

Pedagogy and Ethics in Early Childhood Education and Care: A Danish Hermeneutic Inquiry

ECNU Review of Education
2022, Vol. 5(4) 624–642
© The Author(s) 2022
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/20965311221105526
journals.sagepub.com/home/roe



Jan Jaap Rothuizen 

VIA UC

Abstract

Purpose: This article provides an exploration of the internal relationship between ethics and pedagogy in early childhood education and care (ECEC). It aims at a clarification of the interrelationships between political and administrative government, the absence/presence of a pedagogical foundation, and the need for a code of ethics.

Design/Approach/Methods: The overall approach is hermeneutic and combines interpretations of a narrative research project, a review of recent developments in ECEC in Denmark, and the search for a theoretical conceptualization of a pedagogical foundation for ECEC.

Findings: ECEC as a pedagogical practice needs a pedagogical foundation. If a foundation is vivid and a clear reference for practice, a separate code of ethical conduct might be superfluous. Nevertheless, such a code can be indispensable if ECEC governance is outcome-oriented and reduces practice to technique.

Originality/Value: The study includes a discussion of the central European tradition for human science pedagogy and argues for the relevance of insights from this tradition in pedagogical foundations for ECEC. The study combines an empirical study of knowledge at play in ECEC and of specific developments in Danish ECEC with original philosophical, pedagogical, and conceptual reflections and results in a more precise indication of the relationship between ECEC government, pedagogy, and ethics.

Corresponding author:

Jan Jaap Rothuizen, VIA UC, Ceresbyen 24, Aarhus 8000, Denmark.

Email: jjr@via.dk



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access page (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Keywords

Denmark, ECEC, ethics, governance, human science pedagogy, pedagogical tact

Date received: 10 September 2021; revised: 6 December 2021, 13 January 2022, 30 March 2022; accepted: 5 April 2022

Introduction

In Denmark, there is a more than 100-year-old tradition for “Kindergarten.” The German “Kindergarten” is connected to the ideas of Fröbel (1782–1852) and child-centered reform pedagogy in general (Hygum, 2014; Ringsmose & Kragh-Müller, 2017; Rothuizen, 2018). The Nordic early childhood education (ECE) tradition is “*based on the principle that children have a right to be children. The pedagogical practice must constitute a safe framework for children’s natural curiosity and appetite for life. They must be allowed to explore the world together with other children*” (Rasch-Christensen et al., 2018, p. 1). It is a tradition based on the idea of meeting the children halfway (Ringsmose & Kragh-Müller, 2017; Rothuizen, 2016). In the last 50 years, after it became common for women to be active in the labor market, Kindergarten, literally translated to “børnehave” in Danish, has been a general welfare service for all.

In the new millennium, we have witnessed a turn toward professionalization. So now the official name is not børnehave anymore, but *day-care institution*, and in 2004, a bill was passed that prescribed a curriculum with six themes (Pædagogiske Læreplaner i Dagtilbud Til Børn, 2004; Winther-Lindqvist & Svinth, 2018), in order to stimulate a more goal-oriented development of children’s learning and skill set.

By now, early childhood education and care (ECEC) is mainly a state/municipality-driven and -financed general provision for more than 90% of all children between 1 and 6 years old. About half of the employees are educated at a bachelor level. The large prevalence of Kindergarten is due to a traditional great confidence in public authorities, a very high participation of women in the labor market, and also more recent research on the (economic) benefit of ECE (Heckman, 2021).

There has been an education for early childhood teachers (pedagogues) for more than 120 years. Since the 1950s, education has been regulated by law, and in the new millennium, it became education at bachelor’s level, organized in university colleges. About half of the employees in ECEC are pedagogues, educated at bachelor’s level. Educated early childhood teachers have their own union (BUPL), which today is a hybrid between a union and a professional association. In 2015, BUPL published a code of ethics for Danish early childhood educators.

After the process of increasing state governance and professionalization was initiated in the late 1990s, we have heard a call for knowledge-based practice, accompanied by a combination of complaints about a lack of knowledge and a mobilization of state-supported knowledge providers. We stumbled over this development, and started what should end as an inquiry into the interrelationships

between political and administrative government, the absence/presence of a pedagogical foundation, and the need for a code of ethics.

The study is based on a distinction between ECEC and pedagogy. ECEC is the institutionalized pedagogical practice subject to political and governmental regulation. Pedagogy is a term that designates the thoughtful and value-based practice of upbringing and education, supported by a distinctive disciplinary reflection. The Nordic ECEC tradition is an example of pedagogy in action. Pedagogical practice requires a moral orientation, and as such, it also is an ethical practice (Dige, 2014). Pedagogy is practiced in ECEC; ECEC frames pedagogy and stimulates and limits certain practices. The article deals with the relation between ethics, pedagogy, and ECEC in Denmark.

The study consists of several distinct elements. The first element is a study in “knowledge at play in pedagogical practice” conducted as a narrative research project. It was motivated by a sense of confusion about the prevalent quests for outsider knowledge to be implemented in ECEC (Aabro, 2016, 2019; Buus, 2018; Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut, 2017). We were dissatisfied—pulled up short—because a one-sided request for outsider knowledge shadows for competent pedagogical practice and for possibilities for professional development from the inside. So, we asked: Is there knowledge at play in practice, and if so, what kind of knowledge is it, and can it be a basis for further professional development? It turned out that practitioners primarily are preoccupied by doing the right thing at the right time, practicing *good pedagogy* in everyday life. They also organize activities and learning opportunities, but that seems to be a piece of cake compared to the pedagogical responsibility for both each individual child and for the communities of children (Togsverd, Jørgensen, Rothuizen, & Weise, 2017).

Those results motivated the next piece of research: What is this “doing the right thing at the right time” about? In order to gain a better understanding of this kind of knowledge and its relation to pedagogy, I will present a short study of the effective history (“Wirkungsgeschichte,” Gadamer, 1999, p. 305) of the concept of pedagogy and go back to a neglected tradition: human science pedagogy (“Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik”) and its predecessors (Rothuizen, 2015, 2019). It seems that findings in the narrative research can be understood in line with those earlier conceptions of education/pedagogy, conceptions that place a moral orientation at the heart of pedagogy. The tradition also provides us with a pedagogical concept for the value-oriented choices that ECEC workers have to make on the spot: *pedagogical tact*.

The “knowledge at play” research is embedded in the actual state of affairs in Denmark. We found that there still was more in ECEC than policy-driven concepts and instrumental action, and this “more” could be understood in the light of the effective history of pedagogy. The next piece of research, therefore, is a question of following the case of Denmark, which turns out to be really interesting and even surprising. In 2015, a code of ethical conduct is elaborated by the union of ECEC workers. This code of conduct is about pedagogy and points to all those situations

and challenges that require thoughtful considerations about *good pedagogy*. It is clearly a reaction to the instrumentalization of ECEC. Ethics is an answer, a supplement, or a countermovement in relation to politics and administration that steer ECEC in the direction of more instrumentalization. Ethics is, in the light of our research, a kind of recapturing of pedagogy. Following the case of ECEC in Denmark, we find a surprising turn in the governance of ECEC in 2018, when the statutory curriculum is subordinated *a pedagogical foundation*, that seems to be meant as a protection against instrumentalization. This idea of a pedagogical foundation can be interpreted as a return to the human science pedagogy approach that was developed on the European continent, which integrates ethics in pedagogy. What the future may bring for ECEC in Denmark has to be the object of future studies, but at this state, the combination of the three studies—the narrative research, the conceptual research, and the case study—result in a better understanding of configurations of government, pedagogy/a pedagogical foundation, and ethics.

Such understanding may give rise to new perspectives for action for practitioners and policy-makers, not only in Denmark but also in other countries, with other configurations of ECEC, pedagogy, and ethics. And that is what the whole of this study aims at.

The study contains an original combination of empirical and theoretical, conceptual research. We have accounted for our methods in the original reports, books, and articles, cited in this publication. The whole of the study represents a methodology aligned with the linguistic turn in philosophy in the 20th century, based on a hermeneutical approach, in line with Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1999). In short, the researcher/interpreter is confronted with a situation in which he is pulled up short¹ (Gadamer, 1999, p. 272; see also Kerdeman, 2003) and has to build up a new understanding. In order to get there, he has to make an inquiry both in reality and in how reality is conceptualized. The desired result is "different understanding" (Gadamer, 1999, p. 302). This entails that empirical, historical, and theoretical conceptual research become intertwined in a distinctive way: a linguistic communication between present and tradition (Gadamer, 1999, p. 467), a fusion of horizons of the present and of the past (Gadamer, 1999, p. 311). The article is composed in a way that is appropriate for hermeneutical research, as the reader is taken by hand in the researchers' voyage of discovery. The research is pedagogical as far as it sheds light on the practice of pedagogy (Bollnow, 1978, p. 7), and in the tradition of human science pedagogy, it is hermeneutic-pragmatic (Flitner, 1964, p. 45), as it aims at insights that can help practitioners to develop their practice (Rothuizen, 2019).

Narrative research in the knowledge base in ECEC

Inspired by the works of Clandinin (Clandinin, 2015, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly et al., 1997) and Frank (Frank, 2005, 2010, 2012) and with a background in philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1999), we designed a narrative research project into knowledge at play in ECE (Togsverdt,

Jørgensen, & Rothuizen, 2017; Togsverd, Jørgensen, Rothuizen, & Weise, 2017; Togsverd, Rothuizen et al., 2017). We collaborated with five very different ECEC institutions in the town of Aarhus for about 3 months. Two of us visited each place once a week, and together, we created safe places for storytelling. We got about 200 stories. We were interested in those situations that practitioners consider worth telling about, as we supposed those stories could represent areas of professional interest, and (implicit) deliberations about how pedagogues understand and act in a professional way. Once the safe spaces were established—that certainly could take some time—we heard many narratives, and often a narrative was an occasion for the audience to react, sometimes one narrative became an occasion for more narratives, sometimes narratives developed, as they opened for new perspectives. Generally, the practitioners experienced it was meaningful to narrate, to listen, to discuss—they experienced they got new knowledge, new perspectives, and inspiration for handling situations. In the process from lived experience to storytelling to new experiences, the practitioners acted as hermeneutic interpreters of everyday life, often with a starting point in situations of being pulled up short. Some practitioners wrote their narratives, but mostly, we (researchers) wrote them while we listened, we also documented the session with our field notes. We elaborated our understanding of the mediating role narratives play between life, experience, and knowledge (Bruner, 2006; Garro & Mattingly, 2001; Ricoeur, 2010; Riesmann, 2008) and decided to elaborate an analysis of the plots of the stories, searching for general patterns. In our analysis, we found that practitioner stories are always circling around the question of “good practice” and “good pedagogy,” sometimes as a testimony and a postulate, but most often as an open question. Just read the following story:

The pea-bag

When we gather the children in a circle on the floor we pass a little bag to any child who wants to speak, tell a story or so for the others to listen to. It is one of those bags made of fabric with dried peas in it. A few days ago, Katinka asked for the bag—she clearly wanted to say something. Holding the bag, she immediately began telling a story. It really made no sense at all but she mentioned “presents” and “mum” and “birthday” so I tried filling in the story asking her whether it was her mums’ birthday and if she had any presents. Katinka confirms with a few “yes” and a nod and then begins “borrowing” stuff from the stories and experiences shared by the other children. She holds into the little bag and continues her story. The other children listen carefully as she speaks.

At first glance, it could be a story about language and language learning. Katinka’s language development is not age-appropriate and may be a cause for concern; a special training program might be appropriate. But that is not the point of the story. Lis, who tells the story, is fully aware of Katinka’s linguistic challenges, and it seems she has made a choice for a functional approach to language development. The point of the narrative is not Katinka’s linguistic challenges,

but Katinkás inclusion in the community of children, an inclusion that only can succeed when Katinka herself feels recognized as a worthy person.

In the analysis of the story, we found two landmarks, Lis' points of orientation: *Inclusion* and *a worthy person*. Later on, we formulated them in general terms as *participation* and *emancipation*. So, the story is both specific, about the circle and Katinka, and general, about genuine *pedagogical values*. Those are the educational values that matter for Lis, and it seems she is able to make choices "on the spot" that can contribute to the realization of those values. Her orientation is supported by the activity that is called "the pea-bag": It is the way of framing a situation that can open up for certain things to happen. Inside this framework, Lis is active; she tries "to fill the story" without depriving Katinka of her ownership. She can do so because she, at the same time, studies the wondrous life of the child; how Katinka in her own way is included in the community of children. Lis does not neglect the linguistic challenges, but how she deals with them is conditioned by her overarching interest in *good pedagogy*, in realizing genuine pedagogical values.

In the story about "**New companions,**" we found the same search for the right thing to do:

Viggo is a boy who is not very flexible. He would prefer to completely control what is going to happen and hits and kicks when he feels under pressure.

He is therefore not particularly well-liked in the group. So, we are working on changing it and have decided that we will work with changing companionship on our walks. The easiest thing is if he is allowed to go with the best friend Ole, but I have decided that he must go with Jonas the next time.

There is resistance from both boys, so I decide to go between them. When we go home again, I say to the boys that now they have to go together until we get to the local supermarket and then we will talk about how it was. Passing the local supermarket, the boys think it's ok and we choose to continue in the same way to the railway. Passing the railway, they still think it's ok and the rest of the trip home to the kindergarten they shift kicking stones on the gravel path. They laugh and enjoy themselves.

In this narrative, the point is not that Viggo is a boy with autism who needs structure, although that certainly also is the case. Viggo is a boy who meets challenges in social life, but that does not define who he is. He has both the right to be a unique person (*emancipation*) and the right to participate in children's togetherness and friendships (*participation*), and those are the values at stake in this story. It is not easy to combine these values, and therefore Ann (who told the story) has to take chances: She challenges Viggo (and also Jonas); she gives them some resistance; but she has to be careful, as that can backfire. The point of the story is that it was worth it, as both pedagogical values came into play and emerged. Also, in this story, we can see how Ann administrates the

three positions: She intervenes, she frames, and moves back in order to give the boys a chance to find their own way of relating, and she enjoys the wondrous life of this growing living friendship.

So, the overall findings of this general analysis are that (pedagogical) values of emancipation and participation were at stake and that the pedagogical story is about navigating in order to realize and balance those values in specific and emerging situations. Another overall finding is that the pedagogues in this search for realizing pedagogical values alternate between three positions: intervening, framing, and attentive and thoughtful observation. So, we found that there are moral orientations at stake when pedagogues act and that they direct themselves in appropriate positions in order to be able to balance and enact those values.

We concluded that there is knowledge at play in pedagogical practice, and it is possible to cultivate that knowledge with narratives and dialogues about them. Thus, we were able to give some nuances to the discourse on the lack of knowledge and the need for adding knowledge from the outside. That represents an epistemological point, a correction of a one-sided knowledge theory, in line with what other scholars have argued (Polanyi, 1962; Schön, 1992). But we were not satisfied with the epistemological point; we were fascinated by the finding of those moral orientations and interested in understanding their relation to pedagogy. Thus, I decided to do some more theoretical research on what pedagogy is about.

The relationship between moral orientations and pedagogy as it has emerged in a continental tradition

Let me rehearse our finding in this way: Pedagogues are in possession of a kind of pedagogical compass, calibrated with two pedagogical values that at the same time pull in opposite directions and are presuppositions for each other—*emancipation* and *participation*. They also know that they are not able to realize those values on their own, as only children themselves can emancipate and participate. Therefore, they shift between intervening, framing, and observing. So, they are not thinking and acting in an instrumental way, instead *they stage spaces of opportunities for children to become agents in their own life*. That requires that pedagogues have powers of judgment, that they can make choices on the spot concerning how to realize and balance those values, and that they can regulate themselves, so they take an appropriate position at every single moment. If they are on the right track, they are pathfinders, making the road by walking; they perform, and in their performance, they show that they know what to do.

Our orientation had been toward narrative research and narrative theory, so we had not been aware of, that we were walking in the footsteps of a nearly forgotten tradition of human science pedagogy. Human science pedagogy is a tentative translation of the German “Geisteswissenschaftliche

Pädagogik,” related to the kind of reform pedagogy that characterized ECEC in Denmark. The tradition was nearly forgotten after it failed in two respects in the 1970s: At that time, critical (sociological) theory criticized it for being naive-conservative as it didn’t recognize the impact of societal structures on education, and high status (neo)positivist scientific research sets it aside as speculative (Klafki, 1998; Oelkers, 2006; Rothuizen, 2019). The tradition also failed in relation to its own ambitions: Bollnow, who can be seen as a late representative of this tradition, writes in 1978 that *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* was meant to be a hermeneutics of the educational reality (“Hermeneutik der Erziehungswirklichkeit”), but that it never succeeded—and he opted for a second chance (Bollnow, 1978).

Since that time the Anglo-Saxon idea of education as a field other disciplines—sociology, history, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology—can study, has been dominant. In recent years especially research in “what works” has been considered real and relevant pedagogical research (Biesta, 2007, 2010; Siegel & Biesta, 2021). So, who wants to go in the footsteps of something discredited? Well, in fact, we had done that, and we even showed that human science pedagogy also could manifest itself in the form of empirical research, as a hermeneutic-pragmatic discipline!

In the next section, I will first introduce the idea of human science pedagogy and then argue that it makes sense to renew this tradition. In doing so, I join other scholars, who deal with the differences between “the continental” and the “Anglo-Saxon” constitution of the idea of education and pedagogy (Biesta, 2011, 2015a, 2015b; Friesen, 2020, 2021; van Manen, 2015).

Human science pedagogy

Human science pedagogy developed as a reaction on two tendencies regarding education at the end of the 19th century. One tendency was to subordinate pedagogy under values that came “from outside”: from society, from the church, or from political movements. The other was to reduce pedagogy to a question of “how to.” Both approaches, the normative and the instrumental, presuppose that the child can and has to be molded in a form defined by adults. Human science pedagogy states that pedagogy has its own value—take care of and cherish the humanity and uniqueness of the child—and that educators, therefore, always are in the field between facts and norms, as they have to count with both the child as (s)he is right now and with the child as the person (s)he can be(come) (Litt [1921], 1969). In human science pedagogy, the educator follows and accompanies the child, not as a “molder” but in reciprocal action, and therefore the pedagogical relationship becomes a focus point (Nohl [1933], 2002). Human science pedagogy aims, in the footsteps of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) (Schleiermacher [1826], 1969), at clarifying the nature of upbringing and pedagogy as an intergenerational endeavor.

Human science pedagogy was a specific extension of the European discourse on education, which could not be ignored during the time of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment (Rothuizen, 2015; Rothuizen & Togsverd, 2020). Philosophers in this period were critical toward the civilization as it was handed over by tradition. They were in search of a new conception of man and a new conception of society, and they were aware that there was a need for another kind of education if the new generation should be able to contribute to a more perfect world. John Locke wrote his “Some thoughts concerning education” in 1693 (Adamson, 1922), Jean Jacques Rousseau published “Emile, or on education” in 1662 (Rousseau, 1966), Immanuel Kant lectured on education in the 1780–1790s (Kant, 1803), and Karl Marx wrote his “Theses on Feuerbach” in 1845 (Marx, 1978). In those 150 years, the idea of a new education was born. What is common for these four men, is that they criticized the past for its conformity and oppression of individuality. They saw the need for another educational practice, so new generations could be emancipated and free. They were all opposed to the idea that upbringing and education are only about the reproduction of what exists: *Upbringing and education are also about setting the stage for something new to happen*. In short, they were aware that the strong ties between the individual and the community were becoming, and ought to be, looser and that the child should be brought up and educated to become a free human being. The question they dealt with was: How to educate children and young people for freedom. It is still a central issue in education, an issue education has to deal with, but cannot deal with in an instrumental way. If freedom could be produced as a product of an intervention—well, then it would dissolve at the moment of production. These four men had four different proposals for how to attack this tricky issue. Locke proposed writing on the “tabula rasa,” introducing reason to the child; Rousseau proposed to minimize the influence of civilization and to give place for a natural development; Kant found freedom in morality; and Marx was convinced that there could not be freedom without liberation. What unites them is their attentiveness to the new times that were coming, modernity, characterized by unstable connection between the individual and the communities, between emancipation and participation. This instability raised questions that had to be answered philosophically, sociologically, and pedagogically (see also Mollenhauer, 2016). There are no simple answers, as freedom is an ideal and not an empirical state of affairs. Ideals cannot be reached technically; they have to be realized in specific ways in every new situation. There will always be a discussion of what that involves. We know that from politics. Pedagogy is in the same way from the beginning characterized by ideals, landmarks, questions, and polyphony in the answers. Landmarks are the ideals of freedom, subjectification/emancipation, and communities of free people/participation. Those abstract ideals—and the tensions between them—make educators responsible for searching and finding answers in specific situations, so the new generation can be educated not just to society as it is, or society as we imagine it will be, but to a society they cocreate.

In summary, it is characteristic for this tradition that the goal of education/pedagogy is a free person participating in a free society. It is a normative project, a project based on values, and the basic value is paradoxical that the child should realize those values—the educator cannot do it for the child, as that would harm and deny the freedom of the person. On the other hand, education and the accompanying restraints are unavoidable in order to protect and guide the child on its way (Kant, 1803, p. 32). So, education is a complex endeavor: The values at stake—personal freedom and taking part in a community of men—are not always compatible, and there is dissent about the priorities and the pathways to follow (Locke: reason; Rousseau: nature; Kant: morality; Marx: liberation). Values may be universal, but they always have to be realized in specific situations, so there are no universal receipts and techniques as situations are always different—and in the end, the only person who can realize the values is the child. So, *what is good pedagogy* under those conditions?

Well, that is exactly the educational question. Pedagogues are in search of *good pedagogy*; their equipment is modest and insufficient, and there is polyphony when it comes to action. The discipline of pedagogy as a human science sheds light on the practice of pedagogy: It offers more or less adequate concepts, which can help to disentangle paradoxes, value conflicts, attitudes, intentions, and practices. The discipline of pedagogy is also in search of good pedagogy—it is a normative discipline, but it is normative in such a way that it poses questions and offers methodological approaches to research in practice, especially when practitioners feel stuck, pulled up short, or overwhelmed by expectations and demands.

A helpful concept: Pedagogical tact

In our research project *knowledge at play in ECEC*, we worked in the spirit of human science pedagogy. We found *knowledge at play*, and the previous reflection on the tradition of human science pedagogy makes it clear that this knowledge at play is *pedagogical knowledge*. The argument for this knowledge is not just an epistemological argument, but also a pedagogical one. It is inherent in pedagogy that a pedagogue has to bring moral orientations into play when (s)he practices her profession, as the profession is orientated toward pedagogical values.

In human science pedagogy, there is another word for bringing moral/pedagogical orientations into play: *pedagogical tact*. Pedagogical tact is neither a practice nor theory. Practice is what we usually do, but a new situation might call for a new answer. Theory is general and relatively context-free; so, when a theory is applied directly in practice, the specific context is treated as insignificant, something that does not matter. But context matters: Katinka and Viggo are unique children, and even if we can find universal traits of deficient language acquisition or dependence on structure, we cannot practice good pedagogy if we are not aware of the children's uniqueness and shape our pedagogical actions in such a way that they can find their way.

A German professor, G. F. Herbart (1786–1841) who had one of the first chairs of Pädagogik, wrote in his “Introductory Lecture to Students in Pedagogy”: *“But for every theorist who puts his theory into practice in particular cases—and who does not proceed with pedantic slowness (like a little boy with his sums in arithmetic)—a link intermediate between theory and practice involuntarily inserts itself. By this I mean a certain tact, a quick judgment and decision that is not habitual and eternally uniform”* (Herbart, 2022, ch. 2). He specifies, that this *tact* requires an attunement of the heart, a certain disposition, that can be inspired by but not derived from theory. Max van Manen, who has written extensively on pedagogical tact (van Manen, 1991, 2015), defines it in the form of a paradox: “knowing what to do when you don’t know what to do.” In the book edited by Norm Friesen about pedagogical tact (Friesen, 2022), he defines tact in this way: *“Pedagogical tact’ refers to educators’ attunement to the children or young people in their care, and ‘the pedagogical relation’ to the educator’s professional and personal relationship with a young person, for the sake of that person”* (Friesen, 2022, Introduction).

The above inquiry in the continental tradition of pedagogy reminds us of the pedagogical nature of the moral orientations at stake and provides us with a pedagogical concept for those moral orientations: pedagogical tact. Our narrative research made pedagogical tact—and the search for tact—visible; it opened up for insights and reflections on tact and good pedagogy. The relationship between empirical findings—stories, field notes—the analytical processing of them, and the conceptual understanding in this kind of research is reciprocal. Our findings could be understood in terms of pedagogical tact, with the full connotations derived from the effective history of pedagogy. But our findings also enriched the understanding of what good pedagogy and pedagogical tact are about.

Now we return to the development of ECEC in Denmark and to the question if there is a need for a separate code of ethics in ECEC.

A code of ethical conduct for ECEC in 2015

The union of professional pedagogues in ECEC elaborated and published in 2015 a code of ethical conduct (BUPL, 2015). The background for this initiative was the professionalization in the field of ECE. According to the classical theory of professions, a code of ethical conduct is one of the necessary characteristics of a profession (Abbott, 1983; Carr, 1999), so one possible good reason for the publication of this ethical code is that the union wanted to strengthen the position and status of the pedagogues it organizes. Another possible good reason is that new public management had got a strong foothold in the organization and administration of ECEC and that the mandatory curriculum from 2004 and the quests for knowledge and instrumental techniques from outside did not leave much space for ethical considerations; so, in order to safeguard them, a code of ethical conduct should be developed.

In fact, the law from 2004 with the mandatory curriculum and the principles of new public management required accountability rather than responsibility (Solbrekke & Østrem, 2011) and neglected in a substantial way the moral dimension of pedagogy in ECEC.

The code of ethical conduct is quite short and consists of five themes:

- The purpose of ECE.
- Values of ECE.
- Early childhood educators in their relations with children, young people, and families.
- Early childhood educators in the profession.
- Early childhood educators in society.

Each chapter starts with a statement of purposes concerning the theme and then a number of dots about what kind of moral bearings and obligations that imply for the practitioners.

Let us have a look at the first theme—the purpose of ECE:

“The purpose of early childhood education is to promote the welfare and development of children and young people through care, socialising, education and learning. This is done by:

- *Providing children and young people with equal opportunities regardless of their social or material conditions, ethnicity or religious affiliation, physical or psychological disability.*
- *Providing individual and social support to children and young people in order to strengthen their fitness for life.*

Providing the framework for a good and caring childhood and youth that enables everyone to join social communities” (BUPL, 2015, p. 1).

It is easy to recognize the basic bearings and values linked to the pedagogical project: emancipation and participation. In a way, the ethical code of conduct is a reminder of what pedagogy and education are about, and that the duty of a pedagogue is to stand up for that, also if that entails resistance from within or from outside.

A new curriculum for ECEC in Denmark in 2018

In 2017, the Danish government passed a political agreement, aimed at increasing the quality of ECEC facilities, entitled *Strong ECEC—all children should be included in communities*. It was accompanied by a report: *The strengthened pedagogical curriculum* (Ministry of Children and Education, 2017). What was new in this agreement was the formula of *pedagogical principles* as a foundation. So now there is both a foundation and six curriculum themes. Subsequently, a new subsection was added in

the object clause of the Day-Care Facilities Act: “*ECEC facilities shall promote the well-being, learning and development of children through safe and pedagogical learning environments, in which the notion of play is at its core, and the view of children is foundation*” (Rasch-Christensen et al., 2018, p. 8). In 2018, a new Day-Care Facilities Act based on this agreement came into force (Dagtilbudsloven, 2019).

In 2018, there was an EU-organized peer review on “*Furthering Quality and Flexibility of Early Childhood Education and Care*” in Copenhagen. The Danish discussion paper underlines: “*What is new is the detailed description in the Day-Care Facilities Act of specific elements such as ‘play,’ ‘a broad concept of learning’ and ‘the view of children’*” (Rasch-Christensen et al., 2018), and also that these must unfold in “*communities of children.*” “*The foundation rests upon a view of children that being a child is a value in itself and a good interaction between the pedagogical staff and children is essential to ensure children’s well-being, learning, development and ‘bildung’.* (...) *Furthermore, the foundation rests upon the belief that children should be co-creators of their own development within a framework for which adults are responsible*” (p. 12).

It is remarkable that Danish day care politics after roughly 15 years of experimenting with a more technical and instrumental conception of what pedagogy is about and many years of new public management governance, more or less—we do not really know yet how the act will break through—turned around and went back to “*foundations.*”

Foundations can be understood as basic values, for example, free play = *freedom*, the view of children = children’s subjectivity = *emancipation*, and communities of children = *participation*. Learning is still central as the overall description of the pedagogical place is a “*learning environment,*” but, at the same, it is specified that “*it can (...) be created by spontaneous situations and routines during e.g. during lunch or children getting dressed. This means that there must be a pedagogical component at all times—regardless of the situation (play, routine, planned activity, etc.)*” (op. cit. p. 13). This statement contains a recognition of the importance of pedagogical knowledge at play, pedagogical tact guided by pedagogical landmarks, in ECEC.

What we can extract from this turn is that there is a return to pedagogical values that requires practitioners to make pedagogical choices they take responsibility for, and, at the same time, a more instrumental and learning-orientated approach is kept at a distance. Once more ethics is built into the practice of pedagogy. Standing up for pedagogy requires that practitioners both individually and collectively reflect on the choices they make in everyday life at their workplace. They need to train their pedagogical attentiveness, thoughtfulness, and tact (van Manen, 2015, ch. 6). Pedagogical research in a renewed human science tradition, as we carried out in “*knowledge at play,*” can contribute once more. Ethics and the subsequent moral orientations are no longer an addition to knowledge-based professional work, as they are integrated into the pedagogical foundation. Not as a codex, but as a foundation for knowledge at play, moral orientations, and pedagogical tact. Practicing pedagogy on that base implies that internal learning should have a priority in the workplace (Jakobsen et al., 2018).

Rounding off

In this article, I have dealt with the question if there is a need for an ethical code of conduct in ECE and care. First, I told about a research project: knowledge at play in ECEC. We found out that the stories early childhood educators told were stories in search of good pedagogy because that was what they were preoccupied by. An analysis of the stories told us that there were some specific landmarks the pedagogues used as points of orientation, emancipation, and participation, and that they were aware of the importance of different modes of being—intervening, framing, and studying the wondrous life of the child. The stories were stories of finding paths and reflections on the question if they were on the right track. The section concluded that the pedagogues enacted knowledge about pedagogical values and that they were preoccupied by acting tactfully.

Then, I reflected on the nature of upbringing, education, and the knowledge involved in it. I dealt with the central European tradition of *Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik* and its predecessors, which has a built-in normative orientation, pointed out shortcomings, proposed a way forward, as an alternative and supplement to the study of the field of education as it is practiced with roots in an Anglo-Saxon tradition.

In the next section, I examined the ethical code for ECEC introduced in 2015 by the union of professional workers in ECEC and noticed that it was very close to the moral and normative orientations of pedagogy identified in the previous sections. It seemed it made sense to elaborate an ethical code of conduct as a kind of emergency measure under the conditions of new public management governance and the quests for instrumental knowledge.

In the last section, I noticed that there were signs of a turn in governance, as the new act in 2018 prescribed the primacy of a pedagogical foundation over the curriculum. That might be a chance for keeping alive the memory and the promise of pedagogy itself.

Under these conditions, ethics is not an addition to professionalism that has to be administered besides the professional expertise, but it is at the core of the professional expertise. Pedagogy and education are ethical in nature.

Conclusions

Well-educated pedagogues bring pedagogical knowledge at play and have a moral orientation to pedagogical values. At the time ECEC in Denmark was governed by a law that stressed the result-based and instrumental aspects of ECEC practice, there was a need for an ethical codex, in order to guarantee and legitimize the moral orientations at play in practice. A new law in 2018 is based on a genuine pedagogical foundation that incorporates basic pedagogical values and orientations as guidelines for a responsible practice. Under those circumstances, a separate code of ethical conduct might be superfluous. This case can teach us that ethical codes of

conduct, in particular, are required in a situation where the government of ECEC is outcome-oriented and presupposes a predominant instrumental approach in day care facilities, which leaves little space and recognition for pedagogical moral orientations. Separating ethics and the daily management and conduct of ECEC can in a worst-case scenario even legitimize a non-pedagogic instrumentalized everyday life in ECEC. As pedagogy as a discipline and practice contains its own ethical and moral orientations, it is preferable that the basis of ECEC government is constituted by a pedagogical foundation.

Limitations of the study and further research

The study contains an original combination of empirical and theoretical, conceptual research, and has been completed from the standpoint of a native central European researcher. Hermeneutic research aims at opening up new understandings, which may expand people's (readers) opportunities to act themselves. Often this requires an act of "different understanding," that is, that the reader enters into a dialogue with the text. I hope, but cannot be sure, that the text invites the reader into such a dialogue. An unavoidable limitation of the study is that it is completed from one standpoint—a different standpoint might have led to other pathways and different understandings.

That said, I hope other researchers will get interested in the relationship between ethics, pedagogy, and governance in ECEC and contribute with empirical and theoretical studies, at other places and from other standpoints, that can supplement our knowledge of the intricate connections between them.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the BUPL (grant number 2016, BUPL granted € 100.000 to the narrative research).

ORCID iD

Jan Jaap Rothuizen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2736-4854>

Note

1. Gadamer uses the German word *Anstoss*, which at once contains the meaning of *difficulty/stumbling* and *new beginning/kickoff*.

References

- Aabro, C. (2016). *Koncepter i pædagogisk arbejde* [in Danish]. Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Aabro, C. (2019). *Pædagogers faglighed – i lyset af en stigende regulering af danske daginstitutioner* [in Danish] [Doctoral dissertation, Roskilde University].
- Abbott, A. (1983). Professional ethics. *American Journal of Sociology*, 88(5), 855–885. <https://doi.org/10.1086/227762>
- Adamson, J. W. (1922). *The educational writings of John Locke*. University Press.
- Biesta, G. (2007). Why “what works” won’t work: Evidence-based practice and the democratic deficit in educational research. *Educational Theory*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00241.x>
- Biesta, G. (2010). Why ‘what works’ still won’t work: From evidence-based education to value-based education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 29(5), 491–503. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-010-9191-x>
- Biesta, G. (2011). Disciplines and theory in the academic study of education: A comparative analysis of the Anglo-American and continental construction of the field. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 19(2), 175–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2011.582255>
- Biesta, G. (2015a). On the two cultures of educational research, and how we might move ahead: Reconsidering the ontology, axiology and praxeology of education. *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(1), 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474904114565162>
- Biesta, G. (2015b). Teaching, teacher education, and the humanities: Reconsidering education as a Geisteswissenschaft. *Educational Theory*, 65(6), 665–679. <https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12141>
- Bollnow, O. F. (1978). *Theorie und Praxis in der Lehrerbildung* [in German]. Zeitschrift Für Pädagogik, 15(Beiheft). <http://wernerloch.de/doc/ThPrLB.pdf>
- Bruner, J. (2006). Culture, mind, and narrative. In J. Bruner (Ed.), *In Search of Pedagogy. The selected works of Jerome Bruner* (Vol. 2, pp. 230–3236). Routledge.
- BUPL. (2015). *Code of ethics for early childhood educators*. https://bupl.dk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/etiksk-raad-code_of_ethics_for_early_childhood_educators_2015-13.pdf.
- Buus, A. M. (2018). *Viden der virker. En etnografisk undersøgelse af forbindelser mellem småbørnspædagogik og evidensbaseret metode* [in Danish] [Doctoral dissertation]. Danmarks Institut for Pædagogik og Uddannelse.
- Carr, D. (1999). Professional education and professional ethics. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 16(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5930.00106>
- Clandinin, D. J. (2015). Stories to live by on the professional knowledge landscape. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 20. <https://doi.org/0.15663/wje.v20i3.233>
- Clandinin, D. J. (2016). *Engaging in narrative inquiry*. Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry. Experience and story in qualitative research*. The Jossey-Bass education series.
- Connelly, F. M., Clandinin, D. J., & Ming Fang, H. (1997). Teachers’ personal practical knowledge on the professional knowledge landscape. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 13(7), 665–674. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(97\)00014-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(97)00014-0)
- Dagtilbudsloven. (2019). *Bekendtgørelse af lov om dag-, fritids- og klubtilbud m.v. til børn og unge (dagtilbudsloven)* [in Danish]. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=210015>

- Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut. (2017). *Viden om god organisering af læringsmiljøer -en kortlægning* [in Danish]. <https://www.eva.dk/dagtilbud-boern/viden-om-organisering-laeringsmiljoeer>
- Dige, M. (2014). Professionernes etiske kerne [in Danish]. *Etikk i Praksis. Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics*, 8(2), 4–22. <https://doi.org/10.5324/eip.v8i2.1857>
- Flitner, W. (1964). *Der Standort der Erziehungswissenschaft. Eine Studie über die Sozialfunktion der Wissenschaften und die Pädagogik* [in German]. Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung.
- Frank, A. W. (2005). What is dialogical research, and why should we do it? *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(7), 964–974. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305279078>
- Frank, A. W. (2010). *Letting stories breathe. A socio-narratology*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Frank, A. W. (2012). Practicing dialogical narrative analysis. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Varieties of narrative analysis* (pp. 33–52). Sage Publications.
- Friesen, N. (2020). ‘Education as a Geisteswissenschaft’: An introduction to human science pedagogy. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 52(3), 307–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1705917>
- Friesen, N. (2021). The necessity of translation in education: Theory and practice. In A. Wilmers & S. Jornitz (Eds.), *International perspectives on school settings, education policy and digital strategies. A transatlantic discourse in education research* (pp. 347–361). Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Friesen, N. (2022). *Tact and the pedagogical relation: Introductory readings*. Peter Lang.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1999). *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* [in German]. In *Gesammelte Werke 1, Hermeneutik I*. J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Garro, L. C., & Mattingly, C. (2001). Narrative as construct and construction. In C. Mattingly & L. Garro (Eds.), *Narrative and the cultural construction of illness and healing* (pp. 1–49). Oxford University Press.
- Heckman, J. (2021). *13% ROI for birth-to-five programs*. <https://heckmanequation.org>
- Herbart, J. F. (in press). Introductory lecture to students in pedagogy. In N. Friesen (Ed.), *Tact & the pedagogical relation: An introduction*. Peter Lang.
- Hygum, E. (2014). To be or not to be—The child as a human being. In E. Hygum & P. M. Pedersen (Eds.), *Early childhood education* (1st ed., pp. 11–20). Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Jakobsen, M. L., Baekgaard, M., Moynihan, D. P., & van Loon, N. (2018). Making sense of performance regimes: Rebalancing external accountability and internal learning. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 1(2), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvx001>
- Kant, I. (1803). *Über pädagogik* (D. F. T. Rink, ed.). Friedrich Nicolovius.
- Kerdeman, D. (2003). Pulled up short: Challenging self-understanding as a focus of teaching and learning. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 37(2), 293–308. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.00327>
- Klafki, W. (1998). Die Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik – Leistung, Grenzen, kritische Transformation [in German]. *Erziehung – Humanität – Demokratie. Erziehungswissenschaft Und Schule an Der Wende Zum 21.~Jahrhundert – Neun Vorträge*, 17–34. <http://archiv.ub.uni-marburg.de/sonst/1998/0003/k03.html>
- Litt [1921], T. (1969). Das wesen pädagogischen denkens [in German]. In F. Nicolin (Ed.), *Pädagogik als Wissenschaft* (pp. 268–304). Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Marx, K. (1978). Thesen über Feuerbach [in German]. In *Werke*, Bd. 3 (pp. 5–7). <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/marx-engels/1845/thesen/thesfeue-or.htm>
- Ministry of Children and Education, Denmark. (2017). *The strengthened pedagogical curriculum framework and content*. https://emu.dk/sites/default/files/2021-03/8077SPLHovedpublikation_UK_WEB_FINAL-a.pdf

- Mollenhauer, K. (2016). *Forgotten connections. On culture and upbringing* (N. Friesen, Ed.). Routledge.
- Nohl [1933], H. (2002). Die theorie der Bildung [1933] [in German]. In G. de Haan & T. Rülcker (Eds.), *Hermeneutik und geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik. Ein Studienbuch* (pp. 123–145). Europäischer Verlag der Wissenschaften.
- Oelkers, J. (2006). The strange case of German «Geisteswissenschaftliche Pädagogik». In R. Hofstetter & B. Schneuwly (Eds.), *Passion, fusion, tension: New education and educational sciences/Éducation nouvelle et sciences de l'éducation: end 19th middle 20th century/fin du XIX e -milieu du XX e siècle* (pp. 191–222). Peter Lang AG.
- Pædagogiske Læreplaner i Dagtilbud Til Børn. (2004). <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2004/224>
- Polanyi, M. (1962). *Personal knowledge. Towards a post-critical philosophy*. The University of Chicago Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rasch-Christensen, A., Raaschou, M., & Bech, M. D. (2018). *Host country discussion paper. Peer review on "Furthering quality and flexibility of early childhood education and care". Quality in the light of the strengthened pedagogical curriculum—Preparation, content and implementation*. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9221&langId=en>
- Ricoeur, P. (2010). Tid og fortælling: Den trefoldige mimesis [in Danish]. In M. Hermansen & J. D. Rendtorff (Eds.), *En hermeneutisk brobygger—tekster af Paul Ricoeur* (pp. 75–126). Klim.
- Riesmann, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.
- Ringsmose, C., & Kragh-Müller, G. (2017). *Nordic social pedagogical approach to early years*. Springer.
- Rothuizen, J. J. (2015). *På sporet af pædagogisk faglighed. Pædagoguddannelsens deltagelse i det pædagogiske projekt* [in Danish] [Doctoral dissertation, Aarhus University].
- Rothuizen, J. J. (2016). *Do we tactfully meet the children halfway*. https://www.academia.edu/29501263/Do_we_tactfully_meet_the_children_halfway
- Rothuizen, J. J. (2018). Social pedagogy between everyday life and professionalism. Values and practices in Denmark. In E. Hygum & P. M. Pedersen (Eds.), *Early childhood education* (pp. 91–106). Hans Reitzels.
- Rothuizen, J. J. (2019). Om og for praksis. Pædagogik som handlingsvidenskab [in Danish]. *Studier I Pædagogisk Filosofi*, 8(2), 20–43. <https://doi.org/10.7146/spf.v8i2.110456>
- Rothuizen, J. J., & Togsverd, L. (2020). *Det pædagogiske projekt. Om at udøve, undersøge og udvikle pædagogisk praksis* [in Danish]. Akademisk Forlag.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1966). *Émile ou De l'éducation* (M. Launay, Ed.) [in French]. Garnier Flammaron.
- Schleiermacher, F. (1969). Über die theorie der ERziehung [in Norwegian]. In F. Nicolin (Ed.), *Pädagogik als Wissenschaft* (pp. 6–17). Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Schön, D. (1992). *The reflective practitioner how professionals think in action*. Routledge.
- Siegel, S. T., & Biesta, G. (2021). The problem of educational theory. *Policy Futures in Education*. July 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103211032087>
- Solbrekke, T. D., & Østrem, S. (2011). Profesjonsutøvelse mellom profesjonelt ansvar og regnskapsplikt [in Norwegian]. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 31(3), 194–209. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-5949-2011-03-04>
- Togsverd, L., Jørgensen, H. H., & Rothuizen, J. J. (2017). *Viden om god pædagogik i spil Kultivering af hverdagslivets pædagogik gennem fortællinger* [in Danish]. https://bupl.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/filer-videngodpaedagogik_kultivering-942.pdf

- Togsverd, L., Jørgensen, H. H., Rothuizen, J. J., & Weise, S. (2017). *Viden i spil i daginstitutioner* [in Danish]. DPP. kortlink.dk/ucviden/qedb
- Togsverd, L., Rothuizen, J. J., Jørgensen, H. H., & Weise, S. (2017). Om modstand, frihed og myndigblivelse i børnehaven [in Danish]. *Forskning i Pædagogers Profession Og Uddannelse*, 2(1), 69–84. <https://tidsskrift.dk/FPPU/article/view/97717/146860>. <https://doi.org/10.7146/fppu.v1i2.97717>
- van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. State University of New York Press.
- van Manen, M. (2015). *Pedagogical tact. Knowing what to do when you don't know what to do*. Left Coast Press.
- Winther-Lindqvist, D. A., & Svinth, L. (2018). *Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Denmark*. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756810/obo-9780199756810-0093.xml>