

# What is the Future of ECE Teacher Profession? Teacher's Agency in Finland Through the Lenses of Policy Documents

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## *Abstract*

*The education system and teacher training programs in Finland have been under reform for the past decade. All policy documents in the field of early childhood education have been renewed and this has influenced both teaching training practices and teachers' work as well. Teachers are challenged to implement pedagogical methods to support children in becoming active agents of their learning. Further, teachers should be active agents in their own professional development. Finnish teachers' competences and quality of the teaching are defined in recent policy documents that introduce the future competences of teachers, including expertise agency and innovative approach. The aim of this research is to understand and critically evaluate the teacher's agency and agentic approach of these recent policy documents through thematic content analysis. In total, three policy documents were analyzed. As our theoretical framework we describe the agentic and life-long-learning approach in the educational context. We explain the Finnish early childhood education context, and current policies and practice within the field of ECEC in Finland through the viewpoint of teachers' agency and competence. According to the results, the focus in the analysed documents was more on today and less on future aspects of the teacher's agency. Further, the main focus of the teacher's agency today was on notions describing pedagogical and relational agencies. Our results suggest that teachers are given a large number of different roles as well as values across the different documents. Teachers are asked to be "more of everything" now and in the future. We conclude this paper with critical reflection. We argue that policymakers in Finland in the field of ECE should take a more critical perspective on teacher's future skill requirements especially regarding teachers' agency.*

**Keywords:** early childhood education, Finland, future, teacher education, agentic approach, policy

## **Introduction**

In Finland, the entire education system's policy documents, and therefore the teacher training programs, have been under reform during the past decade. All policy documents in the field of early childhood education (ECE) have been renewed, and this has naturally had its effects on the educational practices in the field (see also Kangas, Venninen & Ojala, 2016; Finnish National Agency of Education, 2018). In this situation teachers are challenged to implement new pedagogical methods, in order to support children in becoming active agents of their learning. Active agency is a requirement not only for children but also for teachers, who should act as active agents in their professional development and learning and throughout their career (Sairanen et al., 2019; Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2011).

The future of education has been of interest to many global influencers. For example, OECD (2018) and the World Economic Forum (Schöning & Witcomb, 2017) listed future skills and competencies that future citizens should have. The OECD Education 2030 project stated that education should embrace three further categories of competencies, called transformative competencies. These include adopting new values, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and finally taking responsibility for oneself, the environment, and others (OECD, 2018). In Finland the solution for addressing these transformative competencies in order to support children in becoming innovative, responsible, and aware is the notion of play: to see (all) play as a learning arena instead of teacher-led learning in front of the class activities. In all this, the role of teachers must change as well. Teachers should scaffold children's learning, social relations, and competencies in the classrooms (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas, in press; Schöning & Witcomb, 2017).

The idea of this research grew from perceptions that the discourse of the teaching profession is changing in the national and global arenas (Maaranen et al., 2019). Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand and critically evaluate the notion of ECE teachers' agency and the agentic approach that is introduced in the new national policy documents. In this paper, we analyze three policy documents with the help of thematic content analysis. This is done in the context of the so-called "new learning" era of early childhood education in Finland. As our theoretical framework we describe the agentic and life-long-learning approaches in the Finnish educational context. We also describe the ECE reforms and current policies and practice within the field of ECE. Special focus is given to the Finnish holistic curriculum and children's active agency in it (FNAE, 2018; Niemi et al., 2016). Our results are divided into two thematic main categories: "teachers' agency today" and "teachers' agency tomorrow." These are then further divided into sub-categories called pedagogical, relational, and sustained professional growth. According to the results, the focus in the analysed documents was more on today and less on future aspects of the teacher's agency. Further, the main focus on teachers' agency today was

on notions describing pedagogical and relational agencies. Our results suggest that teachers are given a large number of different roles as well as values across the different documents. Teachers are asked to be “more of everything” regarding agency now and in the future. We conclude this paper with critical reflection. We argue that policymakers in Finland, in the field of ECE, should take a more critical perspective on teachers’ future skill requirements especially regarding agency.

### **Finnish ECE context**

In Finland there are several policy documents steering the ECE provision. At the national level, ECE is a responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture; the national expert agency for ECE is the Finnish National Agency of Education. The Ministry of Education designs the acts and the Finnish National Agency of Education develops tools to put them into practice. There are also international, national, and local policy documents governing ECE in Finland. On the international level, the guiding documents come from European Commission (1996), the United Nations (1989, 2006), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (1994). Further, the content of ECE is guided by the national curriculum for ECE (ages 1-5; FNAE, 2018) and the national curriculum for preschool education (age 6; FNAE, 2014). Additionally, the law of early childhood education (Finnish law of early childhood education 540/2018) declares the child-teacher ratios and maximum number of children per class (12 toddlers or 21 three- to five-year olds). Other Acts and policy documents guide the work in ECE settings but with smaller impact regarding the everyday pedagogical work. The Finnish ECE working teams are multi-professional, consisting of professionals with a varying combinations of qualifications. The teams consist of at least one teacher with an academic bachelor’s degree and two assistant teachers with lower educational degrees.

### **Teacher training in Finland**

In the twentieth century, two important policy documents were developed that helped in shaping the Finnish education system as a whole. First, in 1921 the Act on Compulsory Education was put into action and then a plan concerning the development of teacher training was developed (Kuikka, 2010). This legislation required all municipalities throughout the country to provide education to all children between the ages of seven and twelve. Consequently, though, these new requirements for compulsory education and teacher training led to a substantial teacher shortage (Määttä et al., 2013). Because of this shortage teacher-training colleges were developed throughout Finland. Around the same time, in 1924, ECE teacher training seminars were taken under the social ministry and here the social and pedagogical aspects of the work were united. After the Second World War the need for ECE teachers grew dramatically. During the 1950s and the 1960s new seminars that trained ECE teachers were developed throughout the entire country. In 1977, the responsibility for teacher

training was finally transferred to universities, and ECE teacher training in 1995. The purpose of these educational shifts was to both reassure the education research community and to implement academically high-quality teacher training at a baccalaureate as well as on master's level (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2018). In the year 2017 (Finnish law of early childhood education 540/2018) teachers with academic teacher education got the official title “teacher of early childhood education” and were recognised as full teachers.

Since 2007, prospective students have been required to complete a written examination as part of their admittance process, adding to the competitive nature of entering the different teacher training programs. This exam is administered by VAKAVA, a cooperative network of teacher training programs, and provides a single application process to all member programs in Finland. Those students who are the most successful on the VAKAVA examination are then selected to continue in the application process. Since the VAKAVA is demanding, students in Finnish teacher training programs tend to be older than are those students in many other countries that also require entrance exams (Maaranen et al. 2019; Hauschildt et al., 2015).

The 1995 Act on Pedagogical Studies and Teacher Education defines which universities in Finland can educate teachers and, on a general level, the content requirements of each program. One of the main goals of the Finnish teacher education is to develop inquiry-oriented teachers (Jyrhämä & Maaranen, 2012). In doing so, teachers will be able to combine both theoretical and practical knowledge and, based on this knowledge, form a practical but personal theory that is applicable to their classrooms (Maaranen et al 2019). Teacher education programs in Finland use a research-based approach, which is seen as a central guiding theme. The starting point for each course is in the latest research evidence wherein students conduct research, analyze and problematize their findings together with their teacher. Further, almost all teachers in ECE university programs have a Ph.D. education. In Finland, being a research-based program means also that it focuses on developing teaching candidates' pedagogical thinking and decision-making, especially regarding how to justify their decisions (Kansanen, 2006; Niemi et al., 2016). Finnish teachers work autonomously and are trusted as professionals by not only society but also by their colleagues (Karila & Kinos, 2012). They work without clear supervision of their everyday pedagogical choices. Therefore, a high level of education is seen as important. Further, teachers on all levels in Finland are required to participate in yearly in-service training.

Teachers are seen as the main players in the pedagogical process of ECE. And they have to be aware of the driving force of education (through political steering and guidance) as well as the practical pedagogical methods and practices as well as the continuous development of it (through functional implementation) (Alila et al., in press). In their everyday work Finnish ECE teachers' observe children's development and skills; interact with children, parents, and other staff members; design learning

opportunities; evaluate activities and environment; and reflect on their professional skills, cultural routines, and policy documents such as curriculums to develop the implementation of ECE pedagogy further (Kangas & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019; Karila & Kinos, 2012). The daily learning activities are planned by teachers to provide all children equal opportunities in education, support sociability, and facilitate early intervention in learning difficulties (Karila & Kinos 2012). Overall, the goals of the Finnish ECE are to support the children's balanced development, growth, wellbeing and create the pathway for lifelong learning (FNAE, 2018.) The Finnish ECE is understood to consist of support for children's wellbeing through care, education, and teaching. This model is based on a sociocultural learning framework where the development and growth are seen as ongoing process goals of education together with learning (Kangas et al., 2016). The Educare model is based on a mutual understanding of the goals and evaluation of development through social processes and interpersonal relationships and interaction between the educators, children, parents, administrators, and researchers (FNAE, 2018; Smith, 1996). More generally the Educare model of early childhood education means that each ECE unit and class forms personal learning plans for each child, and the education plans for the class are based on the children's learning plans, needs, and points of interest (Alasuutari, 2014). This requires a lot from the teachers of ECE and they need to be active to change the plan when it is not working, and reflect and develop it when the children gain new skills and competences. In other words, Finnish teachers in ECE should be agentic their ability to answers the demands of the holistic curriculum and children's personal needs (FNAE, 2018).

Teacher education in Finland is in constant development. In the year 2016 two important policy documents were published. Firstly, the Finnish government founded a teacher education forum to guide and discuss the future needs of teacher education in Finland. The founding document of the forum defines and predicts some of the existing and future challenges of the teachers' profession and states the goals for teacher education itself as the following:

Teacher's work is knowledge-intensive expert work and demanding interactive work in changing contexts. The current challenges in a teacher's work include e.g. increasing diversity of pupils/students and families, changing working contexts due to the availability and usage of knowledge and digitalisation, and learning-focused emphasis in instruction. For this demanding work, a teacher needs versatile pedagogical skills and content knowledge, especially capabilities related to learning and instruction, interaction, well-being, and school development. Teacher competence is the major factor influencing student learning. The most important task of teacher education is to support learning to teach throughout the career. Finnish academic teacher education provides a solid basis for a teacher's work, although in-service teacher education requires significant developments. Teacher education and teacher educators are makers of

future teachers, and thus, it is necessary to develop them in a research-based manner. Here the national strategy for research on teacher education is crucial. (Husu & Toom, 2016, p. 5)

In this document Husu and Toom (2016) suggest further that in Finland teachers' autonomy and the opportunities teachers have to explore and innovate what works in their practice, are part of the accommodation process in the evolving Finnish Education System.

Secondly in 2016, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture published a strategic policy document about refinements to teacher training in Finland on all levels. It defines future objectives for both pre-service and in-service training. The main objectives emphasise the need to provide prospective Finnish teachers with a wide basic knowledge, expertise, and agency that creates innovations, and both individual and organisational expertise (see Fig. 1).

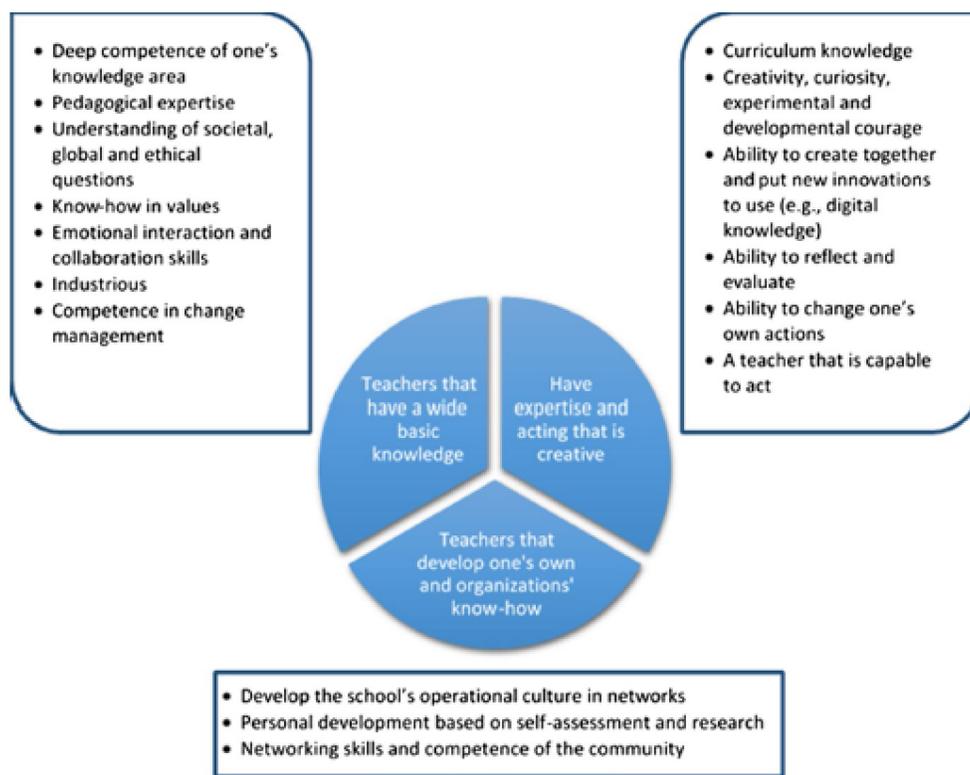


Figure 1. Objectives for future teacher competence in Finland (translated from Finnish; Ministry of Education and Culture. 2016)

### **The agentic approach in the teaching profession in Finland**

Teachers' agency towards their work and developing competencies can be seen as important for different reasons. Kumpulainen & Lipponen (2011) have identified four

notions about the agency of teachers from the point of view of teacher trainers, educational institutions, professional development, and boundary work. From the teacher education perspective, agentic teachers have the competence to both strengthen children's capabilities for life-long learning and increase their skills for sustained professional growth (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). From an educational institution point of view agentic teachers have skills to respond to complex classroom situations and cultivate children's capacity for active and agentic learning (Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2011). From the perspective of teachers' professional development, agency is part of teachers' identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). Finally, the increasing challenges of the ECE teacher profession regarding multi-professional co-operation requires also active agency and a capacity to work in collaboration with other teachers and with other professions (Kangas & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019).

In teaching work in ECE, teachers' agency can be considered through freedom of choice concerning tools, materials, and pedagogical methods. An agentic teacher has the competence to choose meaningful learning materials and design pedagogical programs to motivate children and support their involvement (Sairanen et al. 2019). From a wider perspective teachers' agency is also seen as the professional skill of facing problematic issues in work and aiming to solve them for the benefit of children and the school community (Toom et al., 2015). More generally Finnish teachers' agency is described to be pedagogical expertise and competence of intentional management of learning and scaffolding of individual students (Pyhältö et al., 2015).

This work-related agency should not be seen as an abstract and idealistic value. It should be seen as an agency that is constructed through how individual teachers address their identity position at work, how they negotiate about restrictions and opportunities of agency, and how the practical and embodied relations to the world are taken into account. This orientation to the professional agency is called a subject-centred, socio-cultural, and life-long learning perspective (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). As an example of this, the Finnish teacher students' association SOOL (2019) pointed out in their guidelines for future teacher education that future teachers are already aware of the big changes and challenges regarding education. This is an example of the fact that the teacher students in Finland have not remained silent but instead have actively taken part in the national discussion, and through these types of documents are showing practical and life-history related agency towards their future profession and professional development.

### **Research question**

In this study our aim is to take a closer look at the role of the agency that is given ECEC teachers in three latest policy documents in Finland. From the theoretical premises described earlier, we have formulated and aim to answer the following research question: what type of role are ECE teachers given in policy documents considering their agency today and in the future?

## 1. Data

In this research we use textual data to answer our research question. Three policy documents published on different levels of the Finnish ECE system between 2017-2019 (Table 1) comprised this textual data. The first document is called the roadmap for early childhood education 2030 (Karila et al., 2017), published by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The second gives guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of ECE published by the FINEEC (2018). The third document is published by the Finnish Teacher Student Association (SOOL) describing the Quality Standards for Future Teacher Education (2019).

A uniting factor across all of these documents is that they describe the quality and guidelines of the teacher's profession. In this study we focus only on policy documents and their content; the personal experiences of agency and participation are not considered. These documents can then be used by experts to make decisions regarding future teacher education, teachers' duties, and teachers' job descriptions on several levels. They describe the teacher's job from several perspectives as well. From a country perspective, municipal perspective, private/public sector perspective, and also from the university's perspective. Table 1 describes closer all of these documents, their publishers, as well as the intended audience.

*Table 1. Description of the policy documents used in this research. The document name, publisher, year and the intended audience*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Audience</b>
The roadmap for early childhood education 2030	MinEdu - Ministry of Education and Culture	2017	Municipalities organising ECEC services, Teacher education programs in Universities
Guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of early childhood education and care	FINEEC - Finnish Education Evaluation Center*	2018	Municipalities organising ECEC services, Teacher education programs in Universities
The Quality Standards for Future Teacher Education in Finland	Finnish teacher student association SOOL	2019	Teacher education programs at Universities

\*) FINEEC operates under the Finnish National Board of Education

## 2. Method

Research on document sources has particular applicability in educational sciences, as educational systems consistently produce excessive amounts of documentary data

(Punch & Oancea, 2014.). In this research we use textual data of high relevance regarding the teacher’s profession in Finland now and in the future. In order to answer the research question, we use thematic content analysis and divided the notions that came up repeatedly under the same theme, across all of the three documents. Leedy and Omrod (2001) describe content analysis as “a detailed and systematic examination of the content of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases” (p. 155). We were able to identify a total of 89 notions across the documents. These “chunks of meaning” were then divided into two main categories: teacher’s agency today and tomorrow. These were further thematically divided into three sub-themes called 1) pedagogical agency, 2) relational agency, and 3) sustained professional growth. The identified material was then discussed amongst the researchers to define their meaning under the thematic categories. Table 2 describes closer the number of identified notions in each thematic category related to our research question. According to Leedy and Omrod (2001) this type of approach leads to the highest level of objective analysis as the identification of material can be studied and discussed, allowing the quality examined to be mutually agreed upon. When setting up policy documents, politicians are not always familiar with different discourses having influence on education and teachers’ work or—in this case —their roles and experienced agency. The policy document level and the day-to-day implementation may not always meet in the way the policymakers have aimed for (Alila et al., in press).

*Table 2. The number of identified notions in each category related to the teacher’s agency in the different sub-categories.*

	Pedagogical agency	Relational agency	Sustained professional growth
Teachers agency today	27	20	13
Teachers agency in the future	7	11	11

### 3. Findings

The findings of this research paper are described through the main themes and sub-themes of our results. First, we describe the pedagogical agency and in it the agency notions of today and the future. After that we similarly describe the notions of relational agency and sustained professional growth. In total there we found 89 notions across the three documents. In the theme of teacher’s agency today there were a total of 60 notions. The category of teacher’s agency in the future received 29 notions. Therefore, the focus in these documents was more on today and less on future aspects of the teacher’s agency.

**The pedagogical agency** was found to be formed around the professional competencies and knowledge required in teacher's work and the experienced expertise and know-how of these. Many elements of the competencies were notions of multi-discipline skills and understanding about pedagogy, interaction and teaching in the ECE context. Teachers were described as experts of education in MinEdu (2017) document:

A teacher is an expert of holistic pedagogical planning, development and evaluation in her team of educators. A teacher is responsible of planning and implementing the education...and participates the assessment of the operational culture of the school. They are accounted for the multiprofessional co-operation in different networks. (p.15-117). Teachers should be aware of the psychological, physical, and social development of children as well as be competent to use this knowledge to support children individually and in shared interaction. An example of this could be found in the SOOL (2019) document: "through teacher education teachers gain skills to support children's wellbeing and learning" (p. 6). Similarly, the FINEEC (2018) document described the individual perspective on support: "[teacher] ensures that each child thrives in early childhood education and care. The children feel they are heard and valued just as they are." (p. 77).

The pedagogical agency was more visible in the aspects and mentions defining the teacher's knowledge and competencies today, as existing and gained agency (27 of all 34 mentions), and it can be argued that these policy documents do not see teachers' pedagogical agency to be a developing and increasing aspect of their professionalism. However, it can be easily argued that pedagogical agency is an important part of teachers' professional expertise in Finnish ECE, because teachers are responsible for planning, implementing, documenting, and evaluating the teaching, interaction, learning environment, self-initiated play, care, and learning in their whole day classes. An example of these are the following notions from FINEEC (2018) "*Teacher is responsible for planning the activities for the child group, achieving the objectives set for the activities, and the evaluation and development of the activities*" (p. 19) and "*...to offer to children diverse, culturally, socially and linguistically rich experiences*" (MinEdu, 2017, p.19)

**The future pedagogical agency** of teachers was seen to transform from subject-oriented topics to more general and global level issues. In the future teachers should be on top of everything they need to do today also be able to adapt multicultural, sustainable, and cultural elements to education and accommodate these for the children's interests and backgrounds. The responsibility of understanding and gaining the know-how of these "new" contexts is given to the teachers themselves. The area of developing the learning environment— also digital environments—was also part of future teachers' competence. For instance, MinEdu (2017) describes the situation as the following: "recent immigration situation puts pressure on more multicultural content in education" (p. 78) and in the SOOL (2019) document it is described as "the ability to teach the following content of social activism: emotional and

interaction skills, equality in education, linguistic, and cultural diversity, democracy education, sex education, gender awareness, social justice, consumer and entrepreneurship education” (p. 6).

**The relational agency** was formed around the critical agency as well as a shared agency. In the future, Finnish teachers will be expected not only to follow the curriculum or school operational culture but also to actively develop and change it through critical notions and analysis. Teachers should be able to lead educational teams to make the “needed” changes. This is seen as possible through critical and reflective development which is also today part of their everyday job as following “awareness of the characteristics and requirements of a changing operational environment is one of the personnel's competence challenges” (MinEdu, 2017, p. 74). Also the SOOL (2019) document referred to the digital agency of teachers: “[they] should become efficient digital-teachers to be able to be active and embrace the rapid pressures of change” (p. 8).

Teacher’s critical awareness was linked with Finnish teacher education. The research-based teacher education should promote teachers’ competences to not only think and act critically, but also to be future-oriented. An example of this notion is the following statement: “In order to support a child to acquire the skills that will carry them to the future, teachers need a picture of both the desired and the realized future” (MinEdu, 2017, p. 72). The relational aspects of the agency were visible from the different notions of multi-professional co-operation and shared agency. For example, the Ministry of Education (2017) requested that teachers should share with other professionals the operational situations in work in order to be able to identify and share their special expertise. An example of this is the following notion: “in order for professionals to be able to relate their own professional skills to the wider context, they need to be aware of their skills and those of others” (MinEdu, 2017, p. 76)

The shared agency was not only considered in co-operation with other professionals but also with parents. Co-operation with parents and parents’ participation in ECE in practical levels is one key element of the Finnish early childhood education: “the teacher is also responsible for developing practices that enable parents to participate in the development of early childhood education activities” (MinEdu, 2017, p. 20). Further, “digital tools to support the co-operation between home and schools should be taken in use [already during the teacher training]”(SOOL, 2019, p. 10)

The relational agency was a bit more visible regarding the aspects and mentions defining the teachers’ critical and shared agency today, as existing and gained agency (20 of all 31 mentions), than in developing a relational agency in the future. However, the Ministry of Education (2017) states that in **the future the relational agency** is needed: “thus, there is a need for the systematic development of relational expertise” (p. 72, 87).

***Sustainable professional growth*** regarding teacher's agency was the third sub-theme. It was formed using sub-themes of self-developmental agency and identity and agency. In the sustainable professional growth theme, the teachers' agency was seen both as an existing part of their professional identity and competence, and as strengthening expertise which the teachers could actively develop through their pedagogical work. This is further described in the Ministry of Education (2017) document as "[teachers having] ability to continuously maintain and develop their competence" (p. 74).

Agency related to sustainable professional growth was seen as part of teachers' work today. The analyzed documents make statements about the need for life-long-learning, because the work, the society and the environment of ECE are changing rapidly. The documents also highlight the research-based education and skills are used to develop teachers' work: "Teacher education is research-based and aims to train critically experts capable of critical thinking, whose practical skills are based on the most up-to-date knowledge" (SOOL, 2019, p. 4)

Teachers' identity and agency related to sustainable professional growth was also a theme across the documents. The expectation in general was that a teacher in ECE is an expert in professional development, and a model or mentor for the other staff members of ECE teams. An example of these two notions can be seen in the following from the document published by the Ministry of Education (2017): "With the rapid increase in knowledge and the increase in research in the field of early childhood education, the reversal of previous knowledge also requires staff to acquire and process knowledge" (p.74). Further, "[the teacher] is responsible for the goal-oriented and methodical leadership, evaluation and development of their units' pedagogy and the staff's opportunities for learning in their work" (MinEdu, 2017, p. 88).

The ***future requirements for teachers' identity and agency*** are high across all the analyzed documents. Teachers' agency was linked with the values of society as well as imagining the future. These are two examples of from the Ministry of Education's (2017) document: Values debates, creating images of the future and reflecting on educational consequences are things that work best together with parents of children and the work community as a whole (p. 72), and further, "there is also a need for influencing skills related to the tasks of the teacher to convey the issues they observe in everyday work to decision-making at different levels" (p. 74)

To acquire this high level of professional agency, the Finnish association of teacher education proposes co-operation between working life and teacher training programs, and suggests a relational development plan for professional development: "during teacher training, reflective work begins on creating a teacher professional development ongoing plan." (SOOL, 2019, p 10).

## Discussion

The education system and teacher training programs in Finland have undergone reform during the past decade. All policy documents in the field of ECE have been renewed, which has had influenced teaching practices and teachers' work as well. Teachers are challenged to implement pedagogical methods to support children to become active agents of their learning (Harju-Luukkainen & Kangas, in press). Further, teachers should be active agents in their professional development (Sairanen et al., 2019). In all this, research-based teacher education has an important role in developing critical thinkers for the future profession. Finnish teachers' competences and quality of teaching are defined in recent policy documents that introduce the future competences of teachers, including expertise agency and an innovative approach (Maaranen et al., 2019). In this study our aim was to take a closer look at the role of the agency that is given to ECE teachers in three policy documents in Finland. From the theoretical premises described earlier, we have formulated the following research question. We aim to answer, *what type of role are ECE teachers given in policy documents considering their agency today and in the future?* The question and conception of teachers' personal and experienced agency was not a theme of this study. However, agency is always personally experienced in teachers' work.

According to the results, the focus in the analysed documents was more on today and less on future aspects of teachers' agency. Further, the main focus on teachers' agency today was on notions describing pedagogical and relational agencies, especially pedagogical excellence (Sairanen et al., 2019). Our results suggest that teachers are given a large number of different roles as well as values across the different documents. Teachers are asked to be more of everything now and in the future regarding agency. Teachers should, for example, be aware of the psychological, physical, and social development of children, and be competent to use this knowledge to support children individually as well as in shared interaction. Further, teachers were expected in the future not only to follow the curriculum or school operational culture but also to actively develop and change it through critical notions and analysis. Teachers should be able to lead educational teams to make the "needed" changes. This was seen to be possible through critical and reflective development (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004). Also, the notion of "future-oriented teachers" was visible across the three documents. Teachers' agency was linked with the values of society as well with a requirement to be able to imagine the future. These results challenge teacher education in Finland (Maaranen et al., 2019). When we are educating teachers, we are educating them for the future. Further, teachers will be working with their university degrees for decades in the field. Therefore, the overall quality of teacher education becomes crucial (Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2011). Instead of developing the context of teaching and learning to teach, it would be essential to develop the values and processes of education. Thus teachers are not only developing their work and their

school but also the whole society. The answer in developing teachers with “more of everything” is in-service training. However, according to Husu & Toom (2016) in-service teacher education requires significant developments in Finland.

We would like to conclude this paper with critical reflection. We argue that stakeholders in Finland in the field in ECE should take a more critical perspective on teachers' skill requirements especially those regarding agency. As of today, there are many requirements, probably too many. It seems like notions regarding teacher's current and future agency are much verbiage without a clear focus or content. Teachers are seen as literally miracle makers without proper resources. Also, teachers are expected to simultaneously work with children, develop multi-professional teams, and lead the professional growth of others (Kangas & Ukkonen-Mikkola, 2019). Therefore, we would like to challenge policymakers to critically reflect on ECE teachers' agency with the following three questions: What is meant by ECE teacher agency? How does it transfer into today's ECE context as well into the future? And what is the role of teacher education in Finland in producing these competencies?

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