

**Article**

Narrative Inquiry as an Arena for (Polish) Caregivers' Retelling and Re-experiencing of Norwegian Kindergarten: A Question of Redefining the Role of Research

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Abstract

This study shows how conducting a narrative inquiry with migrant parents not only serves as a means of collecting their experiences of kindergarten¹ services but also opens up a communicative space that allows for engagement with stories different from one's own, and thus allows for the re-experiencing of the services provided. The presented re-experiences were ultimately found to be necessary for the participating parents to understand the values and knowledge underpinning kindergarten practices and routines, and thus to engage meaningfully and authentically with kindergartens. In the material presented, re-experiencing comprises the process of relating to the retold narrative's temporality and sociality, which are oriented toward facilitating engagement with other people's stories, as well as with one's own and others from the past. The conclusion drawn was that the communicative spaces created through narrative inquiry have the potential to support kindergarten's work in enhancing authentic partnerships with (particularly migrant) parents and addressing the democratic deficit in the involvement of (migrant) parents. Diverse ways of using narrative inquiry as facilitating parental engagement in the synergy between academia and the early childhood education sector are also reviewed.

¹ Kindergarten (Norwegian: *barnehage*) is a public or private, early childhood education and care setting for children aged: 1-5, attended in Norway by 90% of children in this age group. Kindergartens are obligated to follow Framework Plan for Kindergartens: Content and Tasks (UDIR, 2017).

Keywords: Immigrant caregivers, democratic deficit, parental involvement, parental engagement, narrative inquiry, experience

Introduction

European policies (Council of the European Union, 2019), international organisations (OECD, 2006; 2012), and Norwegian steering documents (UDIR, 2017) have all underscored the importance of parental involvement in early childhood education (ECE). Developing ECE in partnership with children's families is generally presented as a sustainable solution to challenges related to social inclusion, migrant integration, and the assurance of equal opportunities for all children, including those with different backgrounds, genders, and disabilities (Council of the European Union, 2019). Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens (UDIR, 2017) highlights cooperation and agreement with children's homes as an essential aspect of the partnership between caregivers and kindergartens, which, again, facilitates children's general development (UDIR, 2017). These policies seem to have grown out of the global consensus among researchers regarding both the cognitive and non-cognitive benefits of parental involvement in early childhood education (Epstein, 2011; Hornby, 2011; Hryniwicz & Luff, 2020; Hujala et al., 2009), like maintaining that the transition to school, school performance, social inclusion, and general well-being of children and communities are strengthened by the caregiver's engagement with early childhood education.

Nevertheless, parental involvement in ECE, and school in general, is reported to be characterised by a "democracy deficit" (Tronto, 2013), which refers to the fact that "the goals and modalities of parental involvement are defined without the involvement of parents themselves" (p. 189). These places the migrant parents in a particularly vulnerable position of being both a parent, who, even when coming from a majority background, has relatively little to say about the terms of their involvement, and a migrant, who has a greater need to understand the values underpinning the educational institution as well as its pedagogies (Van Laere et al., 2018).

Parents in Norway who come from minority backgrounds have been reported to be much less involved in their children's kindergartens and schools (Evensen, 2009) or are perceived by kindergarten staff as more difficult to involve than parents from Norwegian backgrounds (Glasser, 2018). This exception has been explained as a result of the majority of discourses underpinning the kindergartens (Solberg, 2018), which expect migrant caregivers to adapt and adjust but result in passivity being demonstrated as their particular mode of self-expression (De Gioia, 2015; Van Laere & Vendenbroeck, 2017; Van Laere et al., 2018; Solberg, 2018). This passivity could be an effect of either the caregivers' own failure to recognise their knowledge and dispositions as relevant aspects

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of their interactions with institutional settings or their previous negative experiences of trying to engage with educational institutions (Leareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). The fact that many parents with a migrant background have negative experiences with educational institutions may indicate that they activate unexpected narratives when interacting with educational institutions. These narratives can result in behaviour that ECE professionals deem inappropriate or even destructive (Leareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). Their activation does not, however, invalidate the migrant parents' need to know more about ECE services in their destination country (Van Laere et al., 2018). Migrant parents must not only passively accept the institutional practices or "misbehave"; instead, they should be encouraged to reach an understanding of why the services are organised in a particular way and be directed to possibilities for parental participation.

Academic recommendations for the sector have referred to the formulation of clearer policies and better educational and professional development among kindergarten professionals through direct cooperation with parents of all backgrounds. Small, qualitative studies have emphasised the great importance of ECE professionals' will to foster dialogue and mutual understanding (De Gioia, 2013; Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016; Sadownik & Ødegaard, 2018) and also to provide support, individualised attention, and necessary explanations. These objectives have been identified as provoked by the process of personalised, qualitative research (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016; Van Laere et al., 2018), which creates a basis for the recommendation that ECE "policies, practices and research should consider communicative spaces for parents, professionals and researchers in which multiple, yet opposing, meanings can be discussed" (Van Laere et al., 2018, p. 187).

In this article, I explore how the process of narrative inquiry with migrant caregivers regarding their engagement in kindergartens can become an arena for both negotiating meaning and re-experiencing these services to foster imagination and create own ways to get involved with the services. I discuss this possibility after presenting the results of my narrative inquiry, motivated by a research question on Polish migrant parents' experiences of Norwegian kindergarten.

Nevertheless, the paper starts with a review of the narrative approach to experience as a general theoretical framework. It then illustrates the Polish and Norwegian context of ECE, so that the reader becomes familiar with the wider socio-cultural contexts of the phenomena mentioned in the empirical material. Then, the article describes narrative inquiry as the methodology of the presented study. Next, the findings show how the kindergarten can be re-experienced during the telling and retelling of stories in a collective research setting. Based on these findings, I argue that the two dimensions of narrative inquiry—sociality and temporality—enable a diametrical change of individual experience that we can refer to as a re-experience. This re-experience results in parents

imagining new ways of interacting and engaging with the kindergartens of their children. This leads to the conclusion that there is the possibility of qualitative (particularly narrative) research serving as a communicative space, whereby mutual understanding and engagement between caregivers and kindergartens can be strengthened (and not only diagnosed).

Narrative inquiry to understand experiences

Narrative inquiry is rooted in the well-established assumption that people's experiences of the world are narrative and that human beings make sense of the world through narratives by making and living stories (Bruner, 1990; Dewey, 1938; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) noted:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story . . . is the portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful (p. 375).

Experience is, then, "a storied phenomenon" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 11), or "a conscious interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39), which is "lived in the midst, as always unfolding over time, in diverse social contexts and place, and as co-composed in relation" (Caine et al., 2013, p. 575). Thus, the sense that is made out of an experience and the experience itself, are inseparable. This unity is however dynamic and necessary to change, as new or other elements are recalled while stories are told and retold across social contexts and groups. And narrative inquiry is "the study of experience as a story" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477).

Narrative inquiry, however, regards individual stories as dialectical and contextual. This means that individual stories are both constituted by and constitutive of an individual's social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Individuals' stories are, on the one hand, framed by social, cultural, and institutional narratives, but on the other, they can change and/or challenge them. In other words, "...the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experience, but also the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). Individuals' stories, as told and retold in different settings, can, thus, both confirm and/or challenge social, cultural, or institutional contexts.

Telling and retelling one's own story and one's own experience also prevents the hegemony of one's own story. This particular hegemony can be challenged by any of the three dimensions that constitute narrative inquiry: temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

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Temporality permits the retelling of a story from different times in one's own life or others' lives. Retold stories can refer to a particular place differently as it is experienced over time and differently constituted by relationships among people who were involved with the place. These people tell and retell their experiences of the place and their relationships with each other from the perspectives of different points in time. The constitutive elements of narrative inquiry: temporality, place, and sociality are then also a basis for the narrative inquiry's sensitivity and respect for the (sometimes contradictory) stories of all the people involved in an experience.

The genuine respect for the variety of stories told and retold by different individuals allows for a re-experience. Narrative inquiry defines experience as "a storied phenomenon" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 11), according to which an experience is held to be an inseparable part of a story. An experience is not something happening before a narrative or outside of it. In this theoretical framework, experience is a story, and a story is an experience, which implies that as retelling a story may change it, the experience itself may also be changed accordingly.

The core dimensions of narrative inquiry, particularly sociality and temporality, have great potential for changing our stories. Sociality, with its focus on ethics and care for relationships with others participating in narrative inquiry, opens up the possibility for diverse stories to be told by different people. Temporality allows for the story to travel in time and bring back experiences from the past, which have the potential to change how we experience things now. Engaging with others' stories or one's own stories from the past opens the current experience up to the possibility of change, sometimes even in a diametrical way. Such a change is referred to as *re-experience* in the analysis below.

ECE in Norway and Poland: The stories of institutionalised childcare in two socio-cultural contexts

The aspect of temporality is also important as a constitutive part of our current experiences. As a specific example, Polish caregivers' experiences of Norwegian kindergarten were strongly related to the stories of ECE they had held with them from the past, which took place in another socio-cultural context with its own traditions for childcare. The text below tries to describe the differences between Polish and Norwegian ECE, the significance of which emerges again later in the findings section.

Traditions (for learning)

Norway and Poland have different, historically anchored approaches to ECE. Norwegian kindergarten (barnehage), a joint ECE service for children up to five years old, is rooted in the tradition of Nordic social pedagogy (Bennet, 2010). This approach holds childhood and play in high esteem for their intrinsic value and emphasises children's rights (to make their own choices, to be heard, and experience well-being) and their roles as agents in their learning by prioritising exploration in both indoor and outdoor spaces (Bennet, 2010). Under Norway's approach, particular learning outcomes and school readiness are secondary side effects of a good kindergarten. In the Polish preschool tradition, however, these outcomes seem to be the main focus of ECE, particularly since the socio-political transformation in 1989. Polish preschools, which provide education for children aged three to six years of age, concentrate on preparing children for school by prioritising cognitive learning and guiding children to cope with future educational requirements as their main practices (Blythe, 2013; Sikorska, 2007; Polish Ministry of Education, 2017). Additionally, the relatively new capitalist spirit in Poland has enhanced the view of childhood development as an investment in the future.

Thus, while Norwegian kindergartens focus on providing institutional conditions that facilitate children's holistic development and learning on their own terms, Poland's corresponding services are particularly oriented towards academic and cognitive learning outcomes, and the services compete to help children achieve these goals through play (Obrebska, 2011). Indeed, the widespread Polish belief in the absolute necessity of investing in children's futures has stimulated the market for early education, and competition among different approaches and pedagogies has emerged. High-quality meals and nutrition offers are supplementing the competing pedagogical offers.

Food and meals

Meals and catering are a flourishing aspect of Polish ECE since good nutrition has been argued by specialists and authorities (Instytut Matki i Dziecka, 2012) to constitute the basis for all learning. Since the Polish National Hygiene Inspectorate's strict hygiene regulations do not allow preschools to prepare food or serve meals brought from home, external, certified catering is a growing business sector to which ECE facilities outsource food preparation. These services allow caregivers to choose between regular, vegetarian, lactose-free, and gluten-free diets for their children in kindergartens. The children's caregivers are also encouraged to establish healthy routines in the home. Interestingly, compared to Norway, Polish handbooks (Sporadyk & Gabrowska, 2012), magazines, blogs (Czas Dzieci, 2013; Grupa Onet, 2013; Klaudia, 2015; Trzcinski, 2011), and national

child nutrition guidelines formulated by the Institute of Mother and Child (Instytut Matki i Dziecka, 2012) advise caregivers not to serve hot dog sausages or other foods with preservatives to children. Meanwhile, in Norway, hot dogs, preserved fish (mackerel), and instant soups are served widely in kindergartens.

At the time the present research was conducted, hot dog sausages were particularly popular at Norwegian kindergartens as a practical food that is easy to take on trips and prepare on a grill or over a bonfire. They remain a very common food at children's birthday parties, as well as on Constitution Day when the population of nearly six million Norwegians eats approximately 16 million hot dogs (Westrheim, 2009).

Early investments in equipment and care

The Polish National Hygiene Inspectorate attends to matters not only related to nutrition, but also those involving space, equipment, and diversity of routines. ECE sleeping routines in Poland are governed by strict hygiene and safety guidelines. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare formulates guidelines on healthy eating and sleeping in the childcare sector (Dz.U. Nr 61, poz. 624 2001), and the National Sanitary Inspectorate is responsible for monitoring their implementation. Children at Polish centres must be put to sleep in hygienic, healthy beds with proper mattresses and laundered bedclothes (Dz.U. Nr 61, poz. 624 2001). The state's regulations and rules are commonly seen as systematic, institutionalised guidelines for the best conditions of care for the child's health and development, and an ECE staff member obeying these rules is commonly seen as having the child's welfare in focus.

Narrative inquiry among a community of Polish parents in Norway

From individual to group interviews

The current study was driven by a research question on Polish caregivers' experiences when entering the Norwegian kindergarten. To obtain insights into how these caregivers understood their experiences within this institutional setting, individual interviews were planned. However, during the process of recruitment of the research participants, I received extensive feedback that suggested they would be more interested in meeting other Polish parents and discussing their experiences in a group setting. These suggestions prompted a change from the study's original, individually focused methodology to a more open approach favouring community and communication. The 30 parents (18 mothers and 12 fathers) who ultimately decided to participate

in the project were divided into six groups of five people, each of whom met with me six times between October 2014 and April 2015. During these meetings, various stories about their children and kindergartens were told and retold.

From recording to talking and co-writing

The planned approach to data collection was to use audio recordings, but since each group of participants included one individual who was uncomfortable with this method, I took notes during the groups' ongoing conversations in an anonymised format, and I sent these loose transcripts to the participants following the sessions as Google documents they could comment on and revise as needed. This method of data collection extensively involved the participating parents. All of them either rewrote my loose transcripts, revised their answers, commented on other participants' accounts (especially if they did not have the chance to remark during the face-to-face meeting), or wrote down what they had forgotten to say. The final written material of 146 pages in a Google document was shown to and approved by all participants before analysis.

Thus, the analysed material comprised stories about Norwegian ECE that were told and retold during the original group interviews and written and rewritten in the Google doc. I interpreted the participants' engagement with rewriting as a way of participation in the research, as this was a form of allowing the told stories to live and evoking stories and experiences that had remained unspoken during the sessions themselves. Therefore, narrative inquiry with the community of Polish parents in Norway occurred both in-person and digitally.

The analysis of the material's content focused on temporality, place, and sociality. In other words, attention was directed to the dynamics of both the experiences of the Norwegian ECE in and through time and the relationships with other people and their stories. The three topics chosen to be presented in the finding section were chosen because of the re-experience being detected in the dynamics of sociality and temporality.

Participants' contexts

The parents who agreed to participate in this research project, although all were of Polish nationality, represented a rich array of educational backgrounds, various lengths of time since their arrivals in Norway, and different value positions.

Table 1: Overview of participants' background information

Characteristic	Mothers	Fathers	Total
Vocational education	2	1	3
Technical secondary education	3	4	7
Higher education	13	7	20
Declared traditional Catholic values	6	4	10
Declared liberal values	12	8	20
3–6 years spent in Norway	8	7	15
7 or more years spent in Norway	10	5	15
Children in Polish ECE	1 (child)	0	1
Total	18	12	30

All the participants—including me, the researcher—were Polish, working immigrants in Norway with children in Norwegian kindergartens, all of whom grew up with the Polish approach to ECE, which constituted our common standpoint for experiencing Norwegian kindergarten.

In the transcripts presented below, the participants are presented with the abbreviations of M (mothers) and F (fathers), followed by numbers that permit the identification of what was said by the same person so that the dynamics of the transformation (re-experience) of meaning would be more transparent.

Ethics and relationships

As a pregnant Polish immigrant with one child in Norwegian kindergarten and a second child on the way, I experienced a high level of trust and identification among the study's potential participants. People seemed willing to participate in the research because of the possibility of talking to someone in an analogous situation and similar life stage as them. Realising this effect, I was particularly careful about following ethical guidelines. All participants were informed about the study's goal and their possibility of withdrawing at any time without needing to offer any explanation. No research data gathered in the project were considered at that moment in time (2014–2015) as personal data. The Google documents were accessed through Google accounts created strictly for the sake of the research, without using the participants' real names. Fulfilling the participants' wishes to meet and talk in groups and establishing relationships and small

communities to share experiences about transitioning to Norwegian ECE sensitively and respectfully was also an important ethical aspect of this research. A commitment to the relationships established during the inquiry (Caine et al., 2013) was thus highlighted and discussed. After the project was finished, I was available for all participants to answer any questions, resolve any challenges, or discuss ECE and other topics. Some participants reached out to me after the study, while others preferred to contact each other, with some developing lasting friendships.

Findings: Parental experiences re-experienced

As I explained in an earlier publication (Sadownik, 2020), the first experience of Polish parents entering Norwegian kindergartens was a shock. Coming from other cultural and societal backgrounds underpinned by the organisation of good childhoods and childcare resulted in great surprise about how different (and, thus, strange) the kindergarten was in Norway. Below, I present empirical examples of how the experience of shock can be re-experienced through intertwining temporality and sociality, the core elements of narrative inquiry.

The shock of encountering the service's poor quality

The story of shock started with food, and specifically, hot dog sausages. For parents who were socialised within a cultural context in which the health minister had warned caregivers against serving such poor-quality meat to children, witnessing the common, almost daily serving of hot dogs as a practical, child-friendly food led to experiences of shock. This shock started with the low-quality food but narratively extended to other cheap, practical solutions that were “easy for the adults” (M3) and that took precedence over the children’s welfare. Thus, the hot dog shock provided a portal to stories about other unhealthy or careless practices, such as children sleeping in strollers that did not allow for their spines to extend fully in a horizontal position, or careless staff who just walked around aimlessly with their coffee mugs (Sadownik, 2020). The empirical examples below present both the narratives related to the poor quality of (cheap) food and those focusing on cheap and careless sleeping routines and the low quality of learning.

Example one: Hot dog sausage shock

M1: In the meantime, one of them goes to the nearest supermarket and buys some hot dog sausages because, once a week, there is a hot lunch.

M2: And then it's excursion day, so they take the hot dogs with them as well.

M3: Because it's easy for the adults...

M1: Then they tell you that it is so healthy to be outside on the trips, but how logical is this if the children are eating junk food?

Example two: Careless sleep routines

M4: It's again an easy solution, and easy for the staff. The children are outside all the time, so you put them in all their clothes in the strollers, and when they wake up, they're ready to play outside again. You don't have to take their clothes off and put them on again. Easy-peasy and cheap!

Example three: Poor quality learning

M5: It must also be quite cheap to keep the staff with the children all day so they almost don't have any preparation time for initiating some joint activities with the children. Well, they do, but it is so much less than what we are used to. I'm afraid my child is under-stimulated...

M6: Well, it's not much more than motional development that is stimulated. How much the children can learn from each other is, however, limited. They need the adults to become curious about new things and learn new words, new songs...

M7: Yes, but this kind of education is expensive, and here we get staff of sausage quality, and so is the learning.

Re-experiencing the quality (food)

The experience of shock was, however, transformed through intertwining with temporality and sociality, the key dimensions of narrative inquiry. The temporality and sociality came into the picture together and allowed the participants to travel in time back to their childhood (temporality) and take another person's perspective (sociality). These two aspects were interwoven when the caregivers started retelling stories of "bad quality hot dogs" from the perspectives of their memories of being forced to eat good, healthy food in communist Polish preschools back in the 1980s. Taking the standpoint of a child (that they all once were in Polish preschool) allowed them to re-experience the "bad quality food" as an important aspect of positive and comfortable meal routines.

M2: But, you know, they call it all "child-friendly," by which they mean that it is something that the children like...

M3: Yeah, like tonnes of candy, but it doesn't mean we should give them as much candy as they want.

M1: But I have to say that I hated the food that was served in my preschool when I was little. I was always so stressed because they forced us to eat. It was good, warm, healthy food that I hated. It always stuck in my throat...

M2: Yeah... I have the same memories; I once even threw up on the teacher who said I had to eat everything on my plate.

M3: You're right. I remember this as well. Now I get what they mean by "child-friendly"... that the whole thing starts with thinking of a meal as a pleasant and not stressful situation for our children.

M2: Exactly.

M1: Yes, and this is maybe why we should see the sausage and instant tomato soups as something that is really okay. What do you think?

M3: Well, yeah. They are sparing our children the big trauma we went through... I think I may even volunteer to grill sausages for the next summer party at the kindergarten [laughter].

M2: And I guess I will consider being more open to participating... not only bringing and picking up the child, but I, in a way, also want to be a part of the good things they are doing for our children.

This re-experiencing of a meal situation started with M1, who, by drawing upon her own memory, activated the dimension of the story's temporality: "But I have to say that I hated the food that was served in my preschool when I was little. I was always so stressed because they forced us to eat." This reflection initiated the retelling of the low-quality food in Norwegian kindergartens from a child's perspective, which involves the dimension of sociality. This combination of temporality and sociality, of recalling an experience and inviting another social actor ("me as a child") to tell the story, led the caregivers in this discussion to diametrically re-experience the kindergartens' quality.

Re-experiencing "lack of care"

The shock connected to "lack of care" in attending to sleeping routines and their equipment (strollers) was mitigated by opening up the dimension of sociality. Sociality became interwoven with the experience as a mother shared a story with the other participants about sleeping routines told her by a teacher in her daughter's kindergarten. Gaining insight into how the "Norwegian sleep routine" was reflected on by the staff, and how much care is required, contributed to the parental re-experience (by developing radically different meanings for the same routine).

M12: I asked the staff directly about what's going on here... [laughter].

M13: And?

M12: They told me it would be much easier to let the children sleep inside... Before sleeping outside, they get a new diaper and are dressed in the right clothes: first, thin merino wool, and then a layer of thick wool or fleece. After that, they are put in winter sleeping bags and then in their strollers outside. The staff needs to be there to comfort the children, sing lullabies, bring teddy bears, and so on. It's actually so much more work than indoor sleeping, but they are doing this outside because it is very good for the immune system.

M14: I would never have thought of that.

M13: Neither had I... but there really is a lot of care here.

[...]

M13: Thanks for letting us know what it's like for them.

Gaining insights into the service's internal story about the sleeping routine was essential for the re-experience of the "lack of care" in the sleep routine (as a routine full of care). It shows the

importance of the sociality dimension, which allows for and expects the involvement of different perspectives in developing new understandings. M13 expressed gratitude for gaining this new insight, as it was unavailable to her before in her social networks.

Re-experience the quality of learning

Re-experiencing learning came into the picture through the interweaving of the dimensions of sociality and temporality combined in M12's story about one episode with her child, which showed the child's great understanding of social relationships. The other caregivers could easily relate to this and engage with this story by expressing surprise and gratitude for their own children's self-awareness and social competence.

M12: You know, but even if they learn so little, I must say that I'm sometimes surprised at how wise my child is and how aware... and his knowledge about living, about how to deal with difficulties, conflicts, one's own feelings, others' feelings, I can't find the right words...

M13: I know what you mean. I can relate.

M14: Me, too.

M12: Yeah. So, there was one time when I was with my son at the grocery store, and he wanted a toy, which I refused to buy. And then he got so angry and started screaming, and I didn't know what to do. So, I just told him, "Oh, don't be so angry. It's just a toy." And then he shouted, "It's so wrong! Maybe I'm not allowed to get this toy, but I'm allowed to be angry about it! It's normal to get angry when we can't get what we want, and this toy was important to me, so don't say, 'It's just a toy.' Maybe for you it's just a toy, but not for me."

M14: Wow...

M13: Powerful.

M14: This is amazing how much you actually learn about one's own and others' feelings, about communication, when you have to relate to others all the time like they do almost all day when playing.

These aspects of learning were not consciously experienced by the parents before. Even if the staff tried to explain the play-based kindergarten to some of them (M13), it was the story about M12's son that activated understanding of the different pedagogy.

M13: Yeah, and this is actually related to what the teacher told me once... Now I understand it better, that they observe the children carefully, and when they play, they intervene when there's a conflict, or when there is a need to include one more child, or when the children lack imagination. I could never picture those interventions in any other way than giving the children a solution... But yeah... Now I can see that these interventions are much more.

M12: Yes. I think they try to show the children how everyone experienced a particular situation and [ask], "What can we do so that no one is hurt?"

M14: They really know what they are doing... It's just so different from what we are used to.

The re-experience, in this case, started with M13 recalling a memory (which was about intertwining the aspect of temporality) of a pedagogical justification provided to her by a teacher (which again involved the aspect of sociality). The pedagogical justification provided once by the teacher, however, only started making sense to M13 after M12 shared her story. This again confirmed the importance of sociality and extended this dimension during the research process.

How is the parental experience re-experienced?

The empirical material presented above shows how entwining the core dimensions of narrative inquiry—sociality and temporality—enables migrant parents to re-experience ECE services. Activating the narrative's dimensions of temporality and sociality allows one to engage with a story different from one's own “here and now” and thus changes one's own story. The changing of one's own story (re-experience) happened in the presented research material through the retelling of:

- one's own experience as a child (which couched the aspects of temporality);
- personal experiences with one's child (which referred to the dimension of sociality);
- stories justifying institutional practices as told by professionals (which had been received earlier and were retold during the research process, thus recalling the dimensions of sociality and temporality).

Moreover, the first re-experience described above led the parents directly to imagine new forms of engagement and interaction with the kindergarten. M3 considered interacting with the service in a way that had been unthinkable for her before, while M2 realised that she was more open to participating in her child's kindergarten because she had recognised the “goodness” of the service.

Discussion: What does such a re-experience mean for research on parental involvement?

Such a re-experience of the kindergarten that occurred in the process of narrative inquiry points to the need to provide communicative spaces in which diverse meanings about ECE can be exchanged and negotiated (Van Laere et al., 2018). This communicative space, provided particularly by the dimension of sociality, can address both the migrant parents' need for more individual attention (Lastikka & Lippinen, 2016) and allow for the discussion of questions and issues that they may want to learn more about, such as the values underpinning the diverse practices and routines (Van Laere et al., 2018). It would also allow the families to share their migrating and “settling in a new country” stories, and thus become not only migrants or refugees but also particular individuals/families involved with the institutionalised education and care of their children (Sønstagen, 2018).

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The present study confirms the idea that narrative inquiry is a “patient methodology,” with its focus on relationships and living alongside one another in a community, that facilitates the telling and retelling to others of one’s own temporary and past experiences, and thus creates the possibility for a re-experience.

In the case of the present study, such a re-experience seemed necessary for activating interactions with the kindergartens, which the caregivers would experience as authentic, and meaningful. This again partially addresses the phenomenon of a “democracy deficit” (Tronto, 2013). Even if the narrative inquiry in this study did not allow the caregivers to innovate ways of becoming involved with the service or to create new dimensions of parental engagement, it still cultivated a new understanding of the existing ways of participation. Creating the possibility of understanding an educational institution and the ways of getting involved in it fulfilled another need constituting the democracy deficit, and this is the migrant parents need to know more about ECE services (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016; Van Laere et al., 2018). Many migrant parents do not expect ECE services in the destination country to be like those in their home countries, but they have a great need to understand the pedagogy underpinning the daily routines (Sadownik & Ødegaard, 2018). The present study showed that a deeper understanding of an institution could result in developing one’s meaningful ways of becoming involved (re-experience 1).

The caregivers’ authentic engagement in kindergarten is what researchers have considered necessary to be strengthened, and they have also drawn diverse conclusions on how professionals can enhance it. The present study reveals, as Lastikka and Lipponen (2016) show, that ECE settings and professionals do not need to be alone in facilitating parental involvement, by operating in synergies with academia. Research projects themselves can become significant communicative spaces, allowing for the (re-)experiences that the parents need to engage with the services in ways meaningful to them.

Access to professionals’ stories was particularly helpful in facilitating the re-experience. Explaining the values and knowledge underpinning particular practices and routines was necessary for the parents to understand the kindergarten, trust it, and find their own ways of getting involved. Not all of the parents, however, gained access to the professional stories, and for them, the retelling of the stories/explanations once told by the teachers was of particular importance. Research as a social practice operating across diverse groups and networks can thus bring diverse individuals, knowledges, and stories together, the exchange of which may be beneficial for all parties involved.

Practical implication and conclusion

The group who participated in the reported narrative inquiry appreciated the safe framework in which they shared their experiences with people whose backgrounds were familiar and where everyone could speak their mother tongue. However, narrative inquiry can also serve as an arena through which parental voices are exchanged with those of professionals, policymakers, teacher education students, and children. The increasing number of partnerships between academia and the ECE sector allow different stakeholders (and stories) to meet. Assisted by a researcher the kindergarten can transform traditional meetings arenas (for example parental meetings) into communicative spaces, where different stakeholder groups (parents, professionals, students, policymakers, children) could participate directly or through their stories gathered in advance by the researcher. Diverse options are possible depending on diverse needs and the type of collaboration between academia and the sector.

As a concluding remark, I will emphasise that research on parental engagement with ECE can serve as a communicative space and arena for re-experiencing the services and reconsidering diverse ways to become involved with them. In other words, research on the diagnosis of parental involvement (as too low) can develop into an arena in which such involvement can be enhanced and facilitated. Through such a process, hegemonies of one story could be challenged, professional and political justifications could become intertwined with the parental and children's ones, and the ECE quality improved by in dialogue with (re-) experiences of all actors involved.

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