Author(s): Peltoperä, Kaisu; Vehkakoski, Tanja; Turja, Leena; Laakso, Marja-Leena

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Pedagogy-related tensions in flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care

Corresponding author: Kaisu Peltoperä, University of Jyvaskyla, Department of Education, Jyvaskyla, Finland. kaisu.peltopera@jyu.fi

Tanja Vehkakoski, University of Jyvaskyla, Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Leena Turja, University of Jyvaskyla, Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Marja-Leena Laakso, University of Jyvaskyla, Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Short abstract

This study examines pedagogy-related discursive tensions in flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care (ECEC) where services are available also during non-standard hours. Analysis of interview data from 31 educators was based on discursive psychology. The tensions found are: 1) children's right to learn vs. need for care, 2) educator's educational background vs. personal strengths, and 3) pedagogy as standardized vs. situational practices. In conclusion, the features of flexibly scheduled ECEC challenge educators to bring their pedagogical practices up to date in order to guarantee each child opportunity to high-quality pedagogy irrespective of the timing of care.

Author biographies

Kaisu Peltoperä, MA (Early Education), University Teacher in Early Childhood Education in the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research interest focuses on flexibly scheduled ECEC. She is also working on in-service training of educators in those settings.

Tanja Vehkakoski, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer (docent) in the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research interests are focused on disability studies, classroom interaction and professional discourse. She is specialised in qualitative research methods, especially discourse analysis and conversation analysis.

Leena Turja, PhD, is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research interests concern children's participation and voice in research and practice of ECE, children's social-emotional learning, and pedagogical leadership and quality of ECE services. She has a long experience both in teacher education and in-service training of ECE educators.

Marja-Leena Laakso is a professor in Early Childhood Education in the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä. She is also a Vice Rector of the University of Jyväskylä. She is specialised in Child and developmental psychology. Her research interests are focused on children's perspectives within health and social services.

Pedagogy-related tensions in flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care

Abstract

In flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care (ECEC), the timing of care depends on parents' non-standard working hours. Multiple individual schedules and care times in a child group may cause irregularity in a child's daily structures, and a child may miss a standard hour's activities that are led by teachers with a pedagogical education. In this context, the significance and definition of pedagogy is vague and tensional.

This study aimed at disclosing discursive tensions related to pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC constructed in interviews by Finnish teachers and childcare nurses (n=31). The analysis of the interview data followed the principles of discursive psychology. Consequently, three discursive tensions related to pedagogy were found: 1) children's right to learn vs. their need for care, 2) educators' educational background vs. personal strengths as a standpoint for pedagogical work and 3) pedagogy as standardised vs. meeting children's individual needs.

As an implication, it appears problematic if we consider education and care as opposites. Instead, they should be viewed from a holistic pedagogical perspective, as each child has the right to high-quality pedagogy despite the timing of care. Moreover, children's individuality should be at the core of planning pedagogical activities.

Introduction

There are several roots of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. From their earliest years, the purposes of ECEC services have been both acting as a welfare charity dedicated to improving disadvantaged children's health and nutrition and providing childcare services so mothers could join the labour market. In addition, ECEC, the first step on the educational pathway that prepares children for subsequent formal education, has also been a remarkable societal responsibility of ECEC services from early on (Alila et al. 2014; Onnismaa & Kalliala 2010). In the Nordic welfare model, ECEC policies are closely linked to social, family, educational and labour policy (Karila 2012), all of which explain the different dimensions of ECEC.

These dimensions dichotomise the field; ECEC can be seen as a service for parents or the child. When children have a subjective right to ECEC despite the occupational status of parents, the service is considered beneficial for the child. A cultural appreciation of ECEC also depends on the age of the child; regarding children younger than three, the value and meaning of ECEC is more critically considered compared to older children (Rentzou 2018; Eurostat 2014; Plantenga and Remery 2009). ECEC services are recognised to have a wide range of benefits for families, children's learning and wellbeing, and society, though these benefits are conditional on the quality of services (Starting Strong III 2012).

The emphasis of different dimensions of ECEC influence how ECEC services have been defined and organised at various times. The widely accepted concept of

educare, which combines educational and care elements with integrated ECEC pedagogy, is at the core of the Nordic welfare model (Karila 2012). Internationally, this is unlike those systems where kindergartens (providing education) and day care nurseries (providing childcare) are separated (Kamerman 2006, 3). Simultaneously, though, the dichotomy of care and education has raised a debate on the concept of early childhood pedagogy: what it comprises and who is providing it. For example, in terms of combining education and care in ECEC services, Finland is fully integrated. Nonetheless, Finnish ECEC services have been criticised for failing to provide education and care for all children under seven (Onnismaa & Kalliala 2010) and not highlighting the positions of teachers as educating children (Karila & Kinos 2012). Thus, the Finnish ECEC has been criticised for teachers not concentrating on the instruction for which they are educated; childcare nurses are supposed to provide pedagogy without having formal competence (Karila & Kinos 2012).

The debate on care and education especially targets issues of flexibly scheduled ECEC, also administered during non-standard hours, such as early mornings, late evenings, nights and weekends. This ECEC service has become increasingly important for many families with young children in the contemporary 24/7 economy (Rönkä, Turja, Malinen, Tammelin, & Kekkonen, 2017). Besides important support to parents combining non-standard work with childcare (Janta 2014, 5–6), flexibly scheduled ECEC is recognised as an important component in providing equal opportunities to attend ECEC for all children (Vandenbroek and Lazzari 2014). However, the remarkable dichotomy in flexibly scheduled ECEC in Finland is that it is a service for parents who work non-standard hours, but children only have a subjective right to daytime ECEC. This may validate the emphasis of care at risk to the educational dimension of ECEC, although flexibly scheduled ECEC also follows the National Core

Curriculum (2018).

In addition, other challenges have been recognised concerning pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC. In earlier research, both educators and parents have highlighted the importance of care, home-like activities, and interaction especially during non-standard hours, which are in most families spent at home with family members (Peltoperä, Turja, Poikonen, Vehkakoski, & Laakso 2018; Halfton and Friendly 2015; Jordan 2008; Statham and Mooney 2003). In addition, owing to the multiplicity of individual schedules and care times in flexibly scheduled ECEC, earlier research has, in particular, drawn attention to the irregularity it creates in children's relationships (Halfon and Friendly 2015) and in their routines and daily structures (de Schipper et al. 2003; Salonen et al. 2016). Due to this irregularity, compared to the situation in regular day care, children in flexibly scheduled ECEC spend less time in a stable peer group than might be beneficial for their learning. However, the routines of children attending during non-standard hours are more flexible and the children have more freedom to choose from different activities than peers in regular day care, factors which may make the adoption of child-centred pedagogy easier in flexibly scheduled than regular ECEC. (Statham and Mooney 2003).

Due to the tensional dimensions and definitions of education and care in flexibly scheduled ECEC, an interesting question is how these concepts are defined and negotiated in a given context. Therefore, in this study, we focus on the meanings teachers and childcare nurses working in flexibly scheduled ECEC attribute to the implementation of pedagogy. Questions of educare have thus far not been studied from the perspective of educators, and the topic of pedagogy has been almost fully neglected in studies concerning flexibly scheduled ECEC, making the current study both important and highly warranted.

The concept of pedagogy

The concept of pedagogy has been defined and used in many ways in the ECEC research literature. According to Moss and Petrie (2002, 141) the pedagogic debate ponders questions such as 'What do we want for our children?' and 'What is a good childhood?'. Farquhar and White (2013), in turn, also see the question "What knowledge is important?' as relevant when talking about educating new generations. In this chapter we follow the definition of Moss and Petrie (2002) to provide a comprehensive picture of pedagogy.

According to Moss and Petrie (2002, 141) pedagogy can be conceptualised to consist of three levels: societal, legislative and practical. On the societal level pedagogical practices can be viewed as serving societal aims that are expressed in curricula that vary across cultures and change overtime (Moss and Petrie 2002, 141). In ECEC, for example, competitive and economic societal approaches may lead to a narrow academic curricular orientation where much emphasis is placed on preparing children for school and thus on the teaching of core subjects at the expense of meeting children's individual needs (Gunnarsdottir 2014). Such 'schoolification' has been claimed to lead to a divide between education and care instead of a pedagogy that unites both aspects (Van Laere, Peeters, and Vandenbroeck 2012). In contrast, a labour-force policy linked to the needs of the 24/7 economy may lead to the prioritisation of a child-care service for families rather than educational service for children.

The legislative level includes, for example, the framing the requirements for the competence, and basic training of educators and establishing child-adult ratios. The qualifications laid down for ECEC educators vary across countries. Commonly, educators are divided into core educators with formal educational training and assistants with no or some training in ECEC (Van Laere et al. 2012). In Finland, however, ECEC

educators are quite well trained: Teachers are qualified at the tertiary education level on education or social pedagogy, whereas childcare nurses have a secondary-level education on social welfare and healthcare (Taguma et al. 2012; Karila 2012).

The division into teachers and childcare nurses or assistants on the legislative level is a crucial issue also in this study, since it may exemplify the care and education divide, especially if the roles and tasks of two groups of educators are strictly divided into teaching (i.e. taking care of children's cognitive and language skills) and care (i.e. taking care of children's physical and mental needs) (see Van Laere, Peeters and Vandenbroeck 2012). In contrary, the Finnish ECEC has been claimed to be unsuccessful in utilizing a staff's multi-professionalism. Instead of clear tasks for each profession, there is a working culture, where 'everyone does everything' despite their educational backgrounds (Onnismaa & Kalliala 2010).

Besides societal and legislative levels, pedagogy also refers to the specific kinds of daily practices performed with the children (Moss and Petrie 2002, 138; Alila et al. 2014). Actually, it has been claimed that pedagogy does genuinely happen in child–staff interactions (Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson 2013). At the policy level, structural characteristics such as regulations, curricula, continuing staff development etc. shape pedagogical environments (Slot 2018; see also Hujala, Fonsén and Elo 2012).

This practical level has been the focus in the majority of the studies in the field and can be defined as purposeful activity reflecting both the teacher's knowledge of learning and human development and the children's abilities and needs (van Manen 2008),or, more specifically, as the use of a repertoire of instructional strategies (Farquhar and White 2013). Thus, on this level, pedagogy can be defined as the choice of practices that fit the needs of certain groups of children (Salminen 2014, 23) at specific times.

Pedagogy on the practical level thus refers to social responsibility for children, their well-being, learning and competence in the formal educational system (Moss and Petrie 2002, 138). Pedagogical practices should thus support children's learning and wellbeing and take each individual child's strengths, needs and interests into account (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2018).

Guiding work and pedagogical choices are children's individual needs (Salminen 2014, 24), parental expectations (Hujala et al. 2012) as well as educators' education, work history and expectations of changing society and working life (Karila and Kinos 2012). Meanwhile, the teacher is responsible for guiding these practices to realise the aims and goals of the national curriculum (Byman and Kansanen 2008). However, many teachers find it difficult to explicate pedagogy in their daily work (Stephen 2010) and adapt theoretical knowledge to daily practices (Karila and Kupila 2010).

Education and care in Finnish flexibly scheduled ECEC

The national policies and the provision of childcare during non-standard hours vary across countries. (Li et al. 2012.) In Finland, every child under school age (under age seven) has the right to part-time ECEC services irrespective of parental labour market status. Municipalities are also obliged to provide childcare to all children, including non-standard hours of care in the early mornings, late evenings, nights and weekends, if required by both parents' or a single parent's work or studies (Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 540/2018). Finnish ECEC is mainly a public service but the number of private service providers has increased in recent years. However, in legislation, they are equally subsided by the government

Flexibly scheduled ECEC is organized in two main ways; 1) extended opening

hours (approximately 5am to 11pm) Monday to Friday and 2) around the clock seven days a week. In practice, some children may attend two different care centres, a neighbourhood day-care centre and a centralised service for non-standard hours of care. Institutional childcare during non-standard hours has been called day and night care (Salonen et al. 2016) or flexible care (DeSchipper et al. 2003). In this paper, we use the term flexibly scheduled ECEC, since the hours of care is scheduled for each child according to parental working hours. The term also highlights the importance of education, not just care.

In Finnish ECEC institutions, children are typically divided into age groups. For each group of children (12 children under age three or 24 children aged 3 to 6) at least one educator with a teaching qualification and two educators (childcare nurses) with vocational training there must be present. In flexibly scheduled ECEC, childcare nurses typically work early morning, evening, night and weekend shifts, whereas teachers work so-called 'standard hours', which is when most children attend. However, in some centres, teachers also work non-standard hours (Rönkä et al. 2017). During non-standard hours, children often form a single group heterogeneous in age.

In Finland, the 2013 transfer of the administration of ECEC services from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Culture was an important acknowledgement of ECEC as the first step along the path of lifelong learning (Vlasov et al. 2016). However, the long history of Finnish ECEC services as part of welfare and health care is still visible in discussions of care and education debates (Onnismaa & Kalliala, 2010; Karila & Kinos 2012). The Finnish socio-pedagogically oriented National Core Curriculum (2018) emphasises high-quality pedagogy in terms of unifying upbringing, teaching and care in daily pedagogical practices. For example, play is seen as an important arena for learning cognitive and social skills, and daily

basic care practices are perceived as important educational activities to teach important life skills, whereas the formal or structured teaching of skills like, for example letters or numbers is not emphasised (National Core Curriculum 2018).

In this study, our interest is teachers' and childcare nurses' talk about pedagogy. The theoretical background led us to assume that the educators build tensional picture of the pedagogy they implement into daily practices. To render visible all the pedagogy-related discourses in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC, the following research questions were set:

(1) What kinds of pedagogy-related discursive tensions are revealed in teachers' and childcare nurses' talk?

(2) How are these tensions constructed in the educators' use of language?

Methodology

Participants and data collection

The data were collected by interviewing Finnish ECEC educators (N=31) working in flexibly scheduled ECEC and form part of the larger data set collected by the 'Children's socio-emotional well-being and daily family life in a 24-h economy' – project research group funded by the Academy of Finland. First, the educators answered a quantitative web-based questionnaire posted by the project. Participants were subsequently asked if they would be willing to be interviewed. All the interviews were conducted over the following months. The data used in this particular study was derived solely from interview data.

The interviewees came from different parts of Finland, from different-sized

municipalities and from both public and private ECEC centres with either extended or 24/7 opening hours. Twelve of the interviewees had an ECEC teacher qualification while the remaining 19 were childcare nurses with a secondary-level education. Mean duration of work experience in flexibly scheduled ECEC was 9 years, ranging from 6 months to 35 years. One participant was male and the remainder female. The teachers typically worked standard hours, whereas the childcare nurses also worked during non-standard hours.

The semi-structured thematic interviews (Patton 2002) were conducted in the educators' work-places by the first author and other research team members. The interviews started with an open question asking what the educator thought about flexibly scheduled ECEC as a way of taking care of children. The other questions were organised around child well-being-related topics, daily activities, participants' working schedules, communication between educators, children and parents, and pedagogical practices. The interviewees were asked to describe the challenges and possibilities related to pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC and how they implement pedagogical practices especially during non-standard hours. Most of the interviews took about one hour; the longest took almost two hours.

In this study, the proper handling of ethical issues was ensured by following the guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2013). At the beginning of the interview, participants were informed about the aim of the study and their rights in participating in it before they were asked to fill in a written consent to participate. The right to opt out of research whenever they decide was explained, including that the data will be anonymised to hide their identity, workplace and other personal information. The data has been stored and reported carefully to secure participants' anonymity.

In discourse analytical research, the focus is not the factuality of talk; instead, we are interested in discourses as cultural interpretative resources available to the speaker (Taylor 2006, Nikander 2012). In discursive psychology, it is assumed that talk is 'action-oriented' and discourse is a 'medium for action' (Potter 2010). In other words, the pedagogical discourses in the flexibly scheduled ECEC constructed in the interview talk are assumed to be resources for future talk (see Taylor 2006). This is also an ethical question for us as researchers: What kinds of discourses will we construct when reporting and interpreting research results?

In the discourse analysis study, both the interviewer and interviewee can be seen as active participants in meaning making. Themes and questions were constructive because, through them, the interviewer controlled the information stream and returned the interview to a topic introduced at the beginning of the interview (see Nikander 2012). However, interviewees were given the chance to concentrate on topics that they found useful. However, all the themes of the semi-structured interview were discussed with all the interviewees.

Analysis

The present approach is based on the principles of discursive psychology, according to which people's language use is viewed as constructive, action-oriented and consequential, producing multiple and varied descriptions of the same phenomenon (Leeds-Hurwitz 2009, Potter 1996; Potter 2012), here pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC. The analysis started by coding all the pedagogy-related passages in the interview data. The criteria used to identify these passages was explicit educator talk about pedagogy. The passages mostly comprised answers to the interviewer's questions about how to implement pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC. At the beginning of the interviews, educators were also asked what they regarded as essential in flexibly

scheduled ECEC. In their answers, some of the interviewees mentioned the importance of pedagogy and the others the importance of care. Some of the passages identified were spontaneously produced in other parts of the interview.

After the coding phase, the pedagogy-related text passages were examined systematically to find the most relevant elements in the data. As the diverse and contradictory meanings attributed to pedagogy in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC had been identified, the focus of the analysis shifted to the discursive tensions present in the interviewees' talk. Here, the term discursive tensions refers to the discourses and counter-discourses produced by the interviewees on pedagogy in the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC (see Burr 2003, 64).

The discursive tensions were identified by analysing (in)consistency and variety in the discourses, that is, the distinctive and internally coherent ways in which the informants described and talked about pedagogy. Some of the tensions were explicitly constructed through the deployment of different linguistic and argumentative strategies. When explicitly constructed, the interviewees actively created a tension referring to the polarity between discourses (e.g., polarising pedagogy as targeted to the older children and the need for care as targeted to the younger ones; positioning educators with various educational background differently; or otherwise displaying a preference for one discourse over the other). Some tensions were more implicit and identified in discourses that seemed to be tensional or contradictory, even if not explicitly stated by the interviewee.

Results: Pedagogy-related tensions in flexibly scheduled ECEC

Three discursive tensions related to pedagogy were found in the data: 1) children's right to learn vs. need for care; 2) educators' educational background vs. personal strengths

as a standpoint for pedagogical work; and 3) pedagogy as standardised vs. situational practice. The tensions and their core questions and main features are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Discursive tensions and their main features

Discursive tension	Core question	Constructive features
Children's right to learn vs. need for care	Who is pedagogy for?	Every child present at all service times must be seen to be given opportunity to learn vs. children only need care during non-standard hours.
Educators' educational background vs. personal strengths as competence requirement	Who provides pedagogy?	Pedagogical work is done only by qualified teachers vs. every educator can conduct pedagogical practices irrespective of his/her educational background.
Pedagogy as standardized vs. situational practice	How is pedagogy implemented?	Pedagogical focus on predetermined outputs vs. individual processes.

Children's right to learn or need for care

The first discursive tension was between children's right to learn and need for care. The core question in these tensional discourses was 'Who is pedagogy for?'. In this tension, pedagogy was a synonym for formal learning practices and thus excluded the other important dimensions of ECEC, i.e., caring for and bringing up children. The tension seems to arise in flexibly scheduled ECEC because time in care also includes non-standard hours, typically viewed as 'spare time' that should be spent at home with family members (e.g. Jordan 2008; Statham and Mooney 2003). In the following example, children's right to formal pedagogy is highlighted:

> Extract 1
> 1. It is that, children are provided equal opportunities regardless of their
> 2. individual schedules, so whenever they attend ECEC, they have equal
> 3. opportunities to participate in the instructed activities and possibly in some kind
> 4. of teaching, and so on, I find this very important. (Childcare nurse 1)

In extract 1, the informant emphasises value of teaching and children's right to learn. She argues that all children should be able to participate in diverse pedagogical practices despite their hours of care. The interviewee mentions the term 'equal opportunities' twice (Extract 1, line1, lines 2-3) indicating her strongly held opinion that all children should participate in pedagogical activities irrespective of when they are in care. She also identifies personally with the argument by saying 'I find this very important' (Extract 1, line 4).

As an opposite to Extract 1, where pedagogy is seen as the right of all children, in the extracts 2-4 below, pedagogy is not considered necessary for children attending ECEC during evenings and nights. In these extracts, the emphasis on care at the expense of formal learning activities is justified in many ways, most typically by reference to children's need for care during non-standard hours. In this line of thought, care and caring practices are constructed as the opposite of teaching practices. This is displayed in the following examples where, using various argumentative strategies, educators actively and explicitly highlight caring practices:

Extract 2
1. I would probably reduce, if you think about the activities, I would reduce too
2. many activities and would give the children more looseness and home-like,
3. where there is more warmth, physical closeness and so on. I believe this is what
4. they long for. (Kindergarten teacher 1)

Extract 3
1. Maybe the youngest children are like, maybe they don't call for so much of that
2. [pedagogy].. physical closeness and that kind of thing is sufficient for them. But
3. then for the older children there should be more activities and more systematic
4. systems. (Kindergarten teacher 1)

Extract 4

1. I guess a home-like atmosphere in the evenings, because children may be tired

2. and this allows them not to attend activities all the time. Also at home they

3. wouldn't attend organised, adult-led activities. Time for play can then be given.

(Childcare nurse 2)

In extracts 2-4, the starting-point for discussing pedagogical practices in flexibly scheduled ECEC is children's needs. These needs are foregrounded through the use of mental verbs like 'long for' (Extract 2, line 4), 'call for' (Extract 3, line 1) and in expression 'sufficient for them' (Extract 3, line 2). Children's needs are also constructed as situational and dependent on both the hours of care and child age. The tension is explicitly constructed by downplaying the learning discourse in favour of the caring discourse. Care is defined as warmth, physical closeness and mental presence, whereas supporting learning is related to planned-ahead and adult-led structured activities that potentially exhaust children. Therefore, children are positioned as in need of protection against too many learning-related activities.

The absence of learning activities in the evenings is also justified by comparisons to home care (Extract 4, line 2-3). Since evening time is traditionally defined as leisure time spent at home with family members, evening time in childcare centre is constructed in the data as homely. By a homely atmosphere, the educators are referring to less in the way of adult-led, structured activities and more time for rest, physical and mental proximity with educators, and child-initiated activities, such as play. Familyism, including spare time and the idea of a close child-adult dyadic relationship, is also strongly related to this kind of caring discourse.

Educators' expertise or personal characteristics and preferences

The second discursive tension concerns educators' formal qualifications for practising pedagogy. The core question in this tension is 'who provides pedagogy'. This question becomes crucial in flexibly scheduled ECEC, as the roles of teachers and childcare nurses working in flexibly scheduled ECEC differ from those working in standard hours ECEC settings. In flexibly scheduled ECEC, childcare nurses also work alone during evenings, nights and weekends while the teachers' pedagogical responsibility extends beyond their own (standard) working hours. The tension here concerns how an educator's educational background vs. personal strengths can be established as a standpoint for pedagogical work.

Extract 5
Researcher:
Is there something you find pedagogically challenging in flexibly scheduled ECEC?

1. Well, I don't consider it that way - - - I like it very much that we have children
2. who are present during the day time, when teachers work with them, and they
3. [teachers] have more [knowledge] of pedagogy. I feel like I am more a caring
4. person, taking children into my lap and having physical proximity with them.
5. And I nowadays have a good conscience about it. - - - and I don't feel like I'm
6. doing anything wrong. I am happy that I can work like this. I believe I cannot
7. give everything so I concentrate on this.' (Childcare nurse 3)

Extract 6
Researcher: So what things have you found pedagogically challenging?
1. Well, I don't know. We have such good teachers (laughing) that they have given
2. very good instructions, so I don't see any challenges. So when they give us
3. instructions, we mainly follow them. (Childcare nurse 4)

In extracts 5 and 6, pedagogy is constructed as something that requires pedagogical and professional expertise from teachers. The division into expertise acquired through pedagogical education and lack of it appears in the way the informants categorise educators into 'me/us' and 'them' (Extract 5, lines 2-3, Extract 6, line 2). In these examples, 'they' (kindergarten teachers) are positioned as responsible for pedagogical tasks, whereas the speakers' (childcare nurses) commitment to pedagogical practices is diminished by their construction of an educational background as a standpoint for pedagogical work.

Although pedagogy is constructed as expertise possessed by teachers, the speaker in extract 6 also positions childcare nurses as able to provide pedagogical input after receiving instructions from teachers. This professional discourse is manifested in descriptions of teachers as activity planners who distribute their plans to the childcare nurses in the team. Thus, pedagogy is constructed as transferrable, as expertise that teachers can 'lend' to childcare nurses by giving them instructions or 'toolboxes' for teaching children. This discourse is about implementing externally set pedagogical practices, whereas in the tensional discourse pedagogical practices are constructed as applied by educators according to their own abilities, as shown in the following example:

Extract 7
1. Well, we have divided it so that, those who has their own strengths, do those
2. kinds of things. And we utilise them a lot, if there´s somebody who knows
3. about handicrafts, they are utilised in activities and also those who know music,
4. if they can play an instrument. We have one person who plays the guitar, so we
5. may ask this person to come to our music session. So even though we work in
6. our own child group, we utilize other's skills. And not like you are a teacher and
7. you are a nurse. It doesn't look like that here. Which is awesome, we are all
8. human and… everyone knows how to [work] and we teach and advice if
9. someone doesn't know. (Childcare nurse 5)

In extract 7, teachers' and childcare nurses' personal strengths and interests are highlighted and the differences in their educational background are dismissed. Pedagogy in ECEC is described as something requiring diversity of expertise, and all educators have some expertise depending on their educational background, experience, personal characteristics and preferences. The extract also serves as an explicit counter-discourse to the professional discourse by denying through negations, that educators are categorised according to their educational background (extract 7, lines 5-7). The unity of the educators in a team is highlighted by the terms 'everyone knows how to' (Extract 7, lines 7-8) and 'we are all human' (Extract 7, Line 7). Here, educators' personal strengths are constructed as a standpoint for pedagogical work, regardless of their professional background.

Pedagogy as standardised or situational practice

The third pedagogy-related tension in the data concerns the construction of pedagogy: is it a standardised or a situational practice?. The core question in this discursive tension is 'how pedagogy is implemented' in flexibly scheduled ECEC. In the following example, pedagogy is seen as standardised:

> Extract 8
> 1. Pre-primary tasks, yes, those I define clearly, because they are teaching
> 2. occasions that I go over here in the child group and so on, so I check it quite
> 3. precisely with the pre-primary children, but then with these others, they are
> 4. mostly handicrafts and tasks for 5-year-olds, and those that they do
> 5. upstairs. So for those children who are away during the weekdays, and not
> 6. attending, they would get it done during the weekends. But here at the
> 7. moment it's a challenge, really a challenge. (Kindergarten teacher 2)

In the extract, standardized pedagogy is constructed as transferrable to different situations and groups of children, like (unfinished) handicrafts and pen -and paper -tasks (Extract 8, line 4). The idea behind standardised pedagogy is to offer all children the same learning contents regardless of their hours of care. In this discourse, pedagogy focuses on both predetermined inputs and outputs and aims at securing the continuity and systematicity of the pedagogy. In the counter discourse, pedagogy focuses on individual processes and is applied in each situation differently, as in the following examples:

Extract 9
1. Well, in flexibly scheduled ECEC, in general, the child has more opportunities
2. to choose the activities. The child's own decision is important, since during non-
3. standard hours, like early mornings and evenings there are no supervised
4. activities like in the mornings. Adult-led goal-oriented activities are located in
5. mornings, so maybe the best thing in flexibly scheduled ECEC is that the child
6. can decide. It is possible to meet children's desires because the child group
7. is considerably smaller during non-standard hours than the child group during
8. daytime and there are still educators there. (Childcare nurse 6)

Extract 10
1. It is important, that we can consider the situation, like the emotions of the child
2. and other - - - so that we can give up our own plans if the child's need is
3. something totally different. (Childcare nurse 7)

In the tension concerning the standardised pedagogy discourse, pedagogy is constructed as meeting children's individual needs and focusing on individual processes at given moments. Thus, pedagogy is constructed as situational. Child-initiated activities are constructed as possible, especially during non-standard hours, when fewer children are attending the childcare centre (Extract 9, lines 6-8). As exemplified in Extract 10, pedagogy can be constructed as meeting children's individual needs in that moment.

The educators thus report themselves as having freedom and responsibility to apply their pedagogical activities according to the situation, their own preferences and the children's needs and interests in specific situations (Extract 10, lines 2-3).

In the situational discourse described above, pedagogy refers to practices in specific situations that take into account the hours of care, and children's state of alertness, as well as needs, emotions and interests. The discourse emphasizes that pedagogy is not only about all children completing certain tasks with a visible output, such as handicrafts. Instead, pedagogy is seen as related to the processes how things are done with children in a particular situation. Thus, this discourse reproduces a holistic view of children's learning and well-being.

Discussion

This study analysed pedagogy-related discourses produced by teachers and childcare nurses working in flexibly scheduled ECEC. The results revealed three discursive tensions that manifested when educators were making statements legitimising either the presence or absence of pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC. The first tension concerned the balance between children's right to learn vs. need for care. The other tensions were educators' educational background vs. personal strengths as competence requirements and pedagogy as standardised vs. situational practices. Educators discussed pedagogy mainly on the practical level, but also referred to the legislative level when speaking about the assorted qualifications and duties of the educators (see Moss and Petrie 2002). On the practical level, evening and weekend care was constructed as less formal and more home-like than regular day care. By home-like the educators were referring to more child-initiated and fewer adult-led formal activities, warm interaction between educators and children, and having children in smaller groups

(Peltoperä et al. 2018).

Two contrasting ways of constructing pedagogy emerged from the data. On the one hand, pedagogy was defined as 'tough', something that may stretch children but in which their involvement is sometimes expected. In this discourse, pedagogy was constructed as formal, standardised adult-led activities targeted to homogeneous groups of children during standard hours. When defined as standardized, pedagogy was also assumed to require special expertise from the teacher (see also Van Laere et al. 2012; Gunnarsdottir 2014). As the data showed, teachers, especially, were positioned as having expertise that can be utilized by the childcare nurses in the form of pre-planned activities. This discourse on pedagogy diverged from the caring discourse (see Moss and Petrie 2002) and therefore confirmed earlier observations of the paradoxes between care and education in ECEC (see i.e. Plantenga and Remery 2009; Onnismaa and Kalliala 2010; Karila 2012; van Laere et al. 2012; Eurostat 2014). This definition of pedagogy was therefore rather narrow, and thus difficult to fit into ECEC during non-standard hours, when children's situational needs vary, owing, for example, to their need for care and the level of alertness (see also Rönkä et al. 2017).

On the other hand, pedagogy was also constructed as 'soft', as activities in which children were happy to participate. In this discourse, pedagogy was constructed as situational, that is, as taking into consideration the hours of care, possible heterogeneity of the groups of children, and children's individual needs and interests. When defined this way, pedagogy was typically provided for children in smaller groups and included adult proximity and time for play during evening and weekend care. The focus on the well-being and needs of children, especially during non-standard hours, reflects the view of Moss and Petrie (2002) on the broader social responsibility of educators and the society for children's wellbeing and competence in formal education.

The present educators argued that having fewer structured learning activities in the evenings and weekends left more time for child-centred play, which the educators highly valued. However, educators did not mention their own role in providing pedagogical content in children's play.

These opposing discourses about the role and implementation of pedagogy can be viewed as both goal-oriented and professional. On the narrower definition of pedagogy, its goals derive from the core curriculum, whereas on the broader definition, its goals are centred on children's individual needs and wellbeing. According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (2018), teachers are responsible for implementing the pedagogical curriculum, however, in a team, everyone is performing pedagogical practices. The present data reveals that in flexibly scheduled ECEC there is no commonly shared understanding of the responsibilities related to pedagogy. A tension was observed on the issue of whether childcare nurses only apply externally set pedagogical practices or apply pedagogy according to their own personal strengths, the situation and children's individual needs and characteristics. This is a matter of commitment to one's work: positioning pedagogy as the task of other educators may indicate a weakened commitment to the job, whereas taking responsibility can be seen as a positive act of commitment.

The major limitation of this study was that the data was gathered in one service form of ECEC. We did not compare different ECEC forms and therefore cannot argue that these findings apply only to educators working in flexibly scheduled ECEC compared and not to educators working in other ECEC forms. Moreover, the generalisability of these findings to ECEC settings outside the Nordic context may not be possible due to the unique features of this service.

The ethnographic research method could be applied in future research, to observe and evaluate the implementation of pedagogy and to reveal teachers' and childcare nurses' tacit knowledge. The interview questions guided the participants to discuss their daily practices as educators, thus omitting the more societal aspects of pedagogy, such as theory and policy issues (see Moss and Petrie 2002). The educators also did not refer to the core curriculums or other societal aspects of instruction nor the importance of children's learning outcomes (see Farquhar and White 2013) when talking about everyday pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC.

Practical implications

Even though in national instruction Finland's ECEC is an integrated system that combines education and care, this study reveals discourses related to a dichotomous system; the data reveals polarisation between education and care related especially to younger children (Rentzou 2018; see also Eurostat 2014; Plantenga and Remery 2009). The current 24/7 economy especially challenges pedagogy in flexibly scheduled ECEC: Parents' work shift are more flexible and unpredictable, so children do not necessarily comprise stable, homogeneous groups. Instead, child groups in flexibly scheduled ECEC may appear rather diverse concerning children's timing of care, age, vitality and different needs at a given moment. Simultaneously, all children should have equal rights to pedagogically high-quality ECEC, despite the timing of care or age of the child. Although the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (2018) and the national Core Curriculum (2018) mandate high-quality pedagogy for children attending ECEC, they have not considered the special features of flexibly scheduled ECEC. These premises and aims may conflict and cause tensional discourses regarding the implementation of pedagogy.

Flexible schedules have also been reported to affect standard hours ECEC, such as causing asynchrony in the level of alertness among children and various kinds of instability in the daily life of both the individual children and the whole child group (see Rönkä et al. 2017). Given this situation, it is unsurprising that the educators' talk revealed so many pedagogy-related tensions. Planning and conducting pedagogical practices almost around the clock necessitate shared views in the team about what high-quality pedagogy means in these settings. At the core of the pedagogy problem is finding ways to maintain a balance between care and education that benefits individual children's learning and development.

Education and care should not be considered mutually exclusive but viewed holistically. Childcare nurses, especially, face different tasks in flexibly scheduled ECEC than in regular ECEC, since they often take sole responsibility for early morning, evening, night and weekend care in the absence of teachers, whereas teachers' responsibility for the pedagogy in their child group is supposed to reach beyond their own working hours. A shared understanding on the implementation of pedagogy is essential among the teachers and childcare nurses in a flexibly scheduled ECEC centre, although finding time for shared discussions is challenging because of the differing rhythms of their work schedules (see Rönkä et al. 2017). The special pedagogical requirements of flexibly scheduled ECEC should be considered in the pre- and in-service education of ECEC personnel so the aims of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (2018) and the National Core Curriculum (2016) are met and children's equal opportunities for learning and wellbeing also are secured in flexibly scheduled ECEC.

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