

Pedagogy in ECEC: Nordic challenges and solutions ^[1]

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Introduction

Finland held the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016. The Ministry of Education and Culture organised the seminar, *Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care – Nordic Challenges and Solutions*, as part of the sectoral presidency programme for education and science. The seminar was held on 22 September 2016 at the House of the Estates in Helsinki.

This report comprises a series of articles about the presentations held at the seminar. Participants represented ECEC administration, research, and other professionals involved in ECEC from each Nordic country and the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

ECEC is now high on the political agenda in many countries. Research has shown us that high-quality ECEC has positive effects on children's welfare, learning and development. The Nordic countries are working through many different activities to develop ECEC, and exchanging ideas between the Nordic countries is always fruitful.

Cultural diversity is also now a central topic on many platforms. Integration, inclusion and the refugee situation has been on the agenda throughout the Presidency year at various meetings and seminars in Finland. On EU level, in June 2016 the European Commission issued a Communication on an EU Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals, in which ECEC is identified as one means of integration. The Member States are encouraged to promote and support the participation of migrant children in early childhood education and care.

At the seminar, participants discussed possible solutions for including and involving the growing number of immigrants and asylum seekers in our societies, and how to strengthen and support the culture of openness and mutual respect. This is where ECEC and education can play a crucial role. We see a special added value in Nordic cooperation and a Nordic dialogue on these issues.

The general view is that the Nordic countries have a lot in common in terms of ECEC and, in international contexts, people often talk about Nordic ECEC. But is this a myth, or do we have a shared view of ECEC? The seminar examined the Nordic values behind ECEC pedagogy – what are the shared and distinguishing features in ECEC between the Nordic countries, what are the particular challenges faced by each country, and what kind of solutions have been found?

The first article, written by Professor Kirsti Karila, briefly introduces the Nordic ECEC pedagogy, its socio-historical roots and close connection with the development of the welfare state. The article also points out that, although the Nordic ECEC model is seen as homogeneous, each country has its own political, geographical and economic history that has shaped the development of ECEC. The Nordic countries are facing their own specific challenges but also have common issues to resolve.

In the second article Professor Eva Johansson and Adjunct Professor Anna Maija Puroila take a closer look at the values guiding ECEC as they present the joint Nordic project *Values Education in Nordic Pre-Schools – Basis for Education for Tomorrow*. This project raises the question of what kind of future citizens we need to foster in early childhood education to build cohesive pluralistic societies in the Nordic countries. In an increasingly diverse society, this question is highly relevant. The project focuses on issues such as how the national educational policies frame values education in preschools, and the similarities and variations in values and values education between the Nordic countries.

The third article of the report was prepared by Professor Maritta Hännikäinen and Professor Lasse Lipponen. It is a summary of participant country responses that were requested in a survey ahead of the seminar. In addition to identifying general development needs, the responses were to focus on the issue of immigration. What kinds of solutions and practices have been adopted in different countries? What can we learn from each other?

The final article is a summary made by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the presentation held by Professor Edward Melhuish. Professor Melhuish presented his views about the Nordic ECEC when compared to the rest of Europe.

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