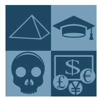
social sciences

MDPI

Article

Contextualised, Not Neoliberalised, Approaches to Families in Five Countries: Quality and Practice

Marg Rogers [1,2,*], Fabio Dovigo [3], Astrid Mus Rasmussen [4], Khatuna Dolidze [5] and Laura Doan [6]

1 School of Education, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia
2 Manna Institute, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351, Australia
3 Department of Human Sciences, University of L'Aquila, 67100 L'Aquila, Italy; fabio.dovigo@univaq.it
4 Department of German and Romance Languages, School of Communication and Culture, Aarhus University, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark; geramr@edu.au.dk
5 School of Business, Technology and Education, Ilia State University, Tbilisi 0162, Georgia; khatuna.dolidze@iliauni.edu.ge
6 School of Education, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, BC V2C 0C8, Canada; ldoan@tru.ca
* Correspondence: marg.rogers@une.edu.au

Abstract: Partnerships with parents in early childhood education and care services are a hallmark of quality education. Educators in Western countries work within a highly regulated environment, where government documents, such as frameworks, standards, and curricula, direct most of their work, time, and energy. Despite this, data from our mixed methods online survey from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Georgia, and Italy revealed a strong resistance to the homogeneity these documents prescribe. For the quantitative data, we used cross-tabulation and descriptive statistics. For the qualitative data, we used deductive thematic analysis using a parent–educator partnership framework. Educators described parents in their service as partners in their child's education. This included efforts to share information, consult, negotiate, and build partnerships; problem solve; and monitor, report and manage the partnership. The educators talked about the uniqueness of their approaches to parents and families within their contextualised services. They then revealed how these unique features impacted their notions of quality and practice in these services. This will be of interest to policymakers, educators, and teacher educators.

Keywords: early childhood education; early childhood educators; neoliberalism; parents; partnerships; quality; family involvement in ECE; parent/EC educator relationships; families in ECE

Citation: Rogers, Marg, Fabio Dovigo, Astrid Mus Rasmussen, Khatuna Dolidze, and Laura Doan. 2024. Contextualised, Not Neoliberalised, Approaches to Families in Five Countries: Quality and Practice. *Social Sciences* 13: 695. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13120695

Academic Editor: Alan J. Dettlaff

Received: 30 October 2024
Revised: 4 December 2024
Accepted: 18 December 2024
Published: 20 December 2024

Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators generally work closely with parents and carers (hereafter parents) due to the benefits it can bring to children's learning (Barnett et al. 2020; Goodall and Montgomery 2023; Tan et al. 2020). Partnerships with parents are integral to fostering children's development and creating a foundation for mutual respect and shared responsibility. This paper begins by exploring these partnerships and offers an adapted framework to analyse their dynamics. It then examines the influence of neoliberal-inspired policies that have standardised much of educators' work in Western countries. Despite this push toward homogenisation, educators in our mixed methods study—spanning Australia, Canada, Denmark, Georgia, and Italy—articulated the contextual strategies they use to build meaningful partnerships with families. These localised practices highlight the complexity and diversity of family and educator collaboration, underscoring how educators maintain relational approaches despite the constraints of prescriptive frameworks.

The existing literature critiques how neoliberal policies in ECEC emphasise standardisation, market-driven principles, and compliance, which often undermine professional agency and holistic, child-centred practices. For instance, Brown (2014) observes that

neoliberal reforms pressure educators to prepare students for standardised outcomes, reducing opportunities to address the individual, cultural, and social needs of children. Similarly, Sims (2017) critiques the Australian National Quality Agenda as a mechanism that fosters compliance over professional agency, stifling the ability of educators to critique or challenge imposed standards. This issue extends globally, as neoliberal discourses are often portrayed as inevitable and universally applicable, further marginalising alternative approaches (Pacini-Ketchabaw 2014). The commodification of ECEC, as highlighted by Vandenbroeck et al. (2022), risks transforming education into a market product, reducing children, parents, and educators to the roles of consumer, supplier, and service provider, respectively.

Despite these challenges, research addressing how educators across diverse cultural and policy contexts navigate these pressures while preserving professional discretion and relational practices remains limited. Our study aims to fill this gap by analysing how educators resist neoliberal homogenisation through localised, family-centric strategies tailored to their unique environments. For example, Rogers et al. (2020) emphasise the role of professional identity in empowering educators to innovate within restrictive systems, maintaining high standards of care while fostering meaningful engagement with families. These strategies align with broader calls for resistance to neoliberal discourses in ECEC, including advocacy for decommodification and community-based approaches (Moloney et al. 2019; Sims 2017).

By revealing the experiences of educators across Australia, Canada, Denmark, Georgia, and Italy, this paper highlights the interplay between global policy mandates and the relational, context-specific nature of ECEC. It underscores the need for policies that prioritise equity, diversity, and professionalism rooted in local contexts, as well as the agency of educators to challenge neoliberal constraints. This work contributes to ongoing efforts to resist the commodification of ECEC and reimagine education systems that value relational care, community engagement, and democratic practices.

1.1. Parents as Partners in ECEC Education

High-quality partnerships, characterised by shared responsibilities, family-centred professionalism, and active parental involvement, are essential to enhancing children's educational experiences in ECEC services. These partnerships create a foundation for mutual respect and trust, allowing parents and educators to work together effectively for the benefit of children's development (Hujala et al. 2009; Tan et al. 2020). ECEC services increasingly recognise the importance of involving parents as partners in children's education. Research emphasises that strong collaboration between parents and educators is associated with improved educational outcomes, as both groups bring unique insights that support children's learning and well-being. Effective collaboration benefits not only children's academic progress but also their social and emotional development, resulting in a more holistic and meaningful educational experience. Parents contribute valuable information about their child's family background, culture, and specific needs, enabling educators to adopt more individualised and responsive teaching approaches. This involvement is particularly crucial during early childhood when children are developing essential skills and neural pathways (Spiteri 2022; Warren et al. 2017; World Health Organisation 2018).

Studies from various contexts also support the importance of these partnerships. In Finnish ECEC settings, educators emphasise the role of parental involvement in fostering both children's learning and their overall development, noting that strong parent–educator collaboration leads to better educational outcomes and helps meet the diverse needs of families (Hakyemez-Paul et al. 2020). This aligns with the findings of Hujala et al. (2009), who propose that family-centred professionalism and shared responsibilities between parents and educators are essential components of quality ECEC. Furthermore, Hakyemez-Paul and colleagues highlight how mutual trust and respect within these partnerships can empower both parents and educators, creating a dynamic and supportive learning environment for children.

1.2. A Framework for Examining Parent–Educator Partnerships

To explore partnerships with parents, we have adapted the categories proposed by Hujala et al. (2009), which propose a theoretical model alternative to developmental learning theories, conceptualising the parent–educator partnership as a mediating factor for constructing educational alliances in ECEC through dialogue. Developmental theories, such as those put forward by Piaget (2005), Bandura (1977), and Bowlby (1969), suggest that development takes place in specific stages, under the right conditions. However, in recent years, questions have arisen over the simplification of how development occurs according to these theories (Miller 2022). Also, questions have arisen about whose worldview is represented and whose is absent within developmental theories. In contrast to these theories, research by Hujala et al. (2009) highlights four main dimensions of parent–educator partnerships: parent involvement in ECEC services, family-centred professionalism, parenting competence, and shared educational responsibilities. The framework helps examine the dimensions with reference to their (a) structure (whether formal or informal), (b) distribution (vertical or horizontal), and (c) level of progression (static or dynamic). The outcomes of these partnerships can be seen along two axes: from top-down to empowering, and from opaque to transparent (Figure 1). The aim of this investigation was to understand whether, from the educators' perspective, the partnership with parents was transparent and how it was positioned in terms of power balance in a spectrum ranging from top-down to empowering relationships. While research has highlighted the benefits of such partnerships, there is limited understanding of how transparent communication and balanced power dynamics impact the effectiveness of these collaborations. By focusing on educators' perspectives regarding the transparency of interactions with parents and the balance of power in decision-making processes, this research aims to identify the main barriers that hinder equitable and empowering partnerships in ECEC services (Oke et al. 2021).

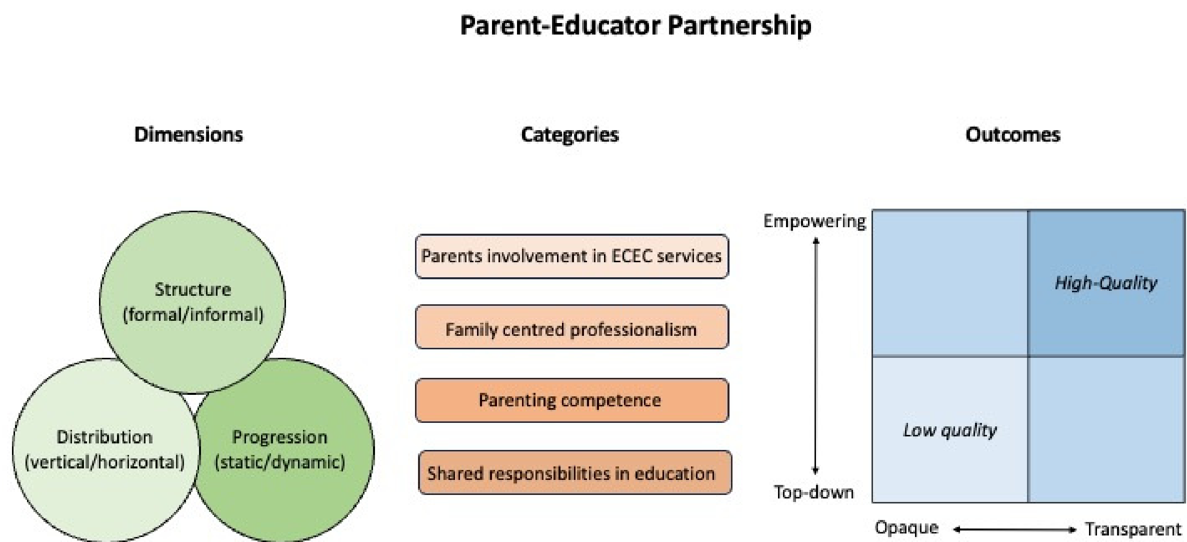

Figure 1. Parent–educator partnership framework (Source: Adapted from Hujala et al. 2009).

High-quality partnerships, characterised by shared responsibilities, family-centred professionalism, and active parental involvement, tend to be empowering and transparent. They promote mutual respect and trust, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for children. Conversely, low-quality partnerships are more top-down and opaque, where communication is limited, and parents may feel disengaged or undervalued. By understanding these dimensions and categories, educators and policymakers can create more effective, high-quality parent–educator partnerships that truly benefit children's growth and learning.

We used this framework to analyse participants' reports on their partnerships with parents and their notions of quality ECEC.

1.3. Neoliberalism in ECEC Education

Similarly to other caring and education sectors, ECEC has been reformed using neoliberal-inspired managerial policies (Sims 2017). This has resulted in stringent regulations that establish frameworks, standards, and curricula grounded in performance metrics, effectively treating children as investments in future economic productivity and reducing educators to technicians, thereby sidelining their ability to exercise professional judgment within their specific local contexts (Rogers 2021). As a result, educators face increased workloads tied to prescriptive documentation, assessments, and reporting systems that are primarily designed to ensure compliance rather than to support individualised learning (Fielding and Moss 2012). Neoliberalism significantly impacts parental involvement by reshaping the relationship between families and educational institutions (Geinger et al. 2014). Neoliberal policies often position parents as consumers rather than active participants in their children's learning journey (Devlieghere et al. 2020). This consumerist perspective limits parents' engagement and diminishes their influence on educational decision making, making them feel more like the passive recipients of services rather than co-creators of their children's educational experiences (Roberts-Holmes 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Moss 2021). Furthermore, the professionalisation of early childhood education specialists is also adversely affected by neoliberal ideologies (Rogers 2021). This focus on measurable outcomes can shift the priorities of early childhood educators towards meeting specific economic objectives rather than fostering children's development. Children's development is holistic, meaning the cognitive, language, physical, and social–emotional domains of development occur simultaneously. Accordingly, these domains must all work together to enable progress through each step (UNESCO 2014). Progress (or lack of progress) in one domain spurs or hinders development in other domains in a dynamic process. Maintaining strong connections with families is pivotal to promoting this process (Farris and Marchetti 2017). However, an environment where parents are pushed to embrace a "consumer mentality" can hinder meaningful collaboration with families, reducing the emphasis on family-centred practices that are essential for nurturing children's growth and learning (Moloney et al. 2019).

The neoliberal paradigm has profound implications for ECEC educators and the families they serve. It calls into question the purpose of education—whether it is to foster holistic human development or to meet economic imperatives driven by neoliberal policies.

In the current study, we aimed to explore the work of educators in highly regulated environments due to neoliberal-inspired policies. In previous papers, we have explored job satisfaction (Rogers et al. 2024b), professional identity (Rogers et al. 2024a), and notions of quality (Rogers et al. Forthcoming). In this paper, we aimed to explore educators' work with families, and how it was impacted by government-prescribed standards, frameworks and curricula. The educators were asked a number of closed- and open-ended questions about their work, including what they thought the government perceived, and what they perceived as quality learning and quality services. They were also asked, "What is unique about the service/program where you work? (e.g., setting, families, diversity, curricula, the way learning is facilitated, cultural context, community etc.)". These questions provided much of the qualitative data discussed in this study.

The data reveal how neoliberal policies have reshaped the dynamics of early childhood education, shifting the focus toward compliance, documentation, and measurable outcomes. Educators, however, expressed a desire to preserve the individuality of their relationships with parents and families, striving for quality that transcends standardised metrics. As our findings illustrate, educators across multiple countries continue to navigate these tensions by developing personalised, empowering approaches to family partnerships. This echoes broader concerns in the sector, where the professionalisation of ECEC must contend

with the balance between policy compliance and maintaining meaningful, family-centred educational experiences.

1.4. ECEC and Parent's Roles in Education in the Participant's Countries

ECEC is organised differently in the five different participant countries, and so are the type and level of family involvement in the services.

In Australia, the federal agency Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) created the National Quality Framework (ACECQA 2018) and accompanying National Quality Standards, while the Australian Government Department of Education created the curriculum *Belonging, Being, Becoming*: The Early Years Learning Framework [EYLF] (AGDE 2022). Despite these federal initiatives for ECEC services for birth to 5 years, each state and territory is responsible for accrediting, assessing and rating services against the standards. This means each level of government can blame the other when educators, services, unions, and advocacy organisations complain about the overwork and administrative burden caused by these prescriptive requirements.

The framework, standards, and curricula outline the importance of the involvement of parents as children's first teachers and advocates. For example, the EYLF states "Educators recognise that families are children's first and most influential teachers and that the views of parents should be respected" (AGDE 2022, Element 6.1.2). While ECEC attendance is not compulsory, 48.3% of children from birth to 5 years old attend a service at any given time (AGDE 2023), more so for preschool-aged children with around 90% attending a pre-school programme before they start school (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017). Attendance is subsidised, although access to services in regional, rural, remote and low-income metropolitan suburbs is poor and some families cannot afford the fees. Australia has one of the highest levels of privatisation of services globally.

In Canada, the early childhood education system is regulated at the provincial and territorial levels, not at the federal level. This results in a "patchwork quilt" of standards, regulations, and ways of operating. Most provinces have their own early learning frameworks, and at the federal level, there is an Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Government of Canada 2018). In British Columbia (where this study was situated), ECEs work with children aged birth to five. The BC Early Learning Framework is connected to the BC curriculum for teachers in the school system. It is meant to be a tool to inspire educators working with children from birth to grade three (age eight).

The BC Early Learning Framework draws on the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and this includes several references to family: "Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors" (Government of British Columbia 2019, p. 14). The Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework places emphasis on the importance of building relationships with families and the prioritisation of family involvement (Government of Canada 2018, p. 7).

In Denmark, the ECEC system covers children aged 0–6 and follows a unitary education and care approach, integrating care and learning. Governed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and implemented at the municipal level, institutions create their own curricula based on the Daycare Act. Nearly all children aged 1–5 (94%) attend ECEC. Public providers dominate, and learning through play is central.

Danish law ensures parents are key partners in daycare. Institutions must collaborate with parents on children's well-being, learning, and transitions. Curricula must outline this cooperation, and municipalities must involve parents in language development efforts. Parents also have the legal right to establish parent boards (Ministry of Children and Education 2024).

In Georgia, the ECE system has undergone significant reforms in recent decades, characterised by an increased emphasis on accountability and standardisation. The Georgian ECE standards and curriculum emphasise holistic development and support the notion that parents are crucial partners in the education process. However, practices vary significantly depending on local leadership, educator training, and available resources. ECEC

interactions with parents in Georgia are not heavily standardised, allowing flexibility but also leading to inconsistencies in practice.

In Italy, ECEC for children under the age of three is provided through various educational services, including nurseries, playgrounds, family and child centres, and home-based care. These services are managed at the municipal level and typically involve high direct costs for families. For children aged 3 to 6, ECEC is offered at pre-primary schools. Public preschools are managed at the national level and have low direct costs for families, whereas private preschools are organised locally and tend to involve higher direct costs. The partnership between ECEC services and families in Italy reflects "unsupported familism", shaped by historical resistance to pronatalist policies, ideological divisions, and limited modernisation (Jurado-Guerrero and Naldini 2018). Women's labour market participation is constrained, placing them at the centre of informal care. Resources prioritise pensions and universal services over family-oriented policies despite low fertility rates. The Catholic Church's emphasis on subsidiarity and strong intergenerational ties rooted in rural norms fill gaps in state support, with the informal economy and family businesses reinforcing these networks.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants in the research were educators working in the ECEC sector in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Georgia, and Italy. The Australian, Canadian, and Danish educators were surveyed in 2021, and then the Georgian and Italian educators were given the survey in 2022. These differences were due to variations in the researchers' and educators' availability and ethics approvals.

2.2. Recruitment

We recruited the educators using various methods, including email, online learning platforms and social media. The educators had access to the information sheet and consent form and were surveyed through the SurveyXact or Qualtrics software depending on the country, as shown in Table 1. These variations were due to the availability of the software in various universities and the need for a contextualised approach due to language and protocols.

Table 1. Participants and recruitment in different countries.

	Australia	**Canada**	**Denmark**	**Georgia**	**Italy**
Number of participants (*n*)	82	145	228	568	251
Recruitment	Via email and student online learning platforms	Via email and social media	Via social media	Via social media	Via social media
Survey administration	Qualtrics	Qualtrics	SurveyXact	SurveyXact	SurveyXact
Participant terminology	Early Childhood Educators	Early Childhood Educators	Pre-primary school: "børnehave." Educators "pædagog" (Eng. "pedagog") resp. "pædagogmedhjælper."	Caregivers: "აღმზრდელი", Methodists (education coordinator) Preschool special teachers Preschool psychologists	"Scuola d'infanzia" (pre-primary school), "Educatrici" (teachers and nursery childminder)

2.3. Ethics and Validity

We gained ethics approval from the University of New England's Human Research Ethics Committee. Subsequently, each researcher used this approval to apply for acceptance from their respective universities. Additionally, the following guidelines were adopted to ensure that the questionnaire was non-intrusive and free from bias:

- Collecting informed consent;
- Ensuring rights to withdraw at any stage or not to complete particular items in the questionnaire;
- Guaranteeing that the research would not harm participants;
- Ensuring confidentiality, anonymity and the guarantee of non-traceability;
- Assessing the degree of threat or sensitivity of the questions; and
- Revising wording to avoid biased and leading questions.

2.4. Analysis

Our project used a mixed methods approach (Bryman et al. 2021) with an online survey that contained closed and open-ended questions. We used descriptive statistics to analyse the quantitative data and deductive thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The quantitative analysis illustrates the educators' demographic data, location, service type, qualifications, professional development, work experience in the sector, and their intention to remain in the ECEC sector for the next 5 years.

The qualitative analysis investigated the three dimensions of parent–teacher partnerships, focusing on their structure (formal/informal), distribution (vertical/horizontal), and progression level (static/dynamic) as depicted in Figure 1. Through a deductive approach, the analysis utilised four main components: 1. parents' involvement in ECEC services; 2. family-centred professionalism; 3. parenting competence; and 4. shared responsibilities in education (Hujala et al. 2009). The objective was to determine, from the educators' viewpoint, the outcomes of the partnership with parents in terms of both the degree of opacity or transparency of the relationships, and how they aligned within a spectrum of potential power dynamics, ranging from top-down approaches to consultative, participatory, and empowering models (Figure 1).

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Data

The quantitative data reveals the lack of gender diversity in ECEC sectors. Those who identified as female varied from less than 82% in Denmark to greater than 98% in Georgia and Australia. A more mature workforce was prevalent in Georgia, Italy, and Denmark with greater than 30% aged over 49 years. Conversely, Australian educators were, on the whole, younger, with greater than 62% between 18 and 39 years. Canada had a more even representation of age groups. Italy had the most experienced educators with over 59% having worked for more than 10 years. Georgia had the least experienced educators with greater than 54% working for less than 10 years. Over half of the Georgian educators taught in rural towns, whereas a third of the Australian educators did. Most Canadian educators reported working in metropolitan services, while the Italian educators were fairly evenly distributed in metropolitan, regional, and rural locations. Four-fifths of the Australian educators want to continue their studies, as almost the same number were diploma-qualified. Conversely, over a quarter of the Italian educators and a third of the Georgian educators had degree qualifications.

Most participants have a diploma qualification (e.g., Australia 79%). Notably, 33% of the Georgian educators are degree-qualified, whereas masters-qualified educators were 26% of the Italian educators. This would explain why about 80% of the educators in Australia want to increase their qualifications, while a large percentage of Italian educators are not interested in further study in this field. Over 34% of the Danish educators said they were currently studying or intend to at a later date. Australians had the highest rate of educators saying they did not intend to stay in the sector in the next five years (over 14%), whereas Danish (over 9%) and Georgians (over 5%) had far fewer indicating their desire to leave the sector.

3.2. Qualitative Data

The educators were asked about the role of educator–parent partnerships in ECEC quality. Using the adapted parent–educator partnership framework (Hujala et al. 2009), we present their data in this section. The educators revealed they had unique philosophies and strategies to partner with parents in various ways that suited their particular setting. These are outlined in Table 2, with the first column identifying the framework components, the second column explaining each component, and the third column reporting the educators' comments about partnerships with parents and their role in developing quality.

The Australian educators spoke of the importance of using a responsive approach with children, families, and communities. They described working "collaboratively to create an environment that is rich in experiences that promote curiosity, connection to each other and country, wonder, and self-esteem". They also mentioned keeping an open invitation for parents to spend time in centres.

The educators from Canada describe their relationships with families as being collaborative, where co-creation happens, and where "every voice is valued and everyone has a seat at the table". The Canadian early childhood educators in this study view the parents as "experts" and are eager to work with parents, recognising the importance of building trust and belonging. Open and timely communication is noted as effective.

The Danish educators spoke of the importance of relationships between parents and educators that are based on mutual trust and respect. One educator shared, "Good relationships and cooperation between parents and pedagogical staff support the children's wellbeing, development, and learning". Further, Danish educators wrote about the value of having support from parents.

The Georgian educators value the involvement of parents in the programmes, believing the parents are "key to a child's development". One educator wrote the following: "Parents actively collaborate with kindergartens, sharing information about their child's unique characteristics and family cultural diversity, and collaborate with teachers to support children's learning". There is a desire to keep families informed about what is being explored in the programmes.

The educators from Italy speak of the importance of meeting the needs of children and families, including being flexible in terms of hours of service, as well as the modes of hearing feedback from parents. The Italian educators speak of the importance of having a mutual agreement about the purpose of the early learning programme, as well as having the necessary materials to equip the programme. One educator shared, "In my preschool, collaboration with families is based on an educational pact that we ask them to sign. We offer regular individual meetings during which we discuss the educational goals that both teachers and parents can work on together with the child".

The analysis of the educators' responses, based on the framework for parent–educator partnerships, highlights some interesting elements. The dimension of structure in parent–educator partnerships across the five countries ranges from formal to informal, reflecting different collaboration models as shown in Figure 1.

Structure Dimensions: In Australia, the structure leans toward an informal approach. Educators promote open invitations for parents to visit, fostering flexible, family-centred collaboration that respects the agency of both children and parents. For instance, one educator noted that they develop positive relations with the children and families so the children can learn within a trusting and comfortable environment. While formal meetings are in place, the overall approach remains responsive and relational. Similarly, Canada adopts an informal structure characterised by co-creation with parents. Communication is open and timely, focusing on building mutual trust and ensuring that "every voice is valued", reflecting shared authority.

Table 2. Educators' notions of quality matching the components of the parent–educator partnership framework (Hujala et al. 2009).

Component of Parent–Educator Partnership Framework	Explanation of Component	Examples of Parent–Educator Partnership in Relation to the Educators' Notions of Quality				
		Australia	Canada	Denmark	Georgia	Italy
Parents' involvement in ECEC services	Parents contribute to the activities of the centre. Parents invest energy in cooperation with ECEC staff. Parents are active in their participation in the ECEC centre.	*Education that is both child led and child family informed.* *Programs are designed to suit families' social-cultural contexts.* *Services that cater to the holistic development of the children and work collaboratively with families and the community.* *When children's sense of agency is respected and children, their families, our community and staff work collaboratively to create an environment that is rich in experiences that promote curiosity, connection to each other and country, wonder and self-esteem.*	*These educators also respect parents as the main teacher for their child and builds relationships with the parents.* *We have an open and timely communication with the families.* *Assisting parents in understanding the needs of their children to develop to the fullest not only strengthens the parent-child bond, but it provides sustainable understanding and perception of caring for their children outside of providing the basic human needs.*	*When you as an educator feel comfortable, you feel respected for your work, get a good response from parents when the children are thriving and a good development is seen. Of course it gives job satisfaction and then the ideas come pouring in, so yes it has a big impact on practice in relation to learning.* *The parents who with their trust believe that I will react if it's necessary.* *A group of parents who understand the institution's conditions and support the collaboration.* *We are a municipality with surplus parents. They support us a lot, are participatory, curious, inquisitive.*	*What makes our program unique is the active involvement of parents* *Parents actively collaborate with kindergartens, sharing information about their children's unique characteristics and family cultural diversity, and collaborate with teachers to support their children's learning*	*For us, collaboration with families is based on flexible hours, meaning the possibility of keeping the service open from 8 AM to 5 PM upon parents' request, as well as during the summer (in July).* *In my preschool, collaboration with families is based on an educational pact that we ask them to sign. We offer regular individual meetings, during which we discuss the educational goals that both teachers and parents can work on together with the child. In general, families are open and trusting of this approach.*

Table 2. *Cont.*

Component of Parent–Educator Partnership Framework	Explanation of Component	Examples of Parent–Educator Partnership in Relation to the Educators' Notions of Quality				
		Australia	**Canada**	**Denmark**	**Georgia**	**Italy**
			We embody the phrase "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child". We are truly part of a community effort to bring our small rural village and surrounding county high quality, accessible, affordable, and flexible early learning and child care as well as family support.	*At our daycare institution, parents are the most important partners we have in ensuring the children's wellbeing. We have always attached great importance to parental involvement in our pedagogical work. We recognize that the home is the primary base of the children and that the daycare institution is the secondary base. Humility is an important factor for our pedagogical knowledge when we are to ensure the best well-being and development for the children = Parental involvement, co-creation and co-responsibility*		*The good quality of the service depends on the synergy of all actors—teachers, parents, and, of course, children. The most important factors for the quality of work are parents and colleagues.* *The quality of the service is primarily assessed through feedback from families* via *questionnaires for parents, along with those for teachers and children.*

Table 2. *Cont.*

Component of Parent–Educator Partnership Framework	Explanation of Component	Examples of Parent–Educator Partnership in Relation to the Educators' Notions of Quality				
		Australia	**Canada**	**Denmark**	**Georgia**	**Italy**
Family-centred professionalism	Educators and parents discuss childrearing and children's learning and development. Educators need different skills to work with various families. Educators regularly support parents with their parenting tasks, offering information and advice. Educators encourage parents to visit the centre whenever it is possible.	*A responsive approach stems from quality communications and interacts with all stakeholders.* *Being responsive to your children's families and community.* *Builds a sense of community. Incorporates families and their strengths.* *One that retains and values their educators as well as children and families through community partnerships.* *Play based, immersive, holistic. Stemming from child's interests, family values and culture as well as community culture*	*We have incredibly dedicated staff who are eager to learn and work with children and families.* *In a non-profit settlement organization, I witness daily how the immigration experience provides a sense of connection and comfort for the newcomer families that come into our care. ECEs that have the ability to speak and communicate to families in their first language immediately builds a sense of trust and belonging for these parents.*	*Have experts, possibly paid. . ., talk about a theme at parent meetings, it will create a common language in the daycare centres. Through intra and Aula, the manager communicates in relation to guidelines both to staff and parents. Development interviews are held, 4 times in the child's institutional life. Here you talk about what the child has learned, what it should practice in the future and how we should support the child's learning and development.*	*We are guided by a curriculum that values family involvement* *Families are involved in developing individual developmental plans for their children (special teacher about her work with SEN child)* *We keep families informed about the topics we are exploring and the activities we have planned; we invite them to join us and learn from their insights*	*We mainly work through workshops that we often organize in collaboration with families. This approach requires the staff to systematically engage in continuous professional development.* *Collaborating with families certainly requires more effort from us, as it demands ongoing and systematic communication. However, by doing so, the quality of the service is undoubtedly better.* *The pace of work in preschool is very fast. In particular, relationships with colleagues and families are often a source of stress.* *The administration should listen more to those who work in preschools every day and understand the real conditions and needs of the children and families, in order to implement appropriate solutions.*

Table 2. *Cont.*

Component of Parent–Educator Partnership Framework	Explanation of Component	Examples of Parent–Educator Partnership in Relation to the Educators' Notions of Quality				
		Australia	**Canada**	**Denmark**	**Georgia**	**Italy**
Parenting competence	Support parents to manage their parenting tasks. Support parents to invest energy in the welfare of their family. Support parents to take an interest in their child's life at the ECEC centre.	*The children should be your number one priority as well as supporting the families attending the service.* *Knowledgeable, passionate and caring educators who are working with families to provide an adaptive curriculum to meet the developmental needs of all the children in their care.* *A service that puts the children, educators and families first.*	*Parents are the experts about their children, and we need to work together as we educate their children.* *Quality ECEC learning is an environment in which the educator, children, and their families are viewed as capable, competent, intelligent, creative, and curious. . .a place where every voice is valued and everyone is included to have a seat at the table.*	*I have just started a parent café and parental guidance. In the parent café, topics that the parents are challenged on are discussed. Here, the parents get a few hours together to share experiences and form networks. Parental guidance/counselling is an open offer for the individual parent. It is my experience that it can be difficult to call the open counselling for fear that a case will come out of it.* *We have a good opportunity to support and guide both the children and their families. We can have more conversations with the parents.*	*The support of families is what motivates me.*	*We work in a small-town setting. It's a small environment with children from various nationalities, where exchanging information and suggestions to and from parents is the most important point.* *Parent-educator collaboration should be one of the foundational principles. In Italy, this is no longer the case, as parents view preschools as places to 'park' their children, and their involvement is minimal.* *I believe in collaboration and sharing educational moments with parents. However, maintaining respect for roles is fundamental. The family and preschool should not be interchangeable.*

Table 2. *Cont.*

Component of Parent–Educator Partnership Framework	Explanation of Component	Examples of Parent–Educator Partnership in Relation to the Educators' Notions of Quality				
		Australia	**Canada**	**Denmark**	**Georgia**	**Italy**
Shared responsibilities in education	Parents support the children's education in cooperation with ECEC teachers. Parents support their children's learning at home.	*Holistic learning that is a partnership with child, their family and community.* *Developing positive relationships with the children and families so they can learn within a trusting and comfortable environment.*	*Working in collaboration with parents, families, and community.* *We bring land-based learning into our curriculum as well as focus on co-creating curriculum and meaning-making with children, families, and the more than human.*	*That we use our knowledge of the child's development and talk to the parents about their child's development, both when things are going well and when we need to react to something.* *Good relationships and cooperation between parents and pedagogical staff support the children's well-being, development and learning. It does this by creating coherence between the child's learning arenas in the daycare centre and the home. In fact, research shows that the more parents are involved in their children's learning, the more children develop their cognitive and social skills. High-quality parental cooperation is characterised by trust-based communication, which is characterised by openness, dialogue and reciprocity.*	*Family is key to a child's development.*	*Our priority is to build a relationship with families that helps us accommodate the different learning paces of each child.* *We strive to create a positive partnership with families through a relationship of trust, valuing the respective roles to foster the child's growth and enhance all of their abilities.* *To ensure quality, preschool attendance should be made mandatory nationwide, with clear guidelines and a coherent curriculum for both teachers and families.* *Quality means providing preschools with the teaching materials they need, viewing them as essential educational services and not as places to "leave children because parents don't know where else to take them while they go to work."*

In contrast, Denmark follows a more formalised structure with clear roles in parent–educator interactions. Regular development interviews and formal cooperation reinforce the partnership, though relationships remain respectful and supportive. "We use our knowledge of the child's development and talk to the parents about their child's development, both when things are going well and when we need to react to something", explained a Danish educator. Georgia also follows a formal model, where parents actively contribute to their child's learning. There is a strong emphasis on cultural context and structured collaboration, supported by regular updates. "Parents actively collaborate with kindergartens, sharing information about their children's unique characteristics and family cultural diversity, and collaborate with teachers to support their children's learning", says one Georgian educator. Italy exhibits the most formal structure, with educational pacts defining the relationship. Regular meetings align both parties on educational goals, reinforcing a structured partnership complemented by flexible service hours. One Italian educator emphasised that the formal agreements "ensure clarity and consistency in communication". Thus, informal partnerships dominate in Australia and Canada, while formal partnerships are more prevalent in Denmark, Georgia, and Italy, where structured communication and agreements are central.

Distribution Dimension: The dimension of distribution addresses the balance of power between educators and parents, ranging from vertical (educator-driven) to horizontal (shared authority). In Australia, the distribution of power is horizontal, with equal contributions from parents and educators. Parents' input is welcomed, fostering collaborative decision making. For example, an educator remarked that "parents' suggestions are directly incorporated into the curriculum, and decisions are made jointly". Similarly, in Canada, the distribution is strongly horizontal, with parents recognised as experts and decision making as a shared responsibility. This approach is evident in statements such as "These educators also respect parents as the main teacher for their child and builds relationships with the parents".

Denmark's model blends the vertical and horizontal approaches. While structured interactions like development interviews suggest a more vertical distribution of power, mutual respect and parental input reduce this imbalance. A Danish educator explained, "We have a good opportunity to support and guide both the children and their families. We can have more conversations with the parents". In Georgia, the model leans more toward a vertical distribution, where educators guide the process, though parents are still considered valuable collaborators. A Georgian educator noted, "We keep families informed about the topics we are exploring and the activities we have planned"; Italy follows a vertical model, where formal agreements and scheduled meetings give educators more control over decision making. An Italian educator says, "We offer regular individual meetings, during which we discuss the educational goals that both teachers and parents can work on together with the child". Overall, horizontal partnerships are prominent in Australia and Canada, while vertical models dominate in Denmark, Georgia, and Italy.

Progression Dimension: The dimension of progression examines how these partnerships evolve, ranging from static (unchanging) to dynamic (continuously developing). In Australia, partnerships are highly dynamic, with educators emphasising adaptability and continuous interaction with families, fostering growth for both children and parents. One educator shared: "the children should be your number one priority as well as supporting the families attending the service". Similarly, in Canada, partnerships are dynamic, with educators working closely with parents to co-create and refine educational practices based on mutual feedback. A Canadian educator mentioned, "(we) ... focus on co-creating curriculum and meaning-making with children [and] families". Denmark's model tends to be more static, with structured processes like development interviews occurring at set intervals. "We use our knowledge of the child's development and talk to the parents ..., both when things are going well and when we need to react to something", noted a Danish educator, indicating a preference for stable engagement. However, mutual respect introduces some flexibility, preventing the model from being entirely static. In Georgia,

partnerships are largely static, with educators guiding the process in a structured, less flexible manner. A Georgian educator mentioned, “We are guided by a curriculum that values family involvement”. Italy’s partnerships are also static, driven by formal agreements and scheduled meetings that limit spontaneous changes throughout the year. Thus, dynamic partnerships are evident in Australia and Canada, where relationships evolve based on feedback, while static partnerships are more prevalent in Georgia and Italy.

Our analysis shows that the different combinations of variables that make up the three dimensions produce outcomes where the interplay between structure, distribution, and progression determines the overall quality of parent–educator partnerships in the five countries. Australia, Canada and Denmark, with informal, horizontal, and dynamic models, tend to foster high-quality partnerships. These relationships are characterised by empowering and transparent communication, where mutual respect and co-responsibility thrive, creating an inclusive and responsive environment for children’s growth. Conversely, Italy and Georgia, with more formal, vertical, and static models, lean closer to low-quality partnerships. The emphasis on top-down communication and structured interactions may limit parental involvement and restrict the partnership’s potential for growth.

In conclusion, high-quality partnerships are marked by informal structures, shared power, and evolving relationships, while low-quality partnerships feature formal, educator-led models with limited flexibility, which may hinder family engagement and collaboration.

In the next sections, we discuss the findings in relation to the literature and draw our conclusions.

4. Discussion

The results from this study demonstrate that early childhood educators across diverse national contexts highly value the relationships they have with parents and family members. These partnerships vary in how they are formed and maintained, reflecting the unique cultural and systemic influences of each country. Educators universally view parents as having an integral role in the life of their child, and some educators described parents as “experts”. This shared understanding of partnerships, where educators and family members work hand-in-hand, appears across countries but takes on different forms depending on local expectations and values. For example, a Canadian educator highlighted the shared responsibility of education by “focusing on co-creating curriculum and meaning-making with children, families, and the more-than-human”.

The educators in this study, regardless of national context, seem to be resisting neoliberal-inspired policy approaches, such as a top-down approach, where educators determine how parents and family members will be involved. Thus, educators in this study articulated a vision of partnership with parents and family members, where each voice matters and everyone is valued. We see linkages to codes of ethics; for example, Canadian educators align with the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia Code of Ethics, Principle 4: “We work in partnership with families, supporting them in meeting their responsibilities for their children” (Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia 2021). Further, the educators’ approaches in this study align well with the European Early Childhood Education Research Association Code of Ethics for Researchers, including “having an ethic of respect for: the child, family, community and society; democratic values; justice and equity; and knowing from multiple perspectives” (EECERA 2015). As one Australian educator shared, “Education that is both child led and . . . family informed”. This fits well with the Early Childhood Australia (2016) Code of Ethics that states “Partnerships with families and communities support shared responsibility for children’s learning, development and wellbeing” and educators need to “develop respectful relationships based on open communication with the aim of encouraging families’ engagement and to build a strong sense of belonging”.

Educators also acknowledged the support received from the parents and family members, recognising the dynamic relationship between educators and family. Parents are highly valued, and educators in this study recognise the impact that family members have

on the educators themselves. An educator from Denmark remarked, "When you as an educator feel comfortable, you feel respected for your work, get a good response from parents when the children are thriving. . .it gives job satisfaction. . .it has a big impact on practice". This fits well with an educator in Italy who described the importance of the "synergy" between teachers, parents, and children. This educator noted, "The most important factors for the quality of work are the parents and colleagues". What is interesting to note here is that educators see and value the importance of the relationships between family members and educators.

An educator in Georgia acknowledged, "The support of families is what motivates me". In Georgia, where traditional family structures and community connections remain strong, educators place a significant emphasis on the motivational role of families. Again, it is important to recognise that educators' motivation is not the paperwork but the connection with families and the impact of that relationship on their practice. An Australian educator described family-centred professionalism as one that "retains and values their educators as well as children and families through community partnerships". Bronfenbrenner asserted the importance of educators and parents working together within the mesosystem as it has a significant impact on children (Bronfenbrenner 2005). This fits well with the results from our study, which show a deep appreciation and recognition of parents on the part of educators, as well as a desire to work together as collaborative partners.

At the beginning of this study, we observed that over the past 30 years, neoliberal narratives have gained prominence in ECEC, emphasising children as human capital, parents' "consumer mentality", and marginalising the workforce. Today, the sector is dominated by discussions of children's outcomes, parental choice, and staff cost reduction, which limit the potential of children, parents, and educators.

The results of our study show that, despite this, the fragmented and rhizomatic forms of subaltern knowledge highlight the possibility for agency within structural constraints, with civil society emerging as a space for transformative counter-discourses. Accounts from teachers participating in our survey vividly illustrate resistance to neoliberal dogma. Counter-discourses can refer to the way migrant children's education can be supported ("ECEs that have the ability to speak and communicate to families in their first language immediately builds a sense of trust and belonging for these parents", Canada); and professional development is provided ("We mainly work through workshops that we often organise in collaboration with families. This approach requires the staff to systematically engage in continuous professional development", Italy); and new collaborative approaches with parents are created ("I have just started a parent café and parental guidance. In the parent café, topics that the parents are challenged on are discussed", Denmark). These accounts show how ECEC staff can actively resist narratives that reduce their work and relationships with families to mere commodities. They demonstrate the ability to navigate and challenge policies that undermine their professionalism while identifying opportunities to advocate for social transformation by acting as agents of change.

In countries with a strong tradition of social welfare and community engagement, like Denmark and Italy, quality is often linked to relational factors such as mutual respect, emotional well-being, and synergy between the affected community and partners (stakeholders). In more neoliberal-influenced contexts, like Canada and Australia, quality may still include relational aspects but is more likely to be assessed alongside measurable outcomes and accountability standards. This raises implications for how the international educational frameworks, which often adopt a standardised view of quality, might need to adapt to incorporate diverse cultural understandings of what constitutes high-quality ECEC. The study highlights the tension between local practices and global policy trends, particularly neoliberal approaches that emphasise accountability and standardisation. In countries that resist these trends, there is a risk that the local definitions of quality may not align with national or international metrics, leading to potential conflicts in policy implementation and evaluation. For countries such as Georgia, which are in the process of educational reform, there is an opportunity to shape policies that acknowledge the

importance of familial involvement while considering the need for professionalisation and accountability.

These findings underscore the need for policymakers to consider cultural and national differences when designing early childhood education policies. Understanding the reasons behind the diverse patterns of parent–educator partnerships can lead to more culturally responsive policies that honour the unique strengths of each context. This could potentially improve both the perceived quality and the effectiveness of early childhood education globally. Additionally, it is important to note that educators do not have a problem with the curriculum frameworks themselves, for in theory, they can be beneficial for children and families, and they can be a guide for educators. However, it is how the frameworks are enacted: the top-down approach, which devalues educator knowledge, wisdom, and experience, as well as the lack of time educators are allocated to engage with the educational frameworks. We agree with Edwards (2021) that the factors related to quality are "contextually defined" and should "operate in the best interests of young children, including the use of curriculum as a lever for process quality" (p. 40). Further to this, we concur that educators should be given time "to understand and interpret the relationship between curriculum and pedagogy in ECEC, including that of the approach used in their own cultural context" (Edwards 2021, p. 41).

5. Limitations

A number of limitations should be noted regarding this study. It was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 and 2022, although the study did not specifically ask questions about this event. Each country involved was affected differently by the pandemic at various times. Also, as different software was used to deliver the survey, there were variations in compulsory questions that should be considered when interpreting the results. Additionally, the educator participants of particular countries may not necessarily represent the view of all the educators in that country, so generalisability is limited.

Follow-up studies might include interviews and observations to further our understanding. Interviews offer valuable insights into the specific qualities that define an open, curious, and communicative relationship, as well as the concrete steps educators take to build and maintain such connections with parents, including what special considerations they take in relation to socio-culturally vulnerable families. Additionally, observations examining how these collaborative intentions are put into practice in the busy context of daily routines, along with exploring parents' perspectives on these efforts, would enrich the field. Further research might also investigate the factors that influence educators' commitment to parental collaboration, such as their educational background, professional experience, or other contextual elements.

6. Conclusions

In all five countries studied, educators address the four essential dimensions—parent involvement, family-centred professionalism, parenting competence, and shared educational responsibilities—in their work. Across these nations, educators emphasise collaborative engagement with parents in areas such as upbringing, well-being, education, and child development. They value open, curious, and communicative relationships with parents, fostered through regular parent meetings and effective communication, as well as active support from parents. Socio-cultural considerations are also highlighted as vital in building inclusive and respectful partnerships with families. Furthermore, educators view the key elements of children's well-being, education, and development as a shared responsibility. Their role, they note, includes keeping parents informed about activities, sharing observations on individual children, and providing guidance and support.

Despite the challenges introduced by neoliberal policies in early childhood education, such as increased demands for regulation, documentation, and assessment that reduce direct interaction time with children and families, the educators in these five countries largely agree that strong partnerships with parents are crucial to the quality of early childhood pro-

grammes. These collaborations are considered essential for fostering children's well-being, development, and learning. However, while educators prioritise parental engagement, they are also aware of the pressures imposed by regulatory requirements. Nevertheless, they work to uphold these partnerships through practical strategies that help them maintain supportive and respectful relationships with parents, reinforcing both job satisfaction and adherence to professional ethical standards. By analysing the accounts of teachers from five countries, we identified common strategies they use to resist the neoliberal model dominating the ECEC sector. These examples reveal the teachers' remarkable creativity in developing alternative approaches that challenge neoliberal constraints while fostering and strengthening collaborative relationships with families as partners in ECEC services.

While these accounts should not be seen as definitive "solutions" to the issues created by the neoliberal agenda, they represent potential "lines of flight" that can support advocacy efforts and, over time, significantly influence local and national ECEC policies. However, while educators' resistance to neoliberal policies and practices is heartening, such efforts add to the overall challenges and emotional burdens of their work at a time when there are high levels of educator burnout and attrition in some countries (Ng et al. 2023; Rogers et al. 2023). It would be wise for policymakers to listen to the voices of educators to reverse these trends.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, M.R. and L.D.; methodology, M.R. and L.D.; software, all authors; validation, all authors; formal analysis, all authors; investigation, all authors; resources, all authors; data curation, all authors; writing—original draft preparation, all authors; writing—review and editing, all authors; visualization, all authors; project administration, M.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: University of New England Human Research Ethics Committee approval number for this study is HE21-039.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: There is no public data set for this project.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. 2018. National Quality Frame-Work. Available online: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard (accessed on 1 October 2024).

Australian Government Department of Education. 2022. Belonging, Being and Becoming—The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Department of Education and Training. Available online: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/EYLF-2022-V2.0.pdf (accessed on 1 October 2024).

Australian Government Department of Education. 2023. March Quarter 2022 Report. Department of Education and Training. Available online: https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/early-childhood-data-and-reports/quarterly-reports-usage-services-fees-and-subsidies/march-quarter-2022-report (accessed on 1 October 2024).

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2017. Australia's Children. Available online: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/education/early-childhood-educa-tion#:~:text=In%202017,%20around%203%20in%205%20children,program%20in%20the%20year%20before%20full-time%20school (accessed on 1 October 2024).

Bandura, Albert. 1977. *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Barnett, Melissa A., Katherine W. Paschall, Ann M. Mastergeorge, Christina A. Cutshaw, and Shannon M. Warren. 2020. Influences of parent engagement in early childhood education centers and the home on kindergarten school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 53: 260–73. [CrossRef]

Bowlby, John. 1969. *Attachment and Loss (No. 79)*. New York: Random House.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3: 77–101. [CrossRef]

Bronfenbrenner, Urie, ed. 2005. *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd.

Brown, Christopher P. 2014. Conforming to reform: Teaching pre-kindergarten in a neoliberal early education system. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 13: 236–51. [CrossRef]

Bryman, Alan, Edward Bell, Jennifer Reck, and Jessica Fields. 2021. *Social Research Methods*, 6th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Devlieghere, Jochen, Yan Li, and Michel Vandenbroeck. 2020. Beyond the veil of parents: Deconstructing the concept of parental involvement in early childhood education and care. *Early Years* 42: 587–98. [CrossRef]

Early Childhood Australia (ECA). 2016. *Code of Ethics*. Canberra: Early Childhood Australia (ECA). Available online: http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/ (accessed on 20 October 2024).

Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia (ECEBC). 2021. Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia Code of Ethics. Available online: https://www.ecebc.ca/resources-merchandise/code-of-ethics (accessed on 19 October 2024).

Edwards, Susan. 2021. *Process Quality, Curriculum and Pedagogy in Early Childhood Education and Care*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 247. Paris: OECD Publishing. [CrossRef]

EECERA. 2015. EECERA Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers. Available online: https://www.eecera.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/EECERA-Ethical-Code.pdf (accessed on 10 September 2024).

Farris, Sara R., and Sabrina Marchetti. 2017. From the commodification to the corporatization of care: European Perspectives and debates. *Social Politics* 24: 109–31. [CrossRef]

Fielding, Michael, and Peter Moss. 2012. Radical democratic education. Paper presented at American Socialogical Association Annual Conference, Denver, CO, USA, August 17–20.

Geinger, Freya, Michel Vandenbroeck, and Griet Roets. 2014. Parenting as performance: Parents as consumers and (de)constructors of mythic parenting and childhood ideals. *Childhood* 21: 488–501. [CrossRef]

Goodall, Janet, and Caroline Montgomery. 2023. Parental involvement to parental engagement: A continuum. In *Mapping the Field*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, pp. 158–69.

Government of British Columbia. 2019. British Columbia Early Learning Framework. Available online: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/early-learning/teach/earlylearning/early_learning_framework.pdf (accessed on 19 October 2024).

Government of Canada. 2018. Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework. Available online: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-early-learning/1352-IELCC_Report-EN.pdf (accessed on 19 October 2024).

Hakyemez-Paul, Sevcan, Päivi Pihlaja, and Heikki Silvennoinen. 2020. Parental involvement in Finnish day care–what do early childhood educators say? In *Working with Parents and Families in Early Childhood Education*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, pp. 102–17.

Hujala, Eeva, Leena Turja, Maria Filomena Gaspar, Marika Veisson, and Manjula Waniganayake. 2009. Perspectives of early childhood teachers on parent–teacher partnerships in five European countries. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal* 17: 57–76. [CrossRef]

Jurado-Guerrero, Teresa, and Manuela Naldini. 2018. Child and family policy in Southern Europe. In *Handbook of Family Policy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 209–22.

Miller, Patricia H. 2022. Developmental theories: Past, present, and future. *Developmental Review* 66: 101049. Available online: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0273229722000399#b0045 (accessed on 9 September 2024). [CrossRef]

Ministry of Children and Education. 2024. Executive Order on the Act on Day, Leisure and Club Offers, etc. for Children and Young People (the Daycare Act). Available online: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2024/988 (accessed on 23 September 2024).

Moloney, Mary, Margaret Sims, Antje Rothe, Cynthia Beuttner, Lisa Sonter, Manjula Waniganayake, Maria Jose Opazo Perez, Pamela Calder, and Sarah Girlich. 2019. Resisting neoliberalism: Professionalisation of early childhood education and care. *International Journal of Elementary Education* 8: 1–10. [CrossRef]

Ng, Joanne, Marg Rogers, and Courtney McNamara. 2023. A systematic review of burnout and quality of life of early childhood educators. *Issues in Educational Research* 33: 173–206.

Oke, Ayooluwa, Judith E. Butler, and Cian O'Neill. 2021. Identifying barriers and solutions to increase parent-practitioner communication in early childhood care and educational services: The development of an online communication application. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 49: 283–93. [CrossRef]

Pacini-Ketchabaw, Veronica. 2014. Postcolonial and anti-racist approaches to understanding play. In *The SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 67–78.

Piaget, Jean. 2005. *The Psychology of Intelligence*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

Roberts-Holmes, Guy. 2015. The 'datafication' of early years pedagogy: 'if the teaching is good, the data should be good and if there's bad teaching, there is bad data'. *Journal of Education Policy* 30: 302–15. [CrossRef]

Roberts-Holmes, Guy, and Peter Moss. 2021. *Neoliberalism and Early Childhood Education: Markets, Imaginaries and Governance*. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

Rogers, Marg. 2021. Contextualised, not neoliberalised professionalism in early childhood education and care: Effects of prescribed notions of quality on educator confidence in Australia: Effects of prescribed notions of quality on educator confidence. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 13: 4.

Rogers, Marg, Fabio Dovigo, and Laura Doan. 2020. Educator identity in a neoliberal context: Recognising and supporting early childhood education and care educators. *European Early Childhood Education Research* 28: 806–22. [CrossRef]

Rogers, Marg, Wendy Boyd, and Margaret Sims. 2023. "Burnout central": Australian early childhood educational leaders' experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Issues in Educational Research* 33: 284–306.

Rogers, Marg, Fabio Dovigo, Laura K. Doan, Khatuna Dolidze, and Astrid Mus Rasmussen. 2024a. Impact of neoliberal-inspired policies on educators' professional identity in five countries: Visions for a better future. In *Supporting Early Childhood Practice Through Difficult Times*. London: Routledge, pp. 70–82.

Rogers, Marg, Khatuna Dolidze, Astrid Mus Rasmussen, Fabio Dovigo, and Laura K. Doan. 2024b. Impacts of managerial systems on early educators' job satisfaction in five countries. *Issues in Educational Research* 34: 219–34.

Rogers, Marg, Khatuna Dolidze, Astrid Mus Rassmussen, Fabio Dovigo, and Laura Doan. Forthcoming. Early childhood educators' notions of quality in five countries: Visions for a better future.

Sims, Margaret. 2017. Neoliberalism and early childhood. Cogent Education. *Cogent Education* 4: 1365411. [CrossRef]

Spiteri, Jane. 2022. The untapped potential of early childhood education for planetary health: A narrative review. In *Handbook of Human and Planetary Health*. Cham: Springer, pp. 297–311.

Tan, Cheng Yong, Meiyan Lyu, and Baiwen Peng. 2020. Academic benefits from parental involvement are stratified by pa-rental socioeconomic status: A meta-analysis. *Parenting* 20: 241–87. [CrossRef]

UNESCO. 2014. Holistic Early Childhood Development Index (HECDI) Framework. A technical guide. UNESCO. Available online: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000229188 (accessed on 1 November 2024).

Vandenbroeck, Michel, Joanne Lehrer, Linda Mitchell, Maarit Alasuutari, Marie-Laure Cadart, Kirsti Karila, Tullia Musatti, Pablo Rupin, and Gail Yuen. 2022. "Resisting the consumentality of parents". In *The Decommodification of Early Childhood Education and Care*. London: Routledge, pp. 81–146.

Warren, Diana, Galina Daraganova, and Meredith O'Connor. 2017. *8 Preschool and Children's Readiness for School*. Growing Up in Australia—The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, Annual Statistical Report. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

World Health Organisation. 2018. Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development. Available online: https://www.who.int/teams/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-health-and-ageing/child-health/nurturing-care (accessed on 20 October 2024).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.