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Chapter 18. Elements of the Pedagogical Process in Finnish Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the Finnish Pedagogical Process as a central element of the educational system of early childhood education (ECE). A conceptual definition and shared understanding and interpretation of the educational process are essential for the high-quality pedagogical practices of ECE. We aim to create a conceptual framework of the Pedagogical Process through a theoretical analysis of the different aspects of the process. Through this framework, we provide and promote the evaluation and development debate of current pedagogical practices. This framework will provide the tools to identify, structure, phase, and clarify the Process as a management system that includes planning, implementation, and evaluation practices and policies. The Pedagogical Process of ECE is considered through the broader sense of a process approach, incorporating both actional and structural concepts as well as the actions, deeds, actors, understanding, and sequential chain of events. The Pedagogical Process of ECE described in this chapter is built around its central elements: the first central element as the aim of the Pedagogical Process is children's development, learning, and wellbeing. The second central element influencing each premise and the aim is the staff. The four premises are modeled as the sub-entities around the central element and structurally influencing it and each other. The elements of the Finnish Pedagogical Process are: 1) Driving force and purpose, 2) Starting point, 3) Functional part, 4) Process outcomes. The multidimensional Pedagogical Process is not only about pedagogy but also related to an understanding of political, scientific, and professional operational practices and national policies surrounding the pedagogy.

Introduction

This chapter introduces the Finnish pedagogical process as a central element of the educational system of early childhood education (ECE). Recently, the Finnish ECE system has undergone a transformation and reform. One significant reform is the emphasis on pedagogy in the educational policies (Kangas et al 2020). A conceptual definition and shared understanding and interpretation of the process of pedagogy is essential for the high-quality pedagogical practices of ECE. The need to define the concept of pedagogy and describe the Pedagogical Process is based on the perceived understanding of ECE as unstructured and undefined institution globally and locally (see Stipek & Byler 1997; Härkönen 2006).

The pedagogy and the Pedagogical Processes of ECE can be viewed as culturally and historically determined concepts, where practitioners' beliefs and practices have been found to influence emerging pedagogy (Stipek & Byler 1997). In the narrow concept the Pedagogical Process is often defined as process of planning, implementing and evaluating the teaching practices. This kind of simplified understanding of the process of education do not pay attention to the premises of education nor the societal values, restrictions and paradigms (Peters 1976). The wider context for ECE compounding through reciprocal interaction between practitioners' beliefs, political context, and theoretical understanding (Brownlee 2009). However the dynamic relations among these concepts remains unclear. Still, the whole process of pedagogy has so far

received very little attention in the educational literature. Peters (1967) claimed that education itself is not a process but a reform, but if the educational process remains unidentified there is no standards for high-quality education. The Process of Pedagogy has been referred before both in Finland (Fonsén, Heikka & Elo 2014; Helenius & Korhonen 2008; Härkönen 2006) and internationally (Brownlee 2009) within the definition of pedagogy. In this chapter, the Pedagogical Process is understood through more general aspects than just teaching and learning, and the description of the Pedagogical Process is constructed through a theoretical literature review with scientific and professional publications, the key legislation documents on Finnish ECE, and the obligatory national curriculum document (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). We aim to create an understanding of the process' components, analyze theoretically the different aspects of the process, and provide and promote the evaluation and development debate of current pedagogical practices. This framework will provide the tools to phase, structure and clarify the process as a management system that includes planning, implementation and evaluation practices and policies.

In this study we aim to understand and describe the Pedagogical Process in ECE in Finland. We produce a process-oriented model of the pedagogy and answer two research questions:

- 1) What are the elements of a Finnish pedagogical process?
- 2) How is the Pedagogical Process constructed in practice?

The Pedagogical Process in Education

To move from the definition of pedagogy as a teaching method to a more comprehensive and multidimensional quality implementation of the pedagogy as practical activities, interaction, and membership of the process, it is necessary to define the Pedagogical Process of ECE. A process can be defined as a series of interrelated recurring events or actions that produce a desired result (Luukkonen et al. 2012) where the concepts of operation and structure are distinguished. First, the operational concepts refer to actions in the process, where the actor(s) are also to be defined. Secondly, the structural concepts describe the process as events where the actor cannot be assigned in the same way as in the action concepts. For example, education can be defined as the actions of the educational staff while the development is the process of individual development (see McLachlan et al 2008). The definition process of education should include at least values of education, learning theory, understanding about teaching, and the interaction through which the other aspects are fulfilled (Peters 1967). Karjalainen (2006) points out that the cultural processes of organizations are also complex that are more than the sum of their parts, and contradictions can occur among different parts. The process of education refers to interactions among the activities of learning and teaching; thus, they are seen as part of the same process (Siljander 2014). In this chapter the process of ECE is considered through the broader sense of a process approach, incorporating both actional and structural concepts as well as the actions, deeds, actors, understanding, and sequential chain of events.

The parts of the Pedagogical Process are not realized as separate, chronologically, and progressive factors, but they are interconnected and influence each other in a processive way in the progress of the overall process. When the parts of the Pedagogical Process or their order in the process cannot be precisely defined, it is called a dynamic process (see Luukkonen et al. 2012).

To understand pedagogical process of ECE the concept of pedagogy needs to be defined. International research identifies two different traditions globally (Bennett 2005). The pre-primary tradition represents the idea of ECE to be preparing school-readiness and is widely used in UK, US, Belgium and France, while the socio pedagogical tradition used in Nordic

countries understand the role of ECE more holistically and widely. In this pedagogical tradition the participation to ECE is seen important for child's and family's competences and development through transversal competencies, learning-to-learn skills and play (see Kangas et al 2020). Pedagogy can be defined to be "walking side-by-side" and to scaffold children through interaction, shared activities and children agency. Pedagogy in ECE is also described to be sustained-shared thinking where children learn the cultural traditions in behaviour and knowledge (Siraj-Blatchford 2008). The shared understanding is essential reason also for determining the Pedagogical Process of ECE for creating sustained continuum of meanings and goals of ECE for all its stakeholders.

However, the implementation of ECE pedagogy can be discerned or should include certain features that are relevant to the activity. According to Helenius and Korhonen (2008), the Pedagogical Process of ECE can be described as "a consciously guided process of education and teaching that encompasses both the individual child's personality and the development of the children's community," and there are six interrelated elements in the Pedagogical Process: 1) the child at the center of the activity; 2) the group of children; 3) content; 4) main forms of the activity, and 5) organizational factors. The staff is referred as the sixth element.

Methods

Context of the study

Finnish ECE policy has been undergoing a reformation since 2013 under the guidance of the Ministry of Education and Culture. Previously, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health was responsible for ECE, and its role was mainly determined through social policies. That included child day care for working families who needed to leave their children in care while at work. Other significant changes took place in the ECE system in 2015, when the Finnish National Agency of Education became the responsible policy agent for pedagogical development under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Culture through the education sector. The assessment and evaluation of ECE practices and structures was combined with The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) in 2015. Thus, the pedagogical significance in the educational policies considering ECE has been emphasized more than before. Completed in 2015, the Early Childhood Education Act (Amendments 2016 and 2018), has resulted in a significant change in the operational culture of ECE through content and pedagogy approaches. The first obligatory version of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education was published in 2016 and updated in 2018 as a prescriptive and binding document on implementation of ECE. The curriculum guidelines are strongly focused on the content of the Early Childhood Education Act and are obligatory for both public and private ECE. Based on the Act and the National Curriculum Guidelines the National Education Assessment Center has begun in 2017 to develop a national evaluation system for the first time in history. At the same time, Finnish ECE research has gained more attention and the quality of research has improved.

The subject of the research were the steering and guidance documents (n=2) and laws (n=7) of Finnish ECE together with scientific (n=23) and professional (n=2) publications which were acquired through an advanced search of the *Helka primo* and *Google Scholar* search engines with key words early childhood education Finland. From the search results a total of 25 professional and scientific publications were selected as analysis material. The selection criteria for the literature were based on their central role and link to the national steering documents and guidelines.

The Pedagogical Process of ECE is constructed in this chapter through three key factors:

- Relevant research findings are used to support and explain elements within the Pedagogical Process.
- Key legislation documents on Finnish ECE, and the obligatory national curriculum document represent the policies in the process.
- Roles and influence of personal of ECE represent the actors in the process.

These three factors are re-constructed and strengthen the conceptualization of pedagogical process of ECE.

Analysis methods

The analysis is conducted through review of the literature, a method by which topic-related single research papers and reports are collected, and critically evaluated to form a coherent picture of the themes and topic (Torraco 2005). Literature research holds a critical position in the development of social science. Research on text-based sources is applicable in the educational sciences, as educational systems consistently produce excessive amounts of detached data (Punch & Oancea 2014). In review of the literature, the aim is to develop existing theoretical understanding, create new approaches, and form a synthesis about the topic. For example, Wee & Bannister (2016) have introduced six different approaches that address these claims and identify the existing gaps; furthermore, they frame practical solution to evaluate different methodological solutions and results (see Table 16.1). This study is mainly situated in the gaps on the literature level to give a new understanding about pedagogy as a process, a real-world application to create a bridge between policy documents and pedagogical practices, and to create a new conceptual framework for the Pedagogical Process.

Table 16.1 Options for the added value of Literature Review Paper

Options for added value		Main output of the Pedagogical Process
Empirical insights	A synthesis what is – or is not – already known	State of knowledge from theories and policy papers
Theories	An investigation of different theories and their importance	Overview of the strengths and weaknesses of existing theories. Creating theoretical links.
Gaps in literature and research agenda	An exploration of omissions and limitations in approaches and suggestions to ways forwards	To give a new understanding about pedagogy as a process
Relevance for real-world applications	A synthesis for real-world application	Implementations and recommendations for policies and practices of ECE
Conceptual model	An explicit structure on the relation of dependents and independent aspects	A synthesis of a framework of the Pedagogical Process of ECE

Original source: Wee & Banister 2016, adapted

The Framework of the Finnish Pedagogical Process of ECE

The Pedagogical Process as a key concept is explored and reflected through the practical implementation focus as well as by defining the cultural approaches of the process. Framing a pedagogical process utilizes commonly used process definitions and process description structures.

To define the Pedagogical Process the concept of pedagogy should be understood. The conception of the pedagogy in the ECE is multidimensional. Definitions of ECE pedagogy often focus either on the relationships and interaction between children and personnel, or the practical and goal-oriented education activities conducted by the educators and the educators’

communities (Siraj-Blatchford 2008). In Finland, the definition includes activities, interaction, professional skills and awareness as well as the description of the actual practices:

The ECE pedagogy in Finland is institutional and professional activities based on carefully planned and structured goal-oriented interaction between children and educators, where educators are aware and have purposeful ways of affect the development, learning and wellbeing of the child. In the pedagogy the goals are to influence child's development, learning and well-being. The pedagogy of ECE is based on scientific knowledge and following the national goals, contents, methods and learning environment of education. Pedagogy is conducted through observation, documentation and on-going development of the operational culture of the ECE. Essential is the role of the child as active and participant member of the society as well as co-operation with parents. (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola 2018)

To move from the definition of pedagogy to the implementation and development of ECE, it is crucial to define the Pedagogical Process. The process of pedagogy is something broader than simply the idea of pedagogy. The wider objectives of framing the Pedagogical Process through structuring and clarifying is to influence in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities as well as management procedures.

This process is crafted using the Structures of Process Descriptions (Luukkonen et al. 2012) where a process is understood as a chain of related and frequent events. The Pedagogical Process also features the previously developed descriptions of the Pedagogical Process of ECE (Helenius & Korhonen 2008). The Pedagogical Process of ECE described in this article is crafted around its central elements: the first central element as the aim of the Pedagogical Process is children's development, learning, and wellbeing. The second central element, influencing each premise and the aim of process, is the staff. The premises are modelled as the sub-entities structurally influencing the central pieces of the Pedagogical Process. Four sub-entities are the basis of the Finnish Pedagogical Process:

- 1) Driving force and purpose
- 2) Starting point
- 3) Functional part
- 4) Process outcomes

ECE Staff

The staff in the Pedagogical Process consists of teachers, social-pedagogues and practical nurses as well as directors (Karila 2012). The staff have a different background from the training, and they come from two different areas of science (education and socio-pedagogy), which produces a variety of levels of pedagogical competence. Professional actors are required to have a wide range of knowledge and skills (see Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas 2020). In addition the professionalization of actors is enhanced through work experience, but systematic, goal-oriented and effective skills development is also important (Fonsén & Ukkonen-Mikkola 2019). The implementation of pedagogical activities in ECE is diverse, but it must be based on goals and a systematic design process. In terms of content and methodology, the potential for different emphases exists, and teachers have a strong role in planning and implementing activities. The staff together form a professional education community, supported by other experts.

Directors are the key actors in pedagogical process. In Finland, the director of the ECE center acts as leader of administration, co-operates with parents and administrative staff, and acts as

the manager of the staff, and oversees development and quality (Heikka & Waniganayake 2011). The role of the Director is to guide staff by undertaking observation, planning, implementation, evaluation, and development. In the Pedagogical Process, the director creates the conditions for the operational premises, and leads the whole pedagogical process. It is essential for the director to understand the Pedagogical Process and its various phases to support the process. Pedagogical leadership takes responsibility for the development of ECE and management with a pedagogical approach (Fonsén 2014).

Driving force and purpose

In principle, the Pedagogical Process of ECE always has some basic driving force, goal or purpose that determines why the pedagogy is implemented. The prime mover that emerges from the purpose and goals of the activity can be said to act as a trigger, cause, or "fuel" or driving force for the activity. As explained in the context of this study, the Finnish ECE is based on both international and national legislation and treaties. In this process, the purpose and driving force behind ECE has been defined as a systematic and purposeful educating, teaching, and caring of the child, with a particular focus on pedagogy and promoting the overall growth and development (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). This general goal is implemented through the operational objectives of the child's individual development, learning, and wellbeing.

The starting point

The implementation of the Finnish ECE process is based on an understanding of the principles on which ECE is based, i.e. the starting points for work in education. These premises are framed here for to shed light to the Pedagogical Process framework through international conventions, national legislation, guiding documents, values and ethical principles, cultural concepts, and scientific approaches.

International treaties and national obligatory documents

International treaties and national legislation guarantee the rights of a child that must be respected in ECE. The most important international treaty for early education is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1989) ratified in Finland in 1991. Central to the treaty is the fundamental value of the child's dignity. There are four general clauses in the agreement relating to the dignity of the child considered as general principles: 1) non-discrimination and equal treatment in society; 2) best interests of the child; 3) right to life, and 4) full development and consideration.

The Constitution of Finland (739/1999) guarantees many rights to children, such as equality (Article 6), according to which no one may be placed in a different position, inter alia based on age. Children are also required by the Constitution to be treated equally as individuals, and to be allowed to participate in issues concerning them. The Constitution also guarantees children cultural rights (Article 16), and the right to their own language and culture (Article 17).

In addition to the Finnish Constitution, early education also follows the Act of Early Childhood Education (540/2018) and the Government Decree on ECE (753/2018). This legislation guarantees the subjective right to education, the best interests of the child, a highly educated staff, and a safe and healthy learning environment. Other legislation relevant to ECE also includes the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003), the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999), the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014), and the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986).

The basic framework of the Pedagogical Process is established in the curricula, both national and local. A key curriculum is the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018) which define the general goals and key principles of pedagogical implementation of ECE.

Ethical principles

The ethical principles of ECE are essential premises of understanding the Pedagogical Process through professional ethics. Ethical principles emerge from the values of the above-mentioned international treaties and the legislation. Ethics guide the ECE staff in practices, attitudes, and responsibilities. Among other topics, the ethical principles state that teaching staff must meet their children, parents, and their colleague in an individual, equal and respectful manner (Kindergarten Teachers Association, 2020).

Oser and Baeriswyl (2001) have structured the teacher's ethical competencies as justice, truthfulness, and capability. These ethical competencies are intertwined with professionalism, professional ethics, and commitment to work. Atjonen (2009), in turn, has pointed out aptly that "pedagogical ethics and ethically sustainable pedagogy" are also needed.

Cultural perceptions

Many cultural concepts are the starting point for ECE pedagogy. The most important cultural concepts that guide pedagogical practices are the concepts of people, education, children, and information. The concept of education consists of a concept of people and learning that influences the way teaching staff understands, acts and speaks in their pedagogical work (Siljander, 2014).

The conception of ECE in Finland can be regarded as holistic and humanistic, whereby the child is seen as a holistic and inherently dignified physical, mental, and social being. The concept of learning in Finnish society is socio-constructivist and emphasizes a child's activity and interactivity. In relation to child participation, learning is addressed through socio-cultural learning theory (see Kumpulainen 2018).

Scientific approaches

The practical implementation of ECE also reflects a changing perception of the child and childhood. since the 1980s, along with the developmental psychological interest in information about childhood, there has also been a rise in social science-oriented childhood research that seeks to understand childhood as part of an era and culture. In part, this change has been the result of the institutionalization of childhood and the rebuilding of intergenerational relationships (Corsaro, 2011). Children are seen as actors defined by their generational status as part of social life (Kangas et al, 2020). Theoretical backgrounds of pedagogical activities in ECE include knowledge of parenting theories, in-depth knowledge of the child, child group dynamics, child growth, development, and learning (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2018).

Functional part

The functional part is explained and formed through the practices of education: topics and activities are selected and implemented to achieve the goals set for pedagogy. Researchers attempt to determine how teachers' awareness and methodical understanding are present in their choices. Finally, they wish to discover how these activities are aimed at the goals set for ECE.

The functional part of the ECE process is the most visible and extensive component of ECE. Teaching and educational practices are mainly visible through operational culture,

implementation of practices and learning environments, interaction and co-operation, and the development of the quality of education.

The operational culture

An operational culture in ECE is a historically and culturally structured way of organizing education. The operational culture exists and develops through the interaction of the members of community: staff, children, and parents. The operational culture of ECE consists of learning environments and working methods, organization, planning, implementation and evaluation of work and leadership structures and practices (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2018; Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). Play is considered important in everyday learning and interaction, and children are seen as capable actors (Kangas et al 2020).

Learning environment

The learning environment consists of physical, psychological, and social aspects (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018) that are combined in a pedagogical environment through a pedagogical examination of these three environmental entities. The development of the environment is linked to the aims of the ECE and learning activities. The involvement of children is important in building and developing learning environments (Fonsén et al. 2014). The pedagogical environment of ECE refers to educational foundations and solutions in planning, implementation and development of activities and environments (Kumpulainen, 2018). Its formation requires a pedagogical work orientation of the staff in solutions related to the child's daily life, interaction, and environment. The learning environment in Finnish ECE is defined to be child-friendly, safe, healthy, and accessible (Act 540/2018).

The practices

The pedagogical practices of ECE are implemented through the interaction and shared actions between staff and children. Pedagogical activities are based on children's interests, their needs for individual support, learning areas and transversal competencies from the curriculum. The pedagogical methods are versatile, and the systematic evaluation and development of activities are essential elements in the implementation of new learning activities (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2018).

The starting point for planning of learning activities is the curriculum (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). Based on the curriculum, municipalities make policies and strategies for education, and develop a local ECE plan. Together with parents, an individual education plan is made for each child. Children and parents are involved in the planning of activities, and the activities are planned based on the children's needs (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas, 2020).

Observation by the staff is considered a method of systematically producing and collecting information. Observation should be goal oriented, systematic, and carefully documented. When planning the educational process, teachers consider curriculum, children's initiatives and personalities, learning environments, cooperation, and many other factors. This approach is called a pedagogical observation approach, and requires awareness of the goals, context and the promotion of the child's learning. (Fonsén et al. 2014). The children's participation in pedagogical planning supports the children's self-concepts, sense of responsibility and agency (Rintakorpi 2016).

Interaction and co-operation

Interaction exists among three actors: children, staff, and parents in the process of ECE. Interaction and cooperation among professionals working in ECE are the basis for the process.

ECE staff come from different educational backgrounds and form a multi-professional community (Kangas & Ukkonen-Mikkola 2019; Karila 2012); they build a learning community for learning from each other and develop community action (Kinos 2008). Interaction between staff and children can be viewed as the central relationship in ECE. This pedagogical relationship considers a child's individual features, and the requirements of group activities. (Brownlee 2009).

Furthermore, children and parents are legitimate actors in interaction. The conclusions parents and the staff make and share with each other form the basis for a perception of the child's overall well-being and development (Purola et al. 2020). The aim of parental-staff interaction is to develop commitment, trust, and equality to promote the child's learning and wellbeing (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). Children also learn different skills and views from each other, and thus become members of the community. Peer group opens opportunities for peer learning emerging through play and playful interaction (Siraj-Blatchford 2008).

Documentation and evaluation

Documentation can be considered as recording of any actual ECE event in details. Pedagogical documentation refers to the process of recording ethical perspectives, pedagogy, as well as constructing an understanding of a child's skills or working methods. Through documentation, education becomes more open, and child-centered activities and participation are strengthened (Rintakorpi 2016). Pedagogical documentation is currently a prerequisite for quality ECE in Finland.

Evaluation is always combined with the concept of quality (Alila 2013). The guidelines for evaluating the quality of ECE are set by FINEEC (see Vlasov et al. 2018). The main factors of quality in Finnish ECE are structural and process factors. Structural factors are related to ECE organization at three different levels: national, local, and pedagogical. Pedagogical factors of quality are the functions of ECE with a link to the child's experiences. An understanding of the quality of ECE determines the evaluation of activities and goals (Alila 2013).

Versatile and multi-faceted evaluation of activities is a prerequisite for pedagogical quality. The evaluation of activities is completed through analyses and reassessment and attempts to create new perspectives (Ojanen 2006). Evaluation enables the planning of pedagogical activities, supports collaboration with parents, and the continuation of the child's learning, and provides information on development needs (Fonsén et al. 2014). Evaluating the effectiveness of pedagogical activity in advance, during and after the activity is crucial.

Process outcomes

The Pedagogical Process of ECE is completed by its intended or unexpected outcomes. The challenge for the process and the pedagogy is that the results are not always predictable or unambiguously and immediately verifiable. The process does not actually end but is ongoing. Therefore, the process should be regularly reviewed based on the accomplished actions. The significant changes and other components should be evaluated to understand how they will affect the future implementation of the process.

To get a comprehensive view of the Pedagogical Process, the outcomes must be considered in relation to the content and objectives of ECE as defined in the Act (540/2018, § 3) and the Early Childhood Education Curriculum. In addition, the result should be viewed in relation to the objectives set locally. If the development and learning of the child, as well as the well-being, involvement and active participation have been promoted in the direction of goals, a

pedagogical process can be considered successful, and the achieved result has also been desired. Another important outcome is that the children also seem to feel well, gain rich experiences in different areas of learning, and enjoy their learning.

Discussion

In recent years, with the reform of the Early Childhood Education Act (540/2018), the core curriculum and local and child personalized education plans have become mandatory to complete and follow in practices (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). This has significantly strengthened the role and status of pedagogy in ECE in Finland. Simultaneously, both national and international research into ECE has increased significantly in the recent decade. The role of ECE as a scientific discipline has been strengthened since the 1990s, although the roots of academia can be traced back to the 1970s (Husa & Kinon 2005). Increasing knowledge and research on education also challenges the practitioners and politicians to critical reflection and evaluation of knowledge. Thus, the understanding of the role of ECE has been changing in recent decades. The Pedagogical Process, which in this chapter is described to be multidimensional, is not only about pedagogy, but also related to an understanding of political, scientific and professional operational practices and national policies surrounding the pedagogy. The multidimensional nature of the Pedagogical Process in ECE is explained and defined through policies, personnel, practices, and process outcomes in this chapter. The Pedagogical Process of ECE has been shaped historically, culturally, and socially through practices, policies, and scientific understanding.

The prerequisite for the success of the Pedagogical Process is the conscious and systematic actions of an individual teacher, and more generally of the staff. The staff of ECE should have a professional work orientation and expertise on the substance of ECE, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the Pedagogical Process (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola 2018). Following the ideas from McLachlan et al (2008) it is important to focus on reflective development and ask defining questions from the Pedagogical Process: What do we want this process to achieve, what would we expect to be the outcomes for children, or outcomes as a result of participating in the implementation of it? (see also Kangas & Ukkonen-Mikkola 2019). It is not enough that teachers focus on teaching, but they must also understand the larger picture and opportunities and responsibilities towards each individual child and family, as well as towards the system. This perspective is essential to future ECE success.

In ECE, the role of the staff and the influences of policymakers can be seen as complex, multi-faceted and ever-changing which on the other hand is based on traditions and details of the guiding documents. The interactions of the staff and families represent these beliefs and understandings of the roles of different actors in the process (Siraj-Blatchford 2008). Forms of interaction between staff and children, parent-professional interaction, interaction between children and professionals working in an educational institution are all central to the Pedagogical Process and influence each other constantly (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas 2020).

Operational practices arise from the operating culture; pedagogical operating practices arise from the pedagogical operating culture. The more aware, thoughtful, reasoned and commonly agreed upon practices are, the more consistent the operational culture will be an important element of ECE. The continuous evaluation and development and development of operational culture and practices is important. Operational culture and practices are dynamic and time- and context-dependent. Professionally grounded pedagogical policies and practices are based on the ECE policy, other policies, theory and knowledge base, values, and principles (see Johansson, Emilsson & Puroila 2018; Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018).

The Pedagogical Process refers to the understanding of the ECE through systematic and goal-oriented aspects. As a process the ECE is a developing system, in which all the aspects of the process are evaluated through the same goals and principles (Alila 2013). However, it is not just a process of reviewing the outcome at the end of the process, but also evaluating the pedagogical function must be continuous and systematic throughout the process (see Kumpulainen 2018). If the pedagogical activity produces the intended result and effects, the process can be linked to its original purpose and driving force (Alila & Ukkonen-Mikkola 2018). Of course, the process may also have unexpected results that have not been predicted as effects. These results also need to be evaluated in relation to the objectives and interrelated practices that have been set.

Finally, based on the results and discussion we propose a definition for the Pedagogical Process of ECE:

The Pedagogical Process of ECE is a chain of events based on aims and planning (see Figure 16.1). The goal of the process is to support the child's learning, development, and well-being. It is implemented by professional actors through interaction with other stakeholders. The Pedagogical Process consists of interrelated sub-entities, that are the Driving force, the Starting point, the Functional part, and the Process outcomes. The process can be defined as sine qua non, the understanding of the process is a prerequisite and essential to the core of high-quality ECE.

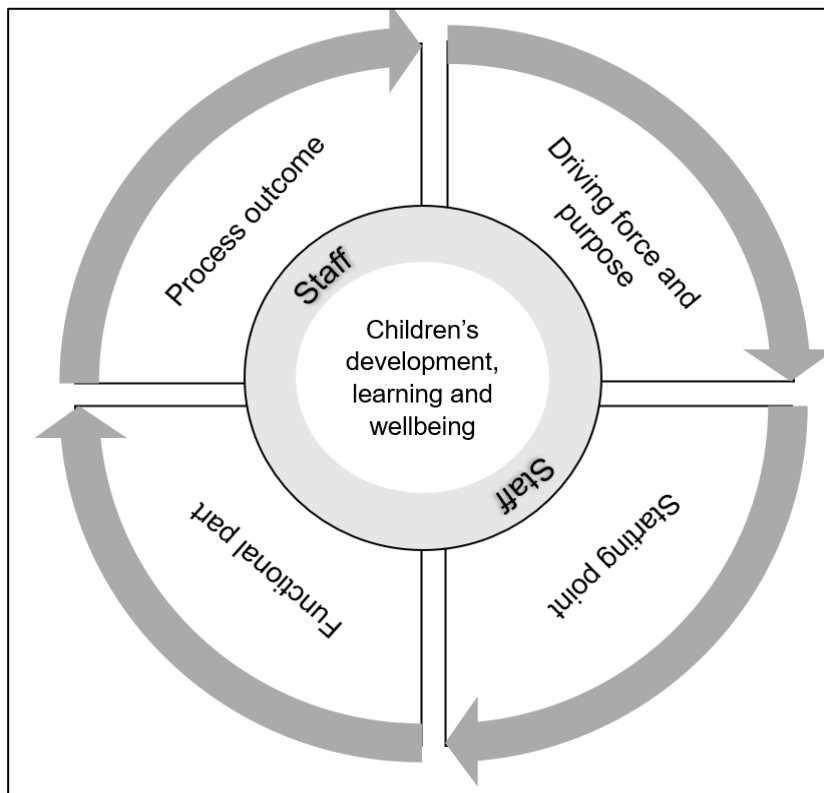


Figure 16.1 Pedagogical Process of Early Childhood Education

Recommendations

After defining the Pedagogical Process of ECE, it is essential to explore a practical level of understanding for the actors: To administration, to education and training, and to the staff of ECE.

A common approach for all stakeholders of ECE is the identification of values, principles, and goals. It is possible to maintain and develop the debate of the meaning of ECE through effective and up-to-date legislation and steering documents. It is essential that these documents are constructed based on scientific research and the understanding of the Pedagogical Process. Finally, ECE administrators should be provided enough knowledge and methods for training the staff, as well as competence for leading staff development.

Already during the education and training of different professional groups in ECE, it is necessary to look at the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the Pedagogical Process from both theoretical and practical points of view. The training must be based on an education science, ECE, and multidisciplinary approaches. The staff needs to understand the substances, be aware of the structure of the process, be competent of teamwork and understand their role within it. Thus, effective education and in-service-training for staff is needed. Through the in-service-training, new regulations and understandings about the dynamic pedagogical process can be implemented in practice.

Through the understanding and definition of the Pedagogical Process, it is possible to structure the practical work of ECE as well as share the expertise and tasks of professional groups at different phases of the process. The Pedagogical Process of ECE gives tools to staff to focus on the central pieces of the process and supports staff involvement. Thus, professional groups can identify their role and contribution as an important part of the process. Outlining of the Pedagogical Process of ECE also contributes to the quality of management and development of education. The management of pedagogy is defined to be the management of the overall pedagogical process as defined above.

The reforms of the national guidance documents and the new research data point to the pedagogy of future ECE and the totality of the Pedagogical Process. Atjonen (2009) has stated when considering future pedagogy that a committed, reliable, and well-educated staff needs pedagogical guidance. The good pedagogy of the future emphasizes the pedagogy of caring, dwelling, tolerating and should include qualities of variability, discernment, and curiosity. These combine into larger factors: a pedagogy of care, justice, and truthfulness.

It will be interesting to see where early childhood pedagogy develops in the coming years. Finally, it is easy to agree with Atjonen's (2009) statement that "pedagogy is in and hot - now and especially in the future."

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