whether I had worked in ECEC and, consequently, whether I possibly understood the preconditions of documentation, such as the amount of time it takes. Some of them told me later that the fact that I told them that I had also struggled with documentation when I was an ECEC teacher was an important factor in building trust with them. As a result of the discussions, I assume that the teachers made more or less a voluntary and at least an informed choice in helping me in data collection. However, it is possible that the participation was not entirely voluntary, even though I did everything in my power to discuss the study with them.

After cooperation was obtained with the teachers and administrators, informed consents from parents and/or guardians were gathered in paper form. In the form, following the operative legislation (Personal Data Act, 523/1999, repealed), parents and guardians were informed about the researcher's contact information, the research topic, the design of the data collection, the purpose of the data collection, the fact that the data would be archived, and the voluntary nature of participation. Parents were told that they also had the right to forbid the use of their child's documents after the documents had been collected and to receive additional information from the researcher (see Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2019, 2012).

The teachers in the groups took care of giving the consent forms to the parents and guardians as well as returning them to me. I as a researcher was not in contact with parents, which also helped me to secure their privacy and that of their children. Typically, the consent was asked from one parent even though I instructed the teacher to seek consent from both of the parents if needed. This was the case when the child's parents were separated and they both were legal guardians of the child. In some cases, when a child had more than two legal guardians, all of the guardians gave their permission. Therefore, the number of consents per child varied from one to four. Parents predominantly allowed the use of the child's documents; only a few families per group refused. In this, the role of the teachers was vital as they reminded parents to fill out the consent form and discussed the study with them. However, the parents of children with identified needs for support did not give their consents as often as did the parents of other children, which I found predictable. Parents of children with identified needs for support justified this decision to teachers by explaining that they experienced stress and exhaustion concerning the great number of professionals who were already taking part in the cooperation concerning their child's education and therefore asserting their need for privacy. However, a few teachers

told me that parents had sent their regards to me and that they were happy to give the documents to me as I was a special education teacher and therefore, according to their thoughts, would use the documents to a good purpose from the point of view of the children.

Prior to the data collection, I did not ask research permission from the children whose documents I was collecting. This can be justified with the legislative right of parents to give consent for the use of an underage child's documents (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2019). Moreover, I did not study the children directly nor did I make any contact with them; in many cases, they most likely did not know about the research project. However, I profoundly considered the matter of informing the children about the study prior to the data collection as, in previous research (e.g., Komulainen, 2007), the voices of children are often said to be disregarded. I reflected on the children's need for protection and the possible benefits of informing them about the research project and the question of their right to give their own consents. I rationalized that if I, as a total stranger, had approached the children by asking their consent or permissions, there would have more likely been a great danger of negative consequences than of positive benefits to the children. Based on previous research, even older children and young people are not always aware that a pedagogical document is drafted for them (e.g., Pawley & Tennant, 2008). Based on my foreknowledge, I assumed that this was the case also in Finnish ECEC. Therefore, by asking permission from children, I would have been introducing the entirely new issue of pedagogical documentation to at least some of them. Moreover, the fact that I had made no contact with the children helped me to secure their privacy and helped me to focus on only written descriptions of, for example, their needs for support as I had no personal observations of the children. Consequently, I decided not to ask permission from the children. However, I wanted to ensure that the study would benefit the children as well as the professionals that had helped me to collect the data. Therefore, as part of the research agreement made with municipalities, I offered to present a free lecture or a workshop about the results of the study, which has since taken place.

4.5.2 Privacy and data protection

The confidential nature of the data needed to be taken into account in order to preserve privacy and data protection. According to Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018) and Basic Education Act (628/1998), pedagogical documents are confidential records including information that covers sensitive topics about children and families. This can include sensitive personal data such as medical conditions, diagnoses, and details of the use of therapies and social services. Therefore, a specific privacy statement including the measures I took to protect personal data was given prior to the data collection and that followed the legislation valid in 2015 (see Personal Data Act, 523/1999, repealed). In practice, as I wanted to make sure that confidential documents were transferred safely, I personally traveled to get the data from the municipalities. When the data was collected, I conducted the anonymization of the data with the bachelor and

masters students studying in the Department of Education in University of Jyväskylä, who utilized part of the data in their bachelor or master's theses. I made written agreements with these students in which I explicitly obligated them to follow the regulations and legislation about research integrity and to protect the privacy of children, guardians, and municipalities. After anonymization, the electronic copies of the documents were saved to the secure university information system. Original anonymized documents, the list containing the information about the children and municipalities, as well as informed consents were stored in a secure place in the facilities of the University of Jyväskylä.

Detailed reporting of research that ensures the privacy of children, parents, and municipalities is an integral part of ensuring research integrity (Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012, p. 30). There, as Finnish National Board of Research Integrity (2012, p. 30) illustrates, "the results are communicated in an open and responsible fashion that is intrinsic to the dissemination of scientific knowledge." Therefore, I have reported the research process in the articles as well as in this dissertation in a detailed manner in terms of analysis and research integrity. The research data was analyzed systematically in order to reach and to report all its features without excluding any unwanted or differing results. When reporting the results, children were referred to with pseudonyms and when needed, child-related details were altered in order to secure privacy. Moreover, I have not reported the names of the municipalities and have applied descriptive information (number of inhabitants, number of pre-primary groups, and geographical locations) only at a general level. In the analysis, I did not interpret anything about the authors of the texts, the children whose documents were in question, nor did I make comparisons between municipalities.

The research data will be archived for future use in an anonymous form for which the permissions and consents were sought from the guardians and municipalities during data collection. After the data collection, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was imposed and accordingly, the Privacy Protection Act (1050/2018) has been given to regulate the use of personal data in research. As I aimed at archiving the data for later use, I have also made sure that these regulations are met during the research process, particularly concerning the use of sensitive information and archiving (Privacy Protection Act, 1050/2018). When the data is archived, the code linking documents to children and municipalities will be destroyed and only the electronic, anonymized documents will be restored for future use.

5 MAIN RESULTS OF THE THREE SUB-STUDIES

As discourse and positioning analysis are wide fields and the commitment to social constructionism (see Burr, 1995) does not give any specific commitments concerning methods (Potter, 1996), I will explicate these choices a bit further. As I aimed to answer questions about the fulfilment of recommendations, strong and weak parts of the documents as well as positions, I utilized the recommendations from previous research about suitable documentation practices as a reference point for investigation. Both the orientations of documents as well as linguistic positions are fundamentally related and consequently, in the analysis, they were also analyzed in relation to some qualities such as ideals, values, other actors, or institutions. When strong and weak orientations were investigated, three interrelations were utilized: 1) multidimensional and problem-oriented descriptions of support needs; 2) child-related knowledge and descriptions of pedagogy and; 3) professional voices and intertextual voices. The relative nature of positions was considered by analysis of the positions of children, parents, and other professionals in relation to the responsibilities of ECEC professionals. Positions were also more implicitly observed as the responsibilities of ECEC professionals and the concomitant positions of children were investigated. In this, the analyzed positions can be understood as tacit positions (see Hirvonen, 2016). The results from the three sub-studies concerning the ways to construct the text in an ethically just and educationally meaningful way were also collected. There, first, the results considering ways to construct support needs as contextual and environment-related issues were investigated. Moreover, the linguistic means of constructing coherence between consecutive documents and specific descriptions of support were gathered. Finally, ways to utilize intertextual references in the documents in a way that would support participation were presented. The analysis of strong and weak parts of the documents, positions and the linguistic analysis are presented in the Table 3.

TABLE 3 Analysis of positions, strong and weak aspects of documents as well as the linguistic analysis

Recommendation of documentation	**Sub-study**	**Summary of previous findings**	**Analysis of positioning (RQ1* and RQ3***)**	**Analysis of strong and weak aspects of documents (RQ2** and RQ3***)**	**Linguistic analysis (RQ3***)**
Multifaceted images of children and contextualized descriptions of support needs	I	Problem-oriented writings and categorization of the child	Positions of children with support needs in relation to the responsibilities of ECEC professionals	Interrelation of multidimensional and problem-oriented descriptions of support needs	Ways to write about support needs as contextual and environment-related issues
Measurable objectives and goals; Object-related and individualized measures; Regular revisions, formative assessment, and development of supports	II	Vague, general, unmeasurable, and unchangeable objectives and support measures; Lacking revisions, summative assessment	Analysis of the responsibilities of ECEC professionals and the concomitant tacit positions of children	Interrelation of the child-related knowledge and descriptions of pedagogy	Ways to construct coherence between consecutive documents and specific descriptions of support
Multi-voiced planning and influential participation	III	The dominance of professional perspectives	Epistemic positions of children, parents, and specialists in relation to the responsibilities of ECEC professionals	Interrelation of professional voices and intertextual voices	Ways to use intertextual references in shared decision-making

* RQ1: How are children, parents, and professionals positioned in pedagogical documents drafted in ECEC?
** RQ2: In what sense can pedagogical documents be considered weak or strong?
*** RQ3: How do pedagogical documents meet the recommended practices of documentation?

5.1 Sub-study I: Positioning children with special educational needs

In the first sub-study, I specifically addressed the question of the positions of children who were receiving either intensified or special support in pre-primary education. In this sub-study, I used the term special educational needs (SEN) to describe the needs for support. I investigated how children with SEN were positioned in the pedagogical documents and how ECEC professionals simultaneously constructed SEN. I also observed the functions of these different descriptions. In the study, the process of documenting children's SEN was approached as a form of institutional governance (Rose, 1999) and, in Foucauldian terms, as a problematizing activity (Miller & Rose, 1998). As a result, three positions and SEN constructions were found: problematic child through definitive descriptions, multifaceted child through contextualized descriptions, and developing child through dynamic descriptions. The most predominant was the focus on the problematic nature of a child's situation, when the responsibility of both causation of a SEN and of overcoming it was predominantly allocated to the child.

In conclusion, documents typically functioned as tools of problematization. This predominant convention of writing about children's SEN in the documents is in line with the previous research findings (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Severinsson, 2016). However, more fluctuating descriptions of SEN were also found, which contradict what was previously known. When a child was positioned as multifaceted through contextualized descriptions or as developing through dynamic descriptions, the blame and responsibility of overcoming SEN were more evenly distributed, which in relation to the recommended practices of documentation would be desirable. However, the multifaceted image of children and contextualized descriptions of SEN also position the child as a target of constant evaluation and assessment. As the roles and responsibilities of professionals have minor roles in descriptions, children are given main responsibility in overcoming SEN.

5.2 Sub-study II: Longitudinal development of support measures

In the second sub-study, I exploited sequential pedagogical documents (N=257) from 64 children to investigate the longitudinal patterns of support measures and pedagogy over the years. The systematic development of support is vital to systematic support (Poppes et al., 2002; Rosas et al., 2009; Severinsson, 2016; Wixson & Valencia, 2011) yet at the same time, the assessment of previously written objectives and measures is the most poorly implemented content of the documents (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017). Therefore, I was especially interested in writings about objectives and goals as well as measures and assessments.

Consequently, I observed the development of writings about these contents as longitudinal sets of recordings. The relation of child descriptions and the descriptions of pedagogy were critical in inspecting whether and how professionals and children are made responsible in writings. Simultaneously, I was able to observe the contents that were stressed.

In the study, four chronological patterns of support revision over the years were found: missing, repetitious, disorganized, and explicit patterns. In the missing pattern (29 % of the challenge cases), no writings about pedagogy were observed. When the development was repetitious (41 %), the descriptions of support were repeated multiple times, and in the disorganized pattern (17 %), they were changed but in an unpredictable manner with no coherence between consecutive recordings. Finally, in the explicit pattern (13 %), recordings formed a coherent unity of writings in which the development of support measures and objectives was specifically documented and the previously written contents were revisited systematically. From 164 cases of documented challenges and related support measures, 70% had no development in the sense of revisited or redeveloped support measures. In writing, vague and general expressions were dominant and the content of objectives was typically broad. The results highlight the need for more systematic support documentation, as the role of pedagogy and professional responsibility is infinitesimal in most of the documents. Then, the document works mainly as a tool to problematize a child instead of as a plan for support.

5.3 Sub-study III: Voices of children, parents and specialists

In the third sub-study, I investigated how children, parents, and specialists are positioned in terms of epistemic rights and duties. The inspection was founded on the ideas of participation (Hart, 1992; Gallagher, 2008; Shier, 2001) as well as the understanding of pedagogical documents as intertextual (Fairclough, 1992; Linell, 1998). By applying the concepts of intertextual voice and epistemic position to the document data (N = 287) from 108 children, I investigated how ECEC professionals cited other voices in the text and what functions these citations served. I also studied the functions of using intertextual voice in the documents.

As a result, it was found that children, parents, and specialists were cited somewhat differently. Whereas children were referred to with direct quotations and scare quotes, parents and specialists were cited with indirect quotations. Moreover, three functions of utilizing the intertextual voices and three concomitant epistemic positions were found: 1) Creating a more multidimensional image of a child (speaker without influence), 2) presenting evidence for their argumentation (legitimator), and 3) assigning the responsibility to others (powerful decision-maker). The results show that even though children and parents were cited in a document, they were given little power to influence educational decision-making and consequently, they were

typically allocated with the positions of speaker without influence or legitimator. Other specialists were, however, typically given the powerful position of decision-maker, using their knowledge to assign the responsibilities. Children's information was typically diversifying or confirming, as the knowledge from other professionals and parents often also had more binding power. Based on the results, it is important to acknowledge that real participation is having power to influence in addition of having a say. In the drafting of documents, this means that the viewpoints of children and parents should be sought and utilized in planning.

6 DISCUSSION

In this research, I aimed to provide knowledge about the nature of pedagogical documents as institutional agents and the functions of documentation. I addressed the question of how children, parents, and professionals are positioned in pedagogical documents, in what sense the documents can be seen as strong or weak, and how well the documents meet the recommendations of drafting pedagogical documents. I utilized longitudinal document data (N = 312) from 108 Finnish children. The results, conclusions, and practical implications are summarized in Table 4. Next, I will discuss the findings of the research, each research question at a time, and discuss the implications of the study for pedagogical practice and future research.

6.1 Child's personal blame or multi-voiced cooperation and professional responsibility? *(positions)*

Results found that children were positioned as problematic, developing, or active, and in terms of epistemic rights, as either powerless bystanders or powerful decision-makers. The predominant occurrence was to position a child as an object with various needs for support, tasking them with the great responsibility of overcoming the problematic situations and needs for support; this finding is also supported in previous research (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Hjörne & Säljö 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007, 2010; Pihlaja et al., 2015; see also Severinsson, 2017). This predominant position was most notable in the first sub-study, but it was also supported in the second sub-study, where the positioning was more tacit, as well as in the third sub-study, where the positioning was analyzed in relation to epistemic rights. In the second sub-study, the role of planning and pedagogy was typically minor, and the systematic development of supports was found only in a minor proportion of the studied cases. This implicitly highlights the central role of children's challenges and support needs. In the third sub-study, where positions

TABLE 4 Summary of results, conclusions, and practical implications

	Sub-study I **Positioning children with special educational needs**	**Sub-study II** **Longitudinal development of support measures**	**Sub-study III** **Voices of children, parents, and specialists**	**Summary of the results**
RQ 1: How are children, parents and professionals positioned in pedagogical documents?	Predominantly a problematic child with a responsibility of overcoming needs for support, yet at times a developing and active child and contextual understanding of support needs.	Predominantly a problematic, unchangeable, or invisible child with the responsibility of overcoming needs for support, yet at times professional responsibility and development of supports.	Predominantly a child and parents act as bystanders and specialists as powerful decision-makers, yet at times also child and parents become presented as powerful and having wide epistemic rights.	Child is typically positioned in a troubled position. Parents are positioned as unable to influence whereas professionals have power without responsibility in terms of overcoming challenges.
RQ 2: In what sense can pedagogical documents be considered weak or strong?	Weak in entrusting professionals to support a child Strong in validating the problematic and stable state of support needs and the child's personal responsibility	Weak in guiding the systematic development of practices and support Strong in consolidating the stable nature of a child's needs for support and personal blame	Weak in increasing children's and parental participation Strong in increasing professional control	Documents are strong in terms of categorizing a child as a problematic individual and in terms of professional dominance in planning. Simultaneously, they are weak in terms of planning and participation.
RQ 3: How do pedagogical documents meet the recommended practices of documentation?	Support needs are typically carefully identified. The knowledge of needs for support is overpresented and the perspective is problem-oriented. Descriptions of development and context bring the descriptions of support needs closer to recommendations.	Documents often lack the systematic development of support in sequential recordings. Objectives, support measures, and assessments are not always documented. The language is imprecise and abstract.	The viewpoints of children and parents are not truly utilized in planning even though specialist opinions are.	Descriptions focus on support needs and children instead of planning and professional responsibility. Coherence of sequential recordings is typically weak. Writings are imprecise and inconsistent. The attainment of recommendation and regulations seems random.
Practical implications for practice and policy	Needs for support should be observed as multi-dimensional and contextual. The identification of support needs should lead to planning of support instead of categorization of a child as a problem.	Development of support needs to be explicitly documented. Support measures and objectives need to be revisited and assessed in terms of their functionality. In writing, specific descriptions are important.	Viewpoints of children and parents need to be actively sought and documented. Moreover, they need to be utilized in planning by linking them to objectives and/or measures.	The key aims and prerequisites of documentation need to be discussed profoundly. The focus needs to move from the inspection of an individual to the multi-voiced planning of support and allocation of professional responsibility.

were approached from the epistemic perspective, a child was most typically positioned as powerless and, to the contrary, professional were allocated with great power. If children were referred, it was done in an instrumental manner and children were excluded from the decision-making process. These findings retell the results of previous studies (e.g., Elfström Pettersson, 2015; Gallagher, 2008; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018) that illustrate that the key focus of documentation does not include children as participants in the planning.

However, as a slightly different finding in relation to the aforementioned previous studies, in the first sub-study, this tendency of positioning children in a problem-oriented way was not totally consistent, as children were occasionally positioned as developing and active (see also Pihlaja et al., 2015). I understood this to reflect the more contextual understanding of support needs. In this case, the emphasis was on the responsibility of professionals to help and to support a child. In the second sub-study, when the support was described and emphasized in the documents and especially when it was systematically developed, the key responsibility of overcoming needs for support was allocated to the professionals. Consequently, children's challenges appeared to be pedagogically attainable and changing, and the tacit position of a child was different, including less personal blame and responsibility. Also, in the third sub-study, the active role of a child was often constructed and the intertextual voices of children who have support needs were actually referred to more often than in the case of other children. Consequently, the results of the third sub-study are somewhat opposite in relation to previous research (e.g., Paananen & Lipponen, 2018), in which references to the voices of children who have needs for support were less often found. This result can be a consequence of the typical method of utilizing direct quotations from children when professionals were writing about challenging issues. However, the inclusion of a voice does not necessarily indicate actual participation (see also Skrtic, 2005). As the inspection did not include studying the differences of children with and without identified support needs regarding the quantity of different epistemic positions, the possible difference from how the documents imply children's ability to make a significant contribution in planning their support remains unsolved.

The active position of a child does not necessarily mean that the professionals take the responsibility of overcoming challenges. In fact, often the active and dynamic position of a child illustrates the change toward individual adjustment and adaptation to follow institutional norms and rules (see also Alasuutari & Markström, 2011). Simultaneously, professionals were not given responsibilities, which implicitly strengthens the impression that the child is the one with the great responsibility to overcome the challenges. Simultaneously, the role of a child's personal well-being, happiness, and flourishing was unsubstantial. Therefore, children were strongly positioned in relation to the ideal child, who manages their conduct, body, and mind independently without support (see also Franck, 2018). The needs for support were predominantly presented as negative and not as something natural, accepted, or even expected. This reveals the values and norms of ECEC institutions, where the fact that one

needs support is first of all a negative thing and second, something that needs to be identified and fixed (see also Vehmas, 2010; Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). It is easy to see the normative understanding about suitable and "normal" development working as a reference point (see also Kelle, 2010; Kelle et al., 2015) for the process of categorization of children as possessing institutionally unwanted characteristics. As a result, professionals are allocated with the right to plan pedagogical activities in order to return an individual to the path of normal development and conduct (Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Thomas & Loxley, 2007). This resonates with the idea presented by Miller and Rose (2008) regarding problematizing activities in institutions in order to govern them and to conduct control over individuals (see also Asp-Onsjö, 2011). As Honkasilta (2017, p.9-10) illustratively presents,

> at worst, *need*, as it is currently conceptualized and executed in practice is nothing but a way of reconstructing blame, and as such, is counterproductive. (…) Therefore, what is construed as individual need is in actuality *institutional need*; need that is constructed through the apparatuses of socialization.

Positions of parents and specialists were investigated especially in the third sub-study. There, parents were typically positioned as unable to influence whereas specialists had a very strong position as influential decision-makers. This again retells the findings of previous research (e.g., Barnes & Turner, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Kovanen, 2002). This illustrates the process of drafting pedagogical documents as a process in which adults play a central role and where the child's role is supplementary and subordinated. Moreover, it illustrates a process in which experimental and everyday discourses of parents are often labeled as opposite to professional ones (see Forbes, 2015). However, even though the strong position of other professionals was unwavering, at times, parents were presented as powerful decision-makers and, in relation to children, their position was more powerful in terms of epistemic rights.

Finally, in terms of responsibilization, it can be said that a lot is entrusted to the child. As a highly problematic finding, ECEC professionals both withhold the right to choose the key contents of pedagogical documents and yet simultaneously, they discharge themselves from the responsibility of overcoming needs for support in the writings. There, the timely question of the governing functions of ECEC documentation can be raised (see also Schultz, 2015; Hirsh, 2014; see also Trnka & Trundle, 2014). Concerning this, the illustration of Cradock (2007, p. 162) seems regrettably incisive: "(T)he neoliberal project is not so much a project to 'responsibilize' citizens for their own conditions, but a project to 'irresponsibilize' institutions created by the collective vision of the welfare state." (see also Kelly, 2001; Rose, 1999). When professionals are irresponsibilized, the responsibility to overcome the challenges is that of the child, which is of course highly problematic. To conclude, based on the results of the first research question, the documentation practices should move from blame of the child to multi-voiced cooperation and professional responsibility.

6.2 Problematizing the individual or emphasizing pedagogy? *(strong and weak documents)*

In regard to the second research question, I aimed at inquiring in what sense the studied pedagogical documents were weak or strong in orientating pedagogical practices. I build this investigation upon the idea of documents as social agents and the division of strong and weak orientations of documents following the documentality theory introduced by Ferraris (2013).

As a result, due to what was previously presented concerning positions, the studied pedagogical documents seem strong in directing ECEC professionals' orientation toward a problem-oriented and normative understanding of the child and to professional dominance in planning, which is in line with the previous research findings (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007). In the documents, the descriptions of children's challenges dominate the text and they form the foundation to everything else that is written. At the same time, the documents are weak in orienting the pedagogy because the role of objectives, measures, and pedagogy-focused assessments in documents is typically minor (see also, e.g., Boavida et al., 2010; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Moreover, documents are weak in attesting the contextual understanding of support needs to be a changing and context-related phenomenon where the professional responsibility of arranging suitable support for children is of key importance. This way of understanding needs for support is also predominant in educational practices in previous research (Røn Larsen, 2012; Parding & Liljegren, 2016) even though the importance of acknowledging the contextual factors and the dynamic nature of support needs would be critical (Franck, 2014). Finally, documents are weak in enhancing the participation of children and parents, yet strong in consolidating the powerful role of professionals both in ECEC as well as outside the ECEC context. This finding also supports the findings of the previous research (e.g., Asp-Onsjö, 2006, 216; Barnes & Turner, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Hjörne & Säljö, 2014; Kovanen, 2002).

Based on the results of this research, in which only documented descriptions were investigated, it is impossible to say what has caused these orientations to occur. However, it is possible to assume that the twofold function of pedagogical documents, which Hirsh (2015) has illustrated, is not utilized because the pedagogical documents mainly summarize the problematic state of each child instead of serving as dynamic planning tools. The situation may be same in practice when pedagogical documents are interpreted into actions. However, this speculation, even though supported by previous research, should naturally be confirmed with further studies. In this, the role of other unseen functions of documentation need to be considered. As pedagogical documents are said to work also as tools of governance (Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Hirsh, 2014), accountability, auditing, and transparency (Bath, 2012; Erixon & Erixon Arreman, 2017; Millwards et al., 2002; Parding & Liljegren, 2016), as well as tools of allocating resources (Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson, Lindgvist, & Bergström,

2010; Sandberg et al., 2010; Thuneberg et al., 2014), the role and effect of these additional aims that professionals need to consider when drafting a plan should also be considered. As Thuneberg et al. (2014) describe, professionals can justify the maintenance of problem-oriented writing practices with the need for fast and easy ways to draft documents as well as a willingness to use the expressions that are considered shared and univocal, such as diagnosis (see also Hirsh, 2014). Moreover, the problem-oriented descriptions may seem effective in terms of claiming services and resources for a child (Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Vehkakoski, 2007). This is, however, very problematic in terms of ethical and educationally valid documentation (see Michaels, 2006).

Based on the recommendations, documents should stress means of support and participation over categorization of an individual child. Consequently, pedagogical documents should be strong concerning agreements of support and weak in categorization. Documents should focus particularly on prescribing (or in Ferraris' terms, attesting) support measures and pedagogical responsibilities. To be more specific, a document should perform the act of responsibilization, that is, it should describe the professional responsibilities of the related social actors (e.g., Trnka & Trundle, 2014; see also Severinsson, 2017). Ferraris (2015b, 2013, p. 267) describes how, while attesting specific acts, documents simultaneously, explicitly or implicitly, prescribe particular responsibilities and rights for those involved and transcend them over time, independently of their registers. Therefore, a document possesses power to make people responsible, as the binding power of a document cannot be reduced by an individual person (Ferraris & Torrengo, 2014). The content of the document defines who is bound and how (Ferraris & Torrengo, 2014). However, it seems that the key feature of pedagogical documents in current times is that of describing instead of planning, or in Ferraris' (2013) terms, of recording inscriptions that are related to the problematic state of a child instead of attesting social acts of planning systematic support. Other strong aspect is the orientation of professionals toward normative understanding about a child in which individualized norms of development and learning are remote (see also Andreasson et al., 2015; Hirsh, 2014; Kelle, 2010; Kelle et al., 2015; Schultz, 2015; Sjöberg, 2014). Consequently, the definition of Vallberg-Roth and Månsson (2009) suggesting that pedagogical documents are not fundamentally education plans but rather are plans of normalization, has some consolidation from this research. To conclude, based on the results of the second research question, the documentation practices should move from problematizing the individual to emphasizing pedagogy.

6.3 Describing or planning? *(relation to recommendations)*

When examined in relation to the recommended practices of drafting pedagogical documents as well as legislation, the pedagogical documents clearly lack the qualities of recommended documentation practices. Based on the two

prior research questions about positions and function of documentation, it is clear that pedagogical documents position children and parents in a problematic manner and that they function as descriptions rather than plans.

Considering the recommendations about documentation, first, support needs are typically carefully identified (Yell & Stecker, 2003; see also Weishaar, 2010). However, in the studied pedagogical documents, challenges are often overpresented and consequently, the documented picture of a child is problem-oriented (see also Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007). The texts often fail to illustrate the multidimensional picture of children (see also Alvestad & Sheridan, 2015; Severinsson, 2016) or assure the multi-voiced planning processes and strong positions of children and parents (see also Asp-Onsjö, 2006; Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Childre & Chambers, 2005; Goepel, 2009; Hirsto, 2010; Isaksson, 2009; Markström, 2015; Millward et al., 2002; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Salas, 2004). However, when utilized, descriptions of development and context bring the text in the documents closer to recommendations that emphasize multi-faceted information (Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003; see also Franck, 2014).

Second, the descriptions of pedagogy should be at the core of the documents and described in a detailed manner (Boavida et al., 2010; Christle & Yell, 2010; DEC et al., 2014). However, the studied documents typically lack the systematic development of support in sequential recordings (see also Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Objectives, support measures, and assessments are not always documented, or they are documented in a very imprecise manner (see also Boavida et al., 2010; Drasgow et al., 2001; Michnowicz et al., 1995; Rakap, 2015; Yell & Stecker, 2003). However, when the systematic documentation practices take place, consecutive documents form a coherent unity which guides pedagogical practices in a more detailed manner (see also Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Rosas et al., 2009). In that case, the references to previously written documents as well as exact, measurable objectives and measures that are systematically assessed are important (see also Boavida et al., 2010; Christle & Yell, 2010; Michnowicz et al., 1995).

Finally, children and parents should be allocated strong positions in the planning process (see also Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Severinsson, 2016; DEC et al., 2014; Drasgow et al., 2001; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003), which, according to the results, is not the case in practice. More importantly, the viewpoints of children and parents are not truly utilized in planning even though professional opinions are (see also Asp-Onsjö, 2006, p. 216; Barnes & Turner, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Hjörne & Säljö, 2014; Kovanen, 2002). However, when professionals include children's and parents' viewpoints and give them a powerful position, this makes the descriptions more multidimensional.

To summarize, documents also often fail to fill their role as strong instructors of the systematic development of practices and support (see Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). Instead, they are most often harnessed to consolidate the stable nature of a child's needs for support and personal blame (see also

Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007, 2010; Pihlaja et al., 2015; Vallberg-Roth & Månsson, 2009). This is in line with the fact that ECEC professionals are not made responsible for overcoming the challenges while simultaneously being the one that dictates the plan, in cooperation with specialists (see also Elfström Pettersson, 2015; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Lindgren, 2012; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Thomas, 2007; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2013). Overall, in all of the sub-studies in this research, documents predominantly described needs for support as stable and unchangeable issues, and which have their roots in the individual features of the child (see also Franck, 2018; Hacking, 1999; Honkasilta, 2017, p. 9; Vehmas, 2010). When this is connected to the lack of systematic planning as well as the exemption of professional responsibility to plan supports, there is a risk that this can lead to categorization and negative consequences for children who have needs for support (see also Franck, 2014). To conclude, based on the results of the final research question, the documentation practices should move from describing to planning.

6.4 Practical, pedagogical, and policy implications

Based on the results, I want to make two conclusions. First, it seems justified to say that in Finnish ECEC, the key aims and essence of drafting pedagogical documents need to be discussed profoundly. There is a danger that documents remain gateways to categorizing children instead of serving as cornerstones for supporting them. That means that pedagogical documents are more weak than strong in the way they meet the international and national recommendations and legislation about emphasis on planning, even though they are strong in relation to some other qualities such as categorizing a child as problematic or a child and parents as powerless. Yell and Stecker (2003) describe how this can lead to a situation in which the documents are merely records "with little or no relevance to the teaching and learning process" (p. 74) even though they are powerful in other senses. In that case, the essence of pedagogical documents as aiming toward the systematic development of pedagogy is compromised (see also Andreasson et al., 2013; Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Mitchell, Morton, & Hornby, 2010). Most importantly, it is difficult to see the benefits for the child (see also Severinsson, 2016), as the documentation mainly performs the acts of categorization and normalization. In the quotation below, Bateman and Linden (1998, p. 63) describe the problematic state of IEPs over twenty years ago (cited in Yell and Stecker, 2003, p. 73), which unfortunately, based on the results of this research, still seems regrettably relevant:

> Sadly, most IEPs are horrendously burdensome to teachers and nearly useless to parents and children. Far from being a creative, flexible, databased, and individualized application of the best educational interventions to a child, the typical IEP is empty...many, if not most goals and objectives couldn't be measured if one tried, and all too often no effort is made to actually assess the child's progress toward the goal.

As another and more encouraging conclusion, in accordance with what Hirsh (2015) has stated, despite the predominantly challenging state of documentation, some professionals have been able to develop functional and exemplary pedagogical documents. In these cases, they take great responsibility for overcoming each child's challenges by describing their own pedagogical responsibilities and actions, which forms a vital core of the documents. They set specific and individualized goals that are divided into short-term objectives. Moreover, they concretely plan the means of support that a child requires. When they write about assessments, they position their own practices and pedagogy into inspection and focus on setting further plans. They hear the viewpoints of children and parents and use them in planning as well as the information from other professionals, which they translate into the pedagogical planning by utilizing their pedagogical understanding. Moreover, these professionals bind the consecutive documents together with linguistic means in a way that presents the process of problem solving instead of a history of misery and individual tragedy. With all this, these professionals construct hope that the child can be seen as a unique and respected individual and that her or his needs are a natural part of being a child and a human being in general. Moreover, they build the trust that they will do what it takes to help the child and that their role is to solve the pedagogical puzzle of supporting that child. These professionals have succeeded in drafting a plan rather than a static description.

6.4.1 Emphasizing pedagogy and the planning process

I suggest that in the future the focus of documentation needs to move from the problem-oriented inspection of an individual child's features and failures, to the multi-voiced planning of support and sharing of professional responsibilities, which includes the measures of overcoming challenges. During this process, the planning and development of pedagogy and support should be explicitly documented in addition to describing each child's learning, strengths, and interests in necessary precision. Viewpoints of children and parents need to be actively sought and documented. Even more importantly, they need to be utilized in planning by linking them to agreements about pedagogical and support-related arrangements, objectives (both long- and short-term ones), and measures. In terms of assessment, again, it is the pedagogy and support that need to be revisited and assessed in terms of their functionality. Additionally, the assessment of a child's learning and development is important because these observations form a base for observing the functionality of support and its further development. However, the successful assessment of a pedagogical document is impossible without a profound reflection of what has and has not been done for the child's well-being and learning. During this assessment, the viewpoints of children and parents are important to include in order to achieve a multidimensional picture of the situation. To summarize, pedagogical documents should be used in showing what practices are needed in order for a child to succeed, learn, feel well, and flourish. Simultaneously, they should give

hope and build trust in the child's future as well as inspire parental confidence in the professionals' ability to take a child's needs into account.

To overcome the current challenges, I suggest that pedagogical documents should be more fundamentally understood, not only as pieces of paper and one-time event, but as an ongoing process of planning. Therefore, the approach to the drafting of pedagogical documents can hardly be the one that sees the documents as independent archives that come into being the moment a professional takes out the document form and ending when they finish the writing. It is important to understand that everything from the very first moments of getting to know the child in question and discussing with their parents prepare ECEC professionals for writing a plan as they obtain the foreknowledge that they need to utilize in writing a document. Similarly, the values, believes, and biases of professionals impact the formation of a plan. Moreover, after the plan is finished and "the document is sent out to the world" (see Prior, 2008), the discussions should continue as the professionals in ECEC need to make commitments to support a child and act as agreed upon in the plan. Finally, pedagogical documents of all the children in an ECEC group should be summarized into an overall plan for the pedagogical practices of a whole group of children, where the individual needs of numerous children are met with the shared operational culture, practices, and, when needed, special support arrangements (see also Parding & Liljegren, 2016). If these phases are dismissed, there is a danger that the plan, no matter how well executed, will not be initiated in everyday life in ECEC or that it will be initiated in a way that will be harmful from the child's perspective. Finally, a document itself needs to be assessed, revisited, and changed regularly and systematically when the child's needs change—the plan needs to develop with the child.

As documents are powerful irrespective of their later use—even though this later use is far from being insignificant—they work in the ECEC institutions even when they are unethically written or lack the relevance for supporting a child. In that situation, the document orientates professionals, parents, and even the children themselves toward problematization and normalization. Therefore, it is of great importance to understand the consequential nature of documentation from a child's perspective particularly. Discourses that rely on medical or other normative categories, such as age-appropriate development (see Kelle, 2010; Kelle et al., 2015), need to be examined (see also Vehkakoski, 2003). It is important to understand that as support needs are socially constructed facts (see also Vehmas, 2010), a professional can create educational challenges by setting entirely unrealistic expectations with normative criteria for assessment of children's actions and learning (see also Alasuutari et al., 2014, p. 37-38; Freedman, & Honkasilta, 2017; Honkasilta, 2017, p. 20-21; Vehkakoski, 2003). For instance, if three-year-olds are asked to sit still for an hour, most of them will probably fail to meet this expectation, even though the failure has significantly more to do with pedagogical practices than it has with the children. In drafting pedagogical documents, even though the understanding about developmental psychology and age-appropriateness of development are of course important,

the most important reference point for assessment of a child's needs is the child's own development and earlier objectives. This is of particular importance when a child's development and learning differs significantly from the standardized norms. If the pedagogical document constantly repeats the message that the child is falling behind the "normal," the message is both crippling and, from a pedagogical perspective, difficult to utilize in planning. When individualized standards are created and applied, it is possible to see success in meeting of the goals as they are set specifically for the particular child. Therefore, the key aim of the pedagogical document should not be to reach for "the normal" but to accomplish individual goals and objectives.

6.4.2 Utilizing pedagogy-oriented way of writing

In order to develop a pedagogical document that is a strong instructor of pedagogical work, in writing it would be important to establish a more pedagogy-oriented way of constructing text. In addition to focusing on pedagogy on the content level, which is writing about objectives, goals, measures, and assessments, the linguistic choices of constructing a text are also important. However, linguistic choices of writing are named as one of the key issues professional struggle with when documenting (Hirsh, 2014). Many of the issues that need to be documented are indeed difficult to verbalize and to observe in the first place (see Parding & Liljegren, 2016). Based on the results and the detailed linguistic analysis conducted in this research, I make a few suggestions about the construction of text in pedagogical documents.

It is important to acknowledge that writing is always founded on values, believes, and discourses, either deliberately or unconsciously. Moreover, the use of certain discourses in writing also reauthorizes the use of them (see Forbes, 2015). If a child's challenges are described by illustrating how "an adult must intervene dozens of times a day," the tendency of describing children's needs as the burden of a professional is utilized and simultaneously strengthened. Therefore, in the case of writing pedagogical documents, the discourses of personal blame and burdensome children should be avoided. Instead, the discourses that emphasize the development, overcoming of challenges, as well professional responsibility should be favored, where it is written that "challenges in sensory integration still exist, but they stand out mainly in auditory sensations or when things feel unpleasant in some other way."

The texts in the documents often include many incomplete sentences (e.g., "easily blames friends") as well as unnecessarily complicated sentence structures including nominalizations (e.g., "challenges manifest in social situations") (see also Forbes, 2015). Moreover, the extensive use of passive voice is representative to the documents (e.g., "functional support measures are noticed"). However, compared to the use of subjects and active tenses, these characteristics of the text can make a significant difference to the meanings the text conveys. First person structure, in which the child or other people are referred to as grammatical subjects, and active tense in writing (e.g., "*We* have noticed some functional practices") is important in bringing the child's presence and a child-centered

perspective to the text. Moreover, these linguistic features explicate responsibilities as it becomes clear who is doing what (see also Forbes, 2015; Mastoras, Climie, McCrimmon, & Schwean, 2011; Vehkakoski, 2003, 2007). Particularly concerning the agreements made in the documents, parental and professional voices seem to be merged by using passive voice (e.g., "support signs *are considered* functional"), which make the assessment of the responsibilities and the origin of the ideas difficult for the reader.

In phrasing foreknowledge in the documents, in order to create a text that focuses on pedagogical solutions instead of problem-oriented illustrations, information about the strengths and interests of the child are vital as they balance the text. Moreover, instead of making value-laden interpretations (e.g., "Maria *could not care* less about teacher's instruction"), neutral reporting of observations (e.g., "Maria sometimes pays attention to the surroundings while instruction is given") and the conclusions (e.g., "Therefore, we will make the room less noisy") creates a more neutral starting point. The use of negations (e.g., "Sebastian can't walk") creates negativity in the texts and is often also less informative than the positive utterance (e.g., "Sebastian crawls"), which offers more specific information for the pedagogical planning and constructs the child as the one who succeeds (see also Vehkakoski, 2003). Moreover, when verbalizing observations, it is important to write how the situation has changed and in what kind of environment things are observed and assessed (see also Vehkakoski, 2003). As stated in the article reporting the results of the first sub-study of this research (Heiskanen, Alasuutari, & Vehkakoski, 2018, p. 841),

> (f)rom this pedagogical perspective, it is important that the fluctuation of SEN in different contexts, social situations and times and in response to the different inner states of a child are identified before a document is written. When this pedagogical emphasis is adopted in writing, the resulting descriptions will create a more complete and multidimensional image of the child and usually offer more detailed information about children and their needs.

In writing about the objectives and measures, for example, some application of the SMART approach could be utilized. In this approach, specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic/relevant, and time-limited objectives are preferred (Hedin & DeSpain, 2018; Rowland et al., 2014). This means that phrasing objectives and measures in a broad, abstract, and general manner (e.g., "Maria is supported in social skills") should be abandoned and should move toward more elaborated writing. Specific objectives describe focused skills or areas of development to which the objective is allocated. Measurability as well as action-orientation can both be increased with concrete description of what it means to achieve a particular objective (e.g., "Marcus joins in to play by asking permission and waiting for the answer"). In creating realistic and relevant objectives from the child's point of view, the aforementioned individualized standards and starting points for planning are vital. Finally, a time-limited objective describes an objective that is so close to the child's current achievement level that it is likely to be achieved in the near future. There, broader long-term goals as well as short-term objectives can be useful in order to avoid those that aspire too far.

Citations and intertextual references to other voices, such as viewpoints of parents and children (e.g., "According to mom"), are useful linguistic tools that can help the writer to show the origin of the observation, information, or decision in the document. One of these, reported speech (Ravotas & Berkenkotter, 1998: Schryer et al., 2011), allows children to speak for themselves in the text with their own voices (e.g., "Anna says: 'I like to play'"). However, as Forbes (2015) has also noted, one needs to be cautious of treating citations as markers of participation. In this research, it was found that professionals used reported speech predominantly to diversify their own descriptions or as a way to show a critical stance toward information. The everyday discourses that parents and children often favor (see Forbes, 2015; Røn Larsen, 2016) are often overshadowed and professional ones are predominant. However, references to other voices can be used as tools to give a voice to children and parents. Moreover, the writer needs to be aware of the stance she or he brings to the text. Viewpoints of children, parents, as well as other professionals can be included in a document in a neutral manner, or they can express either a negative, positive, or even an amused stance when writing.

Finally, the text should be readable and understandable for all its readers (see also Mastoras et al., 2011). Many of the aforementioned linguistic characteristics (nominalizations, incomplete sentences, passive voice, abstract expressions, value-laden language) can potentially cause a reader to face difficulties while reading the document. It is also important to understand that the same writings can have different meanings in different contexts as *the meaning* of the text is always constructed when the document is interpreted by the reader (see Smith, 2008, p. 40; Smith, 2001). It is easy to see this happening in educational institutions where professionals might consider it important to describe a child's challenges in a brute and problem-oriented manner in order for the message to become clear and for the child to receive services (see also Hirsh, 2014; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al., 2010; Sandberg et al., 2010; Thuneberg et al., 2014). Simultaneously, parents reading the document could feel distress and sorrow, as the meaning for them would be completely different. There, in addition to utilizing more pedagogy- and solution-oriented ways to write, discussions with inter-professional teams, parents, and among ECEC professionals are important. Professionals need to understand for what purposes the documents from different fields are written and how they can be interpreted (see also Forbes, 2008).

6.4.3 Equalizing premises with policy, instructions, and training

In ensuring the actualization of these desired future developments, the prerequisites of documentation are vital and consequently, professionals need support for comprehending the ways to document in a functional way (see also Krnjaja& Pavlović Breneselović, 2016). Millward et al. (2002) have stated, based on a rigorous review of literature from multiple countries that the absence of clear guidance about the drafting of pedagogical documents often leads to challenges. Documents often lack significant contents or on the contrary, they are too

extensive and time-consuming due to the lack of understanding of what the key emphasis of the document should be. Therefore, in the future, a shared legislation and policy is needed in Finnish ECEC concerning pedagogical documents with respect to documentation of children's needs for support and support measures. Of course, while giving these instructions, the danger of over-regulation and accountability requirements need to be acknowledged (see also Parding & Liljegren, 2016).

As one element of these guidelines, the document form is important as it guides the writing of the document but also, according to the previous studies, the discussions related to the drafting of the plan (Alasuutari, 2015; Elfström Pettersson, 2018; Forbes, 2015; Gaffney & Ruppar, 2011). Even with unsuitable documentation tools, such as forms, professionals adapt their work and documentation to the tools in a way that can have negative consequences for the children (see Parding & Liljegren, 2016). Therefore, the questions as well as the organization of the document form are important. The results of this research can inform the development of functional pre-set document forms such that the forms would emphasize pedagogical practices and instruct professionals to utilize the voices of children and parents. However, it is important to keep in mind that the document forms are hardly enough for successful guidance of documentation (see also Thompson, Thurlow, Esler, & Whetstone, 2001); consequently, other instructions and training are also needed. According to previous research, there are potential interventions that provide new approaches to documentation (e.g., Boavida et al, 2014; Poppes et al., 2002; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000) as well as encourage the participation of children and parents in the drafting of them (e.g., Children & Chambers, 2005; Jozwik et al., 2017; Mueller & Vick, 2018; Royer, 2016). This needs to be considered in the pre-service training of ECEC teachers and other educators, as well as in in-services training.

After the data collection of this research, an encouraging development has taken place in the Finnish context. In 2017, after the launch of the first binding curriculum for ECEC, the Finnish National Board of Education gave additional instructions for the drafting of an ECEC plan (Finnish National Board of Education, 2017). These open online materials included a specific document form, guidelines, and online training for ECEC professionals. Consequently, in recent reports from Finnish Education Evaluation Center (Repo et al., 2018, p. 117), in those municipalities who had implemented the guiding document form for individual ECEC plans, the writings in ECEC plans were found to be more pedagogy-oriented than in those municipalities who used another forms. As this process included only the basic elements of ECEC plans as universally drafted documents for all children without focusing on the arrangements of educational support, the next steps could extend the same kind of instructions for planning children's educational support in pedagogical documents (see also Repo et al., 2018, p. 40).

6.5 Concluding remarks and future directions

I hope that this research will offer insights for developing the process of drafting pedagogical documents and understanding their many potential consequences. In my approach, I have been critical and have pointed out potential challenges in current practices. With this, I have aimed to deconstruct the current practices of writing the documents in order to make the development of them possible. I want to emphasize that even though I have been illustrating the need for profound change in practices, this does not mean that pedagogical documentation should be seen as a negative practice. However, as elaborated in this research, the awareness of the potentially far-reaching consequences of pedagogical documents, as well as critical reflection on one's own practices, is important. Consequently, I do not at all encourage the abandonment of pedagogical documents or the specific identification of children's support needs, but rather the maintenance of constant professional reflection on how they are drafted, what kind of images of children, parents, and professional responsibilities are constructed, and finally, how writings are initiated in educational practices. When drafted appropriately, I believe that pedagogical documents can claim the promise of ensuring the identification of children's needs and strengths, enhancing the systematic development of support, as well as increasing the participation of children and parents (see also Alasuutari & Kelle, 2015; Elfström Pettersson, 2015; Miller, 2014).

As a researcher and an ECEC special education teacher, I understand that documentation alone is hardly a solution for organizing the systematic support for children. Therefore, I will not suggest that documentation should be compounded. Instead, it would be critical to outline the very core of documentation—a question I hope I have given some answers to with this research. I would in fact be cautious about adding to the amount of documentation. When documentation becomes extremely extensive and is positioned as a very key professional task, at worst, the relationship of a professional and a child can become a relationship of constant observations, assessments, and documentation (see also Hirsh, 2014). Therefore, in the Finnish context where the reviewed curriculum has just recently introduced more detailed instructions for Reggio-inspired and structured pedagogical documents (see also Rintakorpi & Reunamo, 2017), the next development could be the one that aims to finding balance between the benefits and potential pitfalls of documentation in each professionals' somewhat unique pedagogical practices. In order to achieve this, I see that time needs to be permitted for professionals to find suitable ways of arranging tasks of documentation in daily life in ECEC and to come to terms with renewed legislation and regulations (see also Hirsh, 2015; Löfgren, 2015). The results of this study do not call for more documentation. Instead, they call for better understanding of it. Consequently, in the future, it would be important to investigate the practical solutions that ECEC professionals have concerning how they organize their documentation duties.

Based on the chosen approach of this study, I can make no generalizations about pedagogical practices of supporting children in ECEC even though this topic is naturally of great importance. Following my fundamental understanding about documents as institutional agents and documentation as a consequential practice, it is critical to acknowledge the importance of the implementation of documented agreements. The later use of documentation can be unpredictable (Prior, 2008) and even though documents are powerful, they need to be put into operation before their full potential of guiding pedagogical work can be utilized (see also Smith, 2014; Smith, 2001; Yell & Stecker, 2003). In this process of utilizing or, alternatively, abandoning the documented plans and agreements, ECEC professionals play a key role. Even though the pedagogical documents as legal records should include all the required contents and therefore, the investigations of documented text are also important, in the future, the process of implementing pedagogical documents should also be investigated. The previous studies about the link between documented and actualized supports suggest that the connection between what is planned and actually done with children is weak (e.g., Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Kwon et al., 2011; Lynch & Beare, 1990; Miller, 2014; White, Garrett, Kearns, & Grisham-Brown, 2003). This again emphasizes the need for more profound internalization of the key essence of pedagogical documents—the time used in documentation can be misspent if the document is not utilized.

To summarize and to conclude, in the next turn of both educational practices as well as future research, interest could also focus on the lifespan of writings in the documents. As Christle and Yell (2010, p. 111-112) state, "(p)rocedurally correct IEPs will not meet legal standards if the student's educational program does not result in his or her achieving meaningful educational benefit." Therefore, the truly significant pedagogical document from a child's perspective can only be the one that both includes meaningful pedagogical solutions as well as comes to life in daily actions of professionals. Consequently, the whole process of preparing, drafting, implementing, and revisiting a pedagogical document should be both comprehended in pedagogical practices as well as investigated in scientific research. This could also reveal the state of the twofold function of pedagogical documents (summative and formative, see Hirsh, 2015). As Smith and Turner (2015, p. 12) indicate, the inspection of how the writings in the documents become actualized in institutions might be troublesome to study, as the orientations are utilized "in silence." However, the applications of institutional ethnography (see Smith, 2005) combined with discursive approaches could make it possible to expose these processes as well as find ways to utilize the formative function of documentation (Hirsh, 2015), which would be of great importance. Moreover, this could also make it possible to investigate the acts of positioning in the sense of how the positions of children, parents, and professionals are both constructed and challenged in institutional practices (see Hirvonen, 2016).

YHTEENVETO

Lapsen tuen tarpeet ja tukitoimet varhaiskasvatuksen pedagogisissa asiakirjoissa

Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan varhaiskasvatusikäisten lasten pedagogisiin asiakirjoihin kirjattuja kuvauksia lapsen tuen tarpeista ja tuesta. Pedagogiset asiakirjat ovat osa varhaiskasvatuksessa toteutettavaa pedagogista dokumentaatiota, jonka merkitys on viime vuosina korostunut ja määrä lisääntynyt merkittävästi kasvatus- ja koulutusinstituutioissa (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Kalliala & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014). Samalla kirjaamisesta on tullut yhä keskeisempi ammatillisen osaamisen osa-alue varhaiskasvatuksessa (Erixon & Erixon Arreman, 2017). Yhtenä osana lisääntyvää dokumentaatiota ovat lapsen yksilölliset pedagogiset asiakirjat, kuten lapsen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma, esiopetuksen oppimissuunnitelma ja tuen asiakirjat. Näiden asiakirjojen kirjaaminen nähdään tärkeäksi varhaiskasvatuksen laadun ylläpitämisessä ja kehittämisessä (Alasuutari, Markström, & Vallberg-Roth, 2014, s. 17; Elfström Pettersson, 2018). Toisaalta ne esitetään usein lapsen tuen järjestämisen kulmakiviksi: kun tuen suunnittelu tehdään kirjallisesti, sen nähdään lisäävän tuen systemaattisuutta ja helpottavan myöhempää tuen arviointia (Miller, 2014; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Pedagogisten asiakirjojen laatiminen on myös mahdollisuus tukea lapsen ja vanhempien osallisuutta varhaiskasvatuksen suunnittelussa (esim. Alasuutari ym., 2014; Buldu, 2010; Elfström Pettersson, 2015) ja saavuttaa moniääninen näkemys lapsen tilanteesta suunnittelun pohjaksi (Bayat ym., 2010; Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003).

Pedagogisen asiakirjan laatimisen tarkoitus on taata lapselle yksilöllinen tuki, opetus ja kasvatus sekä auttaa lapsen kanssa toimivia ammattilaisia tukemaan lasta (ks. Parding & Liljegren, 2016). Tutkimusperustaiset suositukset asiakirjojen laadinnalle voidaan kiteyttää seuraaviin kuuteen suositukseen: 1) kuvaa lapsi moniulotteisena ja huomioi tuen tarpeiden kontekstuaalisuus ilman kategorisointia, 2) aseta tarkkoja, mitattavissa olevia ja kehittyvä tavoitteita lapsen tarpeiden pohjalta, 3) sovi tavoitteisiin liittyvistä, tarkoista ja yksilöllistetyistä tukitoimista ympäristöön ja pedagogiikkaan liittyviä ratkaisuja korostaen, 4) arvioi tuen toimivuutta ja menetelmien soveltuvuutta, 5) takaa lapselle ja vanhemmille aktiivinen ja merkityksellinen osallistuminen ja osallisuus asiakirjan laadintaan ja 6) kirjoita yksityiskohtaista, selkeää ja neutraalia kieltä käyttäen. Näin ollen pedagogisilla asiakirjoilla voidaan ajatella olevan kaksi keskeistä merkitystä: ne kuvaavat sen hetkisen tilanteen lapsen tukemisesta ja tuen tarpeista ja toimivat toisaalta ammattilaisen pedagogisina työkaluina alati kehittyvässä ja muuttuvassa tukemisen prosessissa (Hirsh, 2015).

Asiakirjojen laadintaan liittyy kuitenkin myös muita piiloisempia tarkoituksia. Asiakirjat toimivat hallinnollisten päätösten tekemisen ja resurssien jaon välineenä (Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson ym., 2010; Sandberg ym., 2010; Thuneberg ym., 2014). Lisäksi ne ovat tiivisti kytköksissä ammattilaisten ja

instituutioiden lisääntyvään velvollisuuteen kirjata, itsearvioida ja raportoida toimintaansa (Aps-Onsjö, 2012; Hirsh, 2014, 2015; Mitchell ym., 2010; Parking & Liljegren, 2016). Ammattilaiset itse suhtautuvat dokumentaatiosta saatavaan hyötyyn ja lisääntyviin dokumentaatiovaatimuksiin toisinaan kriittisesti erityisesti siihen kuluvan ajan vuoksi (Buldu, 2010; Hirsh, 2014; Repo ym., 2018, s.97) ja raportoivat epävarmuutta dokumentointiin liittyen (Rintakorpi, 2016, 2018). Yhtenä keskeisenä ammattilaisten kuvaamana haasteena Hirsh (2014) tuo esiin tekstin rakentamiseen liittyvät valinnat asiakirjoja laadittaessa.

Dokumentaatiota lähestyttiin tässä tutkimuksessa sekä kasvatuksellisena että institutionaalisena ilmiönä. Pedagogisten asiakirjojen laadinta ei ole neutraali tai vaaraton prosessi, jonka seuraukset lapselle ovat automaattisesti positiivisia (esim. Miller & Rose, 2008; Parding & Liljegren, 2016; Sandberg ym., 2010). Asiakirjojen on esimerkiksi esitetty toimivan lasta koskevan normalisaation välineenä, mikä tarkoittaa, että lasta verrataan normaalin lapsen ideaaliin (Andreasson, Asplund Carlsson, & Dovemark, 2015; Esser, 2015; Franck, 2018: Kelle, 2010; Sjöberg, 2014). Koska dokumentointi tekee institutionaalisista diskursseista siirrettäviä ajasta ja paikasta toiseen (Ferraris, 2013; Smith, 2001; Smith & Turner, 2015, s.4), kirjaukset voivat vaikuttaa ammattilaisten ja muiden tahojen käsityksiin lapsesta kirjaamisen jälkeenkin (Boyd ym., 2015; Farrell, 2009; Hjörne & Säljö 2008). Asiakirjat itsessään toimivat ennustamattomalla tavalla ja niillä voidaan ymmärtää olevan itsessään valtaa. Näin ollen asiakirjojen laatiminen ymmärretään seurauksellisiksi prosessiksi, jossa tuotetaan aktiivisesti sosiaalista todellisuutta kielenkäytön välityksellä.

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostui esiopetusikäisten lasten varhaiskasvatushistorian kattavasta pitkittäisestä asiakirja-aineistosta (N = 314). Tutkimusaineisto kerättiin viidestä suomalaisesta kunnasta lukuvuonna 2015 - 2016. Asiakirjoja kerättiin yhteensä 22 esiopetusryhmästä ja 108 lapselta, joista 79 sai esiopetusvuonna yleistä, 21 tehostettua ja 8 erityistä tukea. Asiakirja-aineiston analyysissä hyödynnettiin Maurizio Ferrariksen (2013) teoriaa dokumenttien institutionaalisesta toimijuudesta sekä diskurssiivisen psykologian mukaista positioteoriaa (Davies & Harré, 1990). Analyysi keskittyi asiakirjojen kielellisiin piirteisiin. Etsin tutkimuksellani vastausta seuraaviin kysymyksiin:

1. Miten lapset, vanhemmat ja ammattilaiset positioidaan varhaiskasvatuksen pedagogisissa asiakirjoissa?
2. Missä suhteessa pedagogiset asiakirjat voidaan nähdä heikoiksi ja vahvoiksi dokumenteiksi?
3. Miten hyvin asiakirjojen kirjaukset vastaavat tutkimusperustaisia suosituksia ja kansallisia säädöksiä dokumentaatiosta?

Tutkimuksen tulosten mukaan lapset positioidaan asiakirjoissa tyypillisesti ongelmakeskeisestä näkökulmasta esittäen heidät vastuullisina omien tuen tarpeidensa ylittämisestä (ks. myös Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson ym., 2007; Pihlaja ym., 2015). Tuesta kirjoittamisen ja tuen menetelmien rooli on asiakirjoissa vähäinen. Tulos myötäilee aiempaa

tutkimusta aiheesta, jonka mukaan konkreettiset tukitoimet, ympäristön merkitys tuen tarpeiden taustalla vaikuttavana tekijänä samoin kuin ammattilaisen vastuut lapsen tukemisessa jäävät usein kirjaamatta asiakirjoihin. (esim. Boavida ym., 2010; Drasgow ym., 2001; Michnowicz ym., 1995; Rakap, 2015; Yell & Stecker, 2003). Lasten ja vanhempien positio on heikko suhteessa varhaiskasvatuksen ammattilaisten positioihin, joilla on yhteistyössä päätäntävalta yhdessä erityisasiantuntijoiden, kuten psykologien ja terapeuttien, kanssa (ks. myös Asp-Onsjö, 2006, 216; Barnes & Turner, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Hjörne & Säljö, 2014; Kovanen, 2002). Asiakirjat näyttävät näin ollen toimivan vahvoina dokumentteina orientoimaan varhaiskasvatuksen ammattilaisia kohti ongelma- ja yksilökeskeistä näkemystä lapsesta ja tuen tarpeista sekä toisaalta heikkoina dokumentteina, kun tarkastellaan lapsen tukemista ja pedagogiikan toteuttamista. Samalla asiakirjat vahvistavat voimakkaana normatiivista ymmärrystä lapsesta, joka pohjautuu yleiseen käsitykseen normaalista kehityksestä, sekä ammattilaisten valtaa lapsen tuen suunnittelun prosessissa (esim. Kelle, 2010; Kelle ym., 2015). Lapsen ja vanhempien osallisuuden vahvistamiseen asiakirjat orientoivat heikosti (ks. myös Asp-Onsjö, 2006; Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Childre & Chambers, 2005; Goepel, 2009; Hirsto, 2010; Isaksson, 2009; Markström, 2015; Millward ym., 2002; Paananen & Lipponen, 2018; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011). Yhteenvetona asiakirjat täyttävät heikosti suositukset niiden laadinnasta sekä lakisääteisen tehtävänsä, joiden mukaan pedagogiikan ja ammattilaisen vastuun tulisi muodostaa asiakirjan keskeinen sisältö.

Vallitsevan ongelma- ja ammattilaiskeskeisestä kirjaamisen tavasta huolimatta tutkimuksen tulokset antavat osviittaa myös hyvistä kirjaamisen tavoista, jotka esittävät lapsen tuen tarpeet moniulotteisina ja muuttuvina korostaen kirjauksissa pedagogiikkaa. Tällöin kirjauksissa kuvataan lapsen tuen tarpeita muuttuvina ja tilannesidonnaisina, mikä tuo kirjaamistavan lähemmäs kirjaamisen suosituksia moniulotteisesta lapsen tilanteen kuvaamisen tavasta (Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Severinsson, 2016; Yell & Stecker, 2003; ks. myös Franck, 2014). Kuvauksessa lapsille rakentui aktiivinen positio erityisesti silloin, kun tuen tarpeet esitettiin muuttuvina ja tilannesidonnaisina ja vastaavasti kun lapsiin viitattiin tiedon lähteinä asiakirjoissa. Kun asiakirjoissa kuvattiin systemaattisesti tuen tavoitteita, menetelmiä ja niihin tehtäviä muutoksia, peräkkäiset asiakirjat muodostivat johdonmukaisen, tuen suunnittelun prosessia kuvaavan kirjausten kokonaisuuden, jonka voi olettaa ohjaavan myös tuen toteuttamista systemaattisemmin (ks. myös Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Rosas ym., 2009). Tällöin erityisesti viittaukset aiemmin kirjattuun ja tarkat, mitattavissa olevat kuvaukset tavoitteista ja menetelmistä ovat keskeisiä (esim. Boavida ym., 2010; Christle & Yell, 2010; Michnowicz ym., 1995).

Ehdotan tutkimukseni pohjalta, että pedagogisten asiakirjojen laadinnassa huomion tulisi siirtyä ammattilaisvaltaisesta yksittäisen lapsen ongelmallisuuden kuvauksesta moniääniseen pedagogiseen suunnittelun, jossa ammattilaisten vastuut lapsen tuen järjestämisestä ovat keskeisessä roolissa. Erityisesti tuen tavoitteiden ja menetelmien yksityiskohtainen kirjaaminen,

myöhempi arvioiminen sekä lapsen ja vanhempien näkökulmien sisällyttäminen asiakirjan tekstiin ja niiden hyödyntäminen pedagogisessa suunnittelussa on tärkeää. Pedagoginen asiakirja tulee ymmärtää jatkuvaksi suunnittelun prosessiksi ja seurakselliseksi toiminnaksi, joka muokkaa käsityksiä lapsesta. Dokumentoinnin prosessi lapsen kohtaamisesta ja keskusteluista asiakirjan laadintaan sekä sen jälkeiseen suunnitelman toteuttamiseen on tärkeää ymmärtää osaksi asiakirjan elinkaarta (ks. Prior, 2008). Pedagogisten toimintatapojen suunnitteleminen ryhmän tasolla yksittäisten lasten pedagogisten asiakirjojen pohjalta tukee suunnitellun tuen toteuttamista (myös Parding & Liljegren, 2016). Lapsen tukemiseen sitoutuminen ja suunnitelman toteuttaminen ovat välttämätön osa dokumentoinnin prosessia, jotta dokumentti voisi olla lapsen näkökulmasta hyödyllinen.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

POSITIONING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE DOCUMENTS

by

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Positioning children with special educational needs in early childhood education and care documents

Abstract

The article critically discusses the practice of describing children's special educational needs (SEN) in early childhood education and care (ECEC) pedagogical documents. Documentation is understood as a form of governance. In current practice, documentation is extensively used in educational institutions. Even when the focus of documentation should be pedagogical, the descriptions of children's SEN commonly describe a child's individual deficits as a source of educational problems. In this study, we used discourse analysis to investigate how professionals position children and construct their SEN in pedagogical documents. The research data consisted of 143 documents on 29 Finnish children. Three ways of positioning children with SEN were identified in the documents: as a *problematic child* through definitive descriptions, as a *multifaceted child* through contextual descriptions, and as a *learning child* through dynamic descriptions. The results highlight the importance of a pedagogical focus and dynamic conceptualisation of SEN in ECEC documentation.

Keywords: special educational needs (SEN); early childhood education and care (ECEC); documentation; governance; discourse analysis

Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) plays a central role in observing and detecting children's potential problems due to the dominant ideologies of the earliest possible

identification of special educational needs (SEN) and early intervention. In the process of pedagogical documentation, observations about a child's situation are collected into documents, such as individual education plans or support plans that are typically drafted for children with educational challenges. Pedagogical documents are intended as pedagogical tools for planning and cooperation with parents and other professionals (e.g., Alasuutari, Markström, & Vallberg-Roth 2014; Emilson & Pramling Samuelsson 2014). The importance of in-depth identification of SEN as a basis for planning effective educational support and meeting the individual educational needs of children is often seen as a key justification for predominant extensive and detailed documentation (e.g., Andreasson & Wolff 2015; FNBE 2010; Franck 2015; NRDCWH 2003). Therefore, the descriptions of a child often comprise the core of these documents.

Documentation practices often go unquestioned even though, through documentation, children's educational challenges are permanently registered in written formal documents. Documentation is often justified by the need to authorise the identification of SEN and to formalise these needs within an institution (Cooren 2004; Prior 2008). Although the process of identifying and recording children's SEN might appear to be a neutral practice, it is nevertheless a process that is founded on the ideas of good and desirable conduct and the future prospects of the child (Miller & Rose 2008; Parding & Liljegren 2016; Pihlaja, Sarlin, & Ristkari 2015; Sandberg, Lillvist, Eriksson, Björck-Åkersson, & Granlund 2010; Vehmas 2010). In ECEC, especially, the identification of SEN reflects what is considered to constitute a good childhood at a particular time and in a particular cultural context (see Foucault 1977).

Documents continue to direct educational practices after their drafting (Ferraris 2013). They reframe the thinking and the actions of parties using the documents (Hjörne & Säljö 2008), influencing professional decisions and even children's educational careers (Boyd, Ng, & Schryer 2015; Vehmas 2010). Professionals' subjective interpretation of what has been written

plays a key role in the process; this is problematic, especially since the lifetime of pedagogical documents is typically long: they follow children during their years in ECEC, are transferred to the child's school and eventually archived. At the same time, documents can often be revisited and duplicated in an unpredictable manner after drafting (Cooren 2004; Prior 2008). Therefore, these descriptions of children follow them as they grow, learn and change as individuals (see also Cooren 2004).

Despite these concerns about documentation practices, the role of educational documentation is unswerving. Numerous studies have researched documentation in ECEC (e.g., Alasuutari & Karila 2010; Emilsson & Pramling-Samuelsson 2014), in primary school special education (e.g., Andreasson 2007; Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Isaksson, Lindqvist, & Bergström 2007), and some have investigated children with SEN in the context of ECEC (e.g., Sandberg et. al. 2010). However, an in-depth analysis of how descriptions of SEN are constructed and how, as a consequence, the child is represented in pedagogical documents continues to be needed.

In this article, we apply a discourse analytic approach based on the idea of discursive psychology[1] (Edwards 2005) to investigate how a child and SEN are represented through documentation. With respect to discursive psychology, we understand that, in addition to purely describing a subject, writing also recreates social reality and certain subject positions (Harré & Moghaddam 2003). Therefore, all definitions, including descriptions of SEN, are always simultaneously descriptive and normalising, as they include value judgments regarding the desirability of, for example, the person in question (Foucault 1977). The study sought to answer the following questions:

[1] Discursive psychology, according to Edwards (2005), typically approaches the research subjects as psychological entities from the point of view of language. Discursive psychology has its origin in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

(1) How do ECEC professionals construct children's SEN in documents?

(2) How are children with SEN positioned by these constructions?

Pedagogical documents in Finnish ECEC

In Finland, ECEC is provided before compulsory primary education starts in the year a child turns seven. As a part of ECEC, children participate in compulsory pre-primary education in the year preceding the start of primary education. Regarding SEN, all children basically have right of access to inclusive ECEC groups, which form the most prevalent arrangement of education in Finnish ECEC, although a few segregated special groups exist, especially in the biggest cities. This research focuses on the documentation carried out in inclusive groups.

In Finland, as in many other countries, pedagogical documents are an essential part of support planning practices in ECEC, and an individualised plan is drafted for each child[2]. These plans aim to individualise children's education as well as to ensure systematic and target-oriented education for all. The pedagogical assessment of practices as well as documenting the cooperation with a child's guardians are also important aims of drafting pedagogical documents in Finnish ECEC and pre-primary education. Typically, ECEC teachers are responsible for drafting children's pedagogical documents, especially when a child has been assessed as having SEN. However, especially in the case of toddlers and the youngest children in ECEC, these plans are drafted by day-care and home day-care nurses. In inclusive ECEC groups, early childhood special education teachers can either draft the documents themselves or, as is typical, mainly consult and support other staff in drafting them instead of writing the documents themselves.

[2] The drafting of an individual ECEC plan became mandatory in Finland in August 2015, although the individual ECEC plan was already an established practice. Also in compulsory pre-primary education, the individual pre-primary plan is an established practice and mandatory if a child has been referred for SEN.

The composition of children's pedagogical documents varies considerably at different ages owing to the different documents used in pre-primary education and in ECEC. This is a result of differing legislation and curricula between pre-primary education and other ECEC services. The legislation lays down two different systems of SEN identification and support planning: a more specific three-tiered model in pre-primary education and a more general non-tiered model in ECEC. The three-tiered support system – which is sometimes described as the Finnish Response to Intervention (RTI) model (Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs, & Fuchs 2016) – is employed with specific instructions about the process of identifying SEN. In this system, children can be provided with general, intensified or special support. The three tiers are considered to create a continuum with intensifying and more diverse support. Children's educational needs and the support that has already been provided are assessed before their support is intensified or reduced.

In the three-tiered support system, a pre-primary plan is completed alongside other documents depending on the tier of support. In intensified support (tier 2), additional support planning must be included in the child's pre-primary plan. In special support (tier 3), the pre-primary plan is replaced with an individual education plan (IEP). In addition, before support is intensified, a pedagogical evaluation is conducted and a pedagogical assessment or pedagogical statement document drafted (FNBE 2010; NRDCWH 2003, valid at the time of data collection).

In ECEC, norms guiding SEN documentation are indefinable and educational support is usually discussed and documented as a part of the child's individual ECEC plan. However, numerous Finnish municipalities have additionally employed the three-tiered support system in ECEC because it guides support practices in a more detailed manner. As an outgrowth of this, marked differences between municipal ECEC support policies have emerged in Finland. Therefore,

while additional pedagogical documents are not required by law in ECEC, they are often drafted in practice.

Documentation and problematising activity

In this paper, the process of documenting children's SEN is examined from the perspective of institutional governance. Institutional governance can be described, referring to Nicholas Rose (1999), as institutional and societal acts and practices that fundamentally aim at securing institutional and societal order, security, health and happiness. In this paper, the concept of governmentality is utilised, especially in relation to the notion of *problematising activity* (see Miller & Rose 2008). Governmentality is a mode of governance conducted by identifying deviant or pathological individuals and ways of being and modifying them to act in accordance with societal norms and values (Rose 1999). To do this, institutions and societies need first to collect information about such individuals (Rose 1999) and to store this information in a measurable form (Foucault 1977; Miller & Rose 2008). To this end, specific techniques of governance (e.g., documentation) are dedicated to acquiring knowledge of unwanted characteristics and individuals (e.g., SEN and children with SEN in educational institutions).

In educational practices, problematising activity can be understood as the assessment and presentation of children's conduct, learning and development. Children who are considered to be at risk for an undesirable development path or future are documented as having SEN, so that thereafter certain practices, such as intervention, support measures or secondments to other locations (e.g., special education classes) can be implemented. The documented information about children with SEN allows the relevant professionals to intervene in these children's conduct: that is, to work towards maximising their capacities, to prevent future problems and, ultimately, to adapt children to societal values and norms (Rose 1999).

Documentation as a practice can consequently be understood as a form of political power: documentation is founded on rationalisations about the desired nature of individuals and individual characteristics, yet it also reconstructs these rationalisations. The assessment of who is represented as problematic or special and with what qualities is founded on social norms and values about what is 'good' and 'desirable' (Vehmas 2010). The idea of the shared truth of things (Rose 1999), that is shared values and norms, is also fundamental to the idea of problematising activities: the current values and norms of our society dictate the identification of a way of being, behaving or developing that needs intervention.

According to Rose (1999), current techniques (e.g., documentation) of problematising certain activities are fundamentally founded on, and aim at realising, the ideal of individuals as free and independent citizens. Children with SEN can be viewed as doubly unsuccessful in meeting these criteria. First, as children are typically considered to be immature and dependent, childhood is seen as the most governed phase of life (see Foucault 1977; Rose 1999). Second, when a child has SEN, which is basically an institutionally problematised state or situation that an individual is deemed to be in (see Rose 1999), governance becomes even more predominant.

Positioning children with SEN in documentation

In her work concerning the governance of childhood and the different orientations of normal and desired children across time, Karen Smith (2012) presents a child's individual responsibility for learning and developing as the most current value related to a good childhood. Based on the work of Jenks (2005), Smith (2012, 28) suggests that in the current neoliberal 'idea of [the] self-maximising, entrepreneurial subject', children are preferably seen as competent, active and independent individuals. She goes on to identify the distinctive feature of this orientation to childhood as shifting the responsibility for success or failure from

institutions to the children as individuals and demanding that a child independently develop, learn and adapt to societal norms (Smith 2012).

As Smith (2012) also points out, referring to Kamppman (2004), the emphasis on the individual responsibility of the child and the exemption from liability of adults can lead to increased marginalisation of disadvantaged children, such as children with SEN. The descriptions of SEN that present a child as the source of the problem and as responsible are problematic because they orientate pedagogical practice not towards pedagogical change but towards individual change. Adults are absolved of responsibility, and their role in promoting the desired change in a child's situation remains vague.

From the perspective of previous research on documents related to SEN, Smith's idea of a shift from adult liability to child responsibility seems relevant. Documentation should aim at describing the pedagogical liabilities of adults, especially in a case of children with SEN. Although the need for change in a child's situation is a key reason for identifying SEN, descriptions of children with SEN are typically found to construct the child's situation as unchanging and SEN as permanent and, therefore, the needed change as pedagogically unattainable (see Pihlaja, Sarlin, & Ristkari 2015). Previous research has suggested that the origin of SEN, the responsibility for the development as well as blame for the situation are often predominantly attributed to the child (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Hjörne & Säljö 2004; Isaksson, Lindqvist, & Bergström 2007, 2010; Pihlaja, Sarlin, & Ristkari 2015). This appears in the fact that a child's individual shortcomings and deficits are usually described in detail (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Isaksson, Lindquist, & Bergström 2007), whereas descriptions of the educational context as a force behind SEN are often missing (Hjörne & Säljö 2008). As Røn Larsen (2012) has proposed, when a child in an educational institution is defined in documentation as 'special', the child is often presented without

reference to a) the context and its influence behind the manifestation of SEN or b) as an autonomous actor (see also Parding & Liljegren 2016).

As a result of the problematising of their being and conduct, children with SEN can be seen as positioned in a *troubled position*, as someone who creates a social challenge in a certain context (Wetherell 1998). Staunæs (2003, 104) describes these troubled subject positions as 'positions that challenge the normativities at stake in certain everyday contexts of lived experience'. In other words, children with SEN becomes presented as problematic individuals via the use of language. In documents, the troubled position of a child with SEN is constructed with the aim of pointing out the undesirability of the child's situation and to justify the need to normalise the child (see Mitchell, Morton, & Hornby 2010). The predominant convention of describing children's SEN as permanent, stable and independent of contextual factors also leads to the permanent, stable positioning of a child. This is a somewhat debatable a line of thinking, as fluctuating between being positioned as, for example, able or unable and competent or incompetent is an essential feature of humans and especially of being a child (Danforth & Naraian 2015).

Method

The research data

The research data comprise part of a broader data collection of pre-primary-aged children's pedagogical documents. The documents were collected at the end of the pre-primary year in May 2016 from 19 classes in four Finnish municipalities. The municipalities and pre-primary education classes were selected by applying the principle of maximum variation in the sampling to obtain as diverse a data set as possible (Patton 2015). Therefore, the selected municipalities differ in size and geographical location. Moreover, the pre-primary classes differed in their locations within the municipalities.

In this study, the data are drawn from the pedagogical documents of 29 children assessed as having SEN and who received either intensified or special support during their pre-primary year. No pre-existing diagnostic categories were used to select the children. The documents comprise all the pedagogical documents on the above-mentioned children, thus covering their educational history from the time they entered ECEC to the end of their pre-primary year (see Table 1). As described above, due to variation in municipal documentation practices, the composition of the documents differs markedly. The total number of documents was 143, although the number of documents per child varied from one to eleven. On average, the documents cover a period of three years, although this varied between one and six years as some children had only participated in the compulsory pre-primary year and others had up to six years of history in ECEC. On average, the children had been defined as having SEN at the age of five, with a range from three to six years.

(Table 1)

The data gathering followed the ethical rules and principles of social scientific investigation (see e.g. Christians 2011). The research collaboration was first negotiated and teachers of pre-primary classes were contacted through the heads of the regional ECEC service provision. Research approval was sought from the appropriate authority in each municipality and teachers at the pre-primary classes were personally informed about the project. Guardians were given a letter about the research with a request for informed consent. Both the teachers of pre-primary classes and the children's guardians were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Analysis

In the study, the discourse analytic approach applied was based on the ideas of discursive psychology (see Edwards 2005). This approach offers a useful starting point for researching

the social process of constructing SEN in pedagogical documentation. By investigating language in a detailed manner with discourse analysis, it is possible to reveal the consequences of problematic social practices (e.g., the practice of documenting children's educational needs) on the textual level. Moreover, the revelation of problematic practices, such as the present pedagogical documents, through deconstruction of the language used in them, enhances the possibility of changing them.

Our focus was on ECEC professionals' constructions of SEN and the positioning of a child in these different constructions. Therefore, we first examined all those sections of the documents with subtitles that either directly or indirectly indicated that the section would present a description of the child. Second, we limited the data to descriptions where (a) the child was presented as not being able or skilful in something or (b) something related to the child was presented as a concern or as an issue that needed to be overcome. The children's documents were written using ready-made forms in either paper or digital form; these, again, varied notably between the municipalities. Regardless of the form, the focus in the examined pedagogical documents was clearly on describing a child: such descriptions typically accounted for the majority of the text in a document.

During careful, multiple readings of the documents, three features emerged that were of especial significance concerning the construction of the challenges the children presented: (a) the nature of SEN as either an individual or environmental matter, (b) the permanence of SEN, and (c) the allocation of responsibility for overcoming SEN. It was obvious that these differing perspectives on writing also produced different images of the child, and hence positioned children differently.

When the differences of these three perspectives were studied further, the concept of positioning was applied in the analysis, following the idea of discursive psychology (Edwards

2005). The concept of *positioning* is produced to describe the relational responsibilities, rights and duties that a child is described as having at a certain time and in a certain situation (e.g., in a specific written description) This is important as positions are not permanent but changing and constructed in social relations with other people (Harré & Moghaddam 2003). According to Foucault (1977), the positioning of a person is based on negotiation about what is considered institutionally and culturally normal and abnormal. Positioning is always a social process, and the concept of positioning is relational to the context in which the positioning takes place (e.g., Harré & Moghaddam 2003). In our case, the context is ECEC practices.

In the analysis, we identified three child positions in the data. These positions were the outgrowths of different kinds of SEN constructions. On the one hand, children were strongly constructed as problematic individuals through direct descriptions of them and their deficits or needs. Yet the descriptions occasionally focused on presenting the child in his or her context, and thus offered a more context-dependent presentation of the foundations of SEN. The third perspective focused on descriptions of development and change in the child's situation. In addition to overall constructions of SEN, we performed a detailed analysis of linguistic features. Our aim was to identify the linguistic features that positioned the child in a specific way and illustrated different SEN constructions. This linguistic analysis included, for example, examination of word choices, sentence structures, tenses, causal relations, and the semantic roles of the actors. The analysis was conducted based on the ideas of discursive psychology (Edwards 2005).

Positions of a child in the documents

Three child positions were identified in the pedagogical documents: *problematic child*, *multifaceted child*, and *learning child*. These positions rely on differing ways of describing and constructing SEN. Although the positions are reported here separately, in the documents a child

is typically multiply positioned. The extracts below have been anonymised by assigning each child a pseudonym.

Problematic child in definitive descriptions

Positioning a child considered to have SEN as a problem is the most dominant construction in the ECEC documents. This is evident both quantitatively and in its way of appearing independently of any other positioning. A problematic child is described through definitive descriptions that construct the child's SEN as factual and relatively stable or even as an outcome of permanent individual deficits. The descriptions are characterised by the use of the present tense and expressions that suggest certainty and neutrality.

Extract 1: Kim's (6 years) pre-primary plan

> challenges in concentrating and paying attention, is restless in the pre-primary class
>
> challenges in controlling the use of physical strength, manifests in e.g. rough manners towards friends
>
> many challenges in social skills: playing with friends does not work without the help of an adult
>
> Kim has challenges in respecting his friend's personal space and he comes too close to his friend while queuing, playing and in other situations, he pushes, blows in his friend's face or hugs too roughly to get his friend's attention
>
> easily blames friends in conflict situations (---)
>
> action continues after a while as it was, even if the adult intervenes (an adult must intervene dozens of times a day)
>
> on the one hand, Kim doesn't want to harm his friends, but the skills of being with

friends are lacking

tolerance of disappointment needs strengthening

In extract 1, the SEN are described in the present tense by means of a list, written in short, factual sentences without any explicit reference to the child as a subject (e.g., “problems in concentrating and attention”; “tolerance of disappointment needs to be strengthened”; “is restless in the pre-primary class”). The child is thus desubjectified by documenting his SEN mainly as something separate from himself. Even when the child is presented as a subject (e.g., “Kim has challenges in respecting his friend’s personal space”; “Kim doesn’t want to harm his friends”), he is positioned as an actor who is unable to do or be what is expected from him.

In the extract, the abnormality of Kim’s characteristics is produced by directly classifying them as shortcomings. This is done either through negative word choices (e.g., “challenges in controlling the use of physical strength”); by quantifying the undesirable conduct (e.g., “hugs too roughly”; “the skills…are lacking”); by emphasising the need for practice or support (e.g., “an adult must intervene dozens of times a day”, “tolerance of disappointment needs strengthening”); or by using negations (e.g., “does not work”). When the descriptions emphasise the need for practising or adult support, they do not discuss the child’s challenges and SEN directly, but include these euphemistically as part of the description of pedagogical measures. Nevertheless, the meaning of the deontic modal expression “an adult must intervene” is strong and implies the difficulty he child presents from the viewpoint of the institution. As for the use of negations, unfulfilled expectations of development were disclosed, accompanied by the norms that should be followed at a certain age. For example, the sentence “playing with friends does not work without the help of an adult” constructs an expectation that playing should already go well independently.

It is also noteworthy that the descriptions of SEN are constructed by using interpretative phrases. In phrases such as “many challenges in social skills” or “tolerance of disappointment needs strengthening”, SEN are professionally categorised and defined by the use of nominalisation. In extreme cases, interpretative judgements describe SEN as permanent and as a cause of the child’s deficiencies or inability. In extract 1, interpretative phrases occur at both the beginning and the end of the extract and seem to frame the purely descriptive everyday examples in the middle of the text. The purely descriptive sentences, such as “he pushes or blows in his friend’s face”, are used to concretise Kim’s actions and justify the interpretative descriptions and categorisations. Additionally, the interpretative phrases can also be based on documents provided by other professionals, on the reporting of someone’s talk or on other intertextual sources, as in extract 2 below.

Extract 2: Amy’s (4 years) pedagogical statement document

> F79.9 Unspecified intellectual disability
>
> G82.3 Dystonia tetraplegica
>
> (---)
>
> In different activities and situations, attention is paid to the position of Amy’s head and middle body. At meals, attention is paid to oral motor skills.

In extract 2, intertextual information about Amy’s formal diagnoses heads the description. Thus, professionals in the educational institution define Amy’s SEN by presenting the medical diagnoses constructed by medical professionals. This is followed by examples of what requires to be monitored in everyday activities with Amy. Therefore, the professional categorisation of Amy’s SEN is justified with reference to another professional’s interpretations of the situation.

Such definitive descriptions focus on children's developmental deficiencies or culturally undesirable behaviour by associating a child's being and actions with negative features. The causes of unwanted characteristics are attributed to the child, whose SEN are produced as an objective fact and pre-existing phenomena. The constructed stability of the situation is emphasised by pointing to the unchanged intensity of the child's problems after differing attempts to intervene in them professionally. The language used is simultaneously descriptive and normative.

Multifaceted child in contextual descriptions

When a child is positioned as multifaceted through contextual descriptions, a varied image of SEN is produced by proportioning these needs in relation to different situations and environments. Children's needs are described as depending on changeable factors that are either internal (e.g., state of mind) or external (e.g., physical environment, available support). Thus, the descriptions typically consist of conditional claims that inform a reader about how SEN vary according to place and circumstances.

Extract 3: Mary's (5 years) ECEC plan

> In unusual situations, like during holidays[3], when different groups of children have been combined, Mary might feel distressed and insecure and her behaviour can become restless and adult-challenging. During the autumn break, Mary had 'a temper tantrum' in a dressing situation.

Extract 4: Joe's (4 years) pedagogical assessment document

[3] During the school holidays in Finland, day care group arrangements concerning the composition of staff and children, physical environment and routine are usually subject to temporary changes.

> Joe is self-directed in everyday routines, once he gets started. His concentration and attention easily flag, especially in a big group. Sensitive to external stimuli. Focusing on assignments demanding concentration is difficult. Concentration is better in activities in which one can let off energy. Impulsiveness is shown especially while playing.

Extract 5: Mark's (7 years) individual education plan

> Concentration span is short, especially when Mark doesn't understand the language. Picture support, quick drawings and support signs help with understanding.

Extracts 3 and 4 show how various external factors are viewed as having a significant effect on the child's SEN. In extract 3, unusual situations are presented as the cause of negative emotions (anxiety and insecurity) in the child and, therefore, as the reason for restlessness, defiance and temper tantrums. Similarly, in extract 4, being in a large group, external stimuli and inappropriate assignments and activities are said to weaken the child's concentration. Therefore, in these extracts, the child's problems and difficulties are assumed to be dependent on environmental and contextual issues. For instance, the last line of extract 4 categorises impulsiveness as one of Joe's ways of behaving, but limits this characteristic to a specific context, play. Similarly, in the last line of extract 5, the list of various pedagogical methods which support the child's understanding constructs overcoming SEN as a shared responsibility and as the shared project of the adults and child.

The contextual descriptions construct a multidimensional and context-dependent image of children and their SEN. At the same time, because the context is acknowledged as influencing a child's situation, SEN become a shared issue and, at least to some extent, an environmental question. While the contextual descriptions consider the child's educational environment as a potential source of SEN, instead of seeing them only as internal issues, the descriptions partly

normalise the categorisation of the child as deviant. In addition, the descriptions specify the child's situation by emphasising the context-based variations in SEN and by illustrating them in more detail.

Learning child in dynamic descriptions

When a change in the child's situation is reported to have happened, using past tense descriptions, or when such a change is anticipated in goals, using a future tense, a child becomes positioned as a learning child. Then, the focus is either (a) on past-present comparisons of the child's behaviour, skills or SEN, or (b) on the pedagogical aims set for the child. The descriptions typically illustrate active learning and progress by the child that indicate positive change. Despite this tendency, a child's SEN are constructed as part of the child's internal characteristics.

Extract 6: Susan's (5 years) intensified support plan

> Susan has developed very significantly during autumn 2014. Getting dressed has become much easier and hardly any temper tantrums have occurred. Susan also clearly tolerates unpleasant sensations better, such as clothes that feel unpleasant or, for example, doing her hair up in a ponytail. However, challenges in sensory integration still exist, but they stand out mainly, for example, in auditory sensations or when things feel unpleasant in some other way.

Extract 7: Noah's (7 years) pedagogical assessment

> Noah is motorically restless and bodily control is still being practised.
>
> Fine motor skills are being practised.
>
> Linguistic skills are good as far as vocabulary and concepts are considered, the *r* phoneme is being practised.

Social skills are being practised (speaking instead of assaulting).

Good self-esteem is being developed, tolerating disappointments is being practised. Attention, concentration and cognitive control are being practised.

Taking care of oneself is being practised (staying dry).

In extract 6, the main focus is on the child's learning results and their evaluation and comparison with earlier situations (e.g., "the child has developed (---) very significantly"). The desirability of such changes is expressed through positive comparative adjectives (e.g., *better*, *easier*) and verbs (e.g., *developed*). The use of intensifying adverbs (e.g. *much*, *clearly*, *significantly*) further emphasises the extent of positive changes. Temporal information on when the change occurred (e.g., "during autumn 2014") may also be given.

In the few descriptions that contain negative evaluations of children's situations, the magnitude of the still existing SEN is undermined through the adverbs (e.g., *hardly any*; *a bit*). In addition, the evaluation may be followed by a positive characterisation. This is the case in extract 6, where the negative assessment, "the challenges in sensory integration still exist" (lines 4–5) is followed by the specifying and neutralising contextual description "but they stand out mainly, for example, hearing sensations". Especially the use of the conjunction *but* between the negative and the contextual sentences emphasises the progress over difficulties that has been made. In other words, the difficulties are not presented as an overall phenomenon but as restricted to a specific situation.

Whereas the descriptions in extract 6 refer explicitly to the child and her SEN, the utterances in extract 7 relate to these needs indirectly by describing pedagogical aims that imply the existence of SEN. The extract starts with a definitive description of Noah's restlessness and continues with indirect descriptions of his SEN and deficiencies in skills by describing his practising or developing in eight different developmental areas. The use of the passive voice

(e.g., “Fine motor skills are practised”) removes the responsibility from the text; in other words, the actors who are practising or developing these skills remain unclear. On the other hand, the passive voice also creates an image of overcoming SEN as a shared process – as something which is carried out together, even though the responsibility of training and developing is, in the end, left to the child. Shared responsibility is sometimes represented by indicating professionals or even by naming the one who acts.

Dynamic descriptions typically construct the child as an active participant in training and practising skills. In these cases, a child is positioned as a learner, and SEN is constructed as an issue subject to temporal change that can be overcome with active pedagogical work. The location of the responsibility of these actions, however, varies. Because the passive voice is typically used in descriptions, with no mention of any specific actor supporting the child, responsibility is also obscured. Occasionally, by describing his or her actions, the child is positioned as the only one responsible for training and practising, and hence SEN is constructed as something the child is responsible for overcoming. Moreover, while the child is positioned in a positive light as a learner, he or she is also presented as an object of constant evaluation.

Discussion

This study investigated the SEN constructions and positioning of children with SEN in their pedagogical documents. The results show that the professional descriptions positioned children in three subject positions and constructed SEN in three ways: a problematic child constructed through definitive descriptions, a multifaceted child constructed through contextual descriptions, and a learning child constructed through dynamic descriptions. Table 2 presents a summary of these findings.

(Table 2)

The results revealed some tensions between the three different types of SEN constructions. First, in accordance with earlier studies (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Hjörne & Säljö 2004; Isaksson, Lindqvist, & Bergström 2007; Pihlaja, Sarlin, & Ristkari 2015), the children with SEN were typically positioned as problematic in the documentation. This means that SEN were fundamentally constructed as an individual matter and as a child's deficit in a very evaluative manner throughout the documents. In addition, the responsibility for overcoming SEN was attributed to the child (see Smith 2012). This was most typical in the definitive descriptions, but was also more implicitly presented, to some extent, in contextual and dynamic descriptions. To some extent, this function was an outgrowth of the starting point of the documents, which was to categorise (or referring to Miller and Rose (2008), to problematise) the child and her or his situation after it had been defined as undesirable (see also Cooren 2004; Parding & Liljegren 2016). This way of identifying the challenges facing children through documentation is a powerful act because it implies that these challenges are permanent, and internal and draws a distinction between ordinary needs and special needs. This division into ordinary and special educational needs is controversial, however, because it has its foundation in subjective value judgements regarding ways of conduct and being that are good and desirable instead of in indisputable facts about the child (Vehmas 2010).

In the studied documents, categorisation was produced, especially through interpretative writing, which included professional judgements or assessments of the child´s state that went beyond pure observations. This kind of interpretative writing was thus normative and constructed SEN as an objective reality as well as a permanent fact (see Vehmas 2010). However, when a child was narrated in purely descriptive terms, using contextual descriptions or dynamic descriptions of actions, less blame was usually attributed to the child. These descriptions typically presented everyday examples of children's activities through sentences with a subject-predicate structure. However, in the documents these pure descriptions were

subordinated to interpretive constructions: interpretations were presented as the initial arguments in either the opening line of the text or later on. The role of descriptive writing was to add information and to complete the description. Therefore, interpretations also directed the reading of descriptive writing.

Second, in contrast, children with SEN were commonly presented as individuals with situationally varying needs and characteristics through contextual descriptions. SEN were constructed as conditional, fluctuating and environment-relational, not only as a child's internal states. Occasionally, children were positioned as active learners through dynamic descriptions, yet they were nevertheless presented as objects of constant evaluation. In this respect, the results of this study differ somewhat from the previous documentation research, according to which reflections on professional practices and environmental influence are totally lacking in pedagogical documents which, instead, foreground predominantly deficit-centred and desubjectifying descriptions of children's SEN (e.g., Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson 2013; Hjörne & Säljö 2004; Isaksson, Lindqvist, & Bergström 2007; Pihlaja, Sarlin, & Ristkari 2015; Røn Larsen 2012). All in all, contextual descriptions contain less categorisation of a child as a problem and point to the influence of the environment as well. Therefore, they approach the identification and manifestation of SEN as a social process. In line with the ideas of the social model of disability (e.g. Oliver 2013) and inclusive education (UNESCO 2009), the influence of the environment in creating and maintaining children's challenges needs to be included in the examination of SEN without requiring categorisation (see also Danforth & Naraian 2015; Røn Larsen 2012).

The results additionally highlight one of the most explicit ideologies in the documents: the expectation of an independent child who overcomes difficulties without adult help. The child, in other words, develops, learns and grows. This finding is in line with what Smith (2012) identified as the current emphasis on independent, responsible child subjects. The ideal of

independent change was perhaps most noticeably present in definitive descriptions that positioned a child as a problem. These descriptions indicated no professional responsibility for the desired change. However, the ideal was also apparent in other types of descriptions. The development of a child's situation was typically described as a change in the child's culturally desirable behaviour and ways of being in the institution, such as learning not to disturb others, instead of as a change in, for example, a child's personal wellbeing or satisfaction. In other words, the desired change was described as individual adjustment. It is indeed stated that the identification of SEN often aspires to overcome professional problems, not the child's (Hjörne & Säljö 2004). The current practice of documenting SEN in pedagogical documents can be verbalised, in line with Karila and Alasuutari (2012, 21), as one that mainly describes how a child should change or what he or she should learn in order to meet institutional criteria; it is not a practice that documents how a child should be supported.

Descriptions orientate pedagogical practice

The key function of the child descriptions in pedagogical documents is to offer a pedagogical starting point for planning. Therefore, as definitive writing predominates and SEN is constructed as a child's individual issue, it is fair to question whether the current practice of describing children with SEN is a suitable way to construct a base for planning support. Different kinds of descriptions regarding children with SEN also influence the orientations of pedagogical practice. If SEN are created as stable and unchanging, there is a risk that they are simultaneously understood as unsupportable, especially if they are constructed as disabilities consequent on a child's personal characteristics or permanent state (see Pihlaja, Sarlin & Ristkari 2015). Because the significance of environmental arrangements and pedagogical practices are typically dismissed, the child easily receives the blame for the situation and is

positioned as responsible for self-change (see Smith 2012), even in cases where it is pedagogical practices that should be re-evaluated and developed.

Therefore, the focus in writing pedagogical documents needs to shift from the examination of children's individuality to the identification of children's responses to pedagogical interventions and suitable support. In this way, the child is not positioned as the one responsible for adapting. Despite children's impairments or syndromes or whether they have been included in other diagnostically constructed categories, SEN are a separate case: the relationship between an individual and the environment it is always cultural, contextual and fluctuating (see also Franck 2014). From this pedagogical perspective, it is important that the fluctuation of SEN in different contexts, social situations and times and in response to the different inner states of a child are identified before a document is written. When this pedagogical emphasis is adopted in writing, the resulting descriptions will create a more complete and multidimensional image of the child and usually offer more detailed information about children and their needs.

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Table 1. Research data

Document type	N = 143	Purpose
ECEC plan	64	Planning for early childhood education Obligatory for all children attending ECEC before pre-primary
Pre-primary plan	24	Planning for pre-primary education Can be drafted for all children Obligatory when child receives intensified support
Plan for intensified support	22	Planning intensified support
Individual education plan	8	Planning special support Obligatory when child receives special support Replaces the pre-primary plan
Pedagogical assessment	23	Evaluating and justifying the need for more intense support
Pedagogical statement	2	Evaluating and justifying the need for special support

Note: Names of the documents: FNBE, 2010; NRDCWH, 2003

Table 2. The key characteristics of three description types

Child's position	**Descriptions**	**Child**	**Linguistic features**	**Reference point**	**Fictional example**	**Nature of SEN**	**Permanence of SEN**	**Main Function**
Problem	Definitive	Passive	Factuality Evaluativity	Interpretation	Speaking is very difficult for Tim Tim needs support in communication	Individual	Permanent	Categorise
Multi-faceted	Contextual	Active	Conditionality	Observation	Tim says few words when playing. When he is tired or confused he speaks only a little.	Contextual	Fluctuating	Specify Neutralise
Learner	Dynamic	Active	Temporality Evaluativity	Interpretation	Tim's speech has developed significantly Tim is training to vocalise consonants	Individual	Changeable	Assess

Note: SEN is an abbreviation of special educational needs

II

RECORDING SUPPORT MEASURES IN THE SEQUENTIAL PEDAGOGICAL DOCUMENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

by

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Recording Support Measures in the Sequential Pedagogical Documents of Children With Special Education Needs

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Abstract

This study investigates the descriptions of support measures in the sequential pedagogical documents (individual education plans or programs and others) of children with special education needs from early childhood education and care to preprimary education. According to previous research, the role of pedagogical work is largely disregarded in these documents, which typically focus on describing children's challenges instead of support measures. In this study, the sequential pedagogical documents (N = 257) of 64 Finnish children were studied for approximately three to six years, and the data were analyzed by investigating the textual and content-related coherence, as well as the linguistic precision, of the descriptions of support. Consequently, four chronological patterns of describing and developing the support measures — missing, repetitious, disorganized, and explicit — were introduced, and the study results emphasize the importance of the specificity and continuity of documentation.

Keyword: Curricula, Assessment, Instruction, Qualitative Methods, Preschoolers, Kindergartners and Early Elementary

Introduction

Drafting individualized pedagogical documents, individual education plans or programs (IEPs), or other pedagogical documents for children with special education needs (SEN) is often considered a key element of a successful, high-quality individualized

pedagogical plan (Miller, 2014; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Yell & Stecker, 2003). The practices and prerequisites of drafting pedagogical documents in early childhood education and care (ECEC), as well as the required contents of such documents, vary internationally, depending on educational contexts, educational systems, and the pedagogical documents in question. Typically, pedagogical documents include descriptions of children's strengths, current achievement levels, and challenges, as well as the individualized learning objectives of the pedagogical support (see, e.g., Gartin & Murdick, 2005; Yell & Stecker, 2003).

The practice of drafting IEPs or other pedagogical documents for children with SEN is well established. Consequently, detailed recommendations for drafting these documents have been given. The overall principle and aim of the documents are to elaborate meaningful, suitable, research-based interventions that support children's education (Drasgow, Yell, & Robinson, 2001; Gartin & Murdick, 2005). The main focus should be on planning and support—what adults do with and for children. Consequently, the development of objectives, goals, and methods form the core of pedagogical documents (Poppes, Vlaskamp, de Geeter, & Nakken, 2002), which should indicate specific interventions and measures to support children (Kwon, Elicker, & Kontos, 2011).

From the viewpoint of the effective planning and assessment of children's progress and the efficacy of the support provided, specific descriptions of exact, measurable objectives and support measures (Boavida, Aguiar, McWilliams, & Pimentel, 2010; Christle & Yell, 2010) should be contextualized to children's everyday lives and various learning environments (Boavida et al., 2010; Räty, Vehkakoski, & Pirttimaa, 2018). Additionally, knowledge about children's current achievement levels, situations, challenges, and strengths needs to be explicitly utilized to set goals and

formulate appropriate measures (Michinowicz, Mcconnell, Peterson, & Odom, 1995). This kind of documentation is likely to lead to the individualization of practices (Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000) and the meeting of legal and substantive IEP requirements (Christle & Yell, 2010; Drasgow et al., 2001). To achieve these documentation aims, the language used should be specific, observable, and measurable (Rosas, Winterman, Kroeger, & Jones, 2009).

In pedagogical documents, including IEPs, the systematic follow-up and continuing development of support measures play a central role (see, e.g., Wixson & Valencia, 2011). In evaluating children's progress and the effectiveness of support, previous research highlighted constant formative assessment using appropriate data collection techniques (Christle & Yell, 2010). Drasgow et al. (2001) highlight the need for the multifaceted (re)evaluation of children's progress, needs, and support as part of the revision of pedagogical documents. Moreover, the importance of coherence between sequential recordings and documents in which different contents (e.g., children's needs, objectives, and support) are explicitly linked to each other is underscored (Rosas et al., 2009). The revisions, improvements, and changes, as well as the maintained and terminated practices of support, should be explicitly indicated in revised documents (Wixson & Valencia, 2011).

Despite the need for continuity and coherence, earlier research concerning pedagogical documents has primarily entailed the cross-sectional examination of pedagogical documentation methods, while the development of the support measures in sequential documents and the chronological changes made to the contents of these children's documents over the years have been largely overlooked (for an exception, see Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010). Moreover, in existing studies, the investigation of the contents and use of pedagogical documents, including IEPs, in early childhood settings

is more infrequent than in those related to older children (for an exception, see e.g., Boavida et al., 2010; Kwon et al., 2011; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000). Therefore, to address this research gap, we focus on the descriptions of support measures in the sequential pedagogical documents of Finnish children with SEN in ECEC. This study is based on longitudinal data: We examine the same children's sequential documents and recordings of support over approximately three to six years to ascertain how the recordings of support measures may change over time. The following are our research questions:

> **Research Question 1:** What kinds of patterns of describing support measures can be identified from the sequential pedagogical ECEC documents of children with SEN over the years?
>
> **Research Question 2:** What kinds of content-related and linguistic features are peculiar to the different patterns of describing this support?

Writing Pedagogical Documents: Current Practices

In numerous studies investigating pedagogical documents, including IEPs, in recent decades, the contents and (linguistic) forms of these documents have been found to be problematic. Generally, pedagogical documents vary remarkably in regard to quality, length, and contents (Karvonen & Huynh, 2007). They typically emphasize the descriptions of children and their challenges, referring only scarcely to pedagogical planning (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson, Lindquist, & Bergström, 2007). In the study by Rosas et al. (2009), half of the examined IEPs lacked relevant legal requirements. Zirkel and Hetrick (2017) found that, in particular, the evaluations and revisions of the previous IEPs were insufficiently documented. Moreover, the assessment in IEPs has been reported to be predominantly

summative, focusing on the assessment of children's present skills instead of on the development of support (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013).

In previous research, the quality of the objectives in particular seems to have been studied thoroughly, and this is likely because their significance has been highlighted (e.g., Christle & Yell, 2010; Drasgow et al., 2001). However, in these studies, the objectives elaborated in pedagogical documents have been found to be generally poor in quality, especially concerning their measurability (Michinowicz at al., 1995; Rakap, 2015; Rubler, McGrew, Dalrymple, & Jung, 2010; Sanches-Ferreira, Lopes-dos-Santos, Alves, Santos, & Silveira-Maia, 2013). This is presumably because they were written in an imprecise and inadequate manner (Ruble et al., 2010; Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2013). The objectives are typically broad, vague, and abstract (Boavida et al., 2010; Drasgow et al., 2001; Michinowicz et al., 1995; Rakap, 2015; Yell & Stecker, 2003), and their development is not documented systematically (Espin, Deno, & Albayrak-Kaymak, 1998; Yell & Stecker, 2003). The number of objectives is typically high, possibly leading to problems with monitoring the children's progress (Boavida et al., 2010). In the study by Boavida et al. (2010), it was found that higher-quality objectives (regarding measurability and functionality) were more likely related to autonomy skills. Moreover, the objectives of children with disabilities were more likely high-quality than the objectives of children without disabilities. However, in Rakap's (2015) study, such differences were not found.

The descriptions of the interventions and support measures are studied less frequently than other document contents. Earlier studies show that the descriptions of individualized instruction are not documented systematically (Espin et al., 1998; Yell & Stecker, 2003) and that the connection between learning objectives and instruction planning is weak or nonexistent (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Ruble et al., 2010).

Additionally, support measures are described predominantly using imprecise language and exclude the specific allocation of responsibilities related to the provision of support (Rubler et al., 2010; Räty et al., 2018). Methods are also focused on efforts to improve children's skills instead of on environmental, organizational, or pedagogical aspects of support (Isaksson et al., 2007).

Few researchers have analyzed pedagogical documents based on a longitudinal design. Studying the sequential IEPs of children with autism from kindergarten to Grade 9, Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) found that approximately 50% of the annual goals in IEPs were repeated in sequential documents. This repetition occurred approximately two or three years in a row, depending on the objectives, although goals could be repeated up to nine years in a row. They also found that younger children —those in kindergarten—had fewer adaptations than those in the upper grades, whereas teachers reported comparatively less frequently on children's progress in later grades. However, teachers in inclusive settings reported progress more often than those in non-inclusive settings.

To summarize, the clear discrepancy between theoretical understanding and actual practice regarding high-quality pedagogical documents is evident. Yell and Stecker (2003) describe how, at its worst, "the IEP, in effect, becomes a procedural compliance exercise with little or no relevance to the teaching and learning process" (p. 74). Moreover, there is a danger that pedagogical documents act primarily as administrative rather than pedagogical tools (Andreasson, Asp-Onsjö, & Isaksson, 2013) or aim primarily to meet legislative requirements without having an educational value (Christle & Yell, 2010; see also Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000; Yell & Stecker, 2003).

Method

Setting

In this study, we investigate the pedagogical documents drafted in Finnish ECEC. Finnish ECEC consists of services for children from birth to 6 years of age and preprimary education (4 hours a day) in the year preceding compulsory comprehensive school. Both ECEC services and preprimary education are founded on the Nordic Educare model, based on which teaching, education, and care (while parents work or study) are daily interlinked activities that are provided in one location (either kindergarten or family daycare) (see Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010).

All children participate in compulsory preprimary education at the age of six. However, regarding other ECEC services, the participation rate of Finnish children is relatively low compared to the international rate: Only 74% of 4-year-olds participated in ECEC in 2015, whereas the average for OECD countries was 87% (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). In addition to being compulsory, preprimary education is also free of charge, but other ECEC services are subject to charge (maximum payment: €290 per month). However, the charges are reduced gradually based on family income and whether the family has many children, and low-income families are released from payment entirely. In 2016, this reduction applied to 18% of families (National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2017).

Regarding the arrangements for educational support in Finnish ECEC and preprimary education, a shift toward the application of response to intervention (RTI) ideas (see Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2013) and the three-tiered pyramid model (see Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2010) has occurred in recent years. Since 2010, the RTI model has been applied in Finnish primary and preprimary education as an administrative framework for providing support (regarding the Finnish RTI, see

Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2016). In this model, three tiers of educational support—general (tier 1), intensified (tier 2), and special (tier 3)—are presented. The Finnish system emphasizes open-to-all educational support, which is a prerequisite-free provision that is granted instantly once children's needs are identified (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016; Finnish National Board of Education, 2018). Therefore, from the first tier, instant pedagogical and instructional rearrangements are available in children's own ECEC classes in keeping with the ideas of the earliest possible intervention and preventive support.

However, due to the differing legislative bases, in the Finnish ECEC, the role of RTI and the tiered model is unestablished. Preprimary education is regulated by the Finland Basic Education Act (628/1998) and the core curriculum for preprimary education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016), which indicate the use of Finnish RTI explicitly. However, other ECEC is regulated by the Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018) and the core curriculum for early childhood education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018), which fails to define the exact ways in which educational support should be provided. Therefore, regarding the application of RTI, the Finnish educational system currently reflects the international situation: It is said to be more established in primary and secondary school than in early childhood settings (The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), & National Head Start Association (NHSA), 2014).

In addition to the national legislation and regulations governing ECEC and preprimary education, municipalities in Finland are obligated to localize the national curricula at the municipal level by designing local curricula, which are normative within particular municipalities. In these local policy documents, the multiple municipal

directions can be set (e.g., whether to also apply the RTI framework to ECEC), and the national regulations are elaborated in detail (e.g., specific forms of pedagogical documents are provided). Finnish ECEC services including preprimary education are increasingly arranged in an inclusive manner. For example, in 2016, only 8% of Finnish municipalities reported that they had segregated ECEC classes for children with SEN (National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2017).

In Finnish ECEC, the drafting of pedagogical documents has a long tradition, and the practices are governed by laws, curricula, and municipal regulations. As contrary to international practice, in Finnish ECEC, every child, irrespective of SEN, has an individualized pedagogical document. The aim of these documents has traditionally been to take into account children's individual strengths, interests, and opinions in planning high-quality general ECEC. An individualized pedagogical document called *an ECEC plan* is drafted for children under 6 years of age. This practice has been outlined in the ECEC steering policy document since 2004 and has been mandatory by law since the 2015 legislative reform. In preprimary education, the law obligates the drafting of *a preprimary plan* for children with SEN, although it is enabled for all children. In practice, all children in preprimary education typically have individualized preprimary plans, as municipalities have made it a mandatory component of the local curricula.

ECEC and preprimary plans typically include the planning of educational support at the general level. However, when intensified or special support is provided, additional pedagogical documentation is conducted. According to the laws and curricula, in tiers 2 and 3, children's preprimary plans need to be either (a) completed with additional support-centered contents or separate attachments (plans for intensified support) when children receive intensified support or (b) replaced entirely by support-

focused pedagogical documents, when children receive special support (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016).

In other ECEC services, the practices of documenting the educational support of children with SEN vary. In some municipalities, the RTI model with three tiers is implemented, and then the abovementioned practices of preprimary education are typically followed. However, the practices can also be followed partially, for example, using an individual ECEC document to plan support for all children, even though the RTI model and three tiers are used as the administrative framework. In the municipalities in which the RTI model with tiers is not implemented in ECEC, the individual ECEC plan is typically used universally.

ECEC teachers are generally the ones who draft the documents. In preprimary education, the ECEC teachers with preprimary education qualifications draft the pedagogical documents used in their preprimary classes. Furthermore, in other ECEC services, when children have SEN, early childhood special education teachers typically participate in at least the planning of children's support and the drafting of documents. Additionally, family daycare nurses, in cooperation with ECEC teachers or early childhood special education teachers, draft pedagogical documents for children in family daycare.

There seems to have been a rapid turnover of writers of children's pedagogical documents over the years. In Finnish ECEC and preprimary education, children typically experience multiple transitions and other structural changes in their ECEC classes during their years in early childhood education services. Because of the predominant practice of arranging ECEC based on age groups, children in kindergarten can, for example, move into new groups at the beginning of new terms as they grow older. Moreover, staff can also change classes. In both cases, the educators who write

the children's pedagogical documents may also change. According to the data collected for this research, the same educator had not usually written more than two sequential documents for the child. Therefore, each child's pedagogical documents had typically been written by at least two educators.

Sample

The research data were collected from 23 Finnish preprimary education classes during the 2015–2016 school year. According to Gobo (2011), social research typically focuses on "the social significance of the sample instead of a statistical logic" (p. 2). Therefore, as Finnish municipalities have a great deal of independence in localizing regulations related to pedagogical writing (e.g., making drafts of certain documents mandatory and providing forms of pedagogical documents), purposive sampling was used to achieve the maximum variation (Patton, 2015), considering the municipalities and the preprimary education classes within them. The selection criteria for municipalities included varying pedagogical practices in arranging educational support for children, geographical locations, and sizes. Consequently, five Finnish municipalities participated.

The ECEC administrators in the municipalities selected the participating preprimary classes. The researcher instructed the administrators to seek participating classes from different parts of the cities and municipalities to achieve the most diverse data possible. They were also instructed to take into account the geographical locations of the classes and the potential variations in the children's socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, administrators were asked to invite classes that, to their knowledge, varied in regard to their pedagogical practices. As a result, 23 preprimary education classes participated with a variance of one to ten classes per municipality.

For preprimary education classes, we applied two kinds of sampling techniques. In ten of the participating classes, all the children were considered participants, irrespective of their SEN. However, because the specific purpose of the study was focused on the documentation of support measures, in 13 classes, we asked only the children who had identified SEN (either intensified or special support, tiers 2 and 3) to participate. Patton (2015) describes this kind of selection as *group characteristics sampling*, which is aimed at a "select specific information-rich group" (p. 267). Consequently, we collected the pedagogical documents of 108 Finnish children receiving either special (tier 3, $n = 8$), intensified (tier 2, $n = 21$), or general support (tier 1, $n = 79$). In this sample, the number of children receiving either intensified or special support is purposefully overrepresented, approximately 27% of children in total. In Finnish ECEC, only 7% of children received either intensified or special support in 2016 (National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2017).

We followed the ethical guidelines for data collection (Christians, 2011), which include protecting the anonymity of the children and municipalities throughout the course of the study. We requested written research permission from the municipal authorities and written informed consent from the children's guardians. We also informed these guardians and the teachers of the preprimary classes about their right to withdraw from the study at any time. In 10 of the 23 classes that participated, we requested research permission from all the guardians, irrespective of the children's identified SEN. In the other 13 classes, we requested permission solely from the guardians of the children with SEN (intensified or special support) to enable the collection of sufficient data about these children.

According to the curricula for ECEC (Finnish National Board of Education, 2018) and preprimary education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016),

pedagogical documents should be revisited, at the very least, once a year or whenever children's needs require it. In practice, documents are typically drafted at the beginning of fall and assessed at the end of spring. However, the pedagogical documents of children with SEN are typically revisited more often than those of children without SEN. In the research data, the frequency with which the pedagogical documents were revisited varied substantially, as some children's documents were revisited up to five times a year, while others were revisited only once.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to investigate the patterns of writing about support measures for children with SEN. Research data were selected from the broader data set (n = 108) according to the following criterion: The child had at least two years of documented history in ECEC, i.e., there were two pedagogical documents drafted in ECEC and preprimary education (typically, an individual preprimary education plan and ECEC plan, or substitute documents). This criterion was applied to obtain longitudinal data.

A second purpose was to investigate the descriptions of the support measures for children receiving either general, intensified, or special support. An additional criterion was applied to the data set with at least two years of documented history in ECEC: The child had learning, behavioral, or developmental challenges, which were described in the document drafted during the preprimary year. To be identified as long-lasting, such challenges needed to have been mentioned in at least one pedagogical document prior to the start of preprimary education. Challenges varied from more severe, wide-ranging developmental difficulties, such as an intellectual disability or particular language impairment, to more specific and milder challenges, such as holding a pencil properly or

resting peacefully during naptime. An officially diagnosed condition was not required, as this is not a prerequisite for receiving educational support in Finland.

The final sample consisted of 64 children's pedagogical documents (n = 257). Approximately 72% (*n* = 46) received general support (tier 1), approximately 22% (*n* = 14) received intensified support (tier 2), and approximately 6% (*n* = 8) received special support (tier 3) during their preprimary year. The number of documents studied per child varied from 3 to 10, with the average number per child being 4 (mean 4.02). The data are presented in Table 1.

After identifying all cases of challenges in each document, we identified the recordings of support measures, pedagogical practices, and their related assessments. Each child's individual challenge formed a separate case, such that the challenge was the basic unit of analysis. Challenges were analyzed in sequential documents. For example, if a child was described as having challenges with (a) vocabulary, (b) proper pencil holding, and (c) self-regulation in the preprimary year, the descriptions of support measures, objectives, and evaluations regarding each of these challenges was studied as one case. The descriptions of measures, assessments, and evaluations written in any parts of the documents by ECEC professionals were included. The writings of parents, children, or individuals other than ECEC professionals were not included in the investigation.

We found 164 separate cases of continual challenges in the children's documents. The number of challenges per child varied from one to eight and averaged three. The most typical challenges related to socioemotional (39% of the cases) and motoric (20%) issues, followed by challenges of attention and concentration (16%) and language (15%). Other challenges related to self-help skills such as eating or toileting

(6%), sensory impairments (2%), cognitive functioning (2%), and mathematical readiness (2%).

Data Analysis

The documents can be investigated using various methodologies and approaches (Bowen, 2009). In this study, we based our analysis of the differing patterns of writing about children's support measures on the key ideas of discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and text linguistics (Halliday, 2013). In discursive psychology, reality is understood as being socially constructed through language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). As Halliday reiterates, "language is patterned activity," especially regarding the meanings it creates (2013, p. 56). The intensive case analysis of the sequential recordings of each child's challenge revealed three distinct features of the writing: (a) whether there were any descriptions of support in a child's sequential documents, (b) whether the support measures were changed from one recording to the other, and (c) whether the recordings presented a coherent picture of support planning over the years.

To investigate the differences in greater depth at both the content-related and linguistic levels, we applied two concepts of text linguistics to the analysis (Halliday, 2013). First, we investigated the coherence of the written information in the recordings. Coherence is a vital element of communicative text (De Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981), and it can be constructed using linguistic features, such as referencing and linking words (e.g., *thus*, *since*, and *in order to*). For example, we investigated how specifically the measures were justified in the recordings and whether they were revisited later. Additionally, we focused on the relationships between sequential recordings with respect to content (e.g., including the same kind of support practices) and the abovementioned linguistic features that created coherence. Second, we continued the

analysis by investigating the level of linguistic precision of the descriptions (i.e., the vagueness or elaborateness of the descriptions and resulting specificity of the information they offered).

Based on the observed features, the first author followed the ideas of the constant comparison method (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000), creating the initial categorization based on the preliminary observations of the data. All three authors discussed, negotiated, and revisited the initial categories before deciding on the final categorization (see Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). The final categorization, including four patterns of developing support measures, was constructed by comparing the initial categories with various data extracts and other potential categories (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981). After arriving at a common view regarding the final categories, we continued the analysis by categorizing all 164 identified cases of challenges. The first and last authors both analyzed 66% of the individual cases of challenges by coding the continuity of the support measures for each case into the final pattern categories. In 94% of the cases, the authors achieved a clear consensus on the categorization of the support measures. Regarding the remaining 6% of cases, the researchers discussed the cases and concretized the criteria for the categorization in detail to decide which pattern the continuity of the support measures in question represented. For the remaining 34% of the data, the first author independently conducted the analysis and categorization, without any need to clarify the criteria for categorization.

Results

Four patterns of either disjointed or interlinked descriptions of support in sequential pedagogical documents were found: *missing, repetitious, disorganized,* and *explicit*. The key characteristics of the patterns, as well as the proportions of the cases they cover, are presented in Table 2. Next, each pattern is illustrated with a single chronological

example from the data, demonstrating the key characteristics of a particular pattern relating to both research questions. In the examples, the children's names are replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Pattern 1: Missing Descriptions of Support

Missing descriptions of support refers to the recordings (and sometimes, complete documents) in which the descriptions of support are lacking entirely. In total, 29% of the studied cases were categorized as *missing* descriptions of support. In particular, the recordings that were aimed primarily at assessing a previously written plan (typically, recordings at the end of the ECEC year) lacked the descriptions and revisions of support measures, and included only the descriptions of children and their situations. Extract 1 shows this type of *missing* support in three sequential recordings of Samuel's documents.

Extract 1: Samuel

4 years 2 mon	What the child is practicing: Seeking attention is strong: "look," "look"; would not be willing to wait for others to watch or for their own turn to speak Agreements: Practicing good manners. *(ECEC plan)*
5 years 2 mon	Observations: The need for an adult's attention is great, sometimes seeks other children's attention by fooling around. What the child is practicing: showing and controlling one's emotions (anger provokes kicking, hitting, spitting), malicious pleasure (down arrow), intentional laughter, giggling in situations where it's inappropriate (down arrow). Agreements: Showing and controlling emotions. *(ECEC plan)*
6 years 0 mon	Observations: Making contact: pushing others, blowing, "kicking" with the foot -> seeking attention. *(Preprimary plan)*

In Extract 1, in three records written during a 2-year period, Samuel is described as having various challenges regarding social skills. The records include objectives and descriptions of the situation; however, the descriptions of what adults do with and for Samuel to help him overcome the challenges are missing. Descriptions of actions (e.g., "showing and controlling of one's emotions"; "malicious pleasure") and agreements with parents (e.g., "showing and controlling emotions") describe the objectives for Samuel without describing adults' roles in promoting the achievement of objectives. It is notable that although support is mentioned in the two later recordings, detailed descriptions of Samuel's individual difficulties are included every time the plan is revisited.

Pattern 2: Repetitious Descriptions of Methods

Repetitious descriptions, as opposed to *missing* ones, do illustrate a plan for support. However, the descriptions are brief, nonspecific, and repeated almost identically from one recording to another. This type of writing was the most dominant, as 41% of the studied cases were categorized as having this pattern. The key features of the *repetitious* pattern of describing support are illustrated in Extract 2, in which Emma's seven sequential recordings from an almost 5-year period are presented. In every record, Emma is described as having challenges related to her tendency to withdraw from social situations in ECEC.

Extract 2: Emma

1 year 9 mon	Observations: Shyness in new situations. Is wary of new people; however, gets used to them quickly and trusts adults. Objectives/measures: Is encouraged to play with others. Is allowed to take her time to know them. *(ECEC plan)*

2 years 3 mon	Observations: Is still shy toward new adults, but becomes more and more lively all the time. Is also a bit shy in new situations. Objectives/measures: Is encouraged to play with others. *(ECEC plan)*
4 years 4 mon	Measures: Encouragement and cheering when needed. *(ECEC plan)*
5 years 2mon	Observations: Participates in playing with others, but sometimes drops to the background in a big group. Sensitive, but tearfulness has decreased. Cautious in new situations. Objectives/measures: Is cheered in order to encourage her to play with others. *(ECEC plan)*
5 years 4 mon	Evaluation: Does not take a back seat anymore, even in a big group. Also plays in a group other than the one her sister is in. In conflict situations, comes and tells an adult about being "wronged." Cries less and less frequently. Has gained more courage, although sometimes shy in certain situations—e.g., singalong gatherings with the entire daycare center. Measures: Is encouraged to also participate in unfamiliar situations. *(ECEC plan)*
6 years 2 mon	Observations: Observes. *(Preprimary plan)*
6 years 6 mon	Evaluation: Everything okay. *(Preprimary plan)*

In Extract 2, similar descriptions are repeated yearly without changing the content or developing the approach remarkably (e.g., "is encouraged to play with others," "is encouraged," and "encouragement and cheering when needed"). Support is mentioned briefly using vague expressions ("is encouraged," "is allowed," and "is cheered") and a maximum of two sentences. Recordings do not specify what should actually be done with Emma or how professionals should work concretely to help her participate. Similarly, the recordings contain no explicit justification for approaching withdrawal with encouragement. In the last two recordings, the descriptions of support are missing

completely. Support is also described without contextualizing it Emma's situation, such as what does encouragement means to her alone, in the group situation, or in the types of unfamiliar situations that Emma faces. Consequently, the manner of implementing the support remains unclear.

Linguistically, the connection between sequential recordings is lacking, as the evaluation of the planned support (mainly, encouragement) is not illustrated. In its entirety, the situation for Emma seems to remain quite stable. Emma is described as having withdrawn from the age of 1 year and 9 months. However, at the age of 6 years and 6 months, the situation has changed remarkably (i.e., "everything okay"). In the last recordings of Extract 2, the efficacy of the support is presented implicitly and evaluated when Emma is described as moving in the desired direction regarding her development and learning (e.g., "does not take a back seat anymore, even in a big group," "plays in a group other than the one her sister is in," and "has gained more courage, although sometimes shy in certain situations—e.g., singalong gatherings with the entire daycare center"). Consequently, the slightly revisited plan for helping Emma participate is introduced ("is encouraged to also participate in unfamiliar situations"), and in that plan, the word *also* implies a change: From that point onward, encouragement will be provided in new situations. However, the object of the evaluation is Emma and changing her. The need for encouragement becomes justified primarily by Emma's actions, not by the need to improve the support.

Pattern 3: Disorganized Descriptions of Support

In a *disorganized* pattern, support is typically described in a precise and unambiguous manner. However, this is not as systematical feature as the linguistic features in the other patterns are as the supportcan also be unambiguous and general. The *disorganized* features of documenting support were found in the 17% of the cases studied. Unlike the

previously presented patterns, the descriptions of support change over the years. However, the connections between sequential recordings are absent, and the logic of changing the support practices, methods, and/or agreements is missing at both the content and linguistic levels. Therefore, the *disorganized* pattern gives an incoherent view of support from the viewpoint of continuity. This appears in the following recordings of the third extract, in which Sebastian is described as having diverse challenges related to socioemotional well-being and behavior.

Extract 3: Sebastian

2 years 9 mon	Objectives: Methods for showing one's emotions are practiced—is guided to say, "Now I feel angry." Agreements: Naming of emotions is practiced—e.g., teddy bear cards. *(ECEC plan)*
2 years 11mon	Objectives: clear boundaries, consistency. Agreements: consistency; respecting others; waiting one's turn and sharing things; equity. *(ECEC plan)*
4 years 0 mon	Evaluation: It is important to pay attention to the environment; adult support is important for Sebastian; green and red anger cards are used to support the showing of one's emotions; setting boundaries is important -> gentle positive guidance; Sebastian is supported in regulating his own boundaries. *(ECEC plan)*
4 years 6 mon	Observations: He might test adults, and therefore, it is good that the group has good rules, as well as clear and consistent practices. It is, therefore, important that an adult is near and gatherings are motivating to Sebastian. For him, small-group activities are particularly good because there are fewer children. *(ECEC plan)*

4 years 9 mon	Evaluation: Sebastian is able to concentrate better in the group gatherings; every now and then, he is reminded of the thumbs-up practice when he has something to say. *(ECEC plan)*
5 years 9 mon	Observations: Daily transitions, waiting, and supervised situations are difficult; hard to concentrate. Objectives: Help with concentration during small-group activities. Sebastian is cheered and motivated to participate. Agreements: an adult participates in playing in order to prevent the play from going wild. *(ECEC plan)*
6 years 0 mon	Objectives: Nice memories and relationships with friends, and the ability to concentrate will improve. Methods: is trained daily by proceeding to one instruction at a time if needed; personal, quiet working space (with adult support). *(Preprimary plan)*
6 years 2 mon	Follow-up: Transition to lunch with a special assistant and another boy and sitting next to an adult. *(Preprimary plan)*
6 years 4 mon	Follow-up: A lot of personal support for calming emotions and/or improving alertness. *(Preprimary plan)*

In this extract, Sebastian's recordings illustrate how the connections between various recordings are weak, both within a single recording and between recordings. The recordings bounce from one matter to the other, due to the manner of changing the support measures and describing varying agreements without explicitly assessing their efficacy or citing earlier recordings. Other cohesion is also lacking. For example, new support measures are often introduced (e.g., teddy bear cards in the first recording, red and green anger pictures in the third, and a special assistant in the eighth) but are not revisited. In fact, practices in the preceding recording are typically not mentioned again

after they are introduced. Therefore, information about whether the newly introduced methods are meant to accompany or replace the previous ones is missing.

Similarly, when the assessment is written, it typically focuses on introducing new and changing methods (e.g., “green and red anger cards are used to support the showing of one’s emotions” and “transition to lunch with a special assistant and another boy and sitting next to an adult”). The actual assessment of the functionality of the support measures and the justifications for new ones is typically lacking. As with the previous types of writing, the aim of the assessment is sometimes to evaluate the child as an individual in different learning environments (e.g., “Sebastian is able to concentrate better in the group gatherings”). The *disorganized* characteristics are also evident when Sebastian’s challenges are described. At the age of 2 years and 9 months, Sebastian is described as having challenges related to naming emotions. Thereafter, the main challenges seem to be his lack of concentration and sometimes, his ability to identify, understand, and control emotions. The challenges and objectives are, therefore, described differently in sequential recordings without defining the reasons for changing them.

Although the connections and coherence of the writing are typically missing at both the content and linguistic levels, the linkage between different kinds of information is implied at times. In Extract 3, at the age of 5 years and 9 months, the description, “adult participates in playing in order to prevent the play from going wild” implies the goal of the support: to prevent playing from becoming wild. At the age of 4 years and 6 months, the linkage between observations (“he might test adults”) and practice (“and, therefore, it is good that the group has good rules, as well as clear and consistent practices”) is described. Similarly, the descriptions vary according to how they contextualize where or when a certain support measure is provided. While some

expressions define the place of the support (e.g., “transition to lunch with a special assistant”), others remain very general regarding the descriptions of practices (e.g., “help with concentration during small-group activities”) and omit the child’s individual situation and group context from the planning.

Pattern 4: Explicit Descriptions of Support

In the *explicit* patterns, support is evaluated and developed systematically. The pattern is the most infrequently found category, however, as the features of *explicitness* in documenting support were identified in only 13% of the cases studied. In *explicit* patterns, the recordings refer to the preceding recordings and documents that are cited *explicitly* sometimes. Descriptions are typically detailed, contextualized, and linguistically unambiguous. They are also often precise, even though the precision varies. In the fourth extract, we evaluated and developed the support planned during a period of 2 years and 5 months for Anna, who has sensory integration challenges.

Extract 4: Anna

4 years 4 mon	Strengths and needs: Dresses by herself, but is attentive about clothing—that it not be tight, etc. *(ECEC plan)*
5 years 0 mon	The main challenge: challenges in dressing situations. Support measures at home: dressing situations become calmer when Anna herself chooses clothes from two options. Methods: Anna can choose between two options, if this is possible; Anna is cheered on by others to dress by herself; she can readjust the clothes if they are tight; pictures as a help in dressing situations; anticipation of what needs to be worn; adult support and guidance in dressing situations. *(plan for intensified support)*

5 years 7 mon	Evaluation: Anna has developed very significantly during autumn 2014. Getting dressed has become much easier, and hardly any temper tantrums have occurred. Anna also clearly tolerates unpleasant sensations better, such as clothes that feel unpleasant or doing her hair up in a ponytail. However, challenges in sensory integration still exist, but they stand out mainly in auditory sensations or when things feel unpleasant in some other way . . . Support measures have been sufficient and, for Anna, effective and practical; so, it will be of benefit to also continue using them in the future . . . We have noticed some functional practices in Anna's group that are worth continuing. Dressing situations: dressing situations need to be calm. Not too many children in the hallway . . . (continues) *(plan for intensified support)*
6 years 0 mon	Evaluation: When considering Anna, attention still needs to be paid to sensitive sensations—e.g., when getting her clothes on; what feels good, what doesn't. Anna is a sensitive girl in other respects as well. Reassessment of the situation in autumn 2015 . . . Innings 2014/2015 has gone magnificently for Anna. Putting clothes on goes nicely. Intensified support is continued until autumn holiday 2015, after which the need for it (if any) is assessed. The situation has also calmed down at home. *(plan for intensified support)*
6 years 4 mon	Main challenge: sensory defensiveness. Methods: practicing emotion skills . . . choices are given, and putting on uncomfortable clothes is not forced on Anna; anticipating challenging situations is important. *(plan for intensified support)*

6 years 7 mon Evaluation: emotion skills have strengthened, and sensory defensiveness has not been especially visible in everyday life in familiar environments and among familiar adults and children. *(plan for intensified support)*

In this extract, support is developed systematically in sequential recordings. According to the description, at the age of 4 years and 4 months, Anna "dresses by herself, but is attentive about clothing." At the age of 5 years, the support measures are related to situations in which Anna is expected to dress herself (e.g., "Anna can choose between two options, if this is possible"; "she can readjust the clothes, if they are tight"; "pictures as help in dressing situations"; and "adult support and guidance in dressing situations"). Additionally, support is both evaluated and justified explicitly by illustrating how "support measures have been sufficient and, for Anna, effective and practical; so, it is of benefit to also continue using them in the future," and indicating that "we have noticed some functional practices in Anna's group that are worth continuing." The efficacy of the support is evaluated by referring to the changes in Anna's behavior within a certain specific period ("Anna has developed very significantly during autumn 2014"). Anna's challenges are specified in relation to the specific context within which they appear (e.g., "however, challenges in sensory integration still exist, but they stand out mainly in auditory sensations or when things feel unpleasant in some other way").

In *explicit* descriptions of support, information about children's situations is utilized as evidence to evaluate the efficacy of support measures instead of evaluating the children only. In addition to evaluating past and present situations, the future is explicitly planned, and the prospective reevaluation of Anna's support is scheduled ("intensified support is continued until autumn holiday 2015, after which the need for it

[if any] is assessed"). The accomplishment of set goals is also described *explicitly*: at the age of 6 years ("putting clothes on goes nicely" and "the situation has also calmed down at home") and again at the age of 6 years and 7 months ("emotion skills have strengthened, and sensory defensiveness has not been especially visible in everyday life in familiar environments and among familiar adults and children"). This kind of *explicit* writing increases the coherence of the text, as it connects the components of a single recording and the earlier recordings at the content-related and linguistic levels.

Extract 4 is also an example of the elaborate and unambiguous way of describing support measures (e.g. "Anna can choose between two options, if this is possible"), although more vague and imprecise descriptions are included as well (e.g., "adult support and guidance in dressing situations" and "practicing of emotion skills"). The agreements and evaluations regarding support and Anna's home situation are also described (first, "dressing situations become calmer when Anna herself chooses clothes from two options" and later, "the situation has also calmed down at home").

Discussion

In this research, cumulative pedagogical documents were studied, based on a longitudinal design. We aimed to identify the patterns of describing support measures in sequential documents and the content-related and linguistic features that are peculiar to these patterns. In the analysis, four chronological patterns of describing the support measures over the years were found: *missing* (29%), *repetitious* (41%), *disorganized* (17%), and *explicit* (13%). The findings show that with the exception of the last pattern (*explicit*), the development, justification, and validation of the support measures systematically over time was lacking in 87% of the cases, and the descriptions of support were imprecise, incoherent, or nonexistent. However, when support was

carefully revisited, further defined, and/or regenerated, and its efficacy was assessed in sequential recordings, as was done in the last pattern of *explicit* descriptions, the child's documents exhibited a coherent continuity.

The sequential descriptions of support were most typically *repetitious* (41%), meaning that recordings of children's support remained more or less the same. It is noteworthy and alarming that in 70% of the cases (both the *missing* and *repetitious* patterns), children's support measures and interventions were not developed over the years. Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) suggest that this may be due to numerous underlying factors, including the possibility that teachers have made an informed interpretation of the contents as being valid and meaningful over time. However, it is possible that the contents are not evaluated systematically, despite their continued use. As children's support should be developed systematically, the main benefit of the *disorganized* pattern, compared to the *missing* and *repetitious* ones, is the active development of support measures and interventions. This suggests that the development of the *disorganized* pattern might be deliberate. However, when support measures are changed randomly without fitting them *explicitly* to children's needs and assessment data, it is impossible to say whether these coincidental changes to support measures are any better than stagnant measures that remain the same for years, especially if they have been decided consciously.

The results of this study confirmed what is known currently about varying, inconsistent, and vague documentation practices (see, e.g., Karvonen & Huynh, 2007; Ruble et al., 2010; Räty et al., 2018; Sanches-Ferreira et al., 2013) and about focusing on describing children instead of pedagogy (see Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013; Hjörne & Säljö, 2004; Isaksson et al., 2007). Moreover, the connections between children's needs, objectives, methods, and evaluations were unclear typically, which

coincides with previous research findings (Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Ruble et al., 2010).

The vague practice of documenting support measures is problematic in several ways, as the reader must interpret how to implement the support concretely. Exact expressions of measures (e.g., “a little object in hand to play in shared gatherings”) direct pedagogical practices more carefully and univocally than vague expressions (e.g., “support for attention and concentration”). When the descriptions of support are predominantly missing or lack systematic development, the actual aim of the pedagogical documents regarding the planning of systematic support measures is left unrealized. Consequently, the possibility to exploit the benefits of pedagogical documents is missed (see also Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014). Moreover, in keeping with the principles of RTI (see Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2013), the reliable evaluation of support and children’s learning is difficult when objectives and methods are described ambiguously (see also Michinowicz et al., 1995; Räty et al., 2018). In the studied documents, when any evaluation was documented, it focused predominantly on the assessment of an individual child without explicitly evaluating the efficacy of the support measures or using evaluation data to revise objectives and measures. This observation coincides with the previous research findings, which have shown that the evaluations are the weakest parts of the documents (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017) and that educators tend to document mainly summative and detached assessments of children (Andreasson & Asplund Carlsson, 2013).

Study Limitations

We investigated in depth the patterns and characteristics of written records about support measures of children with SEN. However, the characteristics of the design and

the research context may limit the transferability of the results. The data included the documents (N = 257) of 64 children with SEN, which may be considered a small sample. Additionally, due to the significant variance in the practices of providing ECEC services, all municipal and class-related variations in practices are unlikely to be included in the data. To meet these limitations, our sampling method aimed to collect sufficient data to capture the known variations in the phenomena of interest. According to Gobo (2011), such an approach can be defined as highlighting the "social significance of a sample" (p. 2). In keeping with the discourse analytical tradition (see, e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992), the document data used in this study are naturally occurring, which is understood as a feature that increases the reliability of the results because the researcher has not influenced the contents of the data.

In addition, the Finnish context needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the transferability of the results; this includes the Finnish integrated model of providing both education and care in ECEC settings, the prerequisite-free provision of educational support, and universally-drafted pedagogical documents. It must also be noted that Finnish ECEC and preprimary education are based on an internationally divergent implementation of RTI (e.g., Finnish RTI as an administrative framework versus United States RTI as a specific instruction for supporting children; see Björn et al., 2016). Despite these limitations, the study can offer new insights into documenting support measures in sequential pedagogical documents related to early intervention and RTI practices in Finland, the United States, and internationally.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Based on these results, it is questionable whether the studied documents meet the overall aim of pedagogical documents—that is, to develop meaningful, suitable, and

research-based interventions and support for children. In general, the results highlight the need for more profound discussion and internalization of the key aims of pedagogical documents. This need has been indicated in several other studies over the years yet remains relevant today (e.g., Andreasson et al., 2013; Rosas et al., 2009). In particular, the missing descriptions of support seem to reflect the fundamental idea of describing a problematic child as the initial aim of the documents. Therefore, pedagogical documents turn into reports or statements of children's problematic situations. As Andreasson and Carlsson state (2013, p. 62), "It is hard to see how children could benefit from these descriptions of their shortcomings and failures." Conversely, other patterns that include pedagogical planning, especially the *explicit* type, reflect the understanding of a pedagogical document as a plan and as an instrument for making agreements and taking responsibility for systematic support. In such cases, the connection between the evaluation of the child's progress and the revision of the plan are closely interlinked (see, e.g., Etscheidt, 2003). Based on intervention studies (e.g., Boavida, Aguiar, & McWilliams, 2014; Poppes et al., 2002; Pretti-Frontczak & Bricker, 2000), it has been found that when educators are trained to write appropriate IEPs, the quality of the contents increases; therefore, training for educators should be considered.

In studying pedagogical documents, the unpredictability of their later use needs to be taken into account. This means that although the documents orient educational practices, they are also realized in practice by the professionals who use them (see also Yell & Stecker, 2003), resulting in practices and documented plans that are not automatically similar. Further research is needed into how documentation and the actualization of planned support are interconnected with children's learning and development. Previous research has given some indicators that the link between

documentation and the practice of supporting children is typically weak (see, e.g., Kwon et al., 2011; Lynch & Beare, 1990; White, Garrett, Kearns, & Grisham-Brown, 2003). When written documents are investigated, there seem to be inconsistencies between theory, recommendations and the actual documentation practices, and this disconnect can also be found in everyday ECEC practices and the support offered to children with SEN.

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Table 1. The Research Data.

Name of the document	n
ECEC plan	172
Preprimary education plan	48
Preprimary education plan including planning for intensified support	11
Additional plan for intensified support	18
IEP	8

Note. $N = 257$

Table 2. Four Chronological Patterns of Developing Support Measures in Pedagogical Documents Over the Years.

Chronological pattern	Simplified description of content	Key linguistic feature	Coherence	Number of cases (*N*=164)	% of cases
1 Missing	No descriptions	-	-	48	29
2 Repetitious	Unchanging support	Repetitious word choices, generic utterances	Relatively clear	67	41
3 Disorganized	Unconnected yet changed support	Lack of linking words, inconsistent word choices	Lacking	28	17
4 Explicit	Systematically developed support	Argumentative writing, specific utterances	Clear	21	13

III

INTERTEXTUAL VOICES OF CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND SPECIALISTS IN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

by

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Intertextual Voices of Children, Parents, and Specialists in Individual Education Plans

Abstract

Planning support and education services requires multifaceted information from professionals, parents, and children. Despite this, educators have emphasized professional opinions in individual education plans (IEPs), whereas the perspectives of children and parents have remained inconsequential. In this study, we examine the intertextual voices of children, parents, and specialists in IEPs (N = 287) drafted in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC). The findings show that educators use intertextual voices to serve the following functions: 1) Creating a more multidimensional image of a child, 2) presenting evidence for their argumentation, and 3) assigning the responsibility to others. Consequently, the children, parents, and specialists were positioned as either speakers without influence, legitimators of educator's knowledge, or powerful decision-makers.

Keywords: individual education plan (IEP); early childhood education and care (ECEC); intertextuality; voice

Introduction

The planning of early childhood education and care (ECEC) should be a team decision-making process which is based on the multifaceted information of children's strengths, interests, needs, and viewpoints (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2000; see also Trivette & Dunst, 2000). Participation of children, parents, and specialists (e.g., medical professionals, therapists, and psychologists) offers educators a holistic view to planning, which is of particular importance for children who are identified as having special educational needs (SEN; see, e.g., Bayat, Mindes, & Covitt, 2010; Forbes, 2008; Goepel, 2009; Karila, 2006; Karlsdottir & Garoarsdottir, 2010; Røn Larsen, 2016; Trivette & Dunst, 2000). The importance of participation and multi-voiced planning is often justified for two reasons. First, children's right to participate is presented as an absolute value of an educational system and a society (see Raby, 2014). Second, the active participation of children and parents in planning has been found to have positive effects for a child. For example, parental participation is suggested to have an influence on a child's achievement in school, when the achievements of older children are studied (e.g., Sebastian, Moon, & Cummingham, 2017). In addition, a positive association is reported between students' IEP participation, their knowledge about their IEPs (Royer, 2017), and their academic outcomes (e.g., Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2009).

In this study, we examine how the voices of children, parents, and specialists are included in the IEPs drafted in Finnish ECEC. Here, IEP is used as an umbrella concept to cover all individual plans that are drafted for children, according to Finnish legislation and curricula. These plans include *ECEC plans* and *preprimary education plans* as well as plans specifically aimed at planning the support for children who are identified as having SEN (i.e., *plans for intensified support* and *individual education plans*). In practice, the process

of drafting IEPs is typically actualized through pre-organized meetings among children, parents, early childhood educators, and, as needed, specialists. Thus, IEPs are considered practical tools to enhance the involvement of children and parents (e.g. Alasuutari, Markström, & Vallberg-Roth, 2014; Buldu, 2010).

We examine the participation of children, parents, and specialists through the concept of intertextual voices. We are especially interested in whether and how the knowledge of children, parents, and specialists is presented and utilized and thus, how they become epistemically positioned in the IEPs. Following Bednarek (2006), epistemic positioning can be defined as "the expression of assessments concerning knowledge" (p. 635), which illustrates, for example, the basis and (un)certainty of a piece of intertextual information (p. 638). Then, one's epistemic position in a particular situation can be seen as a socially constructed entitlement of being considered a (in)valid informant and possessor of (in)accurate knowledge. Examining epistemic positioning is of great importance since in addition to being included in an IEP, the voices of children and parents should also be influential and utilized in planning. In previous research, the focus has typically been either on the children's (e.g., Paananen & Lipponen, 2016) or the parents' participation (e.g., Karila & Alasuutari, 2012; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014) separately. Investigations of multiple voices, including also specialists, have been less frequent, although educators' practices to include these voices in educational planning are important for successful participation (Keyes, 2002).

The Concept of Participation

Participation is fundamentally interlinked with power relations. In the broadest sense, participation can be understood as a free space to have a voice (see Horgan et al., 2017).

Then, participation is enabled by hearing different voices and renouncing dominance, thereby fostering more powerful engagement and democratic practices (Gallagher, 2008). However, participation is not only about seeking views; it also about sharing some influential power with others (Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall, 2004; Shier, 2001; Sinclair, 2004). Consequently, participation can be understood as a form of institutional governance, following Foucauldian thinking. According to Foucault, power is understood as something that people do in social relations, not something that a particular person or institution automatically possesses (Gallagher, 2008). Thus, participation is not only about giving away some of one's power or empowering others, it is also about a relationship between individuals (Gallagher, 2008). Therefore, the starting point for investigating participation should focus on the relational nature of power as a collective act (Gallagher, 2008; see also Raby, 2014). This starting point should lead researchers to study the relationships in which power is exercised as well as the specific techniques of governance in participative initiatives (Gallagher, 2008).

Even though participation is emphasized, in all the institutions related to children's lives, the participation of especially the youngest children (Lansdown, 2005) and their chances to influence through participation (Thomas, 2007) seem to remain marginal. The same kind of idea is presented in studies investigating parental participation framed by the concept of educational partnership (e.g. Goepel, 2009; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Karila & Alasuutari, 2012). These studies state that even though partnership is emphasized, relationships between parents and educators appear unequal, and parent's influential power is weak.

In Hart's (1992) eight-step ladders of participation and Shier's (2001) five-stage model, the level of participation increases, starting with mainly listening to others and eventually reaching the consequential sharing of power and responsibility. Shier (2001) states that in order to achieve participation, the adults working with children, procedural arrangements, and policy-level structures need to enable and support the active and powerful role of children. Hart (1992) defines non-participation as a situation where adults use children to implement their own wishes, to run adult-led initiatives, or to reserve all the influential power for themselves. In the context of drafting a child's IEP, Goepel (2009) observes that "'Having a say' is about the child being empowered and engaging much more fully than in the giving of allegiance to well-intentioned but predetermined targets" (p. 131). Similarly, in Epstein's (1995) framework for six types of parental involvement, which includes parenting, communicating, volunteering, contributing to children's learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community, the power to participate in a meaningful way becomes emphasized.

Examining Intertextual Voices

In this study, we approach participation especially in terms of power and knowing in a specific pedagogical practice, an IEP. We investigate the intertextuality in IEPs, an analytical concept that follows the discourse analytic tradition (see, e.g., Fairclough, 1992a, 1992b; Kamberelis & Scott, 1992; Linell, 1998). This is due to our understanding of IEPs as essentially intertextual: they are written, based on discussions with parents and specialists, and rooted in the institutional practices of writing (see also Günther, Raitakari & Juhila, 2015; Ravotas & Berkenkotter, 1998). In addition to education, intertextuality in documents have been studied in many professional fields, such as psychiatry and therapy

(e.g., Ravotas & Berkenkotter, 1998), criminal law (e.g. Komter, 2006), mental health care and social work (e.g. Günther et al., 2015), and pediatrics (e.g., Kelle, Seehaus & Bollig, 2015; Schryer, Bell, Mian, Sparrord & Lingard, 2011).

Considering intertextuality, we apply the concept of intertextual voices to refer to the expression of different viewpoints in IEPs. An intertextual voice in a text represents a perspective of someone other than the author, which the author has taken from one context (e.g., a discussion with a parent or a statement of a medical professional) and referred, cited, or otherwise borrowed in an IEP (see Fairclough, 2003; Linell, 1998). In some studies, the same kinds of expressed voices are approached by using the concept of reported speech (see, e.g., Mayes, 1990). Intertextuality and multiple voices can be seen as inevitable parts of using language and creating texts. Kamberelis and Scott (1992) refer to Bakhtin (1981) when they say that constructing a text is always a process of responses to and further development of pre-existing discourses. Therefore, a text always relies on what was previously said and written (see also Kamberelis & Scott, 1992). Even though intertextuality can be seen as a fundamental part of constructing texts, the use of intertextual voices is not coincidental but the author's choice (e.g., Clark & Gerrig, 1990). The use of a voice from someone other than the author can have multiple functions, from justifying a professional opinion to dramatizing events (Ravotas & Berkenkotter, 1998). Therefore, intertextual voices are always socially constructed, and they can be used differently on different occasions (see also Komulainen, 2007).

Expressing voices in texts can take many forms. Voices can be expressed as completely separate; they can be partly merged and partly independent; they can even be contradictory or merged entirely into a double-voiced text (Bakhtin, 1981). Therefore, intertextuality can

be a great source of ambivalence (Fairclough, 1992a), as various types of mixing, blending, and blurring different voices are often found (Linell, 1998). As recontextualizing discourse is a process of meaning-making, the relations and proportions of things may change when texts are cited (Linell, 1998). A writer can, for example, deny, confirm, or adopt the viewpoint of an intertextual voice as well as maintain an objective, negative, amused, or positive stance toward it (Aikhenvald, 2007; Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992a). Moreover, voices can be discriminated against, subdued, highlighted, or even silenced as well as endorsed and/or re-perspectivized (Linell, 1998).

Previous Research on Intertextuality in IEPs

Previous research has shown strong and consistent professional dominance in practices related to the drafting of IEPs (see, e.g., Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Goepel, 2009; Isaksson, 2007). In this process, children are typically positioned as objects of documentation rather than participants in it (Markström, 2015). In a study of children's participation in IEPs drafted in Finnish ECEC, Paananen and Lipponen (2016) found that educators only referred to the views of a child in 23 out of 380 documented agreements between parents and educators. Moreover, in only seven agreements could children's voice be considered influential. Paananen and Lipponen (2016) also perceived that children typically had a say on issues that did not collide with pre-existing rules and practices and that were directly connected to them, such as playing (see also Elfström Pettersson, 2015; Gallagher, 2008). This was most visible concerning children who are identified as having SEN, who often had the power to support pre-existing arrangements but not the power to initiate constitutive changes in practices (Paananen & Lipponen, 2016). Internationally, children's everyday life experiences and knowledge are also often overshadowed or

positioned as anecdotal in educational decision-making (Røn Larsen, 2016; see also Ravotas & Berkenkotter, 1998).

The same kinds of restrictions have also been found with parental participation (see Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Isaksson, 2007; Karila & Alasuutari, 2012), which is described by Skrtic (2005) as often more symbolic than meaningful. Blackwell and Rossetti (2014) verbalize the predominant situation in the context of IEPs as one in which professionals "exert considerable control over the direction of IEP meetings and content, while families are frequently passive participants" (p. 11).

Although some studies have shown that parents are predominantly satisfied with the IEP process (see, e.g., Fish, 2008), research has mainly reported parental dissatisfaction, especially among parents with a high socioeconomic status (Reiman, Beck, Coppola, & Engiles, 2010; Slade, Eisenhower, Carter, & Blacher, 2018; see also Rosetti et al., 2018). Moreover, culturally and linguistically diverse families face barriers to participation (e.g. Pang, 2011; Rossetti et al., 2018). In general, in a study by Zeitlin and Curcic (2014), parents did not see IEPs as communication or partnership tools but as professionally led tools for problematizing children's situation (see also Røn Larsen, 2016, p. 86). Moreover, parents did not think that IEPs focused on the right things, found them difficult to understand as well as objectifying from the child's perspective (Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014).

Discussions that precede the drafting of children's IEPs are seen as a fundamental part of especially hearing parental voices. Ideally, these discussions are democratic conversations where parents, educators, and specialists raise their views (Warren, 2017). However, it has been found that parents sometimes hold back their viewpoints during the discussions (Martin, Huber Marshall, & Sale, 2004; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011), and even when they

express their views, they lack opportunities to contribute to significant aspects of planning (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Karila & Alasuutari, 2012; Zeitlin & Curcic, 2014). Karila and Alasuutari (2012) conclude that this sets educational and pedagogical practices "outside the sphere of parental involvement and educational partnership" (p. 22). Consequently, even though the intertextual voices of children and parents can be found in documents, the impact of these perspectives on pedagogical work is not self-evident as educators have power over ECEC practices (see, e.g., Paananen & Lipponen, 2016; Thomas, 2007).

Contrary to the situation of children and parents, specialists seem to have a strong position in having their voices heard. This is somewhat predictable as specialists' discipline-specific knowledge serve as an important resource for educators when they plan education for children who are identified as having SEN (see also Forbes, 2008). According to previous research, compared with general educators, specialized professionals voice their ideas more often during discussions related to drafting IEPs (Martin et al., 2004; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011), and general educators consider their role important (Arivett, Rust, Brissie, & Dansby, 2007). Especially in the case of children who are identified as having SEN, the viewpoints of a large variety of specialists are often utilized in planning (Barnes & Turner, 2001; Daniels, 2006; Kovanen, 2002).

This Study and Research Questions

To conclude, children's and parents' roles seem to be weak when IEPs are drafted, and their voices seldom influence agreements or decisions on pedagogical practices. It has also been stated that some children (e.g., children identified as having SEN) would have less possibilities to participate than others (e.g., children without SEN). However, one key aim

of drafting IEPs is to involve the children and the parents in meaningful ways that will enable full, consequential participation. Therefore, in this study, we are interested in how children, parents, and specialists are described as informants and participants in IEPs in relation to the pedagogical decision-making process. We aim to answer the following research questions:

1) How are the voices of children, parents, and specialists linguistically presented in IEPs?
2) What functions do these intertextual voices serve in the IEPs?
3) How are the intertextual voices of children, parents, and specialists epistemically positioned in the IEPs?

The Method

The IEP Process in Finnish ECEC

Finnish ECEC covers services for children up to approximately seven years of age and includes preprimary education in the year preceding compulsory comprehensive school. In practice, all Finnish children has an IEP in ECEC even though the names of these documents vary. Since 2004, in the Finnish core curriculum for ECEC (NRDCWH, 2003), drafting an IEP document called an ECEC plan for every child has been advised, and since the 2015 legislative reform, this has been mandatory (Early Childhood Education Act 540/2018). Moreover, in preprimary education, a preprimary education plan is drafted for most six-year-olds, including all children who are identified as having SEN (Basic Education Act, 628/1998). This document can be replaced with support-centered documents when a child's need for support is more long-term or extensive. In the Finnish

context, these support-centered documents are called plans for intensified support (Basic Education Act 628/1998) and individual education plans (Basic Education Act 628/1998).

The legislation and curricula for ECEC in Finland describe cooperation with children's parents as a starting point of ECEC and the children's participation as one of the key aims and operational principles of early education (Basic Education Act 628/1998; Early Childhood Education Act 540/2018; FNBE, 2016, 2017). The Finnish National Core Curricula for ECEC (FNBE, 2017) and preprimary education (FNBE, 2016) explicitly underline the importance of all children's and parents' participation in compiling IEPs and planning children's education. Regarding ECEC (FNBE, 2017), the following instructions are given:

> The personnel prepare the plan in collaboration with the child's guardians. The child's opinions and wishes must be heard and taken into account in the plan. The personnel are responsible for finding appropriate methods for determining the child's viewpoints. (p.11)

In practice, these discussions are typically arranged in ECEC centers twice a year when parents are invited to discuss and to draft an IEP with a teacher or other staff member (FNBE, 2017). In addition, daily discussions with parents are encouraged. For younger children, participation is typically ensured through interviews or daily discussions with them and at home prior to the IEP meeting. Additionally, educators can offer children opportunities to participate in IEP meetings with their parents, which is often the case in preprimary education. Moreover, children and parents have traditionally been offered the opportunity to include their own writing in the IEP, or drawing, in the case of a young child.

In addition to children and parents, cooperation with specialists is also required (Basic Education Act 628/1998; Early Childhood Education Act, 540/2018; FNBE, 2016, 2017). This is especially emphasized when a child is identified as having SEN. Support services and rehabilitation are integrated into a child's daily schedule in education (Kovanen, 2002; Rantala, Uotinen, & McWilliam, 2009).

In this study, we focus solely on the writings in the IEPs written by educators and do not take the writings of parents or possible drawings of children into account. We have chosen this approach because the key aim of seeking children's and parents' perspectives during the IEP process is to utilize them in planning (FNBE, 2017, p. 11). The educators are in a powerful position in the process of drafting IEPs as they write the viewpoints of children and parents as well as objectives and support measures into the documents, and even more importantly, will implement the content written in the IEPs. Therefore, during the process of planning children's education, educators act as gate-keepers (see Linell, 1998), and are able to add and omit content and to decide how voices are presented and utilized in pedagogical planning (see also Alasuutari, 2014; Røn Larsen, 2016).

Research Data and Sampling

We collected research data from 23 Finnish preprimary education classes in five municipalities during 2015–2016. The data include 287 IEPs that were drafted for 108 children within their years in ECEC and preprimary education. In this study, we included both *ECEC plans* and *preprimary education plans* as well as plans specifically aimed at planning the support for a child who is identified as having SEN (*plans for intensified support* and *individual education plans*). In this study, we call all of the studied documents

IEPs. Respectively, support-centered plans are drafted only after the identification of SEN. The research data is presented in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 somewhere here, please)

In recruiting the participating municipalities, we applied purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), aimed at maximizing variations in the data. Finnish municipalities are very independent in terms of local regulations for IEPs; consequently, municipal differences are notable. Municipalities can, for example, choose the forms for the IEPS and set instructions for educational support. By choosing municipalities based on varying pedagogical practices, geographical locations, and size, we were able to include more variations in the data.

The selection of preprimary classes in each municipality was also informed by the principle of maximum variation. We asked the ECEC administrators to do the selection and instructed them to search for preprimary classes that differed as much as possible in terms of the location of the class in the municipality, the socioeconomic backgrounds of the families in the area, pedagogical practices, and other diversifying elements. As a result, the total number of preprimary classes was 23, with a variance of one[1] to 10 classes per municipality.

Finally, we applied two kinds of sampling techniques to choose participating children from the selected preprimary classes. In 10 of the classes, we asked the guardians of all children for research consent. However, as we wanted to achieve data that would purposefully over-represent the documents of children who are identified as having SEN, in 13 classes, we

[1] The less-populated municipalities had only one preprimary education class.

only asked the guardians of children who had been identified as having SEN to give their consent. This kind of sampling can be described as group characteristics sampling (Patton, 2015). Consequently, in the research data, 27% of the children were identified as having SEN, although in Finnish ECEC, 7% of children had been identified of having SEN in 2016 (National Institute for Health and Welfare [NIHW], 2017).

We followed the ethical guidelines for data collection (Christians, 2011) by protecting the anonymity of municipalities and the children's identities by applying pseudonymity. We requested written research permission from the municipal authorities and written informed consent from the children's guardians. We also informed the guardians of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Analysis

The first phase of the analysis can be described as searching for intertextual voices as we collected all the expressions from the IEPs that indicated the presence of intertextual information. We observed key linguistic features and markers that typically indicate the presence of intertextuality (see Fairclough, 1992a; Mayes, 1990). Intertextualized expressions were either direct (e.g., Anna said, "I need help") or indirect (e.g., Anna said that she needs help) presentations of a voice (see Fairclough, 1992b, p. 274). In addition, pronoun choices, verb tenses, and words indicating a time and place of an event were observed when searching for intertextuality (Mayes, 1990).

In addition to the aforementioned explicit linguistic markers, intertextuality can also be constructed implicitly without quotations and reporting clauses and without specifically indicating the source of the information (see Linell, 1998). Schryer et al. (2011) refer to

this kind of insufficiently attributed citations as incomplete or partial expressions. Consequently, while coding the intertextual expressions during the analysis, we had to elaborate our definition of intertextuality through three inclusion/exclusion criteria:

1) Explicit expressions that illustrated intertextuality through direct citations and quotation marks were included in further analysis.
2) Implicit expressions of intertextuality that did not name any specific source directly but the source could be identified from contextual information were included in further analysis.
3) Unverbalized voices and expressions that blended multiple voices without indicating their source were excluded from further analysis.

The last type signals that multiple viewpoints might be utilized, even though the constitution of the team making this decision is left unverbalized. As we specifically wanted to investigate the voices of children, parents, and specialists, we categorized these kinds of expressions as double-voiced and omitted them from further analysis. In our data, leaving the source of unverbalized voices might be due to the Finnish convention that strives towards shared agreement between ECEC professionals and parents in the drafting of IEPs. In writing, this can lead to merging of viewpoints and voices as ECEC professionals record shared but not personified agreements to the IEPs (see Karila & Alasuutari, 2012). In this convention, however, the voices of a children, parents, and specialists are weakened.

After utilizing the above-mentioned selection criteria, we found that in 15.3% of the studied IEPs (N=287) including all children with or without identified SEN, educators described children's voices in their writing. Regarding parents, the percentage was 24.4%

and for specialists, 15.0%. However, when the IEPs of children who had been identified of having SEN were investigated separately, a child's voice was found more often (22.2%) as well as the voices of parents (33.3%) and specialists (31.3%) compared to the documents of children who were not identified of having SEN. Table 2 presents the prevalence of the inclusion of voices in the IEP-specific investigation and comparisons of these prevalences between the documents of children who are identified as having SEN and the documents of children who are not.

(Insert Table 2 somewhere here, please)

After the first phase, we moved on to examine the typical features of intertextualizing voices. Then, we classified the expressions containing intertextual information based on the information source and investigated what kinds of linguistic features, such as subjects, nouns, and types of quoting, were unique in references to a particular voice. Next, we investigated the reasons for which educators used the intertextual references to these voices in the documents. In studying this, we applied the concept of linguistic function in relation to the use of a specific text or a section of it and its consequences: what is done with a particular text. In studying these functions, we paid attention to intertextual references of voices in a larger textual context. This included reading the entire IEPs from the point of view of what educators did with intertextuality. In studying functions, the relationship between intertextual references and educators' voices in the text turned out to be important.

Finally, we focused on if and how educators constructed children, parents, and specialists as epistemic authorities when citing intertextual voices. In analyzing epistemic positions, we investigated whose information was presented as relevant or irrelevant, how this was done, and how educators possibly brought out their own stance toward the knowledge of

others. In studying the writer's stance, we observed linguistic markers of emotions, such as specific words and writing that indicated distance-taking, agreement, or a neutral stance. Finally, we studied how definitively the educators presented the information that was constructed through the use of references to the intertextual voices.

Findings

Intertextual Voices: Children, Parents, and Specialists

The explicitness of including children's, parents', and specialists' voices in the IEPs varied remarkably. The characteristic intertextual markers and linguistic features of describing these three voices are presented in Table 3. Next, we present how the intertextual voices are described in IEPs. All names used in the extracts are pseudonyms.

(Insert Table 3 somewhere here, please)

Child's voice. When describing children's voices, educators often use the first person structure and direct quotations in the sentences. Consequently, it seems as though the child is speaking with her or his own voice and words, as in the following extracts:

Extract 1

Oliver: "I am good at playing and swimming.
I can play ice hockey and can play games.
I can't skate backwards, I can't fly."

Extract 2

Sleeps peacefully with a toy dog under his arm and wakes up as a happy “mää helään” (I wake up) [2] – boy.

In Extract 1, Oliver’s voice is presented by quoting his self-assessment word for word. Such quotations stand out from other text written with standard language, as their sentence structure is simpler and shorter. They can be seen as reproducing a child’s way of speaking and are probably written while the child dictates. Extract 2 is an example of the use of so-called scare quotes, single words or short expressions in quotation marks (Fairclough, 1992a). The use of the scare quote (“mää helään” – boy) can be seen as an expression of the writer’s epistemological stance toward the child’s viewpoint. While it describes the child’s unique way of speaking about awakening, it constructs the description as funny, illustrative, or exceptional. In the example, this is done especially by showing in the writing that the child is not able to pronounce the Finnish sound of *r.* This way of using scare quotes only relates to the descriptions of children’s perspectives; they are not used when including the parental and specialists’ voices.

In addition to the direct descriptions that allow the child’s speaking to be written as such, descriptions can be interpretive when educators leave the origin of the knowledge unverbalized. In this case, the sentences refer to the child’s own mental state, such as feelings, as in the following extracts.

Extract 3

Leo likes to play “workman” and to renovate places.

[2] The Finnish expression “mää herään” is a colloquialism for “I wake up.” In the extract, a child has a pronunciation error in the *r* sound; consequently, he is unable to pronounce the expression “mää herään” properly but, instead, says “mä helään”.

Extract 4

Samuel likes to cheat others.

In Extracts 3 and 4, the indirect situations leave room for interpretation: although children have the primary ownership of their likes and dislikes, the sentences do not reveal whether the source of the information is a child (i.e., a child has said it or otherwise allowed the educator to know about it) himself, or whether it is based on the educator's observation-based interpretations of Leo's and Samuel's likes. The uncertainty of how a writer has come to their conclusion is clearly noticeably in Extract 4, where a description about an unwanted behavior raises the question of whether it is really an interest of Samuel's to cheat others and how the educator has come to this conclusion. The description is written as an answer to a question that asks for an account of child's situation from an educator.

Parental voice. When parental perspective is referred to, a writer typically takes a distant stance to it by describing the viewpoint as heard through reportative clauses and indirect quotations. In Extract 5, a reported saying of a mother is presented.

Extract 5

Benjamin is, in his mother's words, a happy, social, athletic, and sprightly boy.

In Extract 5, a mother's voice is described with an indirect quotation without quotation marks. The description seems ostensibly neutral, yet the expression "in his mother's words" may imply the educator's distance-taking from the presented opinion. In the extract, the educator leaves the question of her or his own stance unclear by emphasizing that this fact concerns the mother's opinion. Moreover, the text after the extract continues

with the educator's description about Benjamin, where she describes different matters than his mother and concentrates on his identified SEN.

As seen in Extract 5, parents are referred to by identifying their relationship with the child. Thus, they are typically referred to as "mom/mother" and "dad/father" or generically as "parent(s)." Only seldom are parents referred to by their first names, which is typical considering these are children's voices. Parental voice can also be presented by writing that "at home, the child is . . . ." Thus, the location is used to identify the origin of a voice. Typically, only one parental voice is presented in the documents. Most commonly, it is the mother or the parent who has participated in the parent–educator discussion preceding the drafting of the IEP. In individual cases, the voices of parents are equally presented in the document, as in Extract 6.

Extract 6

> Olivia sleeps in kindergarten for about 1.5 hours. In her mother's home, she doesn't take naps anymore, but in her father's home, she sleeps.

In Extract 6, the viewpoints from both of the child's parental homes are found in the document. However, the source of the information is not presented, even though "the voices" of both parents are illustrated. Therefore, it is impossible to say whether the information is from both parents or only one parent. The IEPs analyzed in this study include many similar descriptions, which clearly indicate that the information was not provided by an educator. In addition, the extensive use of the passive voice in writing (e.g., "challenges are observed") compounds the impression and makes it difficult to assess whose information is being expressed.

Specialists' voice. The voices of specialists are often indirectly cited in the documents and only rarely reported with direct quotations. When adding intertextual information from specialists, educators typically explicitly mark the origin of the knowledge by mentioning the specialist by first and last name and title. In Extract 8, an example of reporting an occupational therapist's voice is presented.

Extract 8

> Fine motor skills are, according to the occupational therapy assessment, two years behind peers. This shows in tasks in which a pencil is used (pencil grid and pencil pressing), using scissors, and manual dexterity.

In Extract 8, the occupational therapist's assessment is indirectly cited as a source of information. In the first sentence, intertextual information is reported as such, and the writer does not implicate an epistemological stance toward an intertextual voice. This is typical of specialists' voices in the documents: the writer shows no assessment of the knowledge. However, in the latter sentence, an educator supports the therapist's assessment by describing the manifestation of a challenge in the ECEC context and, simultaneously, displays a positive stance toward the information.

Even though the source of the information provided by a specialist is often very explicitly stated in the documents, exceptions exist. In Extract 9, an educator leaves the source of the recommendation unclear by using the passive tense in writing. Only the content of the description gives a clue that the information is intertextual, as an educator writes about the practices that have been recommended for ECEC staff to implement.

Extract 9

GraphoGame[3] is recommended for strengthening and enhancing reading readiness.

Linguistic Functions of Intertextual Information

The use of intertextual voices seems to serve three functions in the documents: 1) Creating a multi-perspective image of a child's situation, 2) presenting evidence for the author's argumentation, and 3) assigning the responsibility to other parties in the decision-making process. Next, we present these functions and illustrate how the intertextual voices are positioned in relation to the voice of an educator. These findings are compiled in Table 4.

(Insert Table 4 somewhere here, please)

Creating a more multi-perspective image of a child. When the educator adds intertextual voices to an IEP, they mainly create a more multi-perspective image of a child's situation but descriptions are not otherwise exploited. Consequently, children, parents, or specialists become positioned as speakers without influence. This is most typical with children's voices. In creating multi-perspective texts, the intertextual information remains detached, as it has no link to planning or decision-making in the document. Therefore, it can be understood as mainly diversifying in relation to the educator's viewpoints. In Extracts 10 and 11, examples of creating multi-perspective texts without exploiting viewpoint are presented. There, documented viewpoints of mothers are described.

Extract 10

[3] GraphoGame is a free-of-charge mobile and desktop game aimed at enhancing early literacy skills.

> At home, possible situations where a child refuses to cooperate are solved by discussing. Events that will happen that day are discussed in the morning. Anticipating and discussing the daily course of events eases everyday life.

Extract 11

> Mother said that at home these kinds of challenges are not shown; they emerge in a big group.

In Extracts 10 and 11, mothers describe their children's situations. In both extracts, useful practices and viewpoints concerning the children's daily life are described; however, that information is not exploited or taken into consideration in the documents when planning support. This illustrates a main essence of this linguistic function of only creating multi-perspective texts: mothers have had a say, which is also documented, yet it has not been consequential.

Sometimes educators describe children's challenges by using intertextual references or citations. Then, the educator hands over the responsibility of describing challenges to another party. This is the case in Extract 12, where Sebastian's speech development and challenges are described by using an intertextual reference to the information provided by a speech therapist.

Extract 12

> Sebastian has had speech therapy assessments because of his speech development, last time in autumn 2014, and he received speech therapy during the 2014 school year. The ligament under his tongue has been operated on three times, last time in 2014. There have been challenges in language development and oral motor skills during early childhood. Currently (spring 2015), at-home

> exercises are being given by a speech therapist. Speech therapy will continue in autumn 2015.
>
> Otherwise, Sebastian is a very insightful boy. He has, for example, learned to read during spring 2015.

In Extract 12, an educator describes Sebastian's challenges by using intertextual information from a speech therapist. After describing the challenges, the educator completes her writing by describing Sebastian's positive characteristics and his learning. In this part, the voice seems to be that of an educator. The description of a speech therapist's intertextual voice is not utilized later in the IEP when decisions or agreements are described.

Presenting evidence for the author's argumentation. The intertextual voices are also used in the IEP to confirm the educator's perspective by positioning another party as its legitimator. Then, the information presented is often subordinate or substitutive to the educator's viewpoint, and it is used in an instrumental manner. In Extract 13, a mother's approval of the educator's viewpoint is presented.

Extract 13

> Kindergarten: Plays better alone. Also plays with others. Sometimes argues about toys and, by implication, pushes and uses violence.
>
> Same ideas at home.

In Extract 13, a mother's opinion is described as confirmation of the educator's observations about Anna's play-related challenges. Parental opinion is not, however, presented as such, nor does it bring anything new to the description of the situation. In this

case, the use of an intertextual voice seems to serve the function of emphasizing the authority of the educator's voice.

This kind of use of an intertextual voice typically occurs when parents and specialists outside the ECEC context are cited. However, children's viewpoints or observations of their everyday life can also be used to provide confirmation of an educator's opinion. However, this use is slightly different, as children are often referred to with direct quotations within quotation marks. Here, the child's actual thoughts or viewpoints are not cited, but the citation describes the child's actions and behaviors, such as temper tantrums or pronunciation errors. Consequently, the intertextual expression is confirmative in relation to the educator's interpretation, as it illustrates the situation with everyday life examples. In Extract 14, Amelia's ways of pronouncing words are used as evidence for the educators' observations.

Extract 14

> Amelia expresses herself with speech and single signs. Sentences are two- to three-word sentences. It is difficult to make out her speech. Words are duplicated easily: for example, "(What can I) eat, eat?" Recognizes colors when support signs are used. See the papers from the hospital's phoniatrics outpatient clinic.

Assigning the responsibility to others. When intertextual voices are explicitly interconnected with planning and decision-making, an intertextual voice is positioned as a powerful decision-maker. Then the intertextual information becomes influential or even pre-conditional to the educator's educational decisions. However, even though the

information is presented as binding, the level of the binding force varies. In Extract 16, the intertextual information from Jesse's doctor has been described as binding to the educators.

Extract 16

> Doctor (Anna Vaara) has started a medication for Jesse because of the clear challenges in attention and concentration. In preprimary education, observations will be made about the efficacy of the medication as well as possible side effects. Mother tells preschool's observations to the doctor in check-ups/references.

In the extract, an intertextual description of the doctor's action is provided, and it takes a powerful position in influencing the actions of educators. The binding nature of the description is strengthened by the task assigned to the mother, who is given the responsibility of conveying information between the educators and the doctor. A strong position is particularly typical when specialists are referred to. Parents are seldom allocated this kind of power position. However, regarding children, only a few examples of a child's intertextual voice in a powerful position was found. Extract 17 presents an example where an educator writes about the learning objectives for Ella.

Extract 17

> **Learning objectives (autumn 2015)**
>
> Ella: (I would like to) learn to read.
>
> **Assessment (spring 2016)**
>
> Ella's own objective concerning learning to read has progressed with small steps so that she knows syllables when saying them out loud. Motivation has been swinging up and down.

In Extract 17, the educator describes Ella's desire to learn to read with an indirect quotation and sets this as a specific learning objective for Ella. This kind of usage of a child's perspective seems rare, even though children's desires about the content of their education, such as learning to read, are often recorded. Furthermore, Ella's educator revisits the objective later, when the fulfillment of the IEP is evaluated. Therefore, the objective Ella presented seems to be binding to the educator's work, and consequently, Ella is in the position of a powerful decision-maker.

In addition to adding content, assigning the responsibility to others can mean that they can restrict or forbid certain matters. This kind of use of intertextual voice solely concerned parents. The matters that educators constructed as dependent on parental approval included: 1) content of education (religion, the use of information technology, and popular culture); 2) everyday routine events (sleeping during nap time, excursions); and 3) arrangements of educational support (providing support, asking for a referral for an examination or consultation, transferring information). In Extracts 18 and 19, an intertextual parental voice authorizes educators to support the child.

Extract 18

> Guardians' position to support is affirmative.

Extract 19

> We discussed a possible examination period in a central hospital with the father. Mia Niemi *(the psychologist)* could do the referral. Father will think about it . . .

In Extract 18, the educator describes a parental consent. The affirmation is presented in a very formal manner with legal terms. Parents are constructed as having an influence on the

decision about their child's support, yet how this is actualized is not described. This kind of sentence about parental approval is typical in the IEPs of children who are identified as having SEN. Sometimes, parents are given an even more predominant power position, as in Extract 19, where the father has the last word in arranging a more detailed examination concerning SEN. In the extract, the father is described as a gate-keeper in the process of inspecting SEN in health care. The father's hesitation about the permission is described and, as a result, the situation seems stagnant as the father has to make up his mind. Simultaneously, the writer shows her stance toward the father's decision by using an ellipsis at the end of the description, which can be seen as a marker of an uncompleted issue or disagreement. However, the father seems to have the final word; his opinion is constructed as pre-conditional to the educators' actions, which is in line with parents' legislative right to make decisions about their child's medical and psychological examinations.

Discussion

In this study, we investigated how the voices of children, parents, and specialists were described and used in the IEPs. A contradictory finding in relation to previous research (e.g., Paananen & Lipponen, 2016; Rosetti et al., 2018) was the higher prevalence of voices of children who are identified as having SEN (22.2%) and their parents (33.3%) compared to children without identified SEN (11.7%) and their parents (19.7%). However, even though children and parents had a say in the IEPs, the ways in which they were positioned to have power over the planning of support and education varied. Children were typically positioned as speakers without influence, and their information was mainly for diversification. The voices of parents were often used to justify an educator's viewpoints;

however, they were still typically positioned as lacking binding power and were, thus, subordinate to an educator's voice. In contrast, the position of specialists was observed as strong because they had power over educational planning. These findings are in line with previous research findings that show the dominance of professional voices in IEPs (e.g., Blackwell & Rossetti, 2014; Kovanen, 2002). Consequently, this study has illustrated that professionals have stronger ownership of IEPs than children and parents. As the shared decision-making and ownership of the documents has positive effects on children in terms of academic achievement (Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010; Sebastian et al., 2017), children and parents should have stronger positions in IEPs as partners.

Considering the linguistic expressions of intertextuality, children, parents, and specialists were referred to differently. The educators seemed to express the most neutral stance toward the voices of specialists. In addition, the adults were mainly cited in a more indirect manner, compared to children, who were cited with direct quotes. However, especially concerning parents, multi-voiced writing and the extensive use of the passive voice made it difficult to identify the source of the information. This way of obscuring the information source is problematic in IEPs as it leaves unclear for whom responsibilities are attributed.

Even though children's views were recorded, their positions can be seen as an "instrumental call" for participation (Raby, 2014, p. 84), which was also the case for parents, even though they were more often considered valid informants. Thus, although presenting the viewpoints of parents and children in order to create a more varied image of a child's situation is of great importance to a holistic view to planning, children's participation is mainly achieved at a symbolic level by providing ostensible and disconnected acts of participation; real involvement in the plot of the IEP remains out of reach for them (see Skrtic, 2005). Following Hart (1992), this kind of instrumentality is

non-participation, and in Sinclair's (2004) terms, passive participation. Regarding specialists, the actual sharing of power can be identified as they are often cited in IEPs. Consequently, their strong role strengthens the professional dominance in IEPs.

The dominance of professional voices and the instrumental use of especially children's voices can be seen as genre conventions (Koskela, 2013; Linell, 1992) in the writing of IEPs in Finnish ECEC. However, it is important to see that professional dominance is, to some extent, inevitable as IEPs are legal records that educators are obligated to draft. Moreover, the importance of information from specialists has a predominant position when a child has been identified as having SEN. Despite this, as Finnish legislation and regulations explicitly require multiple viewpoints and the participation of both children and parents, there seems to be a discrepancy between policy and practice in writing IEPs.

Limitations and Future Research

A prime limitation of this study is that the sampling and the research context may limit the transferability of the present findings. The sample size was relatively small, as the data included the IEPs of 108 children. Moreover, even though the data had been collected from five Finnish municipalities and 23 preprimary education classes, it is unlikely that all of the variances in drafting the IEPs are included in the data. The applied purposeful group characteristics sampling, which increased the portion of children who are identified as having SEN in the data, might also have led to a bias.

We chose to apply the ideas of intertextuality and intertextual references when analyzing participation. Consequently, the results concerned participation as it is recorded in IEPs, which cannot be equated with actual participation in interactions. It is possible that children and parents have had a say and have been in influential positions in interactions,

discussions, and daily life events in ECEC. Moreover, also utilizing other forms of ECEC documentation, especially Reggio-inspired pedagogical documentation (see, e.g., Buldu, 2010; Carr & Lee, 2012**;** Mallaguzzi, 1993; Rinaldi, 1993), as research data would probably have illustrated a different picture of children's and parents' participation. In the future, it would be useful to investigate the participation in a more complete manner by including also other forms of pedagogical documentation as well as the discussions related to the IEPs.

Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, profound reflection on the ways to enhance the multi-voiced planning in IEPs is needed. As an example, educators often assess the validity of children's viewpoints by, for example, bringing a critical or amused stance to the description of the child's perspective. However, according to Hart (1992), respecting children's viewpoints is a prerequisite for participation. Thus, it is important that children's viewpoints as well as those of parents are presented in the IEPs. To this end, the importance of a functional IEP form is central as it will set a starting point for writing. In an IEP form, both a section for the children's and parental viewpoints as well as questions directed toward utilizing them are important. Based on the studied IEPs, this is not always the case even though in the majority of the document forms, sections for the child's and the parents' viewpoints were included. In writing an IEP, participation can be enhanced, for example, by referring directly to the child's viewpoint (see also Schryer et al., 2011). Numerous studies have reported the benefits of participatory interventions in enhancing child and parental participation (see, e.g., Jozwik, Cahill, & Sánchez, 2017; Mueller &

Vick, 2018; Royer, 2017); thus, providing educators with appropriate training could also be considered.

Especially in the case of children who are identified of having SEN, assisting them with expressing their voice is vital in order to achieve equal opportunities for participation (see also Norwich, Kelly, & Educational Psychologists in Training, 2006). To achieve this, educators need to have multiple methods that emphasize bodily and other expressions of a child's perspective in addition to written and spoken ones, while also employing augmentative and alternative communication techniques (see also Åmot & Ytterhus, 2014; Komulainen, 2007). In the IEPs we analyzed, the majority of the parents with immigrant backgrounds or Finnish as their second language had no recorded voice in the documents. This was also the case for the children with the most profound disabilities. Therefore, it is of great importance to find efficient means to access children's and parents' voices irrespective of their language and means of communication. This requires a broad understanding of both participation and the ability to have a say as socially-produced phenomena instead of being something that a person either manages or fails to manage (see Komulainen, 2007). Consequently, it is important to comprehend that professionals play a central role in making participation possible for all individuals and that they can also restrain that from happening.

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Table 1. The Research Data

Name of the document	n (N = 287)
ECEC plan	161
Preprimary education plan	100
Support-centered plans	26

Table 2. The prevalence of the educators' descriptions of intertextual voices in the IEPs

	All children % (N = 108)	Children with SEN % (n = 29)	Children without SEN % (n = 79)
Child's voice	15.3	22.2	11.7
Parent's voice	24.4	33.3	19.7
Specialists' voice	15.0	31.3	6.4

Table 3. The typical markers of intertextuality and other linguistic features of intertextual voices

Intertextual voice	Typical markers of intertextuality	Other key linguistic features
A child	Direct quotations in quotation marks, scare quotes, reportative clauses	Explicit references, interpretive writing
Parent(s) / guardian(s)	Indirect quotations, reportative clauses	Blending and blurring of voices
A specialist	Indirect quotations, reportative clauses, single direct quotations	Explicitness in referencing

Table 4. Linguistic functions of using intertextual information in the text, epistemic position and information types

No.	Linguistic function of using intertextual information	Epistemic position of an intertextual voice	The type of information
1	Creating multi-perspective texts	Speaker without influence	Diversifying information
2	Presenting evidence for author's argumentation	Legitimator	Confirming information
3	Assigning the responsibility to others	Decision-maker	Binding information