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Similarities and Differences in Discourses on Practitioner-Parent Partnerships in Early Childhood Provision in England, Hungary and Kazakhstan

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England, Hungary, Kazakhstan



Rationale for the Study

- Internationally, policy and investment have increasingly focused on early childhood provision...
- BUT the rationale for early childhood provision lacks consensus (Kaga *et al.*, 2010)
- Parents are positioned variably, seen as:
 - * Less powerful than early childhood practitioners in their children's lives (Cannella, 2002)
 - * More powerful than early childhood practitioners in their children's lives (Government of Kazakhstan, 2012)
 - * Empowered consumers (Hursh, 2005); they are seen as busy employees (Kaga *et al.*, 2010)
 - * Potential supporters of their children's premature schoolification (House *et al.*, 2012)
- Inconsistencies *within* countries and *between* countries in ECEC parent-practitioner relationships (Watson, 2012)
- Numerous comparative ECEC studies recently (Kaga *et al.*, 2010; Watson, 2012; OECD, 2012; Pascal *et al.*, 2013)
- BUT a tripartite ECEC comparison between England, Kazakhstan and Hungary is innovative



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Focus of the Study

Research question: ‘What do academics and the literature reveal about the similarities and differences concerning practitioner-parent partnerships in early childhood provision in Kazakhstan, Hungary and England?’

Objectives for the study:

- 1) To review literature, policy and research focused on practitioner-parent partnership in early childhood provision in Kazakhstan, Hungary and England.
- 2) To capture similarities and differences in early childhood academics’ perspectives of issues arising from a review of literature, policy and research focused on practitioner-parent partnership in early childhood provision in Kazakhstan, Hungary and England.



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Paradigm, Methodology and Methods

- Interpretive paradigm
- Methodology: narrative research: ‘...a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions’ (Czarniawska, 2004:17).
- Methods:
 - 1) Critical literature review (Ling Pan and Lopez, 2008:1)
 - 2) Semi-structured focus group interviews (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007)

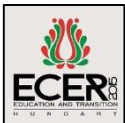


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Sample

- **Critical review:** ECEC researchers (n=6), experienced as practitioners, in 3 countries review literature. Self-selected, purposive cohort
- **Individual country focus group interviews:** Academic colleagues in ECEC field in England (n=6), Kazakhstan (n=6) and Hungary (n=6) explore key themes from the review, to provide new narratives



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Analysis

- Two stages of thematic analysis adopted for review and focus group transcriptions
- A valuable inductive model allowing for revelation of authentic voices AND manageability of data
- Stage 1 is a thematic analysis of data within individual countries
- Stage 2 is a thematic analysis of data across the three study countries



Ethics

- England and Kazakhstan: British Educational Research Association (BERA) Revised Guidelines for Educational Research (2011).
- Hungary: *Ethics Code of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* (Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS), 2010) and this directs the ethical conduct of the Hungarian element of the study
- Observable synergy between HAS (2010) and BERA (2011) requirements.



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Findings (1)

METHOD 1: Critical review of parent-partnership in early childhood provision in Kazakhstan, Hungary and England...

- ❖ **England** (*i.a.* Sylva et al., 2003; Evangelou et al., 2005; Nutbrown et al., 2005; Whalley and the Pen Green Team, 2007; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011)
- ❖ **Hungary** (*i.a.* Kovács Györgyne *et al.*, 2002; Török, 2004; Kovács and Korintus, 2012)
- ❖ **Kazakhstan** (*i.a.* Vinogradova, 1989; Danilina, 2000; Khalipova and Telepiyeva, 2004)



Findings (2)

Themes from the critical review...

1 overarching theme: 'Parent partnership in early childhood provision in Hungary, Kazakhstan and England'.

5 key themes:

(i) Parental choice in early childhood provision

(ii) Power imbalances in parent-practitioner partnership in early childhood provision

(iii) School starting ages

(iv) Culture of parent-practitioner links in early childhood provision

(v) The role of early childhood provision in preparing children for formal schooling.

Critical review themes informed focus group questions...



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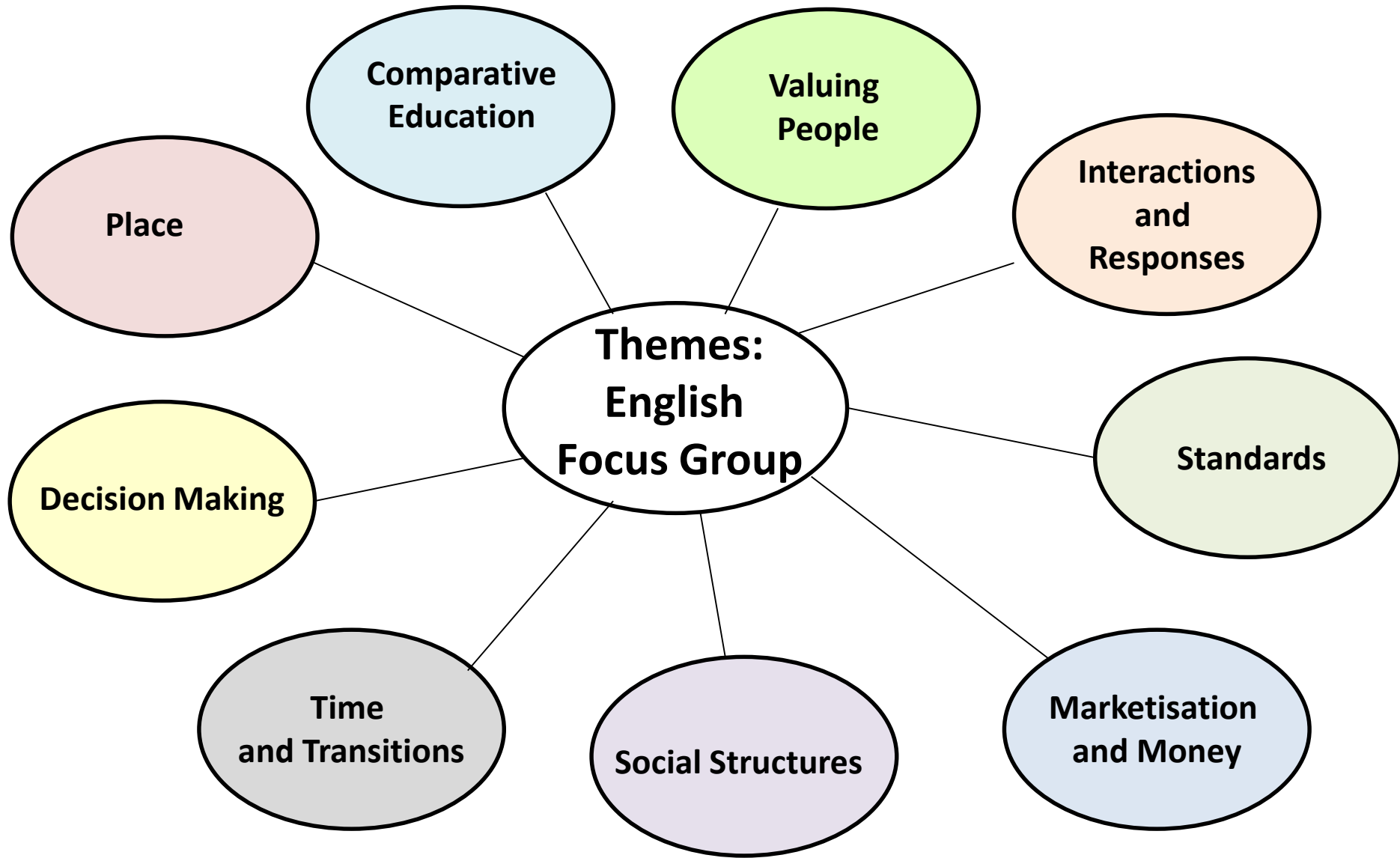


Findings (3): England

- A participatory approach – 2 researchers involved in the discussion
- Participants (n=6) and their varied backgrounds:
 - R1 – Education – Lower Primary Teacher
 - R2 – Education - EY advisor and EY Teacher
 - P1 – Social Inclusion – CC Management
 - P2 – Education – Infant teacher
 - P3 - Business – Nursery Owner/Manager
 - P4 – Health – Teacher of child health education



Findings (3ii): England



Findings (3iii): England

Marketisation and Money

Money (*Initial questions i,ii,iii,iv,v*)

'...we shouldn't be allowed to pay for education' '...the relationship is different if you're a paying customer: we come with certain expectations' (EFGp19_P1) / (EFGp71_P1)

'...you get what you pay for' (EFGp76_P4)

Parents are Consumers (*Initial questions iii,v*)

'... Can you imagine...the uproar in the country if the government suddenly said: 'We're going to change the starting age of school to six or seven?' (EFGp237_P3)

Competition (*Initial question iii*) *'...life outcomes are measured... and you know if you don't get that perfect start – it's - it's frightening - they frighten people'* (EFGp76_P1)



Findings (3iv): England

VALUING PEOPLE (*initial questions (IQ) ii, iii, iv, v*) “just as each a child is unique then a parent is unique and partnership should be as a child needs it.” (EFGp354_P43)

INTERACTIONS AND RESPONSES (*IQ i, iii, iv, v*) “...they are choosing the setting....based on... the way that the staff interact with the children.” (EFGp64_P12)

STANDARDS (*IQ i, ii, iii, iv, v*)

“I think policy is the biggest influence , to be honest...That’s your main driver. Shouldn’t be but it is.” (EFGp346_P41)

SOCIAL STRUCTURES (*IQ i, ii, iii, iv, v*) “I think a lot depends on the parents, too, though. ... The ones that are the lower socio-economic class... feel quite threatened by the power that they perceive that practitioners have.” (EFGp116_P19)



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Findings (3v): England

TIME AND TRANSITIONS (IQ i, iii, v) *“...the last year (in the nursery) the parents turn on the ‘interested parent’ button.”*
(EFGp183_P27)

DECISION MAKING (IQ i) *“...parents tend to want the best setting for their child but those best settings tend to be full up so that parental choice is almost taken away.”* (EFGp8_P4)

PLACE (IQ i) *“...see how many people just move house just to try to get to a certain ... (setting or school)”* (EFGp15_P6)

COMPARATIVE EDUCATION (IQ iii) – *“...it does make you wonder why some other European countries start at the age of six – does that tie in with the developmental understanding of children?”* (EFGp235_P31)



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Findings (4i): Kazakhstan

Parental choice in early childhood provision

- Location
- Government-owned early childhood settings
- Private early childhood provision
- Conditions in settings (New teaching approaches, small groups, high-equipped facilities)
- Extra activities (Dancing, painting, English classes for 4-5 year olds)



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Findings (4ii): Kazakhstan

Power imbalances in parent-practitioner partnership in early childhood provision

- Staff obsolescence
- Partnership is a procedural agreement
- Parents' disinterest in child's learning and lack of time
- Socio-economic hierarchies



Findings (4iii): Kazakhstan

School starting ages

- It is possible to enter school at the age of 6 by passing entrance test, but the majority of children enroll at the age of 7.
- Parent-teacher interactions in this stage are focused on children's learning achievements.



Findings (4iv): Kazakhstan

Culture of parent-practitioner links in early childhood provision

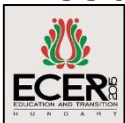
- Information letters
- Regular parent meetings
- Social networks
- Special events
- Sharing information about children during child-collect-time



Findings (4v): Kazakhstan

The role of early childhood provision in **preparing children for formal schooling:**

- Close interaction of EY and school staff
- Mutual discussion of EY and school teaching programmes
- 1-year preparation before starting school, when children visit schools, attend classes and are involved in school events
- Parents are invited to have individual interviews with school counsellors



Findings (5i): Hungary

Findings from the **5 initial focus group questions:**

1. Parents are provided with the opportunity to choose the kindergarten and even the pedagogue.
2. Caring roles of kindergarten professionals used to be prominent and well respected but the increased service function of kindergarten workers means that this is less so now.



Findings (5ii): Hungary

3. School starting age is 6 or 7 but schools driven by achievement and targets, causing families stress
4. One role of the kindergarten is engagement with families and their cultures, especially vulnerable families
5. Another role of the kindergarten is preparation for school which is achieved in various ways; however, child-centredness only materialises prior to formal schooling.



Findings (5iii): Hungary

Theoretical framework of partnership working:

Families are partners in their children's learning (The Hungarian Core Programme (2012):

- All children must receive the same level of care and nurture
- From 3-6/7, kindergartens complement families' care of their children
- Close parental partnership underpins kindergarten care and education
- Kindergartens must take into account families' individual features, cultures and habits when working together.



Findings (5iv): Hungary

Theoretical framework continued:

- There are no prescribed ways of working together; both parents and pedagogues can initiate ways as long as they ensure:
 - a personalised approach
 - a sense of community
 - The possibility of shared organised events to take place
- Kindergartens are to open to establishing and maintaining relationships with parents



Findings (5v): Hungary

Other features of partnership working:

- Families support outings where children learn about their environment at first hand
- Some parents prefer the previous 'kindergarten as service provider' approach: pedagogues care for children according to individual wishes and demands.
- Active involvement of parents in planning has become a key feature of partnership work
- Local agencies and institutions get involved in the work of kindergartens which is supported by the parents.



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Findings (6)

The five original themes were shared across all three countries but in the focus groups, while Kazakhstan maintained fidelity to the original five themes, further themes emerged from England and Hungary...

England:

- Valuing People
- Interactions and responses
- Standards
- Marketisation and money
- Social structures
- Time and Transitions
- Decision making
- Place
- Comparative Education

Hungary:

- Parental Choice has primacy
- Partnership is a requirement
- Continuity of nurture and care
- Relationships are valued
- Increase in parental partnership



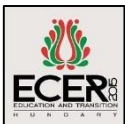
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Key Conclusion and Recommendation

Research question: ‘What do academics and the literature reveal about the similarities and differences concerning practitioner-parent partnerships in early childhood provision in Kazakhstan, Hungary and England?’

- There are more similarities in the literature of the three countries than in the narratives of academics from the three countries.
- Further stratified discourse is needed to identify why this is



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Limitations...

- Paucity of interaction between academics
- Lack of perspective from parents and current practitioners

Planned further second study...

- Increased liaison between the academics to develop and share discourse further (Erasmus mobility project?)
- To facilitate collection of data from parents and current practitioners
- To provide insider understandings of parent-practitioner partnership in early childhood provision.



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