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# CHILD-INITIATED PEDAGOGIES IN FINLAND, ESTONIA AND ENGLAND: EXPLORING YOUNG CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON DECISIONS

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**Abstract**
This paper focuses on child-initiated pedagogy that is based on the process of co-construction of learning experiences between children, adults and the environment, being part of longitudinal research project that analyzes child-initiated pedagogies in formal early years settings with 3-6 year old children. Drawing on an ethnographic approach this paper explores children's own views of the relationships between their own and adults' decisions. Twenty-four participating teachers, in 14 different early years settings in three countries (Finland, Estonia and England) used interviews with puppets and video methodologies to document children's views on how decisions are reached, what kinds of things are decided, and who decides. The data suggest that children embrace the feel of control. They also acknowledge, at a level, acting and taking control within boundaries. Given an opportunity, the children are skillful in sharing the responsibility of control with peers and adults.

**Introduction**
This paper draws on a study that is part of a longitudinal research project that analyzes child-initiated pedagogies in formal early years settings with 3-6 year old children in three countries: Finland, Estonia and England. The overall project aims to provide a deeper theoretical basis for 'democratically appropriate practices' in early years settings, and galvanize teachers everywhere to find spaces for child-initiated pedagogies at a time when national policy frameworks and dominant discourses shape early years pedagogies differently. The global, neo-liberal drive to foster 'school readiness' (Whitbread & Bingham, 2012) and to promote 'free market' principles in early years settings (see Lloyd, 2012, for the case of England) is a growing trend in all three of the countries and elsewhere. This is evidenced by governments using all children, whatever their age, as data to engage in and promote local, national, and international competition (such as PISA tests) and by fostering a hierarchy of subjects and educational outcomes (Alexander, 2009). We question the subjugating of central aspects of children's school lives for global competition, such as the tightening focus on early literacy and numeracy, due to its shortsighted and instrumental view of children. We argue that a child-initiated approach could be a more sensible approach to contemporary global challenges (author name removed for review, forthcoming 2015a). In addition, the fact that young children are not interested in being pawns of an international game is no news to early years teachers either. Young children's own concerns tend to be more immediate and often more collaborative; they are keen to develop friendships and to learn.

The overall study is led by four of the authors, who are all university researchers and lecturers in teacher education departments, each in their respective countries, and who have also worked as qualified early years teachers. At the start of the project, each contacted a number of early years teachers who were known to be interested in the development of child-initiated pedagogies. The first phase of the project in autumn 2013 explored how child-initiated pedagogies emerged in participating settings at the level of everyday practice in the three countries along with USA. A setting from USA is involved in the project, though not participating in the phase explored in this paper. Participating teachers used ethnographic approaches and selected one week in which they kept a pedagogical diary and documented

routine-like examples of child-initiated practice in their own setting. No standardized, international model or definition of child-initiated pedagogy was provided prior to the data collection. Rather, teachers were free to select episodes that they perceived as 'child-initiated' (Kokko, 2014). A brief theoretical discussion of this central term is provided later on.

This paper examines the second phase of the project in spring 2014 when the focus shifted to exploring children's views of the relationships between their own decisions and adults' decisions. Despite some well-addressed research (see e.g. Goouch, 2009; Rainio, 2010; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002), there are few accounts of what child-initiated pedagogies might look like at the level of everyday practice from the aspect of young children's participation. Little attention has been given to children's own thoughts about this. The project seeks to address these gaps, the latter of which is addressed in this paper. In our work on pedagogical practices, we aim to find spaces to build on children's own ideas, interests, motivations and friendships within child-initiated pedagogies. Our evidence suggests that the children construct their decision-making in child-initiated practice from rather similar traits, and it seems that a sense of belonging and a sense of control, with strong understanding of a setting's boundaries, are vital parts of this construction. In order to capture the perceptions in their natural setting, an ethnographic approach has been used. The teachers, trusted experts in the field, engaged in listening to the voices in their setting, using collection methods they saw best suited for the purpose. Their findings were analyzed and co-constructed with the authors.

**Theoretical starting points**
'Child-initiated' activity derives from child's initiative and can be contradicted with adult's initiative. However, a child does not live in a vacuum. Each and every initiative has some origin outside the child. Furthermore, in an early childhood setting there are many children, each with motives of her own, so that in many situations there are a number of initiatives from which to choose. As is evident in the data of this paper, these choices may turn into matters of competence. At times there are situations where no initiatives are present. Thus, adult's initiative has its place in child-initiated pedagogy as well. We are probably not the first ones to suggest that child-initiated pedagogy rests on the process of co-construction of learning experiences between children, adults, and the environment. Child-initiated pedagogy is not in our view 'laissez-faire' pedagogy in which an adult would intervene little in a child's actions or not at all. In a pedagogical sense, a completely 'free' choice does not exist, since before any choice is made the setting is already constructed, whether knowingly or not, reducing the degrees of freedom. Ignorance or not responding to a child's actions would rather fit into the category of neglect. Traits from this sort of practice are indeed witnessed at times, but this is not our aim. Instead, a teacher has an active and conscious role of balancing between child-initiated and adult-initiated activity, in favor of the former. As professionals, adults remain responsible for children's learning and participation at all times. Thus child-initiated pedagogy occurs within certain boundaries.

Our emphasis must be separated from the widely-used term 'child-centred.' The child-centred approach puts the child at the centre of the educational process (Hytönen, 2008). By its vague definition it has been associated with numerous philosophies of education, pedagogies and scientific theories, from Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky to a host of others such as Montessori, the McMillan sisters, Johannes Käis (an Estonian writer on education in the 1920s) and Aukusti Salo (a Finnish writer of the 1920s) (author name removed for review ). In fact, 'child-centred' has evolved into an umbrella term that covers a wide range of theoretical frames, ideas, and practices. It is multilayered and multidimensional (Hytönen, 1997; 2008). To us, it seems that what is common among all of these child-centred frames is the fact that

they do not represent traditional or didactic approaches to education. Therefore, defining something as child-centred is not very useful. With child-initiated, we aim at a clearer, more definitive and more practical concept. Simply put, child-initiated practices fit snuggly under the term child-centred, as vice versa is not true. (author name removed for review.)

In this sense we draw on socio-cultural approaches, neo-Vygotskian perspectives and on post-developmental theories, instead of more individualistic interpretations of Piagetian theory or readily-constructed Froebelian child-centred solutions (Broadhead, Howard & Wood, 2010; File, 2012; Wood, 2010). Our understandings of children's participation in the setting are linked to children's families and their life histories in varied and complex ways. What each child brings to various learning situations within a formal early years setting, and how adults as professionals engage with them and their prior knowledge and life experiences, are for us the two key dimensions of child-initiated pedagogies. We focus on children in their social contexts. Children's interests and motivations are seen as the driving force in planning, organizing, and managing children's learning but always in the context of genuine exchange of ideas between children's and adults' worlds. This defines the curricula of child-initiated pedagogy as rather emergent than predetermined (author name removed for review.)

**Some context-specific issues**
One of the critical theoretical frames is an acceptance of childhoods as socially constructed and researching pedagogies as intertwined with ideas of childhood and learning in a formal early years setting. Thus, international research requires a focus on institutional, historical, intercultural, and country-specific aspects of childhoods (James & Prout, 1997) and an acceptance of difference. Pedagogies are always culture-specific and each early years setting interprets and adapts theory and pedagogical ideas according to their own traditions and societal situations. What happens in one country or area in terms of pedagogical innovations cannot be transplanted to another place as it is. Reggio Emilia serves as an apt example (Rinaldi, 2005). Developments need to be woven in with well-established routines, expectations and national policies, and often this creates tensions and struggles of power in local contexts. These local struggles tend to relate to wider international issues such as the need to listen to children's perspectives as the following international and country-specific laws and directives make clear (author name removed for review, forthcoming 2015b):

> 1. United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child – ratified by Finland, Estonia and the United Kingdom
> 2. European Union Constitution – governing Finland, Estonia and United Kingdom
> 3. Principles of Nordic welfare state – Finland

There is a growing global acceptance in the field of early education and care that young children are competent experts in their own and their communities' lives (Clark & Moss, 2001; Paley, 1991, 2004). The notion of listening and allowing children's voices to be heard is enshrined in the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989) Both of these concepts, listening and voice, have been explored, contested and also applied to a number of different non-dominating groups, often linked to varying notions of empowerment (Griffiths, 1998; Troyna, 1995). Clark et al. (2005) identify an international children's rights movement as one reason for this growing interest in children's agency and voice. They discuss how a parallel development has taken place in the academic world as a number of scholars from different disciplines recognize that young children are capable of providing reliable data when involved in research. Research *with* children (rather than *on* children) should include children's thoughts, opinions, feelings and perceptions. According to

Clark et al. (2005) another factor in the increasing interest of children's voice has been the economic change and the construction of children as not only customers and consumers of products (e.g., toys, clothing, books), but also of child-care services, such as private workplace crèches and preschool settings. This does not necessarily have to be the case. Ebrahim (2011) conducted an important study with 0–4 year old children in South Africa in which she demonstrated that young children were skilled in establishing active, collaborative and sometimes subversive strategies to create peer community cultures around mealtimes. She also argued that the context of South African schools and the increasing focus there on 'school readiness' created conditions that gave rise to children's own intervention and resistance strategies to disrupt the more adult-led formal activities that did not match children's own ideals. She suggests: "Young children are knowledgeable, intentional and skilled actors who deploy influential strategies to assert autonomy and contribute to life at the centres" (Ebrahim, 2011, p.121). She revealed how children actively used strategies such as resistance, avoidance, ignoring, and collaboration.

The context of our work is slightly different. Whilst the increasing pressure on 'school readiness' remains a serious problem, especially in England where young children are tested soon after starting school (at the age of 5-6 years children are expected to pass their first national test called "phonic screening check" (DFE, 2014; Whitbread & Bingham, 2012)), teachers in this study were already engaging in a sustained and silent riot by consciously and explicitly challenging those aspects of formal early literacy and numeracy policies that they thought were harmful for young children (see also BERA/TACTYC, 2013). They strove for excellent inspection results; hence, the need to 'riot' in silence, but at the same time challenged the dominating policy-driven adult-led pedagogies by developing child-initiated practices. Such, they were probably not typical early years teachers in England but they were not on their own either. (There is no national data on these kinds of matters.)

In Estonia, the situation is different. After becoming an independent country in 1991 (after the collapse of Soviet Union), there was a search for a new national identity and this had an impact on schools and teachers. In a quest to develop Estonian early years pedagogies that would match the renewed values and ideals of the broader society, 'child-centred' pedagogies soon became the dominating model in Estonian universities' teacher education departments and, thereby, in early years settings. This was, in itself, a distinctive move away from the old Soviet-style state-controlled models of pedagogy. In the years that followed, however, some early years teachers began to question this because 'child-centred' pedagogies were still typically led by adults. These teachers wanted to focus more readily on children's own interests, motivations, and creativity. Some settings were inspired and influenced by the Reggio Emilia approach and they began to change their own practices, and call for child-initiated pedagogies. A struggle between two schools of thought, child-centred versus child-initiated, was established and a form of sustained and silent riot followed. (author name removed for review, forthcoming 2015.) Teachers subverted the dominating model of early years pedagogy from the perspective of adults having the power to locate the child in the centre, towards adults working *with* children, supporting them in initiating projects and activities and, thereby, shifting the location of power.

In Finland a similar struggle between 'child-centred' and 'child-initiated' took place during the 1980s and 1990s due to the crisis of the earlier Froebelian approach. As a result a child-centred, neo-didactic approach with subject-divided but project-oriented curriculum reigned. Simultaneously, with influences of Reggio Emilia and the sociology of childhood, the term child-initiated was introduced and, to a degree, was utilized as well. In a child-centred frame,

it was often reduced into overemphasis of 'free' unstructured play, resembling the aforementioned laissez-faire pedagogy (author name removed for review.) Not until recently has the more demanding neo-liberal drive brought early pedagogy once again into the centre of heated discussion in Finland. These views are once again polarized, with subject-oriented adult-directed pedagogy in one end and laissez-faire 'free play' -views in the other. The main idea of subject-orientation would be to lay off pressure from well-liked elementary teaching by adding subject matter into a 'junior school.' The laissez-faire emphasis is rather unappreciative towards outcomes overall. In between, there are sometimes voices fostering metacognitive and problem-solving skills with narrative play (Hakkarainen & Bredikyte, 2013). Due to additional demands of agency, creative solutions and more flexible learning needed in global competition, this time the debate may result in favour of a child-initiated practice (Montie, 2006 et al.). Unfortunately, school readiness tendency, as witnessed in England, is also a possible scenario in Finland. (For a fuller discussion of country-specific issues see, author name removed for review)

**Ethnography as a Way of Listening**
The focus of the project at this phase has shifted to exploring children's own views of the relationships between their own decisions and adults' decisions. In spite of theoretical developments of recognising the need to listen to children's voice in the past 10-20 years, more work is needed to develop appropriate methods for capturing young (3-6 year old) children's perspectives. We argue that whilst listening is important, so is interpreting. Malaguzzi's aim of learning to understand 'the hundred languages of children' (Rinaldi, 2005) is dependent on recognising the various idiosyncratic and contextualized ways in which young children convey meaning. Practitioners who have developed trusting relationships with their groups, who have developed a good level of sensitivity and situational awareness and competence, and who actively join in and share ideas with children, are well placed to interpret these 'hundred languages.'

Warming (2005) distinguishes between listening as a tool and listening as a democratic ethos giving voice and points out that the two are not necessarily the same: "Listening as a tool requires hearing and interpreting what you hear, whereas giving voice further requires 'loyal' facilitation and representation, making a common cause with the children" (Warming, 2005, p.53). Here we aim to do both: interpreting what children tell us and making common cause with them. Ethnography as methodology was, therefore, considered best suited for the project. At the very heart of ethnography is an attempt to understand the conceptual framework of a group, and our aim is to discover a new kind of conceptual understanding that is based on children's frame of reference: "Ethnographers attempt to learn the conceptual framework of members of the society [or a group] and to organise material on the basis of boundaries understood by those being observed instead of using a predetermined system of categories established before the participant-observation" (Heath, 1982, p.34).

A purposive sample of teachers was done based on the above-mentioned position of trust, ability to listen, willingness to showcase their child-initiated pedagogies, and to learn more about democratic practices in international contexts. These teachers were considered to be in the best position to both interpret children's thoughts and to make common cause with them from an emic (rather than etic) perspective: "Human acts cannot be separated from their cultural context. They are determined not by causes which can be studied using the methods of the natural sciences but rather by reasons which are under the control of the acting person and must be understood through the eyes of the individuals under investigation" (Helfrich, 1999, p.133).

The data were gathered from 14 settings which were located in various urban localities, some serving the poorest socio-economic groups, whilst others were in more affluent areas. In some settings, children's ethnic backgrounds and the languages they used in their daily lives, were mixed. Other groups were more homogenous, with the majority sharing the school's language. The majority of settings were state-funded with the exception of one in Finland and two in Estonia. All teachers were fully qualified each according to their local legislations with baccalaureate or near-equivalent tertiary education.

|                | Finland    | Estonia | England                     |
|----------------|------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| No of settings | 7          | 5       | 2                           |
| Area           | South-West | North   | London and East-Midlands    |
| No of teachers | 11         | 5       | 8                           |

During this phase, one setting in the USA dropped out because of the pressure of work and another one in Estonia because the project seemed too challenging. Two participating teachers at one setting in England were forced to pull based on ideological differences. The sample of settings, teachers, and children is not, therefore, intended to be indicative of the whole country or area. Nor do the samples share identical characteristics between the countries. The intention is to research child-initiated pedagogies at the level of everyday practice and to analyze these in the light of each country's or area's traditions and limitations and to discuss possibilities. Since our aim is not to standardize one model of child initiated pedagogy to be implemented more widely, we do not suggest what practitioners should do in their daily work either. All participating teachers were asked to explore the following three questions with children:

1) How are decisions reached about activities?

2) What kinds of things are decided?

3) Who decides?

Children, who were asked to comment on their independence and involvement in their activities, and decisions that govern these, were either randomly selected by their teachers, or they happened to be in the space close to the teacher. Some teachers selected another purposive sample of those children who were considered experienced enough in the setting to be able to offer opinions about activities and routines. The settings followed their own ethical approval practices, requesting parents' consent, and asking children whether they wanted to participate. At all times, children had a right to decide that they no longer wanted to be involved and to remove themselves (Flewitt, 2005). The authors involved assured the settings that their anonymity would be preserved in all presentations and publications, and that teachers had an opportunity to contribute to the data analysis. Issues of consent and confidentiality are thus addressed. Furthermore, a level of trust between the participating teachers and participating children is implied and the data are collected within the familiar context of their own. The intent to make the children's voice genuinely heard has already been stated. Also the subject of research is rather far from exposing vulnerability, so that harm of any kind is not expected to any participant. However, no ethical position, or a way of

documenting or presenting data, can fully guarantee the outcome as somehow flawless and complete.

With their recognition of the children and learning environment in their settings, the teachers selected their own methods for surveying and documenting how children viewed their role in the processes of reaching decisions. Methods consisted of either small group interviews with soft toys and children, or teachers looking at and discussing 'learning journeys' or 'progress books' where teachers had included photographs and other evidence of activities. Or teachers used video materials adopted from Tobin's studies and methodologies (Tobin & Karasawa, 2011). In these cases, teachers first videoed small groups of children engaging in ordinary everyday activities and then showed these videos to the same children, videoing them again discussing decisions. The data discussed here come from 14 videos and 12 written accounts of children giving their thoughts about the decision making processes that had an impact on their everyday experiences in Finland, Estonia and England. The analysis was developed together with teachers and university tutors who then shared different sets of data from different countries, in the manner of investigator triangulation. Since this is an international study, examples needed to be translated, and this involves a continuous process of translating both the languages as well as the cultural traditions. Recognizing cultural traditions, one's own or others', is not always a straightforward or speedy process.

**Capturing children's voices**
The complex and multifaceted processes of capturing, listening and interpreting children's voices, and ultimately aiming to make common cause with children, remains a continuous, collective, and reflexive activity that involves teachers and researchers reflecting on meanings, different cultural perspectives, and on different levels of interpretation. On these reflections three themes emerged:

*1) Feeling and embracing the sense of control*
The first theme discovered in all participating settings in the three countries was that, in each setting, children told their teachers very confidently that they were in control of the activities within the context-specific rules and routines. "*We just decide*" said a five-year old girl in Finland whose teacher completed a video interview of three children, whilst her friend, another girl, continued a while later that "*we can go and do, but we cannot interrupt a teacher if she is talking to someone else*" and the third, a boy, concluded "*sometimes I don't decide because my friend decides.*" Disagreements between children were acknowledged and turn-taking and sharing resources were discussed as a method of resolving conflicts as a 5 year-old child in a Finnish setting commented, "*You can combine* [share]. *I have made tunnels out of Legos for our train sets.*"

In an English setting, a 5-year old boy was reflecting on past activities by looking at his personal "learning journey" (a kind of scrapbook of his own drawings, photos and teacher's annotated comments). He remembered being in control of the activities, "*I* [with the emphasis on I] *did that,*" he said. Skillfully, his teacher probed him further and drew his attention to a particular piece of writing that had recently been completed. This boy discussed confidently his ideas for writing and his own sense of control.

In another Finnish setting the teacher asked 6-year old children what kinds of things children are allowed to decide. One boy said, "*in music, what song we're going to sing.*" After the teacher probed the children further, the same boy remembered, "*we have voted.*" All children were, in fact, fully aware of the context-specific rules and routines, and ready to comply with

these as one Estonian 5-year old explained when asked who chooses activities: *"kids of course! All the games are chosen by kids. Well, not really - those games that we play during morning gatherings, we don't decide."* In the same setting another child also pointed out that, *"usually we choose but sometimes teacher suggests what to play. Sometimes we play board games and then we get bored and then we choose another game."* In a Finnish setting, the teacher asked, *"are you allowed to decide who you're going to play with?"* and a 5 year old girl noted, *"if someone plays with someone else, they can. Then you got to ask can I play with you?"*

The above examples from the three countries suggest that these 3-6 year old children viewed themselves, and wanted to view themselves, as competent experts in their own settings. They knew and accepted the possibilities open to them and used them regularly. At the same time they were fully aware of rules and routines. Although on a superficial level, this can be seen as a step towards agency and independence in neo-Vygotskian view (Rainio, 2009) as well as a possibility for reasoned negotiation in the future. Teachers were seen as more knowledgeable partners who at times suggested ways forward, provided ideas or, in some instances, resolved conflicts. Children acknowledged conflicts between friends and offered ways of resolving these, too.

*2) Collaborating*
The second theme to emerge was children's collaboration with other children and their individual friendships. In an Estonian setting, a group of 6-year old children said, *"when the teacher tells us what we are going to do, then we are also allowed to talk* [meaning offer ideas to the teacher]. *Sometimes we want to do the same thing again."* It is interesting to note that most children in the different countries often replied by using the plural pronoun 'we,' rather than the singular 'I.' The use of language suggests a sense of collectivity, 'us the children' in connection with 'you the adults.' Their decisions clearly are informed by others in the whole group, and particularly by their friends. There is a clear sense of hierarchical understanding, too. The teacher as an adult is asking questions and has more power and it is possible that when answering, children may think it more persuasive to be speaking on behalf of all, or at least many. There seems to be some safety in numbers. And power in numbers. Also, acknowledging the hierarchy, the children seek decision-making in collaboration with the teacher.

The processes of being an active participator in an early years settings, and gaining independence, seems to be shot through with the dynamics of personal and peer-group experience. Children's friendships were not a primary focus of this study but it is evident that children with stable friendships were more active and more confident in making decisions. Collective power and action, trusted allies and unions seem to be a key determinant with all humans, young and old, and in all hierarchical settings. Ebrahim (2011) discussed the strategies that young children engage in and one of them was collaboration. The participating children in this study were active in developing collaboration.

*3) Experimenting with chaos*
The third theme to emerge from the data sets is adopted from Paley's (1991) ideas and children's imaginative play. This is best described as children experimenting with chaos in order to show that everything is in order. An example of this took place in an English setting where the teacher videoed a small group of 4-5 year old boys who were playing outside with a water hose. The boys were appropriately dressed, with water-proof trousers and boots, and in control of the hose. They were delighted when they made the water run from one funnel to

the next. They took turns with the hose and helped each other by holding funnels and containers. Every so often they also checked the camera and their teacher's actions. They shrieked with excitement when they managed to squirt the water high up in the air and create twirling shapes. They tested this a few times to see if they could make the same patterns again and again. But the loudest screams came when the water almost, but not quite, sprayed the teacher or a participating child. To an outside viewer their play may have seemed chaotic or inappropriate. Yet, it was neither. The boys were appropriately dressed by their teacher and they were fully engaged in experimenting and testing properties of water. And at no time was another child, the teacher, or the camera sprayed.

In accordance with the video methodologies developed by Tobin (1991; 2011) this video clip was later played to the same group of boys in order to elicit their thoughts on decisions. As with Tobin's study, the teacher videoed the same group of boys watching themselves on a big screen. This second video is highly illuminating on many levels. The teacher asked them a number of questions about the first video, about their choices and decisions, but instead of explaining any of it, the boys simply laugh. The teachers of the school themselves thought that it revealed something about children recognizing that they had been riding on the cusp of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and that in order to do this balancing act so well, they must have had an excellent understanding of both. Their giggles perhaps also revealed their enjoyment in creating a chaotic context for their play. In essence some of this resembles the resistance strategies identified by Ebrahim (2011). Laughter is an aspect of human interaction, and as such is an idiosyncratic and contextualized way in which young children can convey meaning, and, thereby, one of children's 'hundred languages.' Their laughter revealed that they enjoyed experimenting with chaos, even more so to recognize that they managed to keep everything under their control, and that their teacher allowed them to keep everything under control. This is a highly sophisticated approach and reveals young children capable of playing with situations, pushing boundaries and accepted ways of behaviour, and sharing the responsibility of remaining in control together with the teacher. When sharing this example with participating teachers in the three countries, all teachers confirmed children's need to experiment with chaos as a critical aspect of our work focusing on child-initiated pedagogy.


**Conclusion and ponderings**
The overall transformation of authentic everyday examples from three different countries and 14 settings into a written form and the recognition of these as historically located is a multifaceted, dynamic process. Despite the meaning-making initially constructed independently in each culture and setting, the data do suggest coherence in child-initiated pedagogies as perceived by children. This includes acknowledging and taking control of the boundaries within which to collaborate and share decisions, as well with adults as with peers. Overall, the sense of control was perceived valuable and enjoyable. Whether the similarities are due to research instruction common to all settings, a cultural-historical similarity, something 'lost in translation,' a developmental trait, or indeed a mutually understood and developing child-initiated practice, interpretations remain open.

Since the data were context-specific and analysis co-constructed within mutual understanding, the study is limited to a mutually constructed base. Because of the implied nature of child-initiated practice based on trust and judgment of authors, the teacher's perceptions are likely to vary. The data may be perceived as optimistic, part of the sample of children being purposive, raising the question of participating in relation to children's

competence and teacher's role to foster the places of participation. Questionable too is the perceived hierarchy in the setting. What is the nature of such hierarchy in a child-initiated setting and how does it affect agency in the setting? To address these, other means of triangulation with further research and discussion will likely be applied as the research project continues. The project is reflexive in that it includes children, practitioners, and university tutors from each country in reflecting on meaning-making. It focuses more on everyday lives, and less on activities planned or knowledge gained, but at the same time teachers may use their involvement in the project as an evaluative tool when considering their own practice.

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