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## **Language education policies and early childhood education**

### Abstract

This chapter discusses the importance of different types of early language education in the public system according to national policy in two geopolitical contexts: Continental Northern Europe and the UK. We define early language education policy as the language policies in Early Childhood Education (ECE) including planning, practices and ideologies related to the teaching and learning of languages. We present a variety of theoretical approaches and discuss their applicability to the field of early language education research. These approaches include traditional top-down policy implementation models as well as more dynamic and ecological theoretical approaches. Following that, we look at major contributions in the field, presenting empirical studies from Northern Europe and the UK following two lines of research: critical readings of ECE policy documents, and ecological approaches identifying ECE language policy agents and power. Based on our review of the empirical studies, we point out critical issues and topics that need to be addressed, such as prevailing monolingual native speaker norms; how children, communities and languages are made (in)visible in policy texts; conflicting policy paradigms and ideologies; practical challenges in the implementation of official policy; and also how national policy documents open spaces for multilingual education in ECE. Lastly, we present some new projects in the two sociopolitical contexts and suggest directions for future research based on the idea of ecological systems, in which the roles of different policy actors and agents are examined as a function of the setting and conditions under which they operate.

*Keywords:* early language education policy; Early Childhood Education (ECE); Northern Europe; UK; critical discourse analysis, ecological approaches, multilingual children, monolingual norm

## **Language education policies and early childhood education**

### **1 Introduction**

Early childhood education (ECE) is an important stage in children's education, with long-term effects on children's cognitive, emotional and social development.

Researchers have long recognised that the study of language education policies in ECE can facilitate our understanding of the connections between, on the one hand, individual children and their spaces for development, and on the other hand, societal planning. Liddicoat (2013: 1) points out that "language policies for education play an important role in the ways in which a society articulates and plans for the futures of its members." The critical transition from home to pre-school and on to primary education has forced policy makers and educators to provide clear curriculum guidelines, quality teacher training programmes, and a rich language and literacy environment.

This chapter focuses on ECE policy research in Northern Europe and UK. The Northern European context is here represented by Sweden, Norway and Finland. Denmark, including the Faroe Islands and Greenland, and Iceland also belong to Northern Europe but have been left out for reasons of space. The UK context covers four nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

#### **1.1 The Northern European context**

Northern Europe has experienced migration over many decades, and it has been estimated that 150-300 languages are now spoken there (Dewilde & Kulbrandstad, 2016; Honko & Latomaa, 2016). Today, nearly 25 per cent of the children enrolled in Swedish ECE

have an immigrant background, and the figures are 17 per cent in Norwegian ECE and 9 per cent in Finnish ECE (Björk-Willén, 2018; Statistics Norway, 2018a; THL, 2017). The majority language in Sweden is Swedish and there are five officially recognised national minority languages: Finnish, Meänkieli, Sámi, Romani and Yiddish; in Norway, Norwegian is the majority language, with Sámi, Kven, Romani and Romanes as national minority languages; and Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, with Sámi, Romani and Karelian as officially recognised minority languages. Finland has two entire, parallel educational systems - from ECE to higher education – one in Finnish and one in Swedish. The rights of sign language users are protected by law in all three countries.

As for education policies, speakers of the national minority languages have certain rights with regard to receiving their education in these languages, but the rights vary depending on, for example, the official status of the languages in different regions, and the different ways of implementing language education rights. In all three countries, there are ECE units run partly or entirely in other languages as well (such as English, Russian or French), mostly in urban areas. In Finland, there are a number of language immersion ECE institutions and schools, primarily in Swedish for Finnish-speaking children (see Björklund, Mård-Miettinen, & Savijärvi, 2014, cross-ref. Mård-Miettinen et al. this volume).

Although the Nordic countries exhibit differences in terms of their geographic, cultural and political history, their ECE systems and policies share a number of features which are sometimes referred to as *The Nordic ECE Model* (Hännikäinen, 2016). These include ECE services and well-educated staff, and a holistic view of care, play, lifelong learning and the development of social, linguistic and academic skills (Einarsdóttir, Purola, Johansson, Broström, & Emilson, 2015). The Nordic model combines education, instruction and care for all children aged 0-5. In this way, the Nordic model has a different character from elsewhere in Europe, where 0-2-year-olds are enrolled in childcare institutions and 3-5-

year-olds usually go to school-like institutions based on more formal teaching (Eurydice, 2009).

ECE in Sweden, Norway and Finland is targeted at all children under school age and the authorities are obliged to arrange it for those who need it. In 2017, 91.3 per cent of children aged 1-5 years in Norway, 84 per cent in Sweden, and 70.7 per cent in Finland attended ECE (Eurydice, 2019; National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2017; Statistics Norway, 2018b). Fees are moderate and are adjusted according to parents' income, and ECE service providers can be either public (the municipality) or private. The provision of ECE is governed and regulated under one ministry and steering documents include government acts and decrees on ECE, national curricula, and frameworks (Hännikäinen, 2016, p. 1002). A number of studies have analysed the Nordic ECE Model and have compared, for example, ECE teacher education (Einarsdottir, 2013), emergent literacy (Hofslundsengen et al., 2018), and how Nordic ECE guidelines treat content and quality (Vallberg Roth, 2014) and the youngest children (1-3 years of age) (Hännikäinen, 2016). However, ECE language education policy and practice have rarely been the subject of comparative cross-national analysis (but see Alstad, & Sopanen, 2020).

In Norway and Sweden, compulsory primary education begins at the age of 6. In Finland, 6-year-olds participate in mandatory pre-primary education until school formally starts at age 7. Mother tongue instruction (MTI) is a right for children with a migrant or minority/heritage language background attending mainstream schooling in Sweden and Finland, throughout all the stages of compulsory schooling (6-15 years of age). It is arranged as a separately taught subject but the practical arrangements differ on the school and national levels. In contrast, in Norway students with a migrant background are only entitled to MTI during a transitory period, until they know Norwegian well enough to follow instruction in the mainstream school (Sickinghe, 2013, p. 92). Importantly, ECE is *not* obliged to arrange

MTI in any of the three countries (Puskás, 2018). However, all three ECE curricula acknowledge the responsibility of ECE to support multilingual development.

## 1.2 The UK context

The four nations of the UK have witnessed considerable demographic changes in recent years. There are now more than 1.5 million students in UK schools who between them speak more than 360 languages other than English at home. They are labelled as learners with *English as an Additional Language* (EAL). EAL learners represent over 21 per cent of the primary school population and nearly 17 per cent of the secondary school population in England. The numbers of learners with EAL are lower in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but they have grown rapidly in the last ten years. In 2019, 9.2 per cent of pupils in publicly funded schools in Scotland (School Census, Scotland, 2018), about 15 per cent of pupils in Wales (School Census, Wales, 2019), and 5.7 per cent of primary school pupils in Northern Ireland were EAL learners (The Bell Foundation, 2017).

These statistics illustrate the increasing linguistic diversity of the UK. The current situation is further complicated by the language history and political ideology in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, for example, Scottish Gaelic and Scots are two long-established languages that have had political dominance and vernacular importance for centuries (Hancock, 2014; Sebba, 2018). Similarly, Irish (Gaeilge) has been used in Ireland for hundreds of years, despite its low status during British rule (Dillon, 2016; McKendry, 2017). In recent years, the government has implemented various policies in schools and the public domains to revitalise Gaeilge, in an effort to increase its cultural and political status (see also Hickey in this volume). Nevertheless, despite being an official language, Gaeilge is only spoken by 6 per cent of Ireland's population (NISRA, 2011). In



Wales, Welsh was historically used as the only language of the country, but it declined during the 20th century (Williams, 2008). According to the 2011 census, only 19 per cent of Welsh people speak Welsh. In 2018, a survey by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, UK) showed that 29.3 per cent of the population of Wales were able to speak Welsh, an increase of more than 10 percentage points. With regard to ECE in the UK, there is neither universal nor obligatory child care education for children under the age of three. However, publicly funded part-time childcare programmes are available for the most disadvantaged (lower SES) two- to three-year-olds under programmes such as *Sure Start Services* or *Flying Start*. In all four nations, publicly funded pre-school education is available for all three- to four-year-old children, though only on a part-time basis. In England, the free provision is 15 hours per week, or 30 hours for children with working parents. In the other nations, the free provision ranges from 10 hours a week in Wales and 12.5 in Northern Ireland to 15.5 in Scotland. In general, pre-school education is provided in nursery schools or in nursery classes incorporated in primary schools. Most children start primary schooling at the age of four in a reception class (age 4-6), which forms part of the Foundation Stage. Primary school education continues for children until the age of 11 (Eurydice, 2017).

Despite its linguistically rich heritage and diversity, ECE in the UK provides little minority language-medium education. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the respective official languages are offered as the medium of education to a limited number of pupils, and in Wales the Welsh language is offered to all pupils (CCEA, 2016), but otherwise most pre-schools in the UK use English as the medium of education. Ethnic minority children have little access to pre-school education in their heritage language (Hancock, 2014; McKendry, 2017).

In sum, the differences and similarities between Northern Europe and the UK with regard to the sociolinguistic contexts and the historical sociopolitical development in

preschools indicate that in both cases there has been systematic investment in early childhood education. Both contexts show an increasing number of migrant children, but the language-in-educational policies for these children are different. In Northern Europe, mother tongue instruction (MTI) is a right for all migrant children in school and arranged in ECE where possible, whereas in the UK only the official minority language instruction is available for children with or without migrant background.

What particularly needs to be explored now is what types of language education policy are implemented in these countries, and in what ways these policies provide equal access to language education for children with minority language backgrounds and of low socio-economic status and support rather than undermine multilingualism.

## 2 Main theoretical concepts

In this section, we discuss briefly the core central theoretical concepts related to the study of early language education policy from ecological and critical discourse analysis perspectives.

*Language policy* and *language planning* are closely related concepts - and are often used as synonyms - but what their relationship and their meanings are depends on the theoretical stance. Some people argue that language planning is a preparatory activity that leads to the formulation of a language policy: a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure or acquisition of languages within a speech community (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Others see language policy as the overarching concept, and as including language planning. Spolsky (2004), for example, identifies three interrelated components under language policy: *language practices* (the ways language(s) are used in a community), *language beliefs or ideology* (the beliefs the community has about languages and their use), and *language*

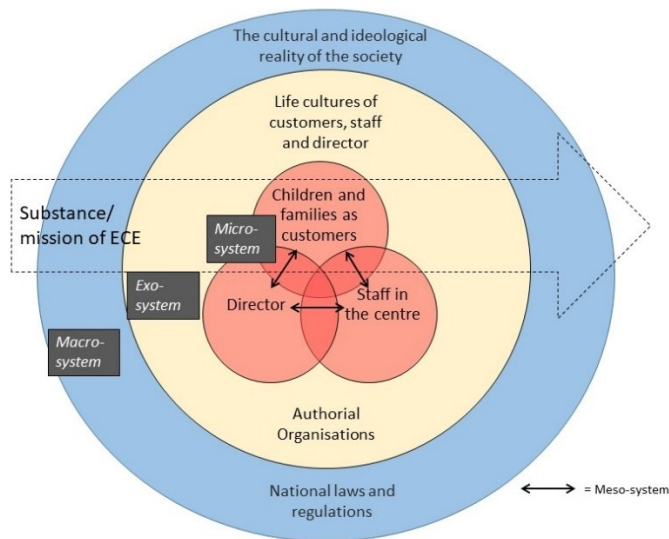
*management* (the efforts to modify or influence the language practices). *Language management* is similar to the notion of language planning in language policy and planning (LPP). In Spolsky's model, policy comprises practices both intentional and unintentional, ideologies, and management. In this chapter, we use the term *language education policies* to include planning as well as practices and the ideologies connected with them in relation to the teaching and learning of languages and language policies in ECE. Rather than seeing a unidirectional, top-down process, this concept acknowledges the complexity of processes and dimensions involved in policymaking and implementation.

In 1996, Ricento and Hornberger introduced the Language Policy and Planning (LPP) onion metaphor, in which LPP processes were seen to interact across layers – such as national, institutional and interpersonal – with the classroom teacher at the very centre of the onion. The researcher's task is then to *peel the onion* layer by layer and examine how “agents, levels, and processes of LPP – permeate and interact with each other in multiple and complex ways” (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, p. 419). Hornberger and Johnson (2007) developed the onion metaphor further and argued the need for *slicing the onion* through the layers to reveal how micro-level interaction relates to the macro levels of social organisation. García and Menken (2010) later argued for *stirring the onion*, to shift the emphasis from official education policies to how educators themselves act in classrooms and interact with socio-psychological possibilities, constraints and other factors; in other words, how teachers “cook” the onion. The importance of *teacher agency* for language policy creation, interpretation, and appropriation has been the focus of many studies during the last decade, increasingly also in the ECE context (see e.g. Schwartz, 2018).

Language policy as a concept has gradually replaced language planning, as it more clearly encompasses dynamic and multi-directional processes, and the identification of different roles, agents, contexts and factors in these (Johnson & Ricento, 2015). In addition to

agency, *ideology* is a key concept in post-modern approaches to language policy (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011). Language ideologies can be held by individuals as well as by communities and states. Official language policy documents manifest what is valued in a society and articulate the beliefs and attitudes of the society about (certain) languages and their use (Liddicoat 2013: 1). Policy is created by agents who are influenced by their environment, and it is therefore dialogical and situated in time and space. In the European context, some countries have encouraged curricular reforms in response to the social changes, societal needs, linguistic diversity and multilingualism caused by the national and transnational movements of recent decades. In order to unpack the policy layers, identify agents and ideologies, and understand the processes, ecological and discourse analytical approaches are commonly applied.

*Ecological* approaches have in common that they strive to understand the interactions within and between certain eco-systems. Hence, language ecological approaches examine the interactions between language(s) and its/their (social) environments (Creese, Martin, & Hornberger, 2008). In the ecological systems theory developed by the psychologist Bronfenbrenner (1979), a child is seen as part of complex social ecosystems made up of multiple and interacting environments. Building on his ideas of interrelated micro, exo and macro levels (or systems), the *contextual leadership model* (see Fig 1) sees ECE leadership as a joint enterprise of families and ECE staff and as being affected by regulations, societal and community values and institutional structures (Nivala 2002; Hujala 2004: 54-55).



**Fig. 1** The contextual leadership model (adapted from Nivala, 2002: 16, and Hujala, 2004: 54), reused with permission of the authors and the publisher

In the contextual leadership model, the micro system consists of the staff at the childcare unit, its director and the families. The interaction and cooperation between these micro levels are referred to as the meso system. On the macro level, societal values and institutional structures define the leadership whereas the exo level between the micro and macro levels has an indirect effect on the leadership. At the core of leadership – illustrated by an arrow that crosses all layers in the model – is the substance or mission of the ECE itself, such as the curriculum. Leadership in this sense is regarded as “interactions between the substance of ECE, the actors in the process, and the structures of an organisational environment” (Hujala, 2004: 55).

The contextual leadership model shares important features with the concept of *educational partnership* (Epstein, 2011), in which teachers, families and communities share overlapping responsibilities for the child’s growth. Despite their great analytical potential, the contextual leadership and the educational partnership models have rarely been employed to describe language education policy processes in ECE (see, however, Section 2.4.1.1).

In *discourse analytical approaches* to language policy, the researcher can reveal “ways in which language defines and sets limits on what is said and understood in the policy context by discursively organising the categories for thinking about and acting on language” (Liddicoat 2013: 11). By applying *critical discourse analysis* (CDA, e.g. Wodak & Meyer, 2009), policy discourse as an instrument of power and control and as a reproducer of ideological systems can be brought into focus. Document analysis of official policies can reveal ideological discourses embedded in and as text and problematize how language is used to reproduce or transform culture, society and power relations. In *nexus analysis* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004), policy discourses on different micro and macro scales can be related and connected. The focus of analysis is policy as social action (such as a phenomenon or a practice) and can be researched with the help of e.g. interviews, observations, text/media analysis, surveys, photography, and/or video-/audio recordings. Nexus analysis has proved to be a powerful tool for understanding a policy action because it identifies the intersections of the *historical body* of the individuals involved, the *discourses in place*, i.e., the material and conceptual context in which the action takes place, and the *interaction order*, i.e., the relations among the actors involved (Hult, 2015). In the following, we provide a review of major contributions to the field of language education policy in ECE in the context of the Northern European countries and the UK.

### **3 Major contributions**

The research to be reviewed falls into two types: analyses of ECE policy documents and empirical studies on ECE language education policy from an ecological perspective. The former is informed by critical discourse analysis (CDA) whereas the second,

relying on ecological and ethnographic approaches, centres on how language education policies are implemented, interpreted and challenged by different policy agents.

### 3.1 Analyses of ECE language policy documents

#### 3.1.1 Northern Europe

The first line of research, particularly relevant in the Norwegian and Swedish contexts and increasingly so in Finland, is the critical examination of national steering documents from the point of view of whether they enable or restrict access to multilingual education in ECE (Johnson and Ricento 2015: 41-42). Some of the studies in this group examine official language policy trajectories over time and as a function of the temporal, sociopolitical and ideological context in which they operated. By way of example, Gruber and Puskás (2013) examined how ethnic and linguistic diversity was constructed in official reports of the Swedish Government and in national steering documents for ECE from the 1970s onwards. They described a trajectory from the 1970s and through the 1980s, when language policies were based on ideas of integration (rather than assimilation) and on a strong political belief in the importance of providing ECE in immigrant children's mother tongue (see Arnberg, 1996; Hyltenstam & Tuomela, 1996 for a comprehensive and critical account of the so-called home language reform). This was followed in the early 1990s by a period of economic recession in Sweden, when discourses of bilingualism were replaced with discourses of (multi-) *culture*. Culture was constructed as something fixed and a property of immigrants only (not of majority speakers of Swedish); it was at the same time an exotic and exciting as well as a problematic and challenging element that could be brought into ECE work (Gruber & Puskás, 2013). More recent analyses have shown this tendency to persist: in the newest Swedish ECE curriculum, implemented in 2019, multicultural identity is ascribed

only to children of the national minorities and children with a foreign background (Rosén & Straszer, 2018).

Kulbrandstad (2017) analysed white papers on Norwegian immigration policy between 1980 and 2016. She was able to identify a notable switch in official language educational policy towards the end of the 1990s: from bilingualism as a long-term educational goal, to seeing the mother tongue primarily as a transitional tool to develop Norwegian. ECE was then given as an important task the development of all children's literacy in Norwegian and of their Norwegian language skills, with the goal of preparing children for mainstream school. Several scholars (e.g. Alstad, 2013; Bubikova-Moan, 2017; Otterstad & Andersen, 2012; Pesch, 2017) have pointed out the goals of the ECE staff focus strongly on developing children's Norwegian as an L2 rather than supporting children's multilingualism. The Nordic ECE model is first and foremost based on play rather than instruction which places the staff in a demanding situation. Similar complexities and challenges in implementing official language policies have been noted in the Swedish context: on the one hand, it is in practice difficult to give equal support to all of the languages children speak (Puskás & Björk-Willén, 2017), and on the other hand, little concrete advice is given in the steering documents as to how to support the development of Swedish as an L2 (Björk-Willén, 2018; Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

Important contributions to the LPP field are also studies that have analysed Nordic ECE language policy texts as discourse and have explored what the labelling of children and languages tells about power, status and ideologies (Liddicoat 2013). As to how these children have been labelled in official documents over time in a Swedish context, Gruber and Puskás (2013) show that they have been referred to as *foreigner*, *immigrant*, *bilingual* and *multicultural*, and in more recent policy texts, from 2000 onwards, as *multilingual*, *having another mother tongue than Swedish* or *having a foreign/migrant*



*background* (see also Rosén & Straszer 2018). The policy term *multilingual children* was introduced to refer to children who themselves or whose parents had migrated to Sweden, and the label was applied irrespective of whether the child actually identified with, knew, or used more than one language (György Ullholm, 2010). Conversely, children of Swedish background were by default seen as monolingual speakers of Swedish.

In Norway, Sickinghe (2013) found that multilinguals are constructed as someone whose mother tongue is not Norwegian, and as “an outgroup member of the ... school population” (2013, p. 102). The most commonly applied term in Norwegian policy discourse for children whose mother tongue is not Norwegian, Sámi, Swedish, Danish or English is, however, *minority language children* (Statistics Norway). Strange as it may appear, as Bubikova-Moan (2017) explains, children with one of the three last-mentioned languages are included in the majority as it is assumed that children speaking these languages will have sufficient skills to communicate with the ECE staff (Norwegian, Swedish and Danish are Scandinavian languages, to some or a high extent mutually comprehensible; English is taught in Norwegian schools and the level of competence is generally high).

The term *newly arrived* is used in Sweden and Norway, but not in Finland (Honko & Latomaa, 2016), and particularly refers to those who arrived during the so-called migration crisis in the autumn of 2015, when Europe experienced the largest migration waves since the Second World War (Axelsson & Juvonen, 2016). The term connotes to individuals who were born somewhere else and have only recently entered into the host country.

In the first Finnish ECE curriculum, from 2003, children with a non-mainstream (Finnish or Swedish) background were referred to as *with an immigrant background, with a different language and cultural background* or *with their roots in Sámi or Roma culture*, whereas in the most recent one, from 2016, they are referred to as *multilingual* or children

*with a foreign language as mother tongue.* In the current curriculum, children who are speakers of national minority languages are defined by their cultural and parental heritage, not in terms of language: *Sámi* and *Roma children*.

Taken together, the labelling of children in official discourse in these three national contexts show that there is an implicit norm of children who are native speakers of the majority language, and whose parents were both born into the society in question and have no recent history of immigration. Children who do not meet these criteria are defined and positioned in terms of the languages they do or do not speak, the cultures they are associated with and, importantly, their parents' heritage, regardless of how they identify themselves.

The analysis of changes in the labelling of speakers and their language(s) over time also make visible ideologies and attitudes towards languages as rooted in the prevailing historical-societal context. Sometimes, explicit attempts to change conceptualisations have been done. One example of this is prestige planning, i.e., language planning activities carried out in relation to the ways in which particular language varieties are perceived and valued, including promotional activities (cf. Liddicoat, 2017: 2). An illustrative case was when the term *home language* was officially replaced by *mother tongue* in Sweden in the mid-1990s. This replacement was done as “home language” was regarded as derogatory, suggesting that the language spoken at home was somehow of lower status than the languages spoken outside the home (Hyltenstam & Tuomela, 1996). In current Nordic policy discourse, mother tongue is thus the term used rather than home language. Notably, individuals are assumed to have only *one* mother tongue (Palviainen & Bergroth, 2018; Rosén & Straszer, 2018). The 2016 Finnish ECE curriculum, however, opens up for new conceptualizations as it explicitly mentions that a child may have more than one mother tongue (Mård-Miettinen, Bergroth, Savijärvi, & Björklund, 2018; Söponen, 2018) and the most recent Finnish curriculum for

primary and secondary education explicitly spells out that every student is multilingual (Tarnanen & Palviainen, 2018). The new discourses that have emerged in the newest Finnish curricula can thus be seen as another type of prestige planning, empowering all children with multilingual competences.

### 3.1.2 The UK

In the UK context, ECE language policies have also been under critical scrutiny. Although official language policies exist in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland for indigenous languages, such as Gaelic, Welsh and the Scots (also known as minoritized languages), language education policies for ethnic immigrant minorities have rarely been featured in curriculum documents. In England, language education policies are mainly concerned with learning modern foreign languages (MFL) (see e.g. Hancock, 2014; Lanvers & Coleman, 2017) and developing ethnic minority learners' English skills.

The ECE curriculum emphasises 17 learning goals, none of which relates to modern languages or home language learning. The goals related to language learning cover basic literacy skills in English only (DfE, 2014). An analysis of the few relevant, and limited, language education policies/curricula indicates that ethnic languages have received scant policy attention (Cohen, Moss, Petrie, & Wallace, 2018; Faulkner & Coates, 2013; McKendry, 2017; Safford & Drury, 2013). Analysing *The Early Years Foundation Stage Framework* (DfE & DoH, 2011; DfEE, 1996; DfES, 2007) over the past twenty years, Faulkner and Coates (2013) point out that home language and literacy skills have not been given adequate recognition in children's overall social and academic development. Indeed, the 2017 Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017: 9) reiterates the importance of English language skills for school readiness, as illustrated below:

For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. Providers must also ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during the EYFS: ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1. When assessing communication language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English, if a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child's skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay.

While the policy gives some recognition to home languages, the emphasis is clearly on English language skills. Especially when it comes to assessment, home languages do not appear to matter much (Tsimpli, 2017) unless there is “cause of concern about language delay” (DfE, 2017: 9).

It should be noted that in policy documents and public discourse, children with home languages other than English have been labelled as learners of *English as Additional Language* (EAL). A large number of curriculum documents have been published and the number of studies related to EAL has been gradually growing in recent years (Leung, 2016; Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). Constant Leung (2016) carried out a comprehensive review of the changes in EAL policy by focusing on provisions and conceptualisations of EAL in the past 30 years. He critically highlighted the notion of ‘equality in education’ as the underpinning ideology that influenced the ‘mainstreaming EAL’ approach to teaching EAL pupils. While the ideological argument for equality seemed to make sense, pedagogical

approaches to teaching have not taken into consideration the linguistic needs of EAL pupils. Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen's (2018) examination of the policy documents also indicated that bilingualism and diversity have been portrayed more as a barrier to developing English skills than as an opportunity to develop multilingual skills.

More studies related to the critical analysis of ECE language education policies have been conducted in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland than in England, probably because of their historical linguistic heritage. In Northern Ireland, research into language education policies has centred on the revitalisation of Irish, and Irish/English bilingual policies (Collen, McKendry, & Henderson, 2017; Dillon, 2016; McKendry, 2007; 2017). McKendry (2017), for example, examined Northern Ireland's primary school curricula for the past 30 years. He found that the discourse about learning Irish has been controversial since political bodies such as the Northern Ireland state and the Unionist community are negatively disposed to the Irish language. As a consequence, Irish was placed together with French, Spanish and German as part of Primary Languages (CCEA, 2007) and was not a mandatory subject in primary schools. The most recently revised curriculum (CCEA, 2016) has given statutory force to 'Education for Mutual Understanding' (EMU), which makes it possible to integrate the teaching of Irish language into the teaching of citizenship and cultural heritage. While Irish as the indigenous language has, to a certain extent, gained political recognition in education, these authors argued that despite the new arrivals from Europe and elsewhere, language diversity has barely been mentioned in policy documents.

Similarly, scholars in Scotland have looked into language education policies towards regional languages (Gaelic and Scots), MFL and migrants' languages in Scotland (Hancock, 2014; Sebba, 2018; Walsh & McLeod, 2008). Highlighting the rich Scottish linguistic culture, Hancock (2014) points out that Gaelic revitalisation has been steady in education because of the strong political movement of nationalism and substantial investment

in the provision of Gaelic-medium education in both primary schools and nurseries. While the government is concerned about the educational achievement of the Gaelic-medium programmes, effective pedagogical guidelines still need to be provided. Policy-making debates should move away from “a rhetoric of linguistic survival and cultural enrichment” (Hancock, 2014, p. 171) to a broader framework that promotes bilingualism and multilingualism and includes ethnic minority languages in education programmes.

Wales has a long history of Welsh teaching in pre-schools. Although the ideologies underpinning Wales’ language education policy are similar to those that prevail in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the revitalisation of Welsh has been more effective than that of Gaelic and Irish (Hancock, 2014). This is because Welsh is not only taught in Welsh-medium primary and pre-schools, but it is also a compulsory subject in the National Curriculum for all pupils from three to sixteen years old (Jones & Martin-Jones, 2004). In analysing the current curriculum for Welsh-medium and bilingual Welsh/English schools, Williams (2008) underlines the fact that bilingual education has been mainstreamed in Wales, and Welsh teaching is given to all pupils, regardless of their linguistic background as a Welsh L1 or L2 speaker. This sends the important message that Welsh belongs to everyone, not just to a small number of minority speakers. While the curriculum puts a strong emphasis on “developing children’s understanding of the cultural identity unique to Wales across all Areas of Learning through an integrated approach” (Curriculum for Wales, 2015), the home languages of non-Welsh heritage speakers are not apparent in the policy.

With regard to the terminologies used about languages other than English or minoritized regional languages such as Gaelic or Scots, Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018) found that *home language* and *community language* have been used in official documents. About minority language-speaking pupils, *EAL pupils or learners* is the most frequently used term in the UK, but *new arrivals*, *newcomers* and *isolated learners* have also been used in

various curriculum documents (Conteh, 2013). Other terms used in the official discourse include *bilingual*, *multilingual*, *inclusion*, *diversity* and *ethnicity* (Flynn & Curdt-Christiansen, 2018). These terms labelling migrant children have a strong ideological connotation for policy makers. They indicate the political and ideological position of the government.

### **3.2 ECE language policy agents and power: An ecological perspective**

#### **3.2.1 Northern Europe**

A second research trend is the examination of ECE language policy agents and power, and how agency and power are distributed and employed across educational institutions and contexts as a multi-layered language policy activity (cf. Johnson & Ricento 2015). In the recent research project *Language conceptions and practices in bilingual early childhood* (Academy of Finland, 2013-2017) which focused on bilingual Finnish/Swedish-speaking children enrolled in minority Swedish-language ECE in Finland, policy and agency were examined from several different angles. Spolsky's (2004) model of language policy as consisting of language practices, language beliefs and ideologies, and language management, was used as a general point of departure, and nexus analysis (Scollon and Scollon 2004) was applied as an analytical tool to unpack layers of policy discourse.

The ECE units focused on in the project were situated in three different regions – two bilingual cities and one Finnish unilingual city – with different linguistic demographics and different obligations towards the Finnish- and Swedish-speaking populations. These varying meso and macro conditions (cf. the contextual leadership model in Figure 1) turned out to provide different constraints on the daily ECE work. While the ECE principals in the two bilingual cities had good structural and peer support for carrying out their work, the

principal in the Finnish unilingual city had to put a lot of effort into advocating for Swedish ECE among her superiors, who had little understanding of minority language rights (Palviainen & Bergroth, 2016). In examining the notion of ECE partnership (Epstein, 2011) for bilingual development, Bergroth and Palviainen (2016) observed that parents, teachers and the principals all had a generally positive and friction-free picture of bilingualism: language mixing practices between all stakeholders, including the children, were allowed. However, the parents and the staff were also in strong agreement that the extensive use of Finnish with children was undesirable and that supporting Swedish was the highest priority, in order to secure the linguistic rights of Swedish speakers and to prepare individual children for school in that language.

In another study in the same project, Bergroth and Palviainen (2017) examined the complex relationships between declared, perceived and practised policies (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012) at the ECE units and how these interrelated with individual (child) agency and (institutional) practice structures. In this case, there were two declared national policies in effect with potentially conflicting aims: on the one hand, the monolingual language policy for ECE which sought to guarantee the linguistic rights of Swedish speakers, and on the other hand, the policy of promoting each child's personal well-being along with the child's right to act and develop his/her own unique person (STAKES, 2005). The examination of perceived and practised policies of and among bilingual children and the staff in the three ECE units showed that the education policy focusing on individual linguistic needs seemed to take precedence over the monolingual language policy. Moreover, the linguistic exo environment in which the ECE unit was situated had an impact on the policies: the more the minority language was used in the surrounding community, the less problematic the dominance of the majority language (Finnish) and bilingualism was experienced to be. Taking the findings of the project together, they showed the intricate ecologies and complexities that exist among



policies, layers, actors and factors, and also that the centre of the LPP onion is not necessarily the teacher but the child and his/her agency and policy understandings.

A special issue, edited by Boyd and Huss (2017), particularly focused on children as policymakers in mainstream Swedish ECE, as well as English-, Finnish-, and Spanish-language preschools in Sweden. The Swedish preschools varied with regard to language backgrounds of the children and how language policies were implemented. In one mainstream ECE classroom, the explicitly expressed policy was to support all the languages spoken by the children. There was, however, no special arrangements in place to accomplish this. In another classroom, two teachers of languages other than Swedish came in for a couple of hours every day to support children with another mother tongue than Swedish. In yet another classroom, staff were speaking another language than Swedish consistently during most of the day. Children served as policy-makers in these different contexts in that they discussed and evaluated their own and other children's language practices, they supported each other linguistically but could also exclude others by means of language. The studies presented in this special issue as a whole show that official policies in Sweden promote and support multilingual development but the ways in which they are implemented vary widely involving many agents and with different degrees of success.

Pesch (2017) carried out a qualitative ethnographic case study of the discursive conditions for linguistic practice in two ECE units, one in Norway and one in Germany. Drawing on Bakhtinian concepts and nexus analysis, she could see that the Norwegian ECE first and foremost viewed multilingualism from a dualistic point of view (a mother tongue + Norwegian) whereas the German ECE unit had a more dynamic view of multilingualism. An analysis of the linguistic landscapes in the two units showed, however, intriguing patterns: whereas the staff in the Norwegian ECE upheld a primarily monolingual (Norwegian) oral discourse, the visual linguistic landscapes reflected multilingualism. The German ECE, in

contrast, made use of multilingual oral practices but the linguistic landscapes were dominated by German. Pesch found too that staff and parents had different understandings of multilingualism. Important implications of the study are, methodologically, the need to include multiple types of data to mirror different (potentially conflicting) voices and, theoretically, the need to understand ECE language ideologies, practices and management as inherently complex.

### 3.2.2 The UK

In the UK, policy agent engagement in ECE policy has begun to receive some research attention. In England, studies tend to focus on parents' involvement in their children's heritage and English language development. Curdt-Christiansen and LaMorgia (2018) conducted a study in England that looked at how parents manage heritage language development in three communities: Chinese, Italian and Pakistani. Using a questionnaire and interviews, they found that parents' language management efforts were motivated by their aspirations to enrich their children's language repertoire which included home language. The family language input indicated, however, that sociocultural and socio-political realities present difficulties and constraints that prevent families from developing literacy in the home language. In all three communities, parents had an active role in providing resources for developing English language skills.

Also looking at the parental role in minority language maintenance and revitalization, Edwards and Newcombe (2005) conducted a study in Wales to understand how health professionals work with parents to raise awareness of the social, cultural, cognitive and economic benefits of bilingualism. As Welsh language has been in decline for over a century, initiatives to reverse language shift have been implemented in (pre)schools. While Welsh-

medium schools have played a pivotal role in slowing language shift, there is mounting evidence of over-reliance on education. The paper reported a project involving parents, health workers, and professionals. Through observations of health workers and interviews with parents and other agents, the project showed that statutory policy alone would not be able to achieve the goal of reversing language shift (Fishman, 1991); what was also needed was building strong alliances, involving policy agents such as professional groups and organisations (nurses, therapists, preschool teachers) that work with families with young children.

Looking at teachers as policy agents, Flynn and Curdt-Christiansen (2018) explored how teachers at different levels interpret the recent EAL policy in England. Using a questionnaire as their tool of enquiry, the researchers sought to find out what policy had been implemented and from where or from whom teachers sought support for their EAL teaching. While the teachers found it difficult to understand the new assessment policy for English as additional language (EAL) learners (DfE, 2017), they took on an agentic role when turning to senior colleagues for help when encountering teaching difficulties.

It has long been acknowledged that young children bring to school a variety of skills and knowledge that they have acquired at home and in other contexts (Conteh & Brock, 2011; Conteh, 2012; Gregory, 2008; Kelly, 2010). Such an acknowledgement views young children as active and powerful agents in their own learning. Their teachers, however, may play a vital role in shaping the school experiences of their bilingual pupils. Conteh and Brock (2011) employed ethnographic methods and an ecological approach to studying how teachers can create 'safe spaces' in schools for young bilingual children to use their linguistic and cultural knowledge. They found that multi-layered policies and practices can either create or constrain safe multilingual spaces, through teachers' words, such as 'well done' or 'be silent'

in minority languages and their arrangement of learning settings, such as providing bilingual corners where pupils can experience a sense of belonging.

With regard to revitalising minoritized official languages, Hickey, Lewis and Baker (2014) conducted a study on policy and practice in Welsh-medium pre-schools. Employing mixed methods, the researchers observed four *cylchoedd* (Welsh-medium play groups) and interviewed the principals. The observation and interview data served as the basis for developing a question protocol for a focus group and a large survey for principals. Survey data were collected from 162 principals in areas attended by a mix of L1 and L2 Welsh-speaking children. The findings indicated that the principals made different decisions on whether Welsh was used in their *cylchoedd* depending on the children's L1. The decisions reflect the principals' individual agency in interpreting language policy, adhering either to a strong immersion policy of speaking only Welsh or to a policy based on individual children's language background.

In sum, ecological approaches to language education policies in the context of Northern Europe and the UK have illustrated the critical aspects of not only creating multilingual spaces for young children but also of acknowledging children as multilingual policy agents themselves. Such approaches recognise the different amount of knowledge and power brought to young multilingual children's learning processes by all the different policy actors and agents. The above illustrative cases also show (see also Ragnarsdottir in this volume) the importance of educational partnerships (Epstein 2011): parents' engagement in their children's learning, either through activities, language use or expectations, can provide their children with rich linguistic and cultural environments as well as offer opportunities to promote their children's learning.

#### **4 Critical issues and topics**

Although multilingualism is celebrated in the Northern Europe policy discourse, the critical readings of the steering documents showed that native (and monolingual) speakers of the majority ((pre)school) language are presented as the norm and default. If bi-/multilingualism or cultural heritage are mentioned, they are primarily ascribed to children with a background other than the norm, and therefore serve to define these as different and potentially in need of support (cf. Bubikova-Moan, 2017). The most recent Finnish curricula differ in this respect as they present the individual as inherently multilingual and recognise that a child can have more than one mother tongue.

As for the Nordic ECE model, certain contradictory elements and practical challenges can be identified. First, as pointed out by Runfors (2013), according to the model, ECE should promote both cultural diversity and cultural unity (i.e., the majority culture). Second, multilingualism should be endorsed while at the same time ECE should prepare every child for school by promoting literacy in the majority language (this is particularly evident in the Norwegian context). Third, although the idea of Nordic ECE is based on play and informal learning, there is an increasing expectation that ECE will teach academic and language skills and prepare the child for school (Runfors, 2013). As ECE is optional and families decide whether or not to use it, there is also a risk that children will not all be in the same position when compulsory school starts. To overcome some of these problems, it is of the utmost importance that steering documents that express well-meaning ideologies and intentions are complemented with concrete guidelines as to how to implement the intentions and deal in practice with ECE's complex missions. This is particularly true in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms, in order to secure the rights of children who speak other languages than the majority language.

Within the UK context, home, schools and communities need to come together to discuss how language education policies can be formulated and applied to ensure that

children's social and academic needs are met. From an ecological perspective, several points deserve more attention. Firstly, 'conflicting policy paradigms' (Safford, 2003, p. 8) should be eliminated. The conflicts are reflected in policy statements which advocate the celebration of ethnic and linguistic diversity but in reality require the 'universal' model of language. As Conteh (2012) noted, 'the celebration of ethnic and linguistic diversity' should be reflected in curriculum documents and assessment policies to allow minority languages to be taught and assessed in mainstream settings. Otherwise, children, their families and their teachers will continue to be caught in the conflicts affecting the social and academic lives of these multilingual children. Secondly, in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the relationship between nationalism and language education needs to be re-evaluated. The emphasis on nationalism and language education has excluded other minority language pupils from having an equal language right to study either the national language or their mother-tongues. Thirdly, attention should be paid to the imbalance in the power relationship between policy agents and actors. While parents, ECE principals, teachers and children can exert their agentic roles in policy practices, policy makers should take these actors' views into consideration when policy documents are produced. While there is strong government support for teaching English to newcomers, there is little formal policy in relation to ethnic community languages. Although these languages are relevant for intercultural and academic development as well as for social cohesion, they are often not valued or accredited in the formal educational context (Ayres-Bennett & Caruthers, 2018).

## **5 New projects**

Recent transnational movements have not only intensified the encounters of different traditions, sociocultural values and political positions, but also enriched the societal

linguistic repertoires, contributing to the ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007) of post-modern society. The following ongoing or recently concluded projects in the Nordic countries and the UK all serve to respond to these linguistic and demographic changes.

Of the Nordic countries in focus of this book chapter, only Finland is currently active in running projects about language policy and multilingualism in the ECE context. These projects all have a clear language education perspective and are based on language ideologies apparent in current official policies (such as the newest ECE and school curricula). Based on the conclusions and recommendations in the National Language Strategy (Tallroth, 2012) and Pyykkö’s (2017) report on the national language resources, the Finnish government and the National Agency for Education in Finland give financial support to early-start language immersion and teaching (2017-2020) [<https://www.oph.fi/fi/koulutus-ja-tutkinnot/kieltenopetuksen-kehittaminen>; in Finnish only]. The aim is to develop forms for innovative language teaching and stimulate language awareness in ECE and school. The Finnish 2016 ECE curriculum, which makes more and clearer provisions than before for multilingual pedagogies, has made it possible to launch research projects such as *Maps and compasses for innovative language education* (2018-2021) [<https://www.jyu.fi/edupsy/fi/tutkimus/hankkeet-projects/iki/in-english-1>], the aim of which is to provide a platform for good language teaching practices all the way through from ECE to secondary schools, and ECE teacher training modules such as *Language pearl* (2018-2020) [<https://www.abo.fi/centret-for-livslangt-larande/sprakparla>; in Swedish only], in which ECE teachers elaborate on their multilingual and language awareness teaching practices under the guidance of researchers. Founded in Helsinki in relation to Finland’s 100 year anniversary celebrations in 2015, HundrED.Org is a not-for-profit organization which seeks and shares inspiring innovations in K12 education all over the world, such as how to carry out a

bilingual pedagogy in ECE [<https://hundred.org/en/innovations/bilingual-pedagogy-in-early-childhood-education>].

In the UK, there are a number of research projects examining language policy and practice. These do not focus on ECE as such but take a broader perspective. The project *Foreign, indigenous and community languages in the devolved regions of the UK: policy and practice for growth* (2017-2020) [<http://www.modernlanguagesleadershipfellow.com>] focuses on policy in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and searches for the successful components of existing strategies for indigenous, minoritized languages and community languages. The project *Audit of Complementary Schools in Scotland* (2014-2017) [<https://www.ceres.education.ed.ac.uk/research-2/research>] gathered information about complementary schools and community language schools across Scotland, with a particular focus on the ways in which these schools help to support the Scottish Government's 1+2 Language Strategy. *Multilingualism: Empowering individuals, transforming societies* (2016-2020) [<http://www.meits.org>] focuses on attitudes towards multilingualism and language policy amongst both the general public and key stakeholders, and has a particular focus on foreign language learning. Other projects with focus on different types of community contexts and language policy and practices include: *Family Language Policy: A Multi-Level Investigation of Multilingual Practices in Transnational Families* (2017-2020) [<https://familylanguagepoli.wixsite.com/familylanguagepolicy>], which looks into the types of Family Language Policy (FLP) that exist in the UK by involving three communities – Chinese, Polish and Somalian. *Here to Stay? Identity, citizenship and belonging among settled Eastern European migrant children and young people in the UK* (2016-2019) [<http://www.migranyouth.org>] is another project that explores the lives of young people (12-18 years old) who arrived as migrant children from Eastern and Central European countries.



In sum, these national council-funded projects described here illustrate that languages and diversity are fundamental components of modern societies, and that the educational systems in these societies are important objects of study. In both contexts, the different ECE programmes and research projects not only promote critical awareness of cultural and language diversity, they also address the practical challenges and opportunities that language diversity brings.

## **6 Future research directions**

Alstad and Sopenen (2020) claim that ECE language education policy is an empty space, and therefore is under-researched. One reason for this, they suggest, is that ECE is not regarded as formal schooling in Northern Europe. Thus language policy in that context is probably seen as less significant than in formal school contexts despite the role of early language learning in developing children's identity, values, empathy and respect (European Commission, 2011). More Critical Discourse Analytical-oriented ECE policy document analyses are needed to give a more complete picture, including different contexts across the globe.

Another area for future research is the processes behind official policy-making and the actions of policy designers and policy makers and others who are involved in the decision making processes. Official national policies, curricula and government reports, which are authoritative and may have a big impact, are not produced in a vacuum, but are written by individuals or groups of individuals who are members of a certain society. Bergroth (2016) produced an insightful study on how a chapter on bilingual education in the current Finnish core curriculum came about. As she was part of the working group, she had access to the minutes of meetings and could reveal the discourses that emerged, were negotiated, and eventually were included or dismissed in the final version. The process of policy-making – on any level – could well be examined from ecological or nexus analytical

perspectives to discern how actors, factors and ideologies interrelate. Also, the effects of major curriculum reforms deserve careful attention, not only in terms of how they affect classroom practices, but also in terms of how individual teacher beliefs and ideologies are changed as a consequence of the reforms (Bergroth & Hansell, 2020; Sopanen, 2019; Tarnanen & Palviainen, 2018).

A growing body of studies has looked at the pre-school child as an active language policymaker (see Section 2.4.1). Studies should also explore educational partnerships (Epstein, 2011) and how families and ECE can and do interact for the benefit of the child and his/her personal growth and multilingual development (Schwartz, 2018). In the research area of distributed leadership (e.g. Spillane, 2006), leadership is seen as a joint enterprise undertaken by several stakeholders – teachers, parents, children – working to achieve common educational goals. This type of ecological research perspective opens up opportunities for cross-disciplinary approaches and the beneficial synergy that they generate. As for agents, there is one key actor who is surprisingly often overlooked in research (Ascenzi-Moreno, Hesson, & Menken, 2016) despite his/her role as a language policy gatekeeper: the ECE principal. The roles and complex tasks of the principal (see Fig. 1.1) have only recently emerged as an area of interest within the research field of ECE (Rodd, 2013; Schwartz, 2013), and so far very little attention has been paid to his/her role in navigating and mediating across micro, exo and macro language policies.

## **7 Conclusions**

This chapter has provided an overview of current theories and research on language education policies in early childhood education and concluded that language policy

in its essence is complex with many layers of agents, ideologies and context which interact. This means that, to come back to the LPP onion metaphor presented in Section 2.2, the LPP onion can hardly be said to have layers that can be neatly peeled back, one by one. A more appropriate metaphor is probably a rather chaotic pile of overlapping, sliced onion rings lying on a chopping board: it is our job as researchers to see the structures and patterns hidden in that pile of onion rings. Consequently, we have focused on critical discourse analytical and ecological approaches that are possible to apply in order to unpack and understand these complexities and to reveal power relations and language ideologies embedded in policy-making. Based on our review of the empirical studies, we have pointed out critical issues and topics that need to be addressed, such as prevailing monolingual native speaker norms; how children, communities and languages are made (in)visible in policy texts; conflicting policy paradigms and ideologies; practical challenges in the implementation of official policy; and also how national policy documents open spaces for multilingual education in ECE. Although the chapter took Northern Europe and the UK as the point of departure, the reasonings and findings can be generalised to, contrasted with, or related to many other national and ECE contexts around the globe. We are, however, also aware that we have touched upon only a small part of the complexities in the national contexts we have examined and that there are many research questions that remain unanswered.

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