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Ethnography in Early Childhood Education and Care

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Abstract

Childhood research is increasingly being conducted from different disciplines, and research methods for showing the child's world are also increasing and evolving. This article examines the challenges and opportunities of childhood research in an early childhood education and care (ECEC) environment from an ethnographic approach. The purpose of the article is to create a vision of what ECEC ethnography is, which can be used to make visible the culture of an under-school-age child, his or her experience, feelings, voice, and actions. A key challenge in ECEC ethnography is that the researcher is a representative of adult culture, emphasizing the need for reflexivity. We highlight five key themes for the researcher: the acquisition of material, the degree of researcher participation, taking on the role of a researcher, reaching the child's voice, and describing the results in a child-centered and ethically sustainable way. Respect for the child and earning the child's trust are essential. When successful, ECEC ethnography provides knowledge and understanding of childhood in a way that can contribute to supporting children's development and overall well-being.

Introduction

Childhood research has risen up increasing interest (Uusiautti & M\"a\"att\"a 2013; Yelland & Bartholomaeus, 2021) as part of educational, social, and cultural research. Scientific research in the world of children's experience has also evolved and several different methods have been introduced (see e.g. Fargas, McSherry, Larkin, Robinson, 2020). Over the past two decades, ethnography has become increasingly prominent in depicting children's lives (Konstantoni & Kustatscher, 2015; Uusiautti & M\"a\"att\"a, 2013).

Childhood research seeks to make visible the nature of childhood, its various stages of development, and its social connections, to which ethnographic research is well suited (James & Prout, 2015; K\"ong\"as, 2018; K\"ong\"as & M\"a\"att\"a, 2021a). Children have been successfully studied with an ethnographic approach, especially in the context of school and ECEC (Gallacher & Gallacher, 2008; K\"ong\"as, 2018; K\"ong\"as & M\"a\"att\"a, 2021a; K\"ong\"as, M\"a\"att\"a & Uusiautti, 2021; Rantala & M\"a\"att\"a, 2013) and in the home environment (Kyr\"onlampi 2012). Examining the children's perspective in ethnographic research appears as an interpretation of children's internal symbolic messages, such as words, pronunciations, expressions, and postures, that allow the researcher to understand children's experiences, feelings, and perceptions of childhood (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010). The starting point for child-centered research is information obtained from the children themselves or in the production in which children themselves participate (Hunleth, 2011). The idea of child-centeredness is to

emphasize the subjectivity of children being the object of study. Children are not always primarily actors in words, but researchers should seek to hear the consistent and genuine ideas children are striving for with the information they provide.

When research seeks to emphasize the role of children as valid actors and producers of culture, the ECEC center is one natural arena to make childhood visible, its developmental stages, and processes (Kirk & Jay, 2018). ECEC center is a key activity environment for a small child. In ECEC, children's social activities, numerous interactions, and peer culture form a central part of a child's world (Köngäs & Määttä, 2021a).

Early childhood educators, their pedagogy, and their role in ensuring the balanced development of children and overcoming learning difficulties have been studied a lot (Äärelä, Uusiautti, & Määttä 2018). The research has focused on the curricula of ECEC (Lundkvist, Nyby, Autto, & Nygård 2017), their educational goals and methods (Hujala, Fonsén, & Elo, 2013), cooperation between home and early childhood educators (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2013) and early childhood education attitudes and working conditions (Happo, Määttä & Uusiautti 2013). Instead, the way ECEC looks from a child's point of view, his or her thoughts and activities, has remained a marginal area of research. The paucity of research work is also due to the limited research methods. It is easy to approach early childhood education professionals through interviews and or to analyze early childhood education plans through content analysis, but reaching a child's real-world requires a different approach. To fill this gap, in this article, we open up a perspective on the possibilities of ethnographic research to reveal the reality of ECEC from a child's experiences. ECEC ethnography can show the ECEC center's environment in a new way, taking the child's experience world as a starting point.

How to implement ECEC ethnography, ie ethnographic research in an ECEC environment, so that the voice and world of under-school-aged children are opened to the researcher? The purpose of this article is to describe the core stages of ethnographic research in the context of ECEC and to create a valid picture of ECEC ethnography. What are its key perspectives and themes in bringing out a true picture of a child's world of experience? The article is based on previous research and literature on the topic.

Purpose of the Article

How to conduct ethnographic research in ECEC in a way that opens the specialty of child-centered subjects to a researcher who is a representative of adult culture? Is the so-called "foreign culture researcher" able to hear the honest voice of children from the material? Are children an unfamiliar group to the ethnographer and is the current childhood too unfamiliar a field for reliable analysis? Does children's micro-culture in ECEC centers ever allow adults to enter their world? (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Kyrönlampi-Kylmänen & Määttä, 2013; Tisdall, Davis & Gallagher, 2009; Warming, 2011.)

In the implementation of ECEC ethnography, special attention must be paid to certain choices and stages when conducting research describing the child's world. The purpose of this article is to describe the main stages and choices of ethnographic childhood research in ECEC based on our previous research work on children (e.g.

Köngäs, 2018; Kyrönlampi & Määttä, 2012, 2013; Köngäs & Määttä 2020) and applying ethnography in an ECEC context and reflecting on critical points in childhood research. At the same time, we want to define and make visible the essence of ECEC ethnography. We want to highlight the key solutions that a researcher should make when conducting ECEC ethnographic research with a child-centered approach.

Ethnography as a Methodology

Ethnography is a qualitative study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Reeves, Peller, Goldman & Kitto, 2013). It is considered a particularly suitable research approach when 1) the nature of a social phenomenon is studied, 2) the data are unstructured, 3) the subject of the study is a small number of cases, 4) the analysis aims to elucidate the purposes and meanings of human activity, and 5) explanations (Köngäs, 2018).

There are references to ethnographic childhood research from the observations of Bronislaw Malinowski and Margaret Mead as early as the 1920s when they justified the relevance of cultural practices, norms, and customs based on their field observations and questioned the evolutionary mindset (LeVine, 2007). The actual educational ethnography can be considered to have developed since the 1950s when a counter-reaction to quantitative educational psychological measurements, tests, and statistics was sought (Swauger, Castro & Harger, 2017). Ethnographers stressed that standardized results could not describe and explain the reality within educational institutions, for example (Delamont, 2007).

Ethnographic research is characterized by 1) that the phenomenon under study is approached through empirical observation, 2) research cannot be approached according to a predetermined coding, and 3) the researcher must be prepared to change his or her preconceptions as the research progresses (Bassanger & Dodier, 1997; Emond, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Within ethnography, clarifications can be made about what kind of research is involved, such as confessional ethnography, life history, autoethnography, feminist ethnography, or ethnographic narratives (Creswell, 2007). Ethnography can also be divided according to the questions in the disciplines, such as sociological, psychological, developmental, or educational ethnography (Gordon, 2002). William Corsaro is considered to be a pioneer in ethnographic research focusing on the ECEC institutions (Köngäs, 2008).

The Main Stages of ECEC Ethnographic Research

We look at ECEC ethnography and the key stages of its implementation with five themes. These include the acquisition of material, the degree of participation, taking on the role of researcher, reaching out to the child's voice, and describing the results to open up the world of children.

Method of Data Acquisition

In ethnographic research, the material is often captured by the researcher in the time spent in the field. Even if the

ECEC ethnographer has defined a specific data acquisition framework, it is only the operational reality in the ECEC centers and the words, deeds, non-verbal messages, and symbols of the members of the micro-culture that form usable material. A longer common time also promotes access to open information in ECEC ethnography: over time, children find it easier to talk about things, they don't have to pinch in different situations, and they don't have to be unaware of what it's all about or what they should do.

Reaching out to guardians of children for research permits is absolute, but often relatively effortless. Ensuring children's consent is important and difficult. Achieving consent from children is challenged by children's potential difficulty in understanding the process and meanings of research (Corsaro & Eder, 1999; Emond, 2005; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, 42). For example, the child may be willing to interact with the researcher but may not share the communication that occurred in their encounters with anyone else, or the child may want to participate in some areas of research (such as videotaping) but not others (such as an interview).

An ethnographer can set out to pursue his or her material through, for example, various observations, interviews, children's drawings, or other documentaries and artifacts (Harvey & Lareau, 2020). Ethnographic observation makes it possible to obtain information about real events without the need for participants to reflect on the situation. Still, it is not easy to observe, and the acquisition of the material requires the ability to integrate into the daily life of the ECEC centers and the group under study without feeling overwhelmed. The observer needs to note his or her as authentically as possible to ensure reliability (Emond, 2005).

The researcher may have access to a so-called child diary in ECEC. A child diary is a structured booklet in which ECEC personnel and also maybe children's parents can write their observations about the child. The researcher will intensively record all his or her findings in the child diary for a limited period. The child diary is important in describing children's "life as it is lived" (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli 2003). The child diary method is an effective way to get information about situations that are easily forgotten and missed in everyday life (Lämsä, Rönkä, Poikonen & Malinen 2013).

Videotaping children's activities can be easier than traditional pen-paper observation, as children's activities are often extremely fast-paced without traditional courtesy rules for adults, such as waiting for their turn, considering an issue, and staying put. A camcorder can be a great help and give an objective picture of the phenomenon being studied. It can also be more invisible and minimize the control effect, not misinterpret or misunderstand. The same video material can be viewed from different perspectives and can be used to confirm events and recall insights that you may not have had time to write down.

Capturing children's culture through video requires detailed and close-contact filming (Walsh et al., 2007). Children's attitudes toward the camcorder do not follow any clear line. Sometimes children struggle for attention to be at the center of the shooting beam, while other times they don't even notice it. Often children do not see the camcorder as an interesting device but as an opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of an outsider. The camcorder acts as a mirror of children's culture of themselves for themselves.

Video recording of children has its advantages and disadvantages. During shooting, children may cover the camcorder, turn their backs on the camcorder (making it difficult to interpret expressions), or move too close to the camcorder. The blind spot is one of the biggest ongoing problems with video recording. Important situations can occur out of the reach of the camera, relying only on audio material. This, in turn, makes it difficult to reliably identify subjects, as well as excludes nonverbal communication. Things that affect children's activities can also occur outside the camcorder (Walsh et al., 2007). For example, in an ECEC center, a staff member may be sitting and watching children play in the invisible to the camera, which may contribute to the behavior of the subjects.

Degree of Participation

The different socio-cultural dominance between the adult and the child must be taken into account in the role of the ECEC ethnography researcher. Children play a marginal role in adult society, but children are active actors in their own culture (Graue & Hawkins, 2005) and capable of decision-making (Powel & Smith, 2009). At worst, however, power relations with an adult can prevent children from fully participating and sharing genuine experiences with the adult on their own terms.

Whether the researcher is a silent observer or a participant (Observer continuum), he or she should guarantee the approval of the subjects (Holland, Renold, Ross, & Hillman, 2008). However, even during the observation of the participant, one should be able to follow all the communication of the members of the community, from the tone of the voice to the gaze and the touch, and to boldly carry out their research. It is important to reflect on one's feelings by keeping a research diary.

The goal of the researcher may appear to the children as visiting adult who does their own work for a while in the same space as them, just like a cleaner or indoor air surveyors who also work in the space from time to time and who also pay no more attention to children than a quiet polite smile. Excessive attachment of the ethnographer to the subjects may confuse the purpose of the study and the power relations in the field. For example, although a researcher may want to spend time with a lonely child during data collection, this only alleviates the researcher's own current discomfort if the child is left equally lonely in a peer group after the research is over (see Batty, 2020). The researcher can make warm and caring contact with the children without joint action. It is often enough for a child to receive confirmation from an adult that they have been taken into account, accepted, and valued, which can encourage the creation of relationships in a new way (Corsaro & Eder, 1999; Köngäs, 2018; Köngäs, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2021).

In most cases, the researcher cannot be completely outside, in which case he or she should spend time building trust in the community before observing the details of children's activities. An outsider researcher can confuse children, rise up suspicion, and uncertainty that can inhibit children's courage to be themselves (Emond, 2005). When observing children, the researcher may eventually appear in two roles; both as a participant and an observer. Through the researchers' participation, he or she demonstrates their acceptance of children's activities, making it easier for the children to accept the researcher also to move into the role of observer.

Regardless of the form of data collection or the degree of participation, there is always the possibility that the researcher will be perceived as an external distraction. Children are intuitive. Nevertheless, the researcher should strive to approach all his or her observations objectively. An adult is hardly able to give the impression that he or she is "one of the members of the culture". The researcher may try to think of himself as a friend, helper, non-adult, unauthorized, or entertainer (Hedegaard, 2008), but in the end, the definition is made by the children themselves (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Konstantoni & Kustatscher, 2015). Often the easiest choice is to communicate one's role honestly and openly, striving for a linguistic expression that children understand the situation.

Taking on the Role of a Researcher

The interaction between adults and children challenges the researcher to pay special attention to their role because the adult has more power to define the nature and rules of the interaction (see Taft, 2015). It is therefore important that the researcher consciously seeks to break free from the connections we consider to be differences between children and adults. It is also significant that the researcher seeks to be aware of his or her personal experience of being a child and an adult. (Harden, Scott, Backett-Milburn, & Jackson, 2000). Garratt (2021) reflects on the role of the researcher under the title "The least-adult role" to minimize its position of authority in the role of the researcher.

Getting rid of adult focus is difficult (Peltokorpi, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2011). In childhood research, it is so easy for a researcher to look at research material that only reinforces an existing practice or one's own preconception. The ability to rule out the obvious as well as the ability to look from and to a child is at the core of ethnographic childhood research (Simon, 2020).

The researcher may feel that he or she is an intruder in the ECEC centers when collecting research material as a person outside the community. Not knowing how the role of the researcher can be properly communicated to both children and adults can increase the researcher's uncertainty. The situation is facilitated by thorough forethought, information, and the construction of cooperation and joint agreements with ECEC staff, children, and parents before the material is collected. It is also important that the researcher sets his or her ground as a researcher and familiarizes themselves with the ECEC activities, children's peer culture, and ECEC regulations and guidelines for daily activities before going to the field (Köngäs, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2021; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012).

The researcher must have a theoretical frame of reference to guide the research work and data collection. The researcher should be solid on their attitudes towards the children being studied, their interaction with them, and the research situations. A particular ethical challenge relates to how the researcher sees his or her role and the role of the child in the research.

The researcher has a great responsibility for children and must not in any way cause maltreatment, harm, or anxiety to children (Kyrönlampi-Kylmänen & Määttä, 2013; Peltokorpi, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2012). The researcher's choices and the way he or she interacts with children are also ethical. ECEC ethnography follows the same ethical

principles as any study that speaks of ethical symmetry (Mishna, Antle, & Regehr, 2004).

Hearing the Child's Voice

Ethnography has been questioned about reaching children's voices (Gallacher & Gallagher 2008; Tisdall, Davis, & Gallagher, 2009; Warming, 2011), although it is a valued research method in childhood research (James & Prout, 2015; Konstantoni & Kustatscher, 2015). In ECEC ethnography, hearing a child's voice requires a child-centered approach, observing and acquiring information about children from themselves without adult guidance. Like adults, children create their own culture and learn and change in constant interaction with the environment (Corsaro, 2012; James & James, 2008).

It is important for an ethnographer researching a child to be able to look for unspoken messages in interactions and conversations rather than interpreting words. Often, of adult dominance, children have the assumption of a three-part interaction structure in which 1) the adult inquires, 2) the child responds and 3) the adult assesses the answer (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Kögäs, 2018). It's important to make the child feel at ease. The presence of the researcher should be calm, participatory, and patient. Time should be spent on the child's feelings and possible hesitations.

ECEC ethnography enables a child to open to the world in their environment, from their starting points, and with their thoughts. Numerous studies have highlighted the child's ability to participate in the study. The child is not only a dependent, vulnerable, and passive party (Daelman, Schauwer, & Van Hove, 2020; Komulainen, 2007). And the definition of a child's voice can also take on different meanings depending on whether it is a voice about children, an objective voice of the children, a voice for a dialogue with children, or a silenced voice for children. (Alasuutari, 2014; Mayes, 2019.) Ethnography can prove that a child is capable of expressing his or her feelings, thoughts, and opinions. They can make decisions as well as plan and evaluate their actions. At its best, ECEC ethnographic research is not carried out on children but also with them.

All forms of data acquisition require special sensitivity from the researcher. Obtaining information about children's views and experiences by interviewing children requires the researcher to have special child knowledge, a child-respecting approach, and fair and honest treatment. The child should be encouraged to speak openly about his or her views, but his or her way of speaking or willingness to communicate may be impeded either because of a lack of expression or because he or she does not feel part of the research process (Hill, 2005; Powell & Smith, 2009). The child may not understand why they are being asked questions, may feel pressured, and the questions may feel stressful and complex. They may have fears about the correctness of their answers, about their failure, or issues related to self-esteem (Kyrönlampi & Määttä, 2013). Children respond sensitively to what they think an adult wants (O'Reilly, Ronzoni, & Dogra, 2013).

With the advent of children's voices, modern technology and video offer new possibilities. One example could be the Video-Stimulated Recall method of visual ethnography, which is based on an interview using the presentation of previously described video material to provide stimuli. It would be important to get more reliable answers from

children about their experiences and views in certain situations. In childhood research, it is considered important to allow children to bring out their own daily lives so that the children's world would be more authentic, and the researcher's impact would be minimized (Kullman, 2012). If they want information generated by the children themselves, the researcher must find ways for children to participate in the study. Under the guise of play and imagination, it is possible to approach what they find interesting to tell an adult. Children are very keen narrators in appropriate settings if the adult is a sufficiently alert listener.

Child-centered Performance Description

In a good description of ECEC ethnographic research, the researcher can rise an interest in understanding children's development, emotional world and behavior, and culture. At its best, an accurate description of the acquisition of research material, a careful description of the analysis of the material, and a detailed description of the results will make the reader experience the research reality of the ECEC environment and be convinced of the phenomenon being studied.

A prerequisite for a successful ethnographic result description is a strong theoretical background and the examination of field data using different methods of analysis. There is no single right way to analyze data. The analysis is a process that involves insights, inspiring aha -experiences, and connections to theoretical starting points (Smith, 2002) as well as a reflection of all this (Köngäs & Määttä, 2021b). Perhaps we can consider the use of several different methods and analyses to be seen more as a desire to experiment than as uncertainty to bring out a child's world (Konstantoni & Kustatscher, 2015). In ECEC ethnography, the researcher must consider both the effects of his or her physical presence on the data and the effect of thought patterns concerning the results. This is important in all child research and is particularly relevant in ECEC ethnography.

Generating a child-centered research report requires a lot of work and constant vigilance on the part of the researcher to banish one's adult focus. Repeated reading of literary material, searching for answers to various questions (such as who did what, why did he/she do it, what did the act look like, how did it start, how did it end, who influenced it), seeking what identifiable similarities there are to the theories used as prerequisites in the data, whether the data confirm the assumptions made in the ECEC center focused observation, and what in the data feel foreign or contrary to the assumptions (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012). The material can be accessed as a new person is introduced and a variety of new information is learned from another. Some of the examples and episodes are relevant, some less relevant, but all provide a basis for producing results in which the ethnographer opens the ECEC phenomenon under the study for the reader to experience.

Discussion

Childhood research has diversified in recent decades and various methods have provided a better picture of children's social, psychological, emotional, and physical development and developmental delays (Hujala, Fonsén, & Elo, 2013). However, research on early childhood education has focused specifically on ECEC professionals and their thoughts, perceptions, and methods of upbringing. There has been an ever-expanding field of qualitative

research, such as phenomenography, grounded theory, discourse analysis, action research, reminiscence research, and design research (Uusiautti & Määttä 2013). Research has helped to promote early childhood education and promoted diversified methods of supporting the growth of children. Yet hearing the child's genuine and personal voice and opening up the children's world of experience has been overshadowed in the study. ECEC ethnography adds a new addition to childhood research due to its child-centered nature.

Limitations

For its part, the ethnographic approach has changed childhood research (Rantala & Määttä, 2013). ECEC ethnographic research can be carried out in many different ways. Children know their own lives and know what they have experienced. Yet children are different as individuals, and each has its self. This also brings limitations to ECEC ethnography. The researcher is responsible for the children's experience of the research. Children are not all the same but may have very different feelings about research. The researcher should remember to protect the well-being of children throughout the research process and strive to avoid potential pressure, stress, fear, guilt, and feelings of failure. The researcher should keep ethics in mind at all times. (Naseem, 2018).

Children's research must be based on an appreciation of the child's individuality (Uusiautti & Määttä, 2013). Unless the researcher always maintains a solid respectful attitude when accompanied by children, children may experience the researcher crossing over their borders. In this case, genuine information is not received from children. An adult is not part of the world of children but a stranger who needs to show appreciation for both the children and the information he or she receives. A researcher cannot assume that he or she is part of children's daily lives. The researcher must achieve his or her position of authority with warmth and discretion.

In ECEC ethnographic research, the researcher should strive to give a balanced picture of childhood in daycare. That is a challenging goal for many reasons. To achieve a child's experience, there must be an open and equal interaction between the researcher and the child, and the researcher must be sensitive to act ethically in different situations. It should also be noted that not all children or groups of children have the opportunity to bring out their voices in ECEC (Mayes, 2019).

The researcher must earn the trust of children through his or her ethical work. (Hedegaard, 2008; Kustatscher, 2014.) The researcher must also be sensitive to recognizing children's ways of communicating their discomfort with being examined (Konstantoni & Kustatscher, 2015; Kustatscher, 2014). The child needs to be taken seriously, says Michael Freeman (2007), showing how this expression has a history of more than 40 years. It is a matter of valuing the status and rights of children throughout the research journey, especially in the description of results. The hectic nature of the ECEC's actions brings its limitations to the ECEC ethnography. ECEC institutional practices control children's use of time and social relationships. Children are surrounded by the ECEC's order, routines, rituals, and rules that mimic adult schedules and hours of operation. The order of the ECEC center consists of symbols and rituals, such as consecutive activities in the day program, space planning, seating arrangements, and the children's places and compartments (Köngäs 2018). They serve as a structure for maintaining and renewing the daily life of the ECEC centers. However, the structure created by adults serves only

to a limited extent as a frame of reference for children's activities (Strandell, 1997). Yet there are numerous different activities taking place in children's culture that reveal the world of childhood experiences in a new way. Similarly, children's peer culture gives children its own rules and operating models (Köngäs, Määttä & Uusiautti, 2021).

In ECEC ethnography, we should also take into account societal perspectives on what research on children is thought to be. What opinions are prevalent and how the realization of children's voices is seen? Renewed research data is also shaping our perspectives on ECEC ethnography as well as the whole concept of childhood. This in turn shapes our ability to conduct childhood research, its ethical principles, methods, and goals. Hearing the authentic voice of children is an important challenge. The researcher should also look at how the information obtained from children is understood (eg whether the children's voice is neutral, whether the adults' voice about the children is truthful, whether the information is generated in conversations with children, and what can be deduced from unheard or unwilling voices) (Mayes, 2019).

It has also been proposed to strengthen the reliability of ethnography by involving children in interpreting and commenting on research material during data collection. The interpretation of the study should also be done together with the children, allowing their views to stand out (Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry, 2009). Holland, Renold, Ross, and Hillman (2008), among others, reviewed each of the children in their study individually for the material and results associated with each.

The reliability of ECEC ethnographic research is also ultimately assessed by the reader's experience of whether the interpretations appear to be consistent with the experiences being studied. It is up to the researcher's professionalism how well he or she constructs the views produced by the subjects in his or her text and also how well he or she can produce them in a readable form in his or her research. In other words, does the text convey interpretations of the subjects only appropriately or aptly? Has the researcher repeated only the words of the subjects or interpreted them between the lines? The topic can also be referred to as credibility and can be thought of as reflecting an important concept of competence in quantitative research.

Why Do We Need ECEC Ethnography?

The goal of childhood research is to improve the well-being of children. Research is also hoped to provide new insights into grievances or misunderstandings in children's daily lives (Hill, 2005). This goal can also be referred to as the 'Starting Strong Agenda' (Farrel, 2015). When conducting ECEC ethnographic research, an educator in the field of education often makes observations already in the field at the ECEC about grievances that he or she would like a more positive change with his or her research results.

For ECEC centers to evolve, their practices need to be researched. A great ECEC system has been built in Finland. Every child has the right to early childhood education and care. The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018) emphasizes the educational partnership, which seeks to emphasize the conscious commitment of parents and staff to support the child's

growth, development, and learning processes. There must be trust, equality, and respect for each other between parents and staff, and the need for support in the child's development and growth must be recognized. An early childhood education plan is drawn up in cooperation with the child. The terminology of cooperation and partnership easily remains a common language that is repeated in early childhood education guides (Köngäs 2018; Vähäsantanen, 2013).

In ECEC centers, the work of professionals tends to drown in everyday administrative work, material work from changing diapers to serving food and preparing crafts, writing documentaries, hurry and overload, all of which take time out of pedagogic work (Köngäs 2008; Köngäs, Määttä & Uusiautti, 2021). There is less time left for the child to encounter the child's individual characteristics. However, the educator is assumed to be individually understanding, listening, and encouraging to the child. The teacher should be close to the child, trying to see things through the child's eyes and hear the child's sayings. The idea behind a good teacher and educator is that the teacher takes care of the child and is interested in him or her as an individual and accepts him or her as such. These are the traditional values of teaching to which teachers are trained from generation to generation (Uusiautti, Määttä, & Määttä 2018). Those values can easily fall short of other things to do and manage.

ECEC ethnographic research opens up the world of children, their perceptions, thoughts, motives, and ideas to be taken into account when developing ECEC centers. At the same time, attention is being paid to the most important thing: securing the growth of children and creating a foundation for a good life. ECEC ethnography helps to understand the child as an influencer and innovator of the ECEC environment, which in turn contributes to the development of the everyday pedagogy and goals of the ECEC from the perspective of the staff and the curriculum. Objectively, the researcher is aware of the social framework of action but can subjectively boldly defend the interpretation he or she sees as correct about the state of education because only in this way is development possible. Education needs new methods such as ECEC ethnography to support the positivity and resources of childhood life. At the same time, research also needs new igniters.

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