Defining pedagogy in flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care

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Professional childcare can be seen as an investment for children’s educational path (Ifland 2013). A revised Act on early childhood education and care (ECEC) adopted in 2015 and the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (2016) guide towards a high-quality pedagogy in Finland. The features of flexibly scheduled ECEC such as multiple individual schedules and care times in a child group may, however, cause irregularity in a child’s relationships (Halfon & Friendly 2015) and daily structures (Salonen et al. 2016). Therefore, during non-standard hours, children’s need for care is often emphasized (Peltoperä et al. 2017) at the expense of standard hour’s activities led by teachers with a pedagogical education. In the context of flexibly scheduled ECEC, the significance and definition of pedagogy is thus vague and tensional.

This study aims to disclose discursive tensions related to pedagogy constructed by Finnish educators (n=31) working in flexibly scheduled ECEC. By discursive tensions we mean competing discourses, i.e., contradictory ways to produce a particular version of pedagogy and to represent it in a certain light (Burr 2003, 64). The data consists of educators’ interviews collected as part of ‘Children’s Socio-emotional Well-being and Daily Family Life in a 24/7h Economy’ -project funded by the Academy of Finland. This study is based on socio-constructionism and the analysis of the data followed the principles of discursive psychology.

As result, three discursive tensions related to pedagogy were found in the data. Those tensions were 1) children’s right to learn vs. need for care, 2) educators’ educational background vs. personal strengths as a standpoint for pedagogical work and 3) pedagogy as standardized vs. meeting children’s individual needs. Each tension seemed to answer different core questions, such as ‘For whom pedagogy is provided?’, ‘Who provides pedagogy?’ and ‘How pedagogy is implemented?’. The definitions of pedagogy varied according to the answers to these core questions.

The results suggest that pedagogy and care should not be considered as opposites but viewed from a holistic pedagogical perspective. Each child has a right to high-quality pedagogy despite the timing of care, and children’s individuality should be in the core of planning pedagogical activities.

Keywords: pedagogy, flexibly scheduled early childhood education and care, discursive tension, discourse analyses