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The Changing Policy Ideals for Parental Cooperation in Early Childhood Education and Care

Abstract

How parents spend time with their children, what they teach their children, and how they raise them in the early years have again become topics of policymaking and public debate. There is an intensive discussion about parents' involvement in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Starting Strong series provides ECEC policy guidelines for national governments that include guides for parental involvement. With inspiration from the sociocultural policy approach, this paper suggests that there has been a shift in the Starting Strong series from underlining policy ideals for parental partnership to focusing on the learning environment. This paper examines how these transnational ideals (re)appear, transform, and shift in the ECEC policy documents released in the first two decades of the twenty-first century in two Nordic countries: Denmark and Finland. Both Nordic countries have been involved in the Starting Strong series since the turn of the millennium. The paper also outlines how transnational ideals have become entangled in policy documents in these Nordic contexts in varied ways and how parental involvement is politicised across each of the two countries. We argue that this politicisation not only marks an intensification in parenting but also attempts to institutionalise the ECEC–family relationship, implying that the parent as well as the child must be enlightened. Thus, our analysis seeks to question the process of problematising the parent and the child's home in the policies and to enable new thinking and action to address this issue.

Keywords: Early childhood education and care (ECEC), policy ideals, parental cooperation, home

Introduction: The politisation of parental cooperation

The Nordic region's early childhood education and care (ECEC) system is often associated with a curriculum, parent boards, and a child-centred approach, while the Anglo-Saxon approach is associated with a preschool curriculum that begins early with formal teaching and prepares children for school (e.g. OECD, 2006; OECD, 2017: 16, 20). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Starting Strong series on ECEC links Nordic pedagogical traditions and welfare services to Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway¹ (OECD, 2001: 55, 86; OECD, 2017b: 165ff). The Nordic ECEC tradition can be seen as a social, geographical, and historical construction that, from time to time, has been

¹'Nordic' has contradictory associations. The OECD has highlighted that there are differences among the Nordic countries, with the Finnish and Swedish systems considered to have more learning and school-oriented curricula than the Norwegian and Danish systems; however, in other contexts, they are all considered the same (OECD, 2017b: 168, 179).

presented with different political and ideological purposes and with changing content (Brembeck et al., 2004: 11). However, the changes and developments in the Nordic traditions are not independent of changes and developments in other contexts (e.g. Alasuutari and Alasuutari, 2012). Indeed, ECEC in the Nordic countries is commonly mirrored in a transnational setting and measured against the quantity and quality parameters in this agenda (OECD, 2001: 51, 53, 55; OECD, 2011: 11; OECD, 2015: 219; OECD, 2017b: 16, 45). Moreover, in line with transnational trends, there has been increasing political and administrative interest in ECEC over the last two decades—initially with the introduction of a national ECEC curriculum in the Nordic countries and subsequently with the reforms that have emphasised early learning.

The OECD's 2001–2021 Starting Strong series is a contributing factor to the development of Nordic ECEC. In this article, we consider the links between the OECD's ideals, as presented in the Starting Strong series, and the ideals outlined in Nordic ECEC documents, with a focus on parents and parental cooperation. We approach the relationship between parents/home and ECEC as a dynamic transformation process that is constantly evolving and pay attention to the shifting currents of this relationship in the transnational and two Nordic contexts, Denmark and Finland. From this perspective, 'the Nordic' is bound by values, interests, and politics that surround and transcend ECEC and that cannot be understood solely within the geographical context or separately from the rest of the world (Urban et al., 2022: 46). Thus, our starting point is the assumption of an essential link between the transnational and the contexts of the two analysed Nordic countries².

By focusing on the transnational context and the two Nordic countries, we demonstrate how parental cooperation is being politicised across such contexts. This involves the notion that Denmark and Finland are not viewed as unique national and bounded entities in an analytical sense, but as part of developments and changes that cannot be demarcated by national borders. Our article focuses on transformation processes of policy and thus does not provide a classical comparison of two country cases. Nor does it follow the traditional approach of political and economic policy studies, which often focus on the

² In both Denmark and Finland, ECEC institutions are part of the national welfare system but partially financed by parents' income-tested user fees. Recent ECEC reforms in both countries reflect an increased emphasis on goal-oriented learning and a pedagogy tradition emphasising play, care, *bildung*, and upbringing. Both countries have a core national ECEC curriculum. [In Denmark and Finland](#), the ECEC attendance of children aged from one to six years is high, and the youngest children attending ECEC are 9–11 months old. Danish ECEC is often provided in daycare centres, with a crèche (*vuggestue*) for children aged 0–3 years and kindergarten (*børnehave*) for children aged 4–6 years or in age-integrated ECEC. Finland provides integrated ECEC for children in all age groups. The youngest children are often placed in groups for 1–2-year-olds, but mixed groups also exist. Both countries also provide family daycare; however, it is rarer than centre-based ECEC.

‘implementation’ and ‘impact’ aspects of policy. Instead, we foreground the social dynamics—where ECEC policy transforms and flows in non-linear directions across and within various institutional and organisational sites. We hereby understand that policy takes many forms, and not a static singular form that is permanent and ready to be found “out there” in the world. We consider the links between transnational and national ideals as reflecting transformation and translation processes. Translation refers to the processes of interpreting and negotiating policy ideals; therefore, the understanding and application of a particular ideal in different contexts may differ considerably from its originally presented aims (Alasuutari and Qadir, 2014).

The Starting Strong series focuses on parental partnership and home-learning environment (HLE) ideals (OECD, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019, 2021). Here, we demonstrate how these transnational ideals are reflected in policy documents on parental cooperation in the Nordic context. Thus, we shed light on how the relationships and boundaries that are created between ECEC and parents are entangled in wider policy than the national and not limited to a single, local context by applying a sociocultural methodology developed to study policy (Levinson and Sutton, 2001; Levinson et al., 2009, 2020). As Levinson et al. (2020) pointed out, policy can be seen as a practice of power as well as a vehicle for potential resistance. Policy formation and the negotiation of ideals are never fixed but rather contingent on the mobilisation of meaning-making (Levinson et al. 2020). Hence, we do not view the policy ideal of cooperation between ECEC and parents as clear-cut but as overlapping and constantly subjected to meaning-making.

Hence, we examine in this article how transnational ideals for parental partnership and the HLE (re)appear and transform in the Danish and Finnish ECEC policy documents released during the first two decades of the twenty-first century? By analytically (re)constructing the ideals associated with parents and parental cooperation, we provide insight into how both the relationships and boundaries between the main obligations of ECEC providers and the family are being drawn and transformed in terms of children’s learning and development.

Methodology: The policy study

International research in this field spans from sociological, pedagogical, and cultural studies of policies and practices related to families, parenting, and daycare–home cooperation (Lee et al., 2014; Macvarish, 2014) to evidence-oriented studies of family and parenting programmes (e.g. Bierman et al., 2015; Barlow and Coren, 2018) and critiques of the same programmes ~~for lack ofing sensitivity (which state they lack sensitivity)~~ to analyses of various contexts (Røn Larsen et al., 2014). Our socio-cultural policy analysis is situated within the former type of research. Both daycare and the family are seen as societal institutions that are part of policy formation and entangled with other societal institutions. Policy is in a socio-cultural approach viewed as a social practice of normative cultural production and meaning-making, constituted by diverse actors and institutions across diverse contexts (Levinson et al., 2020: 364, 366). It is appropriate to use a sociocultural

approach for this policy study because, as Levinson and Sutton highlighted, policy can be understood as moving in ambiguous directions and being constantly negotiated and reorganised (Levinson and Sutton, 2001: 2).

This article is based on a Danish and Finnish research projects on the transformation of ideals for parental cooperation in transnational and national policy contexts, which are approached here from a Nordic perspective³. A transnational perspective can help to illuminate links that are not immediately apparent in a national context (Hilson, 2011: 16ff). Therefore, we have analysed the OECD's Starting Strong series from 2001 to 2021 and the policy documents regulating and guiding ECEC in Denmark and Finland released during the first two decades of the twenty-first century (see Appendix). From 2001 until today, both Denmark and Finland have also participated in the OECD's Starting Strong series. The national documents we have analysed were produced, for example, by Danish and Finnish ministries, other governmental agencies, national councils, and associations and span the ECEC-related laws, government bills that justify renewals, curricula, guidelines, and declarations⁴. These documents were selected based on their status as governing/steering documents in the form of instructions and guidelines. 'Governing documents' is a broad term for documents that have varying degrees of guidelines and directions for pedagogues and parents in daycare institutions (0–6 years) (Roth, 2002: 18).

First, we read the OECD's Starting Strong series and focused on scrutinising the content related to parents/home–ECEC relationship, our original topic of interest. We searched the documents' main text and suggestions using the terms 'parent', 'custodian', 'partner', and 'home', excluding the presented country cases. Based on former research (Schmidt, 2017) and this reading, we identified two key ideals related to these relationships: partnership and the HLE. We decided to focus on these two ideals and relate the descriptions of the parents/home–ECEC relationships in the Danish and Finnish policy documents to these ideals. Then, we examined the Danish and Finnish documents separately and analysed how ECEC professionals and parents were positioned in relation to each other and the child's education, learning, and upbringing at home and in ECEC. For this, we searched and

³ The article is based on: a) an ongoing study of the positioning of parents in Finnish policy documents on ECEC released since the 1970s conducted by the second author, and b) a Danish research project (2016–2018) lead by the first author on what the demands of early learning mean for ideals for the cooperation of pedagogues and parents, and the fractures that arise in other ideals for the cooperation (e.g. Schmidt 2017; 2021; Schmidt & Petersen, 2017).

⁴ The Finnish documents included all the guidelines and regulations on ECEC that were in force or released in the research period and concerned home–ECEC relations (see Appendix). In Denmark, the governmental law for the national ECEC curriculum was introduced in 2004. However, the Danish law for ECEC and the national curriculum have been renewed more extensively than the Finnish equivalents in the last two decades. In 2007, the Danish law for the national curriculum became part of the ECEC Act. The ECEC Act has recurrently been renewed with major and minor revisions until 2022 .g. 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022. The Danish documents and excerpts selected for analysis were published when ideals for the HLE and partnership appeared in the field of ECEC. Thus, the Danish data include governmental laws and guidelines currently in force and declarations and guidelines from governmental agencies, national councils, and associations released in the last two decades (see Appendix).

differentiated all the text extracts that discussed ‘parent’, ‘custodian’, ‘home’, ‘cooperation’, and ‘collaboration’. In the extract analysis, we paid attention to the vocabularies used to describe the relationship between parents/home and pedagogues/educators/ECEC (e.g. terms implying equal relationship, such as ‘partnership’ and ‘shared responsibility’, or asymmetry, such as ‘give guidance’). We also considered how the parties’ rights, duties, and responsibilities were expressed in the documents (e.g. by modal expressions, such as ‘should’ and ‘has to’).

Next, we scrutinised the findings from the Danish and Finnish data side-by-side and related them to the transnational ideals for partnership and the HLE. Overall, the analysis was not a top-down policy reading process (from the OECD policies ‘down’ to the national policies); rather, the documents were read in the transnational to national direction and vice versa. During this process, we strived to trace the multiple ways in which the policy terminology related to partnerships and HLEs has emerged and the roles it plays to aid understanding of the potential differences and continuities in the meanings given to their content in the different ECEC policy contexts.

A limitation of our analysis is that, despite shedding light upon how parents in general are of political interest in the transnational and Nordic contexts, we have not examined how specific categories of parents are targeted. For example, policies often differentiate between parental groups and specify those in special need, such as ‘migrant parents’, ‘parents with low income’ and ‘parents with low education’ (Schmidt, 2021). Another limitation is that we have not explored how the policy ideals are translated and transformed into home–ECEC cooperation practices in Danish and Finnish ECEC institutions. However, we have described the interplay between ECEC policy and everyday practice in each of the two countries in earlier publications⁵.

In the following sections, the results of the analysis are presented. First, we outline the shifting transnational ideals for parental cooperation in the OECD’s Starting Strong publications. We then examine how transnational ideals for parental partnership and the HLE (re)appear, transform, and shift in the ECEC policy documents in Denmark and Finland and the associated transformation process.

The shifting transnational ideals for parental cooperation in the Starting Strong series

In 1998, the OECD launched the Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy to strengthen the knowledge of the approaches to ECEC and childcare by its member countries (OECD, 2001: 7). This action was the first step towards what is now known as the

⁵ Daily ECEC practice is rarely directed solely by policy, and a sociocultural approach often considers how policy is transformed in more informal and local settings (Levinson et al., 2020: 368). It is not within the scope of this article to provide an analysis of how policy emerges and is entangled in the two countries’ various and distinct institutional and daily life contexts. For analysis of the interplay between policy and the specific situatedness of practice and particular practices in Denmark and Finland see e.g. Schmidt (2020), Schmidt and Plum (2018), Schmidt (2017), Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2012), Alasuutari and Karila (2012), and Alasuutari (2020).

Starting Strong series and aimed to contribute to the 'cross-national' development of ECEC policy. The first report in the series was published in 2001 (OECD, 2001), and several reports were subsequently released (OECD, 2006, 2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2021). Finland and Denmark have been involved in the series from its beginning. The main impetus for the Starting Strong series was the 1996 Education Ministerial meeting on Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All, where 'partnership with families' was mentioned (OECD, 2001: 3).

The transformation of the OECD's ideals for partnership and the HLE becomes apparent when considering the first and the latest reports in the series. In the first report, there was a strong focus on the quantity and accessibility of ECEC (e.g., full day), the variation in the quality of ECEC and type of providers, and the parent's degree of willingness to delegate part of the care for their children to ECEC services (OECD, 2001: 33, 34, 56, 77). The term 'partnership' with parents based on trust and respect was introduced in the first report (OECD, 2001: 117, 128) and described a free flow of information and knowledge between parents and ECEC staff (OECD, 2001: 117, 128). In 2001, the need for ECEC staff to both learn from parents' knowledge of their children and support them in their childrearing responsibilities was pointed out (OECD, 2001: 118). In the latest Starting Strong report (OECD, 2021), the term 'partnership' appears only a few times, for example, in reference to national policy documents. Instead, the relationship between ECEC staff and parents is referred to by expressions such as 'staff engaging with parents', 'parents' engagement with or involvement in ECEC', and 'guidance and strategies to communicate with parents' (OECD, 2021: 79). The focus of the relationship is the child's learning, not only in ECEC, but also at home. The importance of impacting a child's home learning (particularly the HLE) is mentioned several times in the report. For example, in relation to ECEC curricula, it is suggested that '[c]urricula written in a user-friendly format can facilitate the understanding of ECEC goals among the wider public and align practices in the ECEC and home-learning environments' (OECD, 2021: 79). Both professionals and parents are seen to have a key role in 'implementing' the curriculum. Parents are defined as the 'first teachers' of a child (OECD, 2021: 28), and the parent-child relationship is also included in the process quality of ECEC. Thus, parents are viewed as their child's educators, and not only as their caregivers.

The ideals shifted between the first and second decade of the twenty-first century to have a stronger focus on the quality of ECEC, (OECD, 2011: 9). First, there was a focus on how quality can have different meanings for ECEC staff, parents, and children (OECD, 2011). Later, there was emphasis on how professionals and parents should form consensual partnerships to ensure the quality of the children's environment (OECD, 2011: 12). Parental involvement has been referred to as both a right and an obligation (OECD, 2012a: 220). Among the identified obstacles were the issues of parents potentially having a lack of awareness and motivation and having time constraints that would hinder their engagement (OECD, 2011: 12). 'Parental partnership' and engagement were viewed as 'critical in enhancing ECEC staff knowledge about the children' and 'in ensuring high-quality children's

learning at home' (OECD, 2017a: 34). Previously, there was sporadic emphasis on the involvement of parents as a democratic right and emphasis on partnerships as a participatory two-way process (OECD, 2006: 17, 18). During the late part of the second decade of the twenty-first century, partnerships were viewed as a mechanism for engaging professionals and parents in working towards common goals with high standards. This parental involvement was considered to begin at birth and to involve '...providing guidance, developing habits, imparting values, supporting learning experiences and sharing expectations' (OECD, 2017b: 209).

The emergence of ideals associated with consensual partnership

As in the OECD publications, cooperation between pedagogues⁶ and parents is central to Finnish and Danish ECEC policies. The aim of such cooperation is to enhance the child's early learning potential. Furthermore, the aims of the policies for parental cooperation also include 'securing the children's health', 'well-being', 'development', 'growth', 'safe and good upbringing', and 'transition to school' (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022: 34; The Danish ECEC Act 27/06/2022: cap. 2 § 7, § 8 stk. 6). However, early learning seems to be given priority in the ECEC curricula, especially in the Danish context.

In the Danish setting, the ideals associated with partnership have strongly influenced the school field (Knudsen, 2010) and have also emerged in ECEC in the second decade of the twenty-first century, although 'cooperation' is the main term used to describe the parent–ECEC relationship. In Danish ECEC, the ideal of partnership is closely connected to the early-learning agenda. Expressions associated with partnership in the transnational context, such as the importance of parents being collaborative partners, parental engagement and involvement in goals and the content of the ECEC curriculum, as well as ensuring high-quality children's learning in the home, also appear in the Danish documents (The Act no. 968 28/06/2018: 10; KL, 2017). Parents are viewed as partners in setting the scene for a child's learning and as obligated to participate in this agenda. In the strengthened 2020 pedagogical curriculum, which is linked to the ECEC Reform Act, the following is stated:

'As part of work on the pedagogical curriculum, the ECEC setting should focus on how the ECEC setting cooperates with parents on the learning and wellbeing of the child and the child group across the ECEC setting and the home. This cooperation on children's learning should be through the cooperation with parents that already exists...This could be an item on the agenda at parents' meetings, telling about what the ECEC is working on, and how

⁶ The term '*pædagog*' (pedagogue) has a long history in Scandinavia. Within the area of daycare, (0–6 years), *pædagog* is often translated into English as 'kindergarten teacher', 'nursery teacher', or 'pre-school teacher'. However, as Moss (2006) highlighted, 'Pedagogy is a long-established tradition in Continental Europe but virtually unknown in the English-language world, partly because it often gets lost in translation: the profession of "pedagogue", for example, is often translated, incorrectly, as "teacher".' (Moss, 2006, p. 32).

parents can support the child's learning at home.' (Ministry of Children and Education, 2020: 24)

At the municipal level, the term 'partnership' is used. For example, it was used in a feature article in the Danish Municipalities magazine published by the national association for municipalities, Kommunernes Landsforening (KL) (Danske Kommuner, 2019: 15). The feature focused on the Partnership with Parents project that runs in a local municipality, involves ECEC and a school, and aims to educate pedagogues and teachers about how to have developmental conversations with parents about their child. The project's focus was described as follows:

'...yearly developmental conversations, in which the parents start by telling the pedagogues about their child's strengths. The parents also talk about the challenges that they feel their child is facing, which hinder them from functioning well. The parents should be encouraged to prepare themselves for the conversation. If this has not happened, the parents should start by reflecting on their child's strengths and write cues about it.' and 'Parents should feel that they set the agenda for the content while the professionals should manage the process.' (Danske Kommuner, 2019: 18–19, author's translation)

In the Partnership with Parents project, parents and professionals are obligated to complete and sign a developmental plan, and the parents take home a copy. In the recently reformed Danish ECEC Act, the term 'partnership' is not a central part of the vocabulary. However, the ideals and expressions for such a partnership are reflected in the words used to describe the early-learning agenda.

In the Finnish setting, the partnership ideal was included in the first ECEC curriculum guidelines in 2003 (Stakes, 2003; English version, 2004), which stated the following:

'ECEC partnership means a conscious commitment by parents and staff to cooperation for supporting children's growth, development and learning. This requires mutual trust and respect, and equality. Parents have the primary right and responsibility for their child's education and also know their child well. Staff, in turn, drawing on their professional knowledge and competence, are responsible for creating conditions favourable for ECEC partnership and cooperation on equal terms.' (Stakes, 2004: 28)

The introduction of the concept of partnership in Finnish ECEC was linked to discussions held with the OECD. A few years before the publication of the guidelines, a review of Finnish ECEC prepared for the OECD (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2000: 65) highlighted the need to develop the predisposition of ECEC to parents and suggested that parents 'should be acknowledged as pedagogical partners'. In a move to develop a new cooperative practice with parents, the curriculum guidelines introduced the individual education plan (or ECEC plan), a plan for each child that should be drafted in collaboration with the parents (Stakes, 2004: 29). Despite the Finnish curriculum guidelines not being a binding document, the

individual ECEC plans became a universal cooperative practice within a few years (Säkkinen, 2010) and the key 'stage' for partnership.

The Finnish ECEC legislation was renewed in 2015, and drafting of an individual ECEC plan for each child was made mandatory (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 2015/540). The binding core curriculum was published in 2016 and underwent minor editing in 2018 and 2020. Despite becoming the dominant term used to describe the parent/home–ECEC relationship, 'partnership' has not been used in the most recent regulation in Finland. This was partly related to the conceptual ambivalence of the Finnish translation. The present regulation uses the terms 'participation' and 'influencing' when stipulating and discussing cooperation with parents. Parents are said to have the right to influence the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their child's early education and the ECEC setting. However, the general description of the parent–ECEC relationship is very similar to the previous description of partnership.

In both the Danish and Finnish contexts, 'partnership' is politicised in various ways. In the development of partnership ideals, both pedagogues and parents can be considered the partners for whom a policy decision is made (Schmidt, 2017). In addition, not only are parental guidelines being developed and emphasised, there are moves to regulate parental attitudes towards and behaviours associated with, for example, *how* to orient and engage in the collaboration and interact with their child. Pedagogues and parents are also expected to form equal 'partnerships', which is understood here as engaging to work towards the same politically set goals (see also OECD, 2012b: 12). Such consensus-driven ideals then determine the topics and projects that the pedagogues and parents should collaborate on. This approach can lead to potentially contradictory elements of pedagogical practice being neglected or overlooked, for example, when pedagogues and parents do not expect the same from each other or from a child. As Strandell (2012: 234) has also pointed out, while setting partnership ideals may appear to be part of a democratic project of co-involvement, the actual result may be marginalisation. This is because the pedagogues are given the significant responsibility of ensuring that the parents develop the right attitude towards their parenting and their child. Thus, the learning agenda creates an asymmetrical distribution of tasks between pedagogues and parents. Furthermore, the emphasis on learning potentially marginalises both the pedagogy and care arrangements shared between the family and the ECEC provider and the parents' perspectives in the cooperation (Westerling and Juhl, 2021; Dannesboe et al 2022). The pedagogues are expected to advise and guide the parents, and this includes ensuring that the learning agenda becomes part of the parent's daily interactions with their child. Under the rhetoric of 'partnership' and 'cooperation', pedagogues are now expected to be parenting experts and guides. In the two Nordic contexts, the classical boundaries between the ECEC provider and home are being (re)challenged, as are the parents' and pedagogues' roles and tasks.

The home-learning environment

In the OECD's Starting Strong series, the early-learning agenda applied to ECEC has been transformed and expanded. It now includes ideals and concepts such as the HLE, 'home curriculum', 'curriculum frameworks', and supporting families to create home environments that are conducive to children's learning, development, and well-being; the importance of partnerships is also emphasised (OECD, 2012b: 3; OECD, 2021: 35).

The HLE terminology did not enter the Danish ECEC field until the second decade of the twenty-first century; in fact, it was not widely used before this time. When it appeared in Danish documentation, '*hjemmelæring*' ('home learning') and '*hjemmelæringsmiljø*' ('home-learning environment') were mostly used (e.g. KL, 2015). Later, the domesticated Danish term '*læringsmiljø i hjemmet*' ('learning environment in the home') was coined (KL, 2012: 3). Today, Danish pedagogues encounter an ideal that includes increased parental guidance and parental involvement on the basis of the curriculum framework. Both pedagogues and parents are now seen as stakeholders in ensuring that learning agendas and policies are implemented in daycare institutions and at home (EVA & RBL, 2016: 2; MBUL, 2016: 15). One of the pedagogue's tasks is to advise parents on how to turn their child's home environment into a learning environment (Schmidt, 2017; Bach et al., 2018: 34).

KL- Local Government Denmark (the association and interest organization of the 98 Danish Municipalities) recommends that:

'The concrete cooperation between parents and professionals should be characterized by: [...] a focus on the home-learning environment supporting the work of learning in daycare and school, and transition to youth education.' (KL, 2017: 9, author's translation)

The policy extract cited above illustrates that there are various intersecting ideals that involve the child's home environment also being (or becoming) a learning environment. This shift is accompanied by the introduction of a 'home curriculum' that guides the activities that a parent participates in with their child. Both pedagogues and parents are expected to make a learning-oriented effort for children in both the daycare and home environments (Schmidt, 2017, 2020). This increased focus in the curriculum on learning environments for all children (0–6 years) and no longer just individual children has transformed daycare centres and homes into arenas for learning in Denmark. Parents are viewed as essential in ensuring their children's learning and development (RBL, 2017: 22). These efforts to involve parents apply not only to their child's activities at the daycare institution, which is seen as a learning context, but also when the child returns home. The child's well-being and development are typically mentioned in connection with learning and not as separate, stand-alone dimensions.

The Danish Council for Children's Learning, whose president is appointed by the Minister for Children and Education, has stated: 'Children who in their early years of life grow up with a

good and stimulating learning environment at home have much greater opportunity to subsequently learn and acquire knowledge'. (RBL, 2017: 22)

The Danish policy goal of strengthening the quality of ECEC, especially in terms of early learning, is applied to daycare institutions, parents, and the home environment. In this context, the family and home can be understood as central institutions in societal life (Gullestad, 1989). The family is also an institution that other institutions seek to influence and regulate. The quality of the home environment is determined by assessing whether it is an adequate arena for proper learning. In addition, the capacity of parents to promote learning in their interactions with their children (or to be alienated from learning) seems to be closely linked to social differentiation processes. It is also evident that the goal of strengthening the quality of ECEC is closely linked to categorising of at risk populations, such as 'single-parent families', 'low-income families', 'families with a migrant background', 'families with low education', and 'non-academic homes' (BSM, 2018: 26; RBL, 2019: 14).

The Finnish policy documents do not explicitly discuss the HLE, although an aim of the Finnish ECEC legislation is to 'support the child's parent or other guardian in her/his educational task' (author's translation) (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 2015/540 2 §). While this aim could be linked to a child's education at an ECEC centre and at home, it is not specified in any of the ECEC guidelines or regulations published since 2000. Instead, the documents—and thus the cooperation between parents and pedagogues—seem to focus on the education that takes place in ECEC institutions, based on the emphasis on and the role of the individual ECEC plan.

The 2003 Finnish ECEC curriculum guidelines (Stakes, 2003) described the individual ECEC plans as the basis of the educational plan for a group (i.e. a class). The content of the individual plans was described as encompassing; it was expected to take into account a child's individuality, experiences, current needs, and future perspectives, as well as their interests, strengths, and individual support and guidance needs (Stakes, 2004: 29). Research has demonstrated that, in practice, drafting a child's ECEC plan—and the partnership—results in a discussion that often includes the home environment and parenting more than education in ECEC (Alasuutari, 2010).

The present Finnish ECEC legislation (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 2015/540) and core curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022) specify that individual ECEC plans should focus on ECEC pedagogy and the work of pedagogues, clearly distinguishing between education in ECEC institutions and at home. However, the general description of parent–ECEC cooperation in the core curriculum does not completely exclude the child's home. The parents' participation in their child's ECEC and in discussions about their child's ECEC plan are emphasised due to the importance of children experiencing continuity between their home and ECEC provider. The aim of regular cooperation between parents and staff on shared educational tasks is to form a meaningful whole from the child's perspective (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022: 19, 42). The core curriculum also lists values, goals,

and responsibilities as topics of discussion between ECEC staff and parents (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022), which can invite discussion about the home as a learning environment.

There are also instances clearly outlined in the Finnish core curriculum in which ECEC staff should intervene in a child's home situation or address a parent's responsibilities (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). These instances involve a child's understanding of digitality, a child's physical activity, and bullying. Moreover, the core curriculum contains guidelines for ECEC staff on how to discuss a child's language environment and learning in cases where families do not speak any of the official national languages (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022: 50). While the family is mainly responsible for sustaining and developing a child's mother tongue(s) and culture (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022: 53), ECEC is said to support each child's integration into Finnish society.

The pedagogicalisation of parents has also been discussed in other Nordic research. For example, it has been suggested that a strong policy focus on parents potentially expands the role of pedagogues as becoming "parental educators" (Bach et. al. 2018, p. 44). It has also been shown how policy learning agendas for ECEC potentially create a curricularisation of family life and rupture of other ideals (Schmidt, 2020, Vallberg Roth, 2010), and how questions of the responsibility, authority, and balances between child institutions and families about children under the auspices of the welfare state always have been a conflictual issue (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017). It has been argued that in public debate about parents' responsibilities, there is a need to recognize the fundamental differences between the family as an institution and public child institutions if they are not to be reduced to each other (Gulløv, 2018).

Concluding remarks: Institutionalisation and pedagogicalisation of parents

In this article, we have studied the links between the transnational policy ideals, as presented in the OECD's Starting Strong series, and the policy ideals outlined in Danish and Finnish ECEC documents, with a focus on parents and parental cooperation in ECEC. We have approached these links from a sociocultural policy perspective as transformation and translation processes that are dynamic and non-linear and can entail differing interpretations of the ideals in different contexts. We have provided insight into how the ideals associated with parental involvement and cooperation across two Nordic contexts have changed and (re)appeared during the first two decades of the twenty-first century and how they are linked to transnational and politicised agendas on early learning. As we have shown, the transformation process and its linkages are particularly evident in the ideals associated with partnership and the HLE.

In both Finland and Denmark, parents have become a political target through ECEC policy. This policy development seems to foster a new type of institutionalisation: the pedagogicalisation of parenting. Thus, not only is the child a policy target for societal goals

and ideals, but so too is the parent. In addition to pedagogues, parents are now also increasingly expected to establish the ECEC setting and conduct early-learning and curriculum based agendas for their children. Political goals to simply strengthen early learning are not seen as sufficient.

In the Danish and Finnish contexts, the pedagogicalisation of parents has taken different forms; however, the partnership ideals are more similar than the HLE ideals and how the HLE has been addressed. In Denmark, both partnership and HLE ideals have emerged and transformed, with the HLE ideals becoming dominant, at least at the governmental level. In contrast, in Finland, partnership ideals dominate. The HLE terminology is not applied as directly as in Denmark, although the importance of parents engaging in their child's learning agenda is still explicit, particularly in policy guidelines regarding the child's ECEC plan. Policy projects in Western countries that aim to engage parents in their children's learning and development are often based on standardised parenting programmes that are intended to (re)skill or (re)train parents on more tailored and homegrown guidance for families in their everyday lives (Daly, 2013). The home-learning curriculum (not to be confused with home schooling, in which the parents replace the school) can be seen as an example of such tendencies to standardise. As cultural studies of parenting have also shown, parental guidance is intensified, and parenting is being politicised (Lee et al., 2014; Macvarish, 2014). In these processes, parents who apply alternative values and practices to their children's learning and upbringing can be viewed not just as troublesome or difficult, but as deviant or a threat to their children. If this perspective is adopted, then parenting can be reduced to a certain skill set that must be taught and supervised by experts (pedagogues).

The transnational and Nordic ECEC early-learning agenda is expanding to involve the home and possibly the institutionalisation and pedagogicalisation of parenting. The Nordic approach has long been associated with the concept of the competent child (Brembeck et al., 2004), and now with the pedagogicalisation of parenting the notion of the incompetent parent in need of guidance is gaining traction (cf. Onnismaa, 2010). This is reflected in the increasing political and administrative interest in ECEC over the last twenty years and the introduction of the ECEC curriculum and reforms that emphasise early learning and parents as learning facilitators. An increased focus on learning environments for children (0–6 years) has led to a new perspective in which both daycare and homes are seen as arenas for learning and in which the ideal of parents as collaborative partners is emphasised. The development of ideals associated with quality and a 'proper' learning environment for a child has also been emphasised. Defining an idealised goal for learning environments may result in both pedagogues and parents being expected to identify with it and work towards it as a common goal. The relationship and boundaries between ECEC and home are undergoing transformation, and new issues are arising, such as who is responsible for what part of a child's early learning. This calls for further examination of how cultural and social inequalities become part of ECEC policy agendas about parental cooperation (Schmidt,

Appendix. Documents

Danish documents

Børne- og Socialministeriet (BSM) [The Ministry of Children and Social Affairs] (2018) Den styrkede pædagogiske læreplan. Rammer og indhold. [The strengthened pedagogical curriculum. Frameworks and content]. Børne- og Socialministeriet [Ministry of Children and Social Affairs].

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Ministry of Children and Education. (2020). The strengthened pedagogical curriculum, Framework and content. Denmark. https://emu.dk/sites/default/files/2021-03/8077%20SPL%20Hovedpublikation_UK_WEB%20FINAL-a.pdf

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Rådet for børns læring (RBL) [Council for Children's Learning] (2019). Beretning fra formandskabet [Presidency report]. <https://www.xn--brns-lring-i6a4s.dk/materialer>

The ECEC Act no 985, 27/06/2022 [”Dagtilbudsloven”. Bekendtgørelse af lov om dag, fritids- og klubtilbud m.v. til børn og unge]. Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet [Ministry of Children and Education, Denmark]. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2022/985>

The Act no. 968 af 28/06/2018 [Act on pedagogical goals and content in six curriculum theme - Bekendtgørelse om pædagogiske mål og indhold i seks læreplanstemaer]. Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet. [Ministry of Children and Education, Denmark]. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2018/968>

Finnish documents

Finnish Legislation:

Laki lasten päivähoidosta [The Act on children’s day care] (1973/36).
<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1973/19730036>

Varhaiskasvatustilaki [The Act on early childhood education and care] 2015/540.
<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/ajantasa/2018/20180540?search%5Btype%5D=pika&search%5Bpika%5D=laki%20lasten%20p%C3%A4iv%C3%A4hoidosta>

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Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi lasten päivähoidosta annetun lain muuttamisesta ja eräiksi siihen liittyviksi laeiksi [Government proposal of the laws to change the law on children’s day care and some other laws related to it] (HE 341/2014 vp).
<https://www.finlex.fi/fi/esitykset/he/2014/20140341.pdf>

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2021). It is also vital to consider what the ideals for 'good parental effort' are and whether they benefit some parents more than others. Presuming pedagogues and parents share the same goals may increase the risk of institutional devaluation of those parents and children who do not fulfil these ideals.

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