Chapter 1
Why a *Re*-theorisation of *More-than-*Parental Involvement in ECEC Is Needed

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Abstract This introductory chapter begins with the critical presentation of the concept of parental involvement (PI) as one implying a "democratic deficit" that builds on educational experts' protectorate approach towards families. This aspect of PI is traced back to its history, and regardless of its colonial roots, we argue that we should not give up on this sense of PI. Based on a strong political will that can be traced in policy documents in all regions of the world, together with existing research reporting on the importance of acknowledging the democratic and culturally responsive practices of PI, we redefine PI as part of a search for theoretisations of hope, by which we mean the conceptual toolkits that acknowledge parental *participation* and provide room for more-than-parental involvement and agonism/disagreements. This introduction concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters in the book, as well as some information about the ethical details related to the empirical examples used later in the book.

Keywords Colonialism · Democracy deficit · Hope · Parental involvement · Policy

Parental Involvement: A Troubled Term with a Colonial Vibe

In recent years, parental involvement (PI) has been troubled as a self-contradictory concept that combines the forced enrolment and genuine engagement of parents/caregivers in the educational lives of their children (Devlieghere et al., 2022; Pushor,

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2012; Vandenbroeck, 2009; Van Laere et al., 2018). Involvement originates from the Latin word "involvere", which means "to roll into and by extension implies wrapping up or enveloping parents somehow into the system" (Benson, 1999, p. 48). Such a meaning of the term has been reconstructed in many critical studies showing that regardless of the intention behind enabling authentic engagement, the expression of the parent's own voice, and democratic participation, PI is in fact about following the agenda of the educational institution (Pushor, 2012). To reflect this asymmetry of power in the relationship between a (pre)school) and the students' families, Pushor (2012) uses the colonial term "protectorate" to delineate

> …a colonialist structure in which those with strengths (the colonizers) take charge to protect the those they believe to have little or no strength (the colonized). (…) Educators, as holders of expert knowledge of teaching and learning, enter a community, claim the ground which is labelled "school", and design and enact polices, procedures, programs, schedules, and routines for the children of the community. (p. 466)

Parents can choose whether to join and support these programmes and procedures (i.e., become involved), but there is no space for them to articulate the modes of involvement that they find important and meaningful. Van Laere et al. (2018) have called this a "democratic deficit" (p. 189), which refers to the idea that "the goals and modalities of PI are defined without the involvement of parents themselves" (p. 189), which makes their involvement largely about engaging in practices that have already been decided upon (Janssen & Vandenbroeck, 2018). As these practices are not necessarily meaningful for the parents (Crozier, 2001; Doucet, 2011), they may instead lead to the dis-involvement of the families (Devlieghere et al., 2022).

How alienating "involvement" in these practices can be for those of other cultures, values, and opinions becomes more visible in relation to the educational collaborations with parents of lower socio-economic status, or families from Indigenous or migrant backgrounds. Families from im/migrant backgrounds and lower social statuses are not always met in acknowledging or culturally responsive ways (Sadownik, 2022; Tobin et al., 2013; Tobin, 2020). The majority of discourses underpinning early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions are so structured that these individuals become absent, silent, or passive in their contact with these institutions (Leareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Solberg, 2018; Sønsthagen, 2020).

For the Indigenous and some im/migrant families, this lack of acknowledgement also seems to occur through the Western epistemologies that interrupt their culturally anchored ontologies and dislocate their significant relationships, particularly with elders (ARACY, 2016; Hayes et al., 2009). PI in ECEC is in such cases founded on the disconnection of families from their own cultures and acculturation into the dominating one. These acculturation-related assumptions may play out in the form of deficit discourses about the Indigenous communities (ARACY, 2016; Chenhall et al., 2011; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014; Muller, 2012) or programmes aimed at improving their health, competencies, and parenting skills (Mechielsen et al., 2014). The lack of recognition of these families as being in any way resourceful for the

educational system can also be observed in how the front-line staff of educational institutions are often non-Indigenous (Hayes et al., 2009; Lampert et al., 2014; Lea et al., 2011). This, together with the racism that still silently underpins many "inclusive" societies, creates a great obstacle to facilitating genuine and meaningful collaboration for all parties involved (Lowe et al., 2019).

In the case of the involvement of im/migrant parents, the acknowledgement of a family's culture or language is in some cases not even discussed, as adjusting to the dominating culture and attaining the indicators for school readiness or educational achievement is taken-for-granted goal. The study by Capps et al. (2010) conducted with fathers of Mexican and Chinese origin living in the United States, or the research of Ndijuye (2022, Ndijuye & Basil Tandika, 2022) on refugee children in Tanzania, are examples of works that do not dismantle or even discuss the cultural discourses and power relations constating the concept of educational achievement. The assumption that educational achievement and high school performance are the natural and desired goals of parental involvement shifts the focus of attempts to operationalise PI onto sets of easily measurable indicators of "the right" parental activities (Fantuzzo et al., 2000), the factors contributing to literacy development (Lee, 2002), variables that mediate academic achievement (Hill & Craft, 2003; Pomerantz et al., 2007), or how parental social class and ways of being involved influence the school performance of children from both minority or majority backgrounds (Downer & Mendez, 2005).

Our perspective on such studies is critical, as we find that they do not allow us to discuss the protectorate character of educational institutions (Pushor, 2012) and confirm the "democratic deficit" (Van Laere et al., 2018) as a foundation of PI. Imposing specific modes of involvement on very diverse families can intentionally pre-judge some families as resourceful and "good", and others as lacking in resources. These protectorate aspects of PI that emerge in these cases could be anchored in the colonial history of education, and thus also the history of PI.

The Western **History** *of Parental Involvement*

In looking at the dominant discourse on the history of PI, it is difficult to find any other registration or documentation aside from the Western version. While spreading throughout the world, this particular discourse violently discouraged and erased a lot of stories and practices related to how parents engage in the lives of their own children. In the sections below, where we take a retrospective look at PI in education, we would like to acknowledge all the stories, relationships, and practices that were interrupted and silenced in different regions of the world. As Berger (1991) states, "Parents have been their children's first educators since prehistoric times" (p. 209). However, we will never really know about many of the ways in which parents, tribes, and communities engaged in their children's lives.

The history we do know is a story of PI to a great degree, which presupposes the supremacy of educational institutions and professionals over families. This

supremacy has taken different forms and is based on the assumption that certain families have shortcomings, that compensation strategies must be developed accordingly (as is often the case for families from lower socio-economic or migrant backgrounds), and, in some circumstances, that the children's connections to their families should be severed (as in the case of many Indigenous children).

The compensatory perspective towards families and the channelling of forms of parental engagement towards the children's learning seem to have been established in the "Plowden Report". The Plowden Report was written by the Central Advisory Council for Education (1967) in England and referred to by many scholars involved in research on PI in education as a milestone and turning point in understanding the relationship between families and (pre)schools (i.e., Hornby, 2000; Crozier, 2012; Shaw, 2014). The "newness" of this report lies in its interpretation of the child's attainment of learning goals at certain ages as both a goal and a value of PI. Children's homes thus become acknowledged for their importance in their development on the one hand, but on the other, the spectrum of this contribution is narrowed to include only certain activities. Within such limits and criteria for the "right" support of children, some families appear right away to be resourceful and supportive, while others do not.

Such asymmetries were not that visible when the goal of collaboration between the homes and educational institutions was the transmission and preservation of joined values. In ancient Greece, where societies were interested in maintaining the democratic order of things, great care was taken to preserve the thoughts that diverse adults in different milieus could implant in the young mind. The minds of the children and youths were seen as the bearers of the democratic culture of the future (Berger, 1991), and families and educational institutions were viewed as equally influential and responsible for the values to which the children were exposed.

Equality was no longer the objective in medieval Europe, which was dominated by the powers of the Catholic Church. In this era, the educational system was subordinated to the normative system of religion. In such a context, the role of the home was acknowledged only as an "implementor" of Catholic beliefs and practices, consisting of actors who were expected to confirm the established religious worldview at the level of home life (Prentice & Houston, 1975).

Transformations of social systems and changes in how the child is understood – as the bearer of their own development, with childhood being considered a special period of life – pointed back to the importance of interaction between the child and everyone else involved in their upbringing. Therefore, creating a collaborative platform and communication channels through which diverse milieus could become involved in the life of the child became important. Berger (1991) identified Rousseau (1712–1778), Pestalozzi (1746–1827), and Froebel (1782–1852) as the creators of this new perspective of the child and thus the originators of the idea of collaborative relationships between parents and teachers. Their work influenced an educational approach in which the relationship between the family and the educational institutions was considered necessary for the well-being of the child. Given that Froebel is considered the founder of ECEC institutions (*kindergartens*) in Western cultures, it is possible to argue that his consideration of the necessity of collaboration with

families is organically intertwined with the institutionalisation of ECE itself (Berger, 1991; Tovey, 2013).

In the American context, John Dewey (1897), in his essay "My Pedagogic Creed", presented child-centred practice as depending on good cooperation between the educational and family environments. Such a perspective on parents led to the establishment of parent cooperative preschools in the United States (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). Parents were the founders and teachers were the managers of these institutions, which were supported by parental trust. In such facilities, programmes involving children and parents, to which parents contributed with their attendance, volunteering, and professional knowledge, were developed. In socially and economically deprived communities, such schools have made efforts to support each family's education and thus contribute to the development and well-being of children. Such approaches may be seen as focused on compensation for families' shortcomings (Ansari & Gershoff, 2016). Nevertheless, this compensatory work with families builds on the communitarian spirit of the whole community, who, through the parents becoming involved in school, reaches out to families in vulnerable life situations (MacIntyre, 2013).

Another example of how parents began to be included in early childhood education, this time in the context of England, was represented by Margaret McMillan (1860–1931). She profiled her preschool as cooperating with and assisting parents in raising their children (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). Her acknowledgement of the parental role was reflected in the architecture of the preschool she opened at the beginning of the twentieth century, where one room was dedicated specifically to the parents (Fitzpatrick, 2012). This is not a rule in contemporary ECE settings. McMillan also encouraged ECE institutions in London to establish mothers' clubs as a setting where young mothers could be acknowledged, empowered, and develop their parenting competencies (Fitzpatrick, 2012).

It is important to mention at this point that while these Western systems supported initiatives for PI, they were also removing children from Indigenous families in Australia, the United States, French Indochina, and Canada (Firpo & Jacobs, 2018) and putting them in either correction facilities or boarding schools, thus forcing Western culture and ontology onto them. Duke Bryant (2015) describes how the French schooling system deconstructed the mentoring authority of the parents (i.e., mothers over the daughters and fathers over the sons) and why formal education was avoided by the families. These cuts to the relationships between children and families also took the form of discouraging the use of native languages (Muaka, 2011; Nabea, 2009; Nana, 2013; Rotich, 2021), along with forced Christianisation (Glenn, 2011; Rotich, 2021). These interventions, together with the intentional spread of alcohol (Lakomäki et al., 2017), effectively destabilised the connections within families, tribes, and communities.

"Have we learned anything… from all this sad history?" asks Duke Bryant (2015). With a focus on Indigenous communities, he discusses the lack of satisfactory solutions to the complex and complicated issue of "minority education" (p. 193). We agree on the difficulty of developing a solution here and suggest continuous reflection and trials of improvement. Despite the "sad history" and

protectorate luggage of PI (Pushor, 2012), we do not want to give up on the concept and the practices it may inspire.

Why and How to Not Give Up on Parental Involvement?

The reasons for which we do not want to give up on PI are associated with its potential, which is constituted by both (a) the acknowledgement and appreciation it is given in policy documents around the world, and (b) the research documenting highly mutual, culturally sensitive, responsive, and responsible examples of family involvement. The underlying political will that led to its formation and the empirical examples demonstrating its possibility create a powerful standpoint from which we will further map the theories of PI. In doing so, we intend to embrace, confirm, and strengthen the hope of PI.

ECEC Policies Acknowledging Parental Involvement

PI is a phenomenon and practice acknowledged in ECEC policy documents if not in all countries, then at least in all regions of the world. For instance, parents, as the first and most important actors involved in and responsible for the lives and development of children, are mentioned in the *Constitutions of Ghana* (Government of Ghana, 1992) and the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996). In a slightly different way, the Council of the European Union (2019) recognises PI in ECEC as supporting processes of poverty reduction, migrant integration, and social cohesion. Collaboration and communication between families and ECEC settings are highlighted in ECEC-related policy documents in many other countries throughout the world, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Scotland, and Uganda. Below, more details on the values attached by these policies to the ECECs' partnerships with parents are described.

The *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2018) recognises families as "children's first and most influential teachers" (p. 13) and highlights ECECs' partnerships with families as one of the five principles that underpin children's learning and development. Parents and families are seen as crucial cultural knowledge recourses that shall inform the activities taking place in the ECEC setting, so that the children can participate in these services "without compromising their cultural identities" (p. 26). The reciprocal and collaborative partnerships between homes and ECECs are then a guarantee of the children's integrated becoming.

In Brazil, the Legal Framework for Early Childhood, or more formally the *LEI 13.257 Marco Legal da Primeira Infância* (2016), promotes a child-centred and family-focused approach. Within this approach, children are seen as individuals inseparable from their social and cultural contexts, which again are to be seen,

acknowledged, and valued by educational institutions. Government policies and programmes shall thus provide all families with the necessary support for responsible parenting. One such programme, the *Criança Feliz Program* (2019), meaning The Happy Child Program, developed by the National Secretariat for Early Childhood Care, reaches out to thousands of families with home visits and is considered the largest home visitation programme in the world for early childhood ages. According to *Decreto n° 8.869* (2016), the programme succeeds in exercising parenthood, strengthening bonds, and making many families capable of performing the roles of caretaker, protector, and educator of children 0–6 years old.

In this vein, the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education (2014) released the *CMEC Early Learning and Development Framework*, in which the family's central role in a child's life and development is highlighted. A parent is acknowledged as "a child's first and most important teacher" (p. 9), and ECEC-related institutions are encouraged to establish vital and reciprocal relationships with families (including extended families). According to this framework, "By working in partnership, families and educators can learn together and gain a deeper understanding of each child and ways to promote his/her learning and development" (p. 9).

Recently, the Framework for Good Management and Leadership in Early Childhood Education, developed in Chile under the title *Marco para la buena dirección y liderazgo en educación parvularia* (2023), also recognises families as the first educators of children and promotes active involvement in a variety of activities and processes. It also delineates that the responsibility for enabling and sustaining good relationships should be shared between ECECs and the families and local communities associated with them. It further highlights the necessity of an inclusive approach to values, cultures, and knowledge. This document recognises families as social capital, as they generate networks and alliances with multiple institutions and actors from the surrounding environment that enhance opportunities for comprehensive development (Ministerio de Education, 2023, p. 29). These ideas are not, however, new in the Chilean context; they appeared and were gradually developed in the *Estándares indicativos para la educación Parvularia* (2020), which pointed to the importance of communication and collaboration with families, and the *Marco para la buena enseñanza en educación parvularia* (2019), which recognises the synergies between families and communities as enriching learning opportunities and being a quality indicator in ECECs.

The *Constitution of Ghana* (Government of Ghana, 1992) states that parents have a right and obligation to act in the best interests of their children. The child's best interests may be interpreted in relation to other documents, like the *Children's Act* (Republic of South Africa, 2005) and the *Early Childhood Care and Development Policy* (Republic of Ghana, 2004), which acknowledge PI as providing general conditions for care and development, as well as more specific support to ECECs, either through volunteering, material contributions, or another form of help the ECEC setting may need. The *Ghana Inclusive Education Policy* (Ghanian Ministry of Education, 2015) clearly highlights the importance of parents' communication and cooperation with teachers as not only an obligation but also a quality characteristic of ECEC.

The *Scottish Early Years Framework* (Scottish Children and Families Directorate, 2009) highlights the parental commitment associated with a child's upbringing and emphasises the provision of a nurturing, stimulating, and conflict-free home environment as a form of PI in children's learning. This framework also underlines the necessity of parental access to integrated support in cases of weak relationships with their children or vulnerable life situations. Moreover, parental access to ECEC is also presented as the government's active help in preventing child poverty by enabling parents to access training or employment.

The *National Programme of Action for Children in South Africa* (1996) also highlights the crucial role of parental support in early childhood education. However, as families with children may be in vulnerable life situations, *Children's Act No. 38* (2005) promotes ECEC as an early intervention programme that can support families in need. As an outcome, ECECs should develop support programmes for families. The *National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy* (Republic of South Africa, 2015) expands on the rhetoric of families being the first and most important caregivers and underlines the necessity of a variety of forms for governmental (i.e., financial, educational, and advisory) support for families. It is significant that these policies highlight the need for increased and multifaceted support for families and recognise ECEC as a service capable of reaching out to families who need it the most.

Uganda's Education Act (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008) also promotes PI through its indication that parents are the ones responsible for pre-primary education, children's support, and their relationships with the community. The *Uganda National Parenting Guidelines* (2018) provide a more precise account of these parental responsibilities as ensuring children's social-emotional development, learning, and play, which we interpret as identifying parents as a crucial resource in children's holistic development. Accordingly, they should be acknowledged as such in their contact with the (educational) institutions of the state.

Regardless of the very general rhetoric of these policies, it is still possible to discern the acknowledgement of parents' crucial role in their children's lives (Australia, Brazil Canada, Chile, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa), the child's inseparability from the family and community (Brazil and Scotland), the necessity of involving parents' cultural heritages as resources in early education (Australia), and the importance of providing all the necessary support to the families so that they could succeed in their parental role (Brazil, Chile, and Scotland). Seeing the global political will to enable/enhance partnerships between ECEC and families and communities convinces us that good practices can be achieved. The general language of these policy documents also allows for many autonomous practices to be developed at the levels of particular ECEC settings, which are to operate closely with children and their families. The examples of PI presented below show the concrete possibility of overcoming the democratic deficit (Van Laere et al., 2018) while encouraging culturally sensitive practices of collaboration between families and ECEC institutions or schools.

Parental Involvement – Some Practices of Hope

The review of the literature on the factors affecting the development of school and Indigenous community engagement conducted by Lowe et al. (2019) presents a ray of studies reporting on practices underpinned by the mutual respect and openness needed to co-create spaces for collaboration between families and (pre)schools. The studies of Chenhall et al. (2011), Chodkiewicz et al. (2008), Lowe (2017), and Lowe et al. (2019) acknowledge how certain relationships constitute Indigenous communities and allow them to exercise their social capital in alliance with schools, thus enriching the cultural and social capital of the teachers. Lowe (2017), Lea et al. (2011), Lovett et al. (2014), and Bond (2010) connect such partnerships with the further development of cultural and language programmes run by/with the local communities, which also bolsters the "educative role of the Elders" (Lowe et al., 2019).

These intergenerational aspects also appear in Nagel and Wells's (2009) powerful description of how family and culture are honoured in ECEC settings in New Zealand. In this case, the intention of *honouring* was operationalised in the form of cultural resources/artefacts reflecting the children's ethnicities being available in the room for the children's play. Such availability demonstrated how the contributions of entire families (not only parents) in the children's home languages were valued, thus enabling a sense of place (which runs more smoothly in a space filled with artefacts and languages mirroring the children's ethnicities) and goal setting for each child with the input of both parents and teachers.

The realistic possibility of creating "culturally safe, meaningful, and responsive early childhood education spaces, programmes, and practices" (Gapany et al., 2022, p. 21) is also shown in literature reviews synthetising existing experiences, like those of Krakouer (2015) and Perso (2012). Of equal importance are the most recent studies initiating and following up on efforts to acknowledge and empower families as the children's first teachers, as in the study of Gapany et al. (2022) on Aboriginal families in Australia (Gapany et al., 2022). On the basis of such studies, it is possible to claim that recognising, connecting to, and embedding cultural knowledge, languages, and worldviews is possible and indeed "encourages equal partnerships between families, educators, and local community and strengthens continuity of practices across communities and education services" (Gapany et al., 2022, p. 21; see also Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Martin, 2017).

The diversity and complexity of family relationships can also be acknowledged through the recognition of intergenerationality and involving more-than-parents in ECEC's collaboration with families. Acknowledging more-than-parents as the relational home context of the child, as well as involving the older adults from the local community, could be a game changer for ECEC settings' collaborations with children's homes. Intergenerational programmes in ECEC have the potential to transform the institutional practices of ECEC settings and challenge the Western socio-political demands of separating generations from each other (Oropilla et al., 2022). Breaking through these segregations and creating spaces for

intergenerational interactions has not only benefits for children and older adults, but is also valuable from the point of view of social sustainability (Oropilla & Ødegaard, 2021).

The acknowledgement of more-than-parents and their cultures, as well as overcoming the "democratic deficit" in ECEC's collaboration with them, can also arise through the practice of research and ECEC's collaboration with academia (Urban et al., 2012). In this vein, Moss et al.'s (2012) literature review points out the potential of ethnographic and participatory studies (Tobin et al., 2010) to introduce new, more responsive modes of communication between ECEC settings and families. Such practices are in line with the postulate for creating more "communicative spaces" (Van Laere et al., 2018) through research (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016; Sadownik, 2022) or through staff training that encourages more inclusive and culturally responsive work with more-than-parents. The growing field of methodologies for research *with* ECEC professionals (Wallerstedt et al., 2022) implies that there is great potential for co-creating collaboration spaces intertwining families, ECEC professionals, and researchers.

The great political will and the existing documentation and reports on culturally responsive practices of PI, both of which acknowledge the importance of more-than-parental agency, have steered us away from giving up on PI. However, the concept still needs rethinking and redefinition.

More-than-Parental Involvement in a Redefined Education

Our redefinition of PI builds on the acknowledgement of more-than-parents and efforts to overcome the "democratic deficit" (Van Laere et al., 2018). To legitimise both of these aspects, it is necessary to reflect on the purpose of (more-than) PI, as anchored in the understanding of the broader purpose of education in general. Following the discussions of Biesta (2014), we suggest a value-based formulation of educational goals, as we see such goals as opening up communicative spaces (Lastikka & Lipponen, 2016; Van Laere et al., 2018) and allowing for the co-creation of various modalities of PI.

The studies referred to above, which report on the culturally sensitive, mutual, and meaningful practices for the actors involved, seem to assume and serve goals other than academic achievement. In our view, they (pre)assume values, such as mutual respect and recognition, togetherness, and superdiversity, which together create a positive climate for children's holistic development, well-being, and well-becoming.

According to Biesta (2014), global educational policies that have developed comparative measurements of children's school performance have reduced the value of good education to high educational achievement, as measured by standardised tests, which once again silenced important normative questions on what good education is. Analogically, the focus on academic attainment left PI with only a technical value (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2014), instructing parents on what to do to

strengthen their children's language and mathematical literacies and thus rolling them into a set of activities and routines that are not meaningful to them (Benson, 1999). Following Biesta (2014), we argue for normative, value-based articulations of the purpose of education, and for the values of PI to be clearly outlined.

Building further on the work of Biesta (2014), we claim that it is easier to recognise one's own standpoint when being exposed to value-based goals. Value-defined goals, by being so transparent, invite discussion and disagreement, which itself implies the possibility and legitimacy of other values. It is much harder to articulate disagreements about learning goals, as the great majority of parents want their children to learn and develop. In fact, presenting learning goals as neutral hides the (neo-liberal) value positions underpinning these goals, and thus makes it difficult for parents to depict what it is they do not agree/identify with and why. In other words, making these values behind the learning goals transparent makes it possible to identify what/why one disagrees with, and thus opens pathways for the articulation of alternative value positions. The value-based formulation of educational purpose values alternative meanings, recognises the potential of conflicts and disagreements, and invites the possibility of "common symbolic spaces" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 25), where the goals of education can be constructively negotiated.

The usage of value-based language in defining ECEC purposes is then in line with the postulate of Vandenbroeck (2009), "let us disagree" (p. 165), which he concludes with when discussing ECE and PI in an increasingly diverse and complex world. Valuing disagreement implies PI, not as a mere invitation or meaningless enrolment, but as participation. The word participation, as explained by Benson (1999), "implies that parents actually 'have a part in'" (p. 207) and genuinely/organically belong to the space of defining the purpose of (good) education (Biesta, 2014) and establishing the premises of their own involvement.

Our Understanding of Parental Involvement

In our trial redefinition of PI, we include and build on its aspects discussed above, which consist of the following:

1. The intergenerational, more-than-parental approach to the children's home- and community-based relationships.
2. The recognition of parental *part*icipation as the families' genuine belonging and influence over their children's lives, well-being, and well-becoming.
3. The value of antagonism, conflict, and disagreements as necessary for the co-creation of meaningful collaboration between ECEC and children's homes.

When defining more-than-parental involvement in a way that would embrace and allow us to discern/discuss the three aspects outlined above, we decided to anchor our understanding of PI in interaction(s) enabled or enhanced by the fact that a particular child attends a particular ECEC setting. These groups of enabled/enhanced interactions include the following:

– *Interactions between the ECEC staff and the parents/caregivers,* which can take the individual form of a conference or talk, or the collective form of a parental meeting, parental evening, or another form of event in which both the parents and ECEC staff participate;
– *Interactions among the more-than-parents* whose children attend the same ECEC, which can be initiated by an ECEC trying to establish a community of families and bonds between the caregivers, while also taking the form of the families themselves reaching out to each other because of friendships between their children, or other issues that bond them;
– *Interactions between the parents and the children* – and not only their own children, but also other children attending ECEC. Such interactions can relate to events organised by one or more families for all or some of the children, like birthday parties, trips, or events to which all the parents and children are invited;
– *Interactions among the children, more-than-parents, and ECEC staff,* which can take place at events for all (e.g., a celebration of the end of the school year) or just one of the parents, an ECEC staff member, and a child (e.g., during the adaptation period when the parent is in the ECEC together with the child, or on a daily basis during arrival and departure situations).

We are also aware that all these interactions always take place in the context of particular cultures, values, and beliefs (that may be different for each of the interacting individuals), as well as different localities with their own policies and potentially divergent goals (Patrikakou et al., 2005). In this book, we will present theoretisations that acknowledge and offer different (however always limited) perspectives and ways of conceptualising the diverse combinations of interactions among ECEC and families; we will also acknowledge that these interactions occur within/across individual and/or institutional cultures and values.

Tracing Theorisations of Hope – Overview of the Book Chapters

When discussing the different theories used to conceptualise PI, we searched for *theories of hope*, by which we mean theories that create and embrace a reflective space for the following aspects that we highlighted in our redefinition of PI:

1. The intergenerational, more-than-parental approach to the children's home- and community-based relationships.
2. The recognition of parental *part*icipation as the families' genuine belonging and influence over their children's lives, well-being, and well-becoming.
3. The value of antagonism, conflict, and disagreements as necessary for the co-creation of meaningful collaboration between ECEC and children's homes.

Our theoretical search starts in Chap. 2 with a literature review of conceptualisations used in ECEC between the years 2000–2010 and 2021–2022. Based on the

overview of the applied toolkits and the regions of the world in which they are used, we choose theories that in our eyes carry the potential to capture good practices and enable critical views of the practices of more-than-parental involvement.

The third chapter takes a closer look at the cultural-historical wholeness approach, a Vygotsky-based theory developed by Hedegaard and Fleer. This theory, with its focus on societal, cultural, and institutional contexts, as well as the individuals operating within them, offers a holistic analytical perspective on children's development and more-than-parental involvement. The potential of this theory for enhancing critical reflection and culturally responsive practices lies in the concepts of (a) *activity settings*, in which ECEC staff and more-than-parents interact, and where cultural and institutional demands intersect with diverse individual motives, and (b) *crises* that inspire re-negotiation and re-thinking of institutional practices and individual motives.

The fourth chapter discusses Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. It presents its origins – as a theory of involvement—as well as the ways in which it is applied when theorising the involvement of families in education. Based on articles analysed using this theory, it is shown how this theoretical model allows for the child (the centre of this model) to be acknowledged as a subject and actor of collaboration between ECEC and the family.

The fifth chapter focuses in more detail on social capital and its possible forms that occur (or do not) in the interaction between ECEC and the more-than-parents, as well as among families in/and/with communities. Building on Coleman and Putnam's theories, this chapter discusses the ways in which parental *bridging* into the parental community and *bonding* with other families could be supported.

In Chap. 6, Epstein's and Hornby's models of parental participation are examined. In discussing these models in light of the different traditions of PI, Epstein's model is shown to be one that is established on the assumption of compensation for the parents'/family's lacks, while Hornby's model seems to emphasise reciprocity and openings/closings to the various ways in which different parents participate.

The seventh chapter departs from the most desirable form of interaction between ECEC and the family, which is a partnership, and examines this relationship in light of collaboration theories. A joint understanding of the common goal and the significance of leadership in the collaboration between equal partners are highlighted and discussed in relation to an empirical example of an intercultural partnership between ECEC and im/migrant families in the United States.

Chapter 8 describes how Bordieuan "thinking tools" invite reflection on ECEC's collaboration with families and interactions among them as instances of *habituses* accumulating different levels of capital and (mis)recognising different *illusios* in their respective social *fields*. Using an example of private ECEC, this theory is shown to capture how more-than-parental forms of capital (or the lack thereof) shape their ways of becoming involved in ECEC.

The ninth chapter on the theory of practice architectures discusses more-than-parental involvement as a social practice constituted by cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements, respectively referred to as *sayings*, *doings,* and *relatings*. This theory allows us to understand the complexity of the

practice of more-than-parental involvement and the diverse arrangements that need to be addressed when intending to change it. This theoretical perspective also allows us to capture ECEC's collaboration with families in its ecology with other social practices.

Chapter 10 takes a look at discourse theory (of ECEC quality) and narrative inquiry as a theory and method and discusses the diverse discursive hegemonies shaping the practice of (more-than?) PI, as well as possibilities of challenging these hegemonies by enabling spaces where neglected narratives can be articulated. The theoretical reflection in this chapter is supported by publications addressing Indigenous families' experiences with ECEC.

The eleventh chapter troubles the assumed human–human character of collaboration between ECEC and more-than-parents and proposes a posthuman perspective on this interactive practice. After presenting posthumanism as an ethical project, as well as the conceptual toolkit of new materialism, the author shows how productive and change-inspiring this theory may be if working with ECEC staff on new forms for connectedness and intra-action with and among families. Extending the concept of more-than-parental involvement to a more-than-human entanglement empowers the staff to try out their ideas and institutions, which are impossible to justify with humanistic theoretical toolkits.

The last chapter summarises the theories described in the previous chapters and discusses them in light of the values presented in the preface of the book. The value of relational and contextual theoretical approaches is highlighted to provide conceptual toolkits for sustainable futures.

Research Ethics Connected to Empirical Examples Used in the Book

Many of the chapters use empirical examples to illustrate the theory described. Some of these examples comprise unpublished material gathered from the previous project in which we participated. These already anonymised empirical examples, stored on our computers, were gathered in line with research ethics guidelines in our respective countries (Croatia and Norway), and with the consent of the research participants. The other group of empirical examples has been generated for the purpose of this book, with the great help of our international network. Through our networks around the world, we reached out to both families and professionals with a request for anonymised stories from their experiences with ECEC–home collaborations. After receiving the stories, we ensured that all personal data were anonymised. After intertwining the stories in the text of the book, we reached out to the people who shared them with us to make sure that the context did not manipulate the content. We would like to very much thank all of our colleagues and friends who shared their stories on PI in different regions of the world.

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