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On the surface and below: a genealogical look at the waves of evaluation in early childhood education and care

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ABSTRACT

The rise of evaluation and data in education and education policy is a trend manifesting across a wide variety of policy contexts, holding in its grip national and global policies, with impacts that reach the level of individual children, teachers, and their subjectivities. Earlier research has mainly focused on the phenomenon in neoliberal contexts. This article presents a case study of Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy discourse built on a tradition of social democratic political rationality and egalitarian values. By utilizing Evert Vedung's metaphor of evaluation waves, we examine how the evaluation trend has influenced the Finnish ECEC policy, which has traditionally been skeptical toward the assessment of individual children's learning and skills and the production and use of data for accountability purposes. In the genealogical reading of ECEC curricula and policy documents from 2002–2021 as data, we identify three discursive practices – *partnership, pedagogization, and evidence wave* – that have socio-historically contributed to the formation of the present conception of evaluation in the Finnish ECEC policy discourse. Our genealogical reading also reveals a movement toward international trends – evaluating the individual child's skills – especially through the evidence wave.

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Introduction

In the sphere of prevailing advanced liberal political rationality and related educational policy practices, evaluation, assessment, and data in their diverse forms have gained a self-evident and almost unquestioned role in governing education, education policy-making, and societies at large (Dahler-Larsen, 2011; Grimaldi, 2019; Rose, 1999; Smith, 2016). This trend, closely rooted in neoliberal education policy reforms combining policy technologies of market, managerialism, and performativity (Ball 2003), was first adopted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia in the 1980s and since then

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increasingly by education systems across the globe (Verger et al., 2019). It has been widely discussed under 'governing by numbers' (e.g. Ball, 2018), governing 'at distance' through data and evaluations (e.g. Ozga et al., 2011), the culture of performativity (e.g. Ball, 2003; Gore et al., 2023; Holloway and Brass, 2018) and testing (Smith, 2016), datafication of education and education governance (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Hardy, 2019, 2022; Jarke and Breiter, 2019), and more generally under the evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen, 2011; also Furubo and Stame, 2019; Vedung, 2010). Following these, Lingard and Sellar (2013, 652) suggested that (evaluation) data and numbers have become naturalized, even as 'a most sensible medium for thinking about teaching and learning'.

The evaluation and data trends seem to circulate and travel across education systems. It is strongly promoted by powerful transnational policy actors, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), using soft governance techniques, such as policy comparisons and recommendations on evaluation in their transnational policy formation (see, e.g. Ozga et al., 2011). However, this manifests differently depending on the national and local histories and social and political contexts of education systems (e.g. Kauko et al., 2018; Verger et al., 2019), and different levels of education from early childhood education (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017) to higher education (see e.g. Ball, 2003; Holloway and Brass, 2018; Piattoeva, 2015). This article is motivated by the scientific curiosity about how this trend, widely reported in contexts following neoliberal policy rationality (e.g. Bradbury, 2019a, b, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016), has come to be in the Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy discourse. Acknowledging the Finnish traditions of welfarist social democratic education and early education policies and child-centered ECEC pedagogy that emphasize play over children's educational performance and assessment (Karila, 2012), the question evidently resonates far beyond the Finnish context. Although the Finnish educational and social policy context differs from the neoliberal contexts discussed in earlier research, the analysis of the Finnish case provides additional nuances on the interplay between local histories and practices and global policy influences in the shaping of the raveling discourses.

Therefore, following genealogical methodology and by using Finnish ECEC curricula and policy documents since 2002 as data, we direct our scientific curiosity toward the aims of shedding light on the kinds of entities and issues that policy has contributed to the increased importance of data and evaluation[1] in the history of Finnish ECEC policy discourse. We consider divergence from the former situations in which (1) individual children or their skills are not evaluated (Act 540/2018), and in which (2) the education policy has been skeptical of evaluations and the production and use of data, especially for accountability purposes (Kauko et al., 2020; Sahlberg, 2011; Wallenius, 2020).

(Data) governance in early childhood education

At the core of the 'new mode of data driven rationality' (Sellar, 2015) – the current phenomenon around the evaluation and data – lies the basic assumption that significant improvement and betterment can be achieved through and by evaluation and data, especially when accompanied by the mechanisms of accountability. This rationality has penetrated into the discourses and practices of education and education governance from

transnational to national and local levels (Siippainen et al., 2023; Ozga et al., 2011; also Sahlberg, 2016; Verger et al., 2019). Accordingly, it is rooted in the discourses prevalent in transnational organizations such as the OECD (e.g. 2013) and is clearly manifested in the current European educational policy discourse, highlighting the importance of the continuous processes of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE), operated at each level of education systems, in improving the quality of education. This is expected to raise the global competitiveness of economies and, therefore, assure better future prospects for European societies (Kauko et al., 2020; also European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

Manifesting the same evaluation-driven political rationality, evaluation and data have entered the everyday lives of educational institutions and the work of the professionals and children attending these institutions worldwide. Numerous studies have reported on the steady growth of evaluations aimed at inspecting the performance of schools and teachers and the related increase in demands for schools and professionals to continuously evaluate themselves and their practices and collect data in the name of continuous improvement of quality (Ball, 2016; Garver, 2020; Holloway and Brass, 2018). This demand is not only directed toward professionals but also affects children who are subjected to continuous testing of their performance (Bradbury, 2012; 2019b). The results of these evaluations are not only used to track and evaluate children's individual learning outcomes or progress but are also reasoned as an indication of the effectiveness of the teaching and educational institution, and finally as a means of improving the standards and quality of education (Bradbury, 2012; Kauko and Salokangas, 2015; Oosterhoff et al., 2023; Sahlberg, 2016). Increasingly, children are expected to evaluate and monitor themselves and their own learning (Pitkänen, 2022a). Thus, they are expected to improve their learning results and performance (Andrade, 2019; Andrade and Valtcheva, 2009; Boud and Soler, 2016) to become better learners (Wyatt-Smith and Adie, 2021) and future citizens having ability to critical self-reflection and continuous self-improvement – required in the global knowledge economy (Pitkänen, 2022a).

The above instances on evaluation partly indicate the extent to which the evaluation and data-driven rationality currently operate in governing and shaping policymaking from local to transnational levels and in the everyday lives of individuals and groups in educational institutions and societies at large. Using Foucault's (1997) terms, the idea of governing and improving education, learning, and educated subjects through the diverse forms and techniques of evaluation and data has become a practice of truth and power of our present.

How evaluation and data govern the policies and everyday practices of education has become a major topic of research and has been extensively studied at different levels of education across education systems. The main message of these studies, following Ball's (2003, 2016) wording, is that these reforms 'does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars, and researchers do, it changes who they are.' For example, Holloway and Brass (2018) indicated how market-oriented and managerially based techniques and evaluation and accountability policies not only introduce new kinds of practices to education and teaching but indeed have an impact on 'teachers' subjective existence' and professional identity.

Although trends in evaluation and data governance have been widely acknowledged and studied from basic to higher education, they remain understudied and overlooked in

the field of ECEC (Jarke and Breiter, 2019). We argue that this applies especially in the case of countries and education systems that have been traditionally non-compliant to neoliberal political rationality: education systems swimming against the global tide (see Kauko et al., 2020; Pitkänen, 2023) – the global education reform movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2016). The GERM, albeit manifested in context-specific and history-related ways across countries and education systems (Verger et al., 2019), shares some fundamental underpinnings, such as the adoption of market-based and managerial solutions, and highlights evaluation and data in organizing and governing education. For example, policy technologies, such as school choice, school autonomy, competition, market-based accountability, and the related use of quality evaluation and standardized large-scale testing, are often found at the core of the GERM (Sahlberg, 2016; Verger et al., 2019).

Thus, existing research focusing on governing through evaluation and data in ECEC has often, albeit not exclusively (e.g. Paananen, 2017), found their research context in the countries following the GERM and 'neoliberal political rationality.' For example, there is an extensive and pioneering body of literature on datafication on ECEC in the context of England (Bradbury, 2019a; Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Pierlejewski, 2020; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016). In line with the research examining the phenomenon of the evaluation and data in the other levels of education – in primary and secondary education (Ball, 2003; Garver, 2020; Holloway 2019; Holloway and Brass, 2018; O'Neill, 2015) and higher education (Piattoeva, 2015; Su, 2022; Selwyn and Gašević, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020), these studies have indicated the fundamental impact of increased reliance on evaluation and data on the ECEC policy, educational practice, experience, and subjectivities of those involved. Further, Bradbury (2019a) reported on the ECEC-specific impacts of these policies, such as the increased formalization and related schoolification of ECEC and learning of young children. ECEC has become part of a chain of evaluations that evaluates children from ECEC until the end of school (Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016) and all the way into working life. These changes are not purely reforms that change educational practices and ways of doing things in educational institutions. Instead, they have fundamental impacts on both children and professionals, as they constitute and call for 'data-driven subjectivities for both teacher and child' (Bradbury, 2019a, 7). Therefore, the evaluations and data promoted by reforms not only describe children but also, describe, shape, and constitute children's identities, feelings, and experiences according to prevailing rationalities (Ball, 2003, 2016; Holloway, 2019; Holloway and Brass, 2018; O'Neill, 2015; Sellar, 2015).

In this article, we argue that the evaluation, data-and performance-driven policies, practices, and rationalities in ECEC are not limited to contexts following neoliberal political rationality but are increasingly experienced in those traditionally committed to social democratic political rationality and egalitarian values such as Nordic countries (e.g. Camphuijsen et al., 2021). Second, they not only exceed education that has selective function but also ECEC, which has traditionally emphasized play rather than educational results and performance. To pinpoint these, the article aims to provide a historically informed account of how this trend of evaluation and data has come to be in the case of Finnish ECEC, which has traditionally swum against global GERM and emphasized children's participation and play instead of learning results. Employing a poststructural genealogical methodology, this article analyzes the socio-historical constitution and mobilization of our current understanding, a current practice of truth, where evaluation

and data play a significant role in the governing education and subjectivities of those involved. We examine the descent and mobilization of the rationality and practices of governing by evaluation and data in Finnish ECEC policy discourse, which has its socio-historical roots deeply in the socio-democratic welfare tradition. Our research question is: *How has the present conception of evaluation been socio-historically shaped in the Finnish early childhood education policy discourse?*

Finnish ECEC policy and evaluation in the international framework

Following the traditional Nordic welfare policy model, Finland can be characterized as a social service state. This means that social services, including education and childcare services, are universally provided and available to all (Anttonen and Sipilä, 2000). In 1972, Finland implemented daycare as a public social service, providing childcare for working parents, especially mothers. In the mid-1990s, daycare was made an unconditional right for each child (Act 882/1995). Since 2015, daycare services have been called 'early childhood education and care' (Act 540/2018), reflecting the changing policy attention toward the child's right to attend quality ECEC[2] (see Siippainen et al., 2022). The change from daycare to ECEC also reflects the international trend, in which daycare and ECEC are increasingly considered an education and accordingly a part of the process of lifelong learning (Act 540/2018; FNAE, 2021; Karila 2012).

As with the education system in general, Finnish ECEC has recently faced increasing demands for evaluation. Currently, ECEC and other educational institutions and service providers – mostly municipalities but especially in the field of ECEC also private organizations – are required by law to conduct self-evaluations and participate in external evaluations. The requirements for self-evaluation and external evaluations were first introduced in basic education in the 1990s as part of New Public Management-oriented reforms, including the decentralization and deregulation of education governance. In the reform, the traditional school inspection system was abolished and replaced by demands for self-evaluations and national sample-based external evaluations. These evaluation requirements were adopted by the Basic Education Act (628/1998) and similarly, in ECEC in the mid-2010s, by the Early Education Act (540/2018), currently constituting the main core and elements of Finnish ECEC evaluation policy and practice.

The current self-evaluation requirement applies to education providers, schools, and ECEC institutions. However, there are no predetermined national models for self-evaluation. Instead, education providers, schools, and ECEC institutions have great autonomy in conducting the required self-evaluations. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) is responsible for the external evaluation of education, and educational providers are required to participate by law. FINEEC carries out evaluations at all educational levels, and with the Act on Early Childhood Education (540/2018), FINEEC has started evaluating ECEC. Evaluations carried out by FINEEC are based on the principle of enhancement-led evaluation (FINEEC, 2022) emphasizing the trust between the implementer and participant and the education provider's responsibility to enhance its activities. Therefore, instead of a culture of inspection resting on hierarchical monitoring, control, and disciplinary power, the enhancement-led evaluation culture manifests the operation of soft power relying on the self-governance of the governed (see Pitkänen, 2023). To build the capacities for the self-governance of local

ECEC providers and actors, FINEEC, also responsible for supporting the development of the local quality evaluation culture (Act 580/2015), has published guidelines and recommendations for local self-evaluation and quality management (Vlasov et al., 2019). Recently, FINEEC, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOE), has implemented a digital quality evaluation system that can be used to collect information and produce analyses that support the development of ECEC at both the local and national levels.

As indicated above, today, the evaluation system and practices in ECEC and other levels of education share many common principles and policy grounds. Despite this and the current emphasis on ECEC as one phase in formal education, there is a major difference in the evaluation culture between ECEC and school institutions. Whereas one of the main foci of evaluation in education in general is on pupils' performance and skills (FNAE, 2021), the evaluation in ECEC, in its short institutional history in Finland, has focused on pedagogical activities and learning environments instead of the individual child's skills and learning. It remains to be seen whether this Finnish policy principle remains intact, as the trend in some countries heads toward the early assessment of child skills and competences (Bradbury, 2019a, b; Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Gitz-Johansen, 2011). The same question concerns the principle of local autonomy in self-evaluation and quality management. The principle is increasingly being questioned and faced by the rising policy pressures toward more standardized local evaluation and quality management practices, therefore resembling international policy trends (Finnish Government, 2021). In these two senses, the Finnish evaluation policy in ECEC has run counter to the global GERM and its standardized, data-driven, performance-focused rationalities and related practices (Bradbury, 2019a; Roberts-Holmes, 2015; Selwyn, 2015). Thus, the potential for policy transformation makes the Finnish ECEC policy discourse an interesting case for analysis.

Research material

The study used Finnish ECEC curricula and policy documents from 2002–2021. This was the period when the idea of evaluation entered and became consolidated into the studied national-level ECEC policy discourse. At the national level, evaluation was strongly introduced in the policy process (MOS 2002), leading to the preparation of the first National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education in 2003 (Stakes, 2003/2005). The selection of the research material was inclusive of all key legislation and its preparatory governmental documents, as well as curricula documents, during the research period, representing the very core of the studied Finnish ECEC evaluation policy discourse.

The research documents ($n = 13$), which are described in Figure 1 above as a timeline, included Green Papers (Education and Culture Committee reports ECCR), preparatory curriculum documents (MOS 2002), White Papers (Government's proposals GP), Acts, and National Core Curricula for ECEC and two-year pre-primary trials.

Genealogical reading of Finnish ECEC evaluation policy discourse waves

The methodological standpoint of this research is inspired by Foucauldian genealogy, also known as the history of the present. Genealogical research takes as its research object

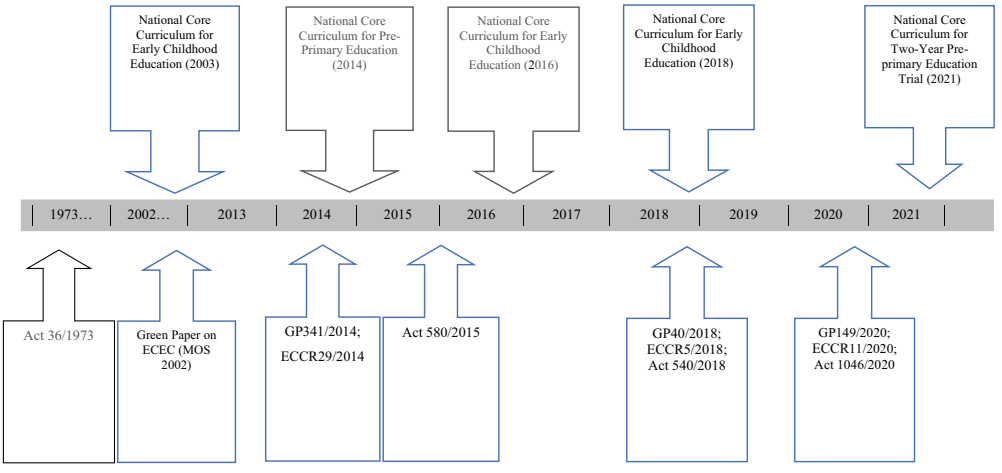


Figure 1. Research material.

an issue, idea, or practice that we currently consider normal and self-evident and, therefore, unquestioned and natural. The genealogy unravels and problematizes this self-evidence by studying the descent and socio-historical constitution of these ideas and practices by focusing on their emergence, mobilization, transformation, and disappearance (Anderson, 2015; Christensen, 2016; Foucault, 1977; Tamboukou, 1999). This means that genealogy notices the historicity of our current notions and captures the current self-evidence as contingent and sociohistorically constructed events of history rather than natural elements of our social and political world.

Genealogy often operates in three analytical dimensions: knowledge, power, and subject (e.g. Heikkinen et al., 1999; Mahon 1992). In the dimension of knowledge, our focus is on socio-historically changing discursive practices. We refer to Foucault's, (2013/1969 notion of discursive practices as socio-historically constituted practices of discourse and knowledge, which organize and shape the thinking and conduct of people and society (also Bacchi and Bonham, 2014). Therefore, ideas, concepts, and practices focused on analysis are not considered separate from each other but rather related and part of some wider system of reasoning and practicing in the social and political world (Foucault, 2013/1969/1969). In other words, each analyzed discursive practice has its own specific but coherent system of reasoning, conceptualizing, and organizing education and its governance and related practices.

Inspired by Evert Vedung's (2010) metaphor of evaluation waves, describing the historically changing idea and roles of evaluation in society from the 1960s onward, we illustrate the analyzed discursive practices as socio-historically changing evaluation waves. During the research period, new waves (discursive practices) emerged and developed, whereas others diminished their role in the studied ECEC policy discourse. Although Vedung's own approach was not genealogical, the idea of the wave is illustrative of how changing discursive practices transform through time. As a new wave emerges, it brings new water from the sea, containing new ideas, concepts, and practices, but it is mixed with the water that has landed earlier. The water also includes undercurrents that flow and penetrate the waves. Thus, in the swirls of

Table 1. Analytical frame.

Genealogical axes	Knowledge		Power	Subject
Discursive practices/evaluation waves	*Object*	*Concepts*	*Technologies*	*Ethos*

each new wave, something drifts ashore that is sedimented, and something is washed away. The metaphor of the wave also leads us to consider whether we have been around the same sea and the evaluation waves that Vedung (2010) described, especially in the context of Sweden but also more broadly in the context of North American and Western Europe, as scientific, dialogue-oriented, neoliberal, and evidence-based waves.

Our genealogical analysis mainly focuses on changing discursive practices – the changing evaluation waves. We analyzed these by identifying (1) the specific object of focus or problem that is constituted by and discussed in the discursive practices, (2) the use of a specific set of concepts and related knowledge, and (3) the strategies and techniques for governing the problems in the discourse. Lastly, we considered (4) the constitution of the specific positions for the subjects of and in each specific discursive practice Foucault, (2013/1969/1969; also Bacchi and Bonham, 2014; Pitkänen, 2022b).

Discursive practices do not operate in the vacuum and independently but in relation to the structures and operations of power in society, as the wave is not independent of the rest of the sea or the ground; it crashes or collides. Therefore, each discursive practice is briefly discussed in relation to power and subject, the other two main analytical dimensions often applied in genealogical analyses. Power is understood here as productive instead of repressive or something to be possessed (Foucault, 2002/1982, 2007). We focus on the changing techniques and strategies of power related to evaluation and data in ECEC. In the axis of subject (ethos), the analysis also focuses on the types of subjectivities mobilized and invoked in changing discourse (knowledge) and practices (power) of evaluation and data in ECEC. We summarize our analytical frame by employing the genealogical approach, with an overlapping focus on the analysis of discursive practices metaphorically illustrated as evaluation waves (Table 1) (also Pitkänen, 2022b).

The analysis started by reading and skimming the research material documents. All text passages discussing evaluation or related issues were extracted and tabulated into Excel, where we organized all the extracted data (1) in temporal order and (2) thematically categorized. These angles allowed us to systematically analyze the historical descent of evaluation. By using temporal tabulation, we identified emergences and developments, as well as the disappearance of ideas and reasoning related to evaluation, concepts used, technologies employed, and positions given to the subjects discussed in the data. Thus, we followed the political struggle around the evaluation policy over time, paying attention to what we call discursive undercurrents – widely shared and historically formed, grounding socio-political understandings and principles shaping the constitution of the studied discourse. We also ordered the data thematically by inspecting the objects specified for evaluation, the function given to evaluation, the techniques of evaluation, and the stakeholders involved. Combining the temporal and thematic readings of the data allowed us to identify the changing discursive practices in the researched period, which we call here evaluation waves, inspired by Vedung's (2010) metaphor in his historical study on evaluation.

Three waves in the ECEC evaluation policy discourse

In our reading of the research data, we identified three socio-historically changing discursive practices – evaluation waves – that have contributed to the shaping of the prevailing conception of evaluation in the field of Finnish ECEC policy discourse and practice. Each of these waves has brought new kinds of reasoning on evaluation, employing diverse concepts and techniques of assessment and evaluation in governing ECEC through evaluations. Under the influence of each evaluation wave, specific positions for subjects central to the discourse were offered.

Although the idea of quality evaluation intensively entered the studied ECEC policy discourse recently in the 2000s, raising the first wave of evaluation we call the partnership wave, multiple and decades-long historical roots can be traced underlying the emergence of the constitution of discourses and practices of quality evaluation in ECEC. For example, as early as the 1920s, Elsa Borenius, a Finnish ECEC official appointed by the Finnish National Board of General Education, inspected all kindergartens in Finland and provided a report that proposed organizing afternoon care for school-aged children (Meretniemi, 2015). Further, the issue of 'quality' ECEC has been a relevant policy concern since the introduction of ECEC as a public service in the early 1970s (see Alila, 2013). However, quality was governed through top-down bureaucratic regulations and rules. In the 1990s, a practice called 'quality evaluation' entered the ECEC field. It first landed the local level ECEC administration, and in particular, the customer satisfaction surveys gained popularity among them to respond to the rising policy concern of ECEC quality and related media debate about the increasing dissatisfaction by parents toward ECEC services (e.g. Hujala and Nivala, 2022). Although these early developments in quality evaluation remained local and sporadic, they significantly prepared to consolidate the ground for the intensive landing of the very first evaluation wave – a partnership wave – into the studied Finnish national ECEC policy discourse at the turn of the next millennium.

Partnership wave

Manifesting (1) the principle of educational collaboration between parents and ECEC personnel – that is, a principle with deep roots and undercurrents in the social democratic tradition of Finnish education and society – entangled with (2) the emerging customer orientation of ECEC services in the mid-1990s, we call this first wave the *partnership wave*. During the wave, the idea of evaluation as elementary to quality management and improvement in ECEC, as well as to the professional development of ECEC personnel, emerged in the studied discourse. In the discourse, parents' 'primary responsibility for the upbringing and wellbeing of the children' with the support of ECEC was strongly highlighted (MOS 2002, p. 5), followed by their participatory role in quality evaluation and thus the partnership wave. This conceptualization of the wave also draws from a double connotation embedded in the concept of partnership in the Finnish language. Partners contains both ideas: 'equals in the companionship' and 'sharing the business.' In the first sense of these, the idea of educational partnership closely relates to the Finnish social democratic tradition highlighting equality and collective shared responsibility for the wellbeing of all

citizens, the political rationality we consider as constituting the deep undercurrent in the studied ECEC policy discourse and practice. Partnership as framed through market language brings new nuances into the discourse in its orientation to parents and children as customers of ECEC services.

The landing of the first evaluation wave in ECEC policy discourse preceded extensive reforms in Finnish public sector governance, including social and health services (Outinen and Lindqvist, 1999) and education (Bardy, Salmi and Heino, 2002). Along with these reforms following the New Public Management doctrine spreading across many countries and education systems (e.g. Kauko et al., 2018; also Bradbury, 2019a,b), implemented during the 1990s in a period of deep economic depression, the centralized and bureaucratically governed public sector administration was radically decentralized and deregulated, and result-based management and funding, together with the practices of quality evaluation, were introduced. The related political rationality also changed from bureaucratic rule and regulation to new managerialism. At the core of the emerging political rationality was the introduction of market and private sector types of reasoning and related techniques of governance into the governing of public sector organizations (e.g. Kauko et al., 2020; Simola et al., 2011). In line with these, the established understanding of quality as conformity to bureaucratic regulation and rule was transformed toward the idea of quality as a service responding to the needs of citizens considered customers, therefore also installing the position for the customer-citizen subject (Pitkänen, 2023).

The above changes were also reflected in the ECEC sector. As an indication, customer satisfaction surveys received increasing popularity across ECEC providers (e.g. Hujala and Nivala, 2022), and several separate research projects on quality evaluation were launched in the 1990s. The first non-binding quality criteria for daycare and ECEC providers were published in 1995 (see Alila, 2013; Hujala-Huttunen, 1995; Hujala-Huttunen and Tauriainen, 1995). Although these developments remained local and sporadic in the 1990s, the idea of the continuous evaluation of ECEC activities drifted ashore the studied national ECEC policy discourse in the beginning of the 2000s.

A significant shoreline for the landing of the first evaluation wave was the Green Paper by the working group set by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2002). The national curriculum for ECEC was still non-existent when the Green Paper (MOS 2002) proposed the implementation of the first national core curriculum for ECEC, as recommended by the OECD (2001), as a policy solution to the policy concern of the equal quality and content of ECEC across the country. To respond to the policy concern of 'quality,' it also raised the requirement for continuous evaluation of ECEC activities on the national political agenda by proposing the incorporation of the evaluation into the ECEC legislation – for the first time in the history of ECEC legislation:

> To promote quality management in early childhood education, the Act must contain the provision of a nationwide ECEC curriculum on which local municipality-developed curricula are based. The Act must also contain a mention of the continuous evaluation of activities. (MOS 2002, p. 19)

However, contrary to the proposal set by the MOS (2002), the ECEC legislation in effect since the early 1970s (Act 36/1973) remained intact and silent on evaluation until ECEC reform was implemented later in the mid-2010s (Act 580/2015; Act 540/2018). Instead,

the first National Core Curriculum for ECEC (Stakes, 2005), which, in turn, would guide the implementation of local and institution-specific ECEC curricula, was enacted in 2003.

Although the curriculum was not yet mandatory, it adopted the goal of promoting the equal provision of high-quality ECEC across the country, as set in the Green Paper (MOS 2002). It aimed toward this goal by 'standardizing' the practices of ECEC (Stakes, 2003) and adopting the idea of continuous evaluation and quality management with regards to goals specified for ECEC in the local and national ECEC plans. The evaluation, which was reasoned as necessary for the management and improvement of the quality and the standard of ECEC, was directed toward a multiplicity of objects and a variety of purposes, such as improving curriculum, pedagogical planning and processes and educational environments, and the quality management and evaluation processes itself. The evaluation aimed to involve a wide range of actors, such as parents, children, ECEC workers, administrative staff, and other stakeholders. Parents were even given the role of monitoring and evaluating '*the implementation of the objectives of the curriculum*' (Stakes, 2003, 32), somewhat assuming that they were extensively familiar with the curriculum and its objectives.

This emphasis on parents gained strength from the rationality of customer orientation widely adopted in Finnish public sector reforms (e.g. Pitkänen, 2023) and promoted in the Green Paper (MOS 2002). However, whereas the Green Paper on ECEC explicitly positioned the parents and children as customers of ECEC services with a right to good-quality ECEC while responding to the individual needs of families and children (MOS 2002), the curriculum omitted the concept of the customer and instead engaged with the notion of educational partnership in describing the role of parents in ECEC:

> A prerequisite for success in early childhood education is a partnership between parents and early childhood education staff, which is based on the needs of the child. (MOS 2002, p. 5)

By employing the concept of educational partnership, which had been earlier used by UNESCO (1986), for example, in its report 'Working Together' in the context of family-oriented work on education (Alila, 2013), the curriculum (Stakes, 2003; also MOS 2002) highlighted the equal and collaborative role between parents and professionals in educating and caring for the child and fulfilling the needs of each individual child. As with the concept of the customer, it also shared its background in business language. In this sense, the partnership connoted sharing the educational 'business' – that is, educating the child in ECEC. Thus, the partnership wave we discuss here wrapped together the idea of equal collaboration and customership between families and ECEC.

The core of the first evaluation wave harbored continuous and multilevel quality evaluation and partnership orientation while highlighting the central role of ECEC professionals in ensuring the quality of ECEC. Introducing the practice of self-evaluation by professionals and educational teams, the curriculum expected that '*the educator community continuously documents, evaluates, and strives to develop their activities*' (Stakes, 2003, 17). Further, it was reasoned that the reflection and evaluation of one's own work would help professionals act consciously, ethically, and professionally in accordance with sustainable operating principles. Thus, in the participation wave, evaluation played a key role in developing and maintaining personnel's professional competence.

Pedagogization wave

The second wave of evaluation entered the studied discourse in the mid-2010s. Reflecting the emerging reasoning of ECEC as a first step in a child's lifelong learning process, we call the second wave the pedagogization wave. The wave also raised the issue of children's enrollment in ECEC, including participation in the evaluation, to the surface of the ECEC policy discourse. These rationalities occurred in the context of major administrative and legislative ECEC reforms, along which the administrative responsibility for ECEC was transformed from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013. Further, the Act on Children's Day Care (36/1973) was revised in 2015 (580/2015) and eventually replaced by the Act on Early Education in 2018 (540/2018). At that point, the evaluation finally entered ECEC legislation, and self-evaluation by ECEC providers became mandated by law (Act 580/2015; Act 540/2018). This was followed by the institutionalization of external evaluation, as FINEEC was given the task of conducting national external evaluations of ECEC and providing support for ECEC organizers in their statutory task of self-evaluation and quality management (Act 582/2015). Along with these reforms, the administrative and steering systems of ECEC changed, similar to those adopted in school education since the late 1990s (Act, 628/1998). More profoundly, the underlying rationality of ECEC transformed from the idea of ECEC as daycare serving the needs of families to the idea of ECEC as learning and education. Following this, families' and children's right to daycare services transformed toward highlighting children's right to learn in ECEC.

Thus, along with the rise of the second wave, the idea of ECEC as a first step in a child's lifelong learning emerged. The sprout of the idea was already present in the Green Paper by MOS (2002), which stated that '*early childhood education is part of life-long learning*' (p. 7), but it now found its way into the core of the ECEC policy discourse. Thereafter, the focus on the care of the child turned to an increased emphasis on pedagogy in the discourse. Reflecting this rationality of ECEC as education and lifelong learning and the child as an educated albeit 'participating' object, the technique of the individual early education plan was introduced in the policy discourse and eventually in the ECEC legislation in 2015 (Act 582/2015). Since then, an individual education plan has been required for each child attending ECEC. However, during the policy process preceding the final legislation, the role of the plan was disputed between the White and Green Papers in the way it shaped the direction of Finnish ECEC policy discourse. The White Paper by the Government (GP341/2014) proposed that the plan should provide the objectives for the development and learning of each individual child and that these should be followed by the related measures for assessment. This idea was opposed by the Education and Culture Committee's Green Paper (ECCR29/2014), which claimed that such efforts would constitute the individual child's and child's differential learning and skills as the object of the assessment instead of the quality of ECEC and pedagogical surroundings, which had been the original concern:

> According to the government proposal, the risk of recording is that the differential learning and development of individual children will be subject to assessment rather than focusing on the high-quality implementation of ECEC activities. The committee proposes an amendment that emphasizes support for child development, learning and wellbeing. (ECCR29/2014, 7 a§)

Following the policy formulation of the Green Paper (ECCR29/2014), documenting the early education plan for each individual child attending ECEC was introduced as an obligatory yearly practice by the ECEC legislation in 2015 (Act 580/2015) and the 2016 curriculum (FNAE, 2016; FNAE, 2018). This technique encompassed planning and assessing *pedagogical* activities and the learning environments of ECEC institutions instead of assessing the learning and skills of the individual child. Thus, assessment in ECEC preserves a partly divergent role and function compared to other levels of the education system, in which student assessment has a history-long and self-evident role in education (e.g. Pitkänen, 2022a).

The pegagogization wave also engendered the transformation of the role of parents. Although the White Paper in 2014 (GP341/2014) still considered parents as educational partners '*with opportunities to express their views on their child's early education*,' manifesting the rationality and conceptualization central to the partnership wave, since the mid-2010s, the idea and concepts of educational partnership and customer disappeared from discourse (Act 580/2015; FNAE 2018; also Schmidt and Alasuutari, 2023). The role of parents as equal educational partners and customers of ECEC services was condensed into the position of informed guardians, with some opportunities to engage in ECEC planning and evaluation:

> The early childhood education organizer has an obligation to inform guardians about the objectives and activities of early childhood education in its various forms. [. . .] In addition, there is a regular opportunity for guardians to engage in planning and evaluating local and unit-specific early childhood education. (FNAE 2018, p. 16)

This is a major turn in the reasoning of the discourse, which also reflects the swirl of the growing professionalization tendency of ECEC. Earlier, parents, as educational partners, were also given the opportunity to contribute to the content of the local and institution-specific curriculum and to monitor and evaluate its implementation. Now, these tasks are primarily for ECEC professionals, who are considered experts who know what is good, right, and quality ECEC for each child.

Whereas the parents' positions transformed from educational partners to informants, the participatory role of children was promoted. Both the ECEC legislation (Act 580/2015) and the National Core Curriculum (FNAE 2018) emphasized the children's right to engage in, participate in, and influence matters that concerned them, including the planning, implementation, and evaluation of ECEC activities, as the guiding principle of ECEC. This tendency toward highlighting children's participation in ECEC activities follows the main principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989), obliging all activities concerning children to be examined as a standard under the Convention. Further, as suggested by Onnismaa and Paananen, (2019), the tendency also reflects the rise of liberal rhetoric and its emphasis on individualism in the core idea of the ECEC curriculum, starting from the beginning of the 21st century and manifesting in the recent curriculum (FNAE 2016).

Evidence wave

The third wave entered along with the policy process that introduced the two-year pre-primary trial, which was launched in Finland in August 2021. This wave brought to shore

two ideas in the Finnish ECEC policy discourse: one that emphasizes the evaluation as a tool for indicating the effectiveness of the policy trial, and the other that highlights the role of ECEC in developing children's self-assessment skills. As the call for evidence on ECEC through evaluation is found at the core of the wave, we call it an *evidence wave*.

In the trial, justified by the policy aim of making '*education more equitable by encouraging more children to participate in pre-primary education as part of ECEC*' (MOE 2023), approximately 15,000 five-year-olds were obliged by law (Act 1046/2020) to participate in two-year pre-primary education instead of one-year education. Thus, the trial can be interpreted as a policy response to a debate and related policy concern about the low enrollment of children in ECEC in Finland in comparison with other Nordic or OECD countries (OECD, 2018; 2019a; 2020), which in turn translated into a concern about educational equality. The trial was also aimed at developing the quality and effectiveness of pre-primary education from other angles. For example, the policy interest is directed toward the continuity and transitions between ECEC, pre-primary education, and initial teaching; choices guardians make regarding ECEC and childcare services; and the impact of two-year pre-primary education on children's learning and social skills and on the building of healthy self-esteem (GP149/2020; ECCR11/2020).

As the pre-primary education reform was introduced as a trial, it was accompanied by a related experimental setting aimed at demonstrating its impact and effectiveness. Whereas earlier Finnish discourse had been highly suspicious toward measuring individual children's skills and learning in ECEC (GP341/2014; ECCR29/2014), now, under the guise of trial and its policy intention of increasing educational equality, the measurement of developmental and learning conditions, social skills, and self-esteem of individual children's reached the ECEC legislation without dispute (Act 1046/2020; also ECCR11/2020; GP149/2020). Nevertheless, some contradictions seem to remain in ECEC policy discourse. Namely, continuing the rationality manifested in the earlier ECEC policy discourse, the curriculum set for the trial (FNAE, 2021, 38) continued to outline that '*the curriculum objectives are set for education, not for the learning of individual children*.' Following this reasoning, the evaluation was directed toward the educational environment and pedagogy rather than the results of the children's learning (FNAE, 2021). Contrary to this, the trial legislation inserted the idea of measuring children in the mood of enabling scientific examination and demonstrating the effectiveness of the trial:

> The body conducting the follow-up and evaluation of the trial can commission necessary evaluations for children in the target group to examine the realization of the purpose of the trial, to monitor the development of the child's developmental and learning conditions, social skills, and the child's healthy self-esteem. (Act 1046/2020)

Thus, the child, positioned as a participating learner by the pedagogization wave, is transformed toward an assessed and examined child along the evidence wave. The mixing of 'water' that landed earlier, constitutes a significant change in the history of ECEC policy discourse, manifesting a tendency toward the schoolification of assessment and evaluation in ECEC. This is also supported by the introduction of the related practice of children's self-evaluation in the trial curriculum:

> Pre-primary school education develops the prerequisites for self-assessment of children. Children are encouraged to describe what they like in pre-primary school, where they feel they have succeeded and what they would like to learn in the future. [–] During the learning

> path of children, the gradually evolving self-assessment skills are part of the learning skills. (FNAE, 2021, p. 39)

Therefore, in the evidence wave, an ECEC-aged child with certain skills and learning is not only constituted as an assessed object but also positioned as a self-evaluative subject. This transformation is following developments in the field of comprehensive education, where, in line with the constructive and self-regulated learning theories, and the swirl the of life-long learning, the pupil self-evaluation has found its way into the core of pupil assessment policy discourse and practice since the 1990s (Act, 628/1998; §22; FNAE, 1994; Pitkänen, 2022a), also in pre-primary education since 2014 (FNAE, 2014). Now, this practice of child self-evaluation and its related position for self-evaluative pupil subjects also enters ECEC policy discourse, as self-evaluation skills are considered an elementary part of the learning skills practiced in two-year pre-primary education.

Although the third wave raises the child as an evaluated object justified by the trials' aims, and also as a self-evaluative subject, the discourse remains almost totally silent on evaluating the impacts of trial on the child. This is only briefly addressed in the Education and Culture Committee's Green Paper in response to the government's White Paper, as stated:

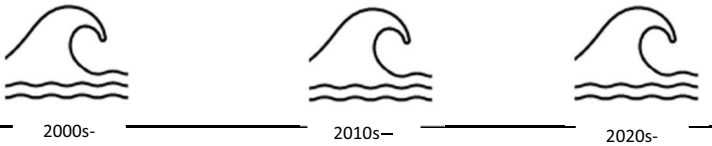
> The child impact assessment must, using a variety of methods, examine the opinions of all children involved in the experiment and take them into account in decision-making both during and after the experiment. Enabling the participation of children is a key part of ensuring the realization of the rights of the child and the best interests of the child. (ECCER11/2020)

However, this claim to the child impact assessment on trial is ignored in the final legislation (Act 1046/2020). This is noteworthy, as the policy discourse emphasizes that children must learn self-assessment skills, but the state does not have to demonstrate child impact assessment when it comes to the trial. Therefore, under the evidence wave, unlike Vedung's notion of it, not only is the importance of demonstrating effectiveness emphasized, but the wave also manifests the idea of self-evaluative children responsible for their own learning and future.

Marks on the shoreline? Concluding remarks

This article has been inspired by scientific curiosity about the entities and issues in the history of Finnish ECEC policy discourse that have contributed to the increased importance of data and evaluation in the Finnish ECEC field, traditionally emphasizing child-centered ECEC pedagogy and play over children's learning outcomes (Karila, 2012). In the genealogical reading of the research material, using a set of ECEC curricula and policy documents as data, we identified three socio-historically changing discursive practices – evaluation waves, following the metaphor by Evert Vedung (2010) – that have been contributing to the formation and rise of the present conception and related practices of evaluation in the Finnish early childhood education policy discourse. We called these evaluation waves partnership, *pedagogization*, and *evidence waves*. Our analyses show that these waves have been

formatted at the intersection of national and global policy flows, swirls, and undercurrents. To summarize the findings, we next reflect each of these waves through



Waves & Genealogical axes	WAVE1: Partnership	WAVE2: Pedagogization	WAVE3: Evidence
Knowledge/ rationality	ECEC as daycare service	ECEC as a chain in the lifelong learning	ECEC as schoolified education
Power/ techniques	Involving parents in evaluation; Evaluation as a tool in professional development and quality management	Evaluation as professionals' tool to develop pedagogy; Children's participation in evaluation process	Evaluation indicating the efficiency—assessment of children's skills; Developing children's self-evaluations skills
Subject/ subjectivities	Nursed child; family as educational partners; Self-evaluating professional	Child as participating lifelong learner; Informed parents; ECEC personnel as educational experts	Assessed and self-evaluating child

Figure 2. Evaluation waves and genealogical axes.

the genealogical axes of knowledge, power, and subject, as encapsulated in the following figure (Figure 2).

The first evaluation wave, *the partnership wave*, entered at the turn of the 21st century, mobilizing the idea of quality evaluation in the studied Finnish ECEC policy discourse and related practice. The rise of the wave was supported by the global swirl of managerial rationality and practices landing vastly the Finnish public sector, including ECEC, along with the introduction of New Public Management-oriented reforms in the mid-1990s (e.g. Bardy, Salmi and Heino, 2002; Kauko et al., 2018; Outinen and Lindqvist, 1999). The wave was also shaped by the traditional Finnish and Nordic social-democratic undercurrent emphasizing egalitarian values such as social equality and collective shared responsibility for the wellbeing of all citizens (e.g. Karila, 2012). Thus, it was at the intersection of these flows – the social democratic undercurrent and global managerialist swirl – under which the first wave emerged and started to shape.

Along the partnership wave, ECEC became reasoned as a daycare service that should respond to the needs and quality expectations of families, constituting the core rationality of the wave. Mixing the traditional social democratic and emerging managerial ideas and reasoning, the families' involvement, collaboration, and educational partnerships between parents and daycare personnel were highlighted. Parents were then positioned as educational partners in the double sense: as subjects educationally collaborating with

the personnel, the child being their shared interest and object of care, but also as subjects of being customers of ECEC services whose needs the services should respond to. Along the wave, the techniques and practices of quality evaluation, including customer surveys, quality criteria, and the practice of continuous self-evaluation, documentation, and improvement of activities by ECEC professionals and daycare centers, were introduced. Moreover, by inserting these techniques and related reasoning, the idea of self-governing ECEC centers was consolidated and the self-evaluative and self-governing ECEC professional subjectivity mobilized. In this way, the governing of ECEC was transformed from traditional bureaucratic regulation and rule toward governing at a distance increasingly relying on the self-governance of the governed (Pitkänen, 2023) – the idea of governing still prevailing.

During the second wave, *the pedagogization wave*, which landed in the 2010s, the role and extent of evaluation increased and conquered new arenas. As part of the major reforms in ECEC, evaluation became obligatory by law and curriculum. The evaluation became directed at a more diverse range of issues – including data generated by evaluations that can be linked with datafication development – following increasing amounts of evaluation and assessment in the field of ECEC (e.g. Paananen and Grieshaber, 2022). Most significantly, during the pedagogization wave, the rationality underlying ECEC became transformed. At that point, ECEC was primarily reasoned as a chain in the process of lifelong learning of the child rather than as a daycare service offered for families. Therefore, under the pedagogization wave, the emphasis on families' and children's right to daycare services transformed toward highlighting children's right to learn in ECEC but also engage and participate in matters concerning themselves. These emphases strongly reflect the idea of lifelong learning, which is widely spread in international educational policy discourses (e.g. OECD, 2019b), intersecting with the Children's right convention. Following the changing rationality, the evaluation was primarily considered a pedagogic technique for planning and assessing *pedagogical* activities and the learning environments of ECEC institutions instead of monitoring customer satisfaction. Under these rationalities, new kinds of subjectivities emerged. The role of parents transformed from being educational partners to being informed guardians of the child. Instead, the child became considered a lifelong learner with a participatory role in one's education and the evaluation of ECEC activities. The ECEC personnel, in turn, became positioned as educational experts who used evaluation and assessment as a pedagogical technique. Following this, the key role of ECEC professionals in evaluation was sedimented into the discourse.

The third wave, *the evidence wave*, was pushed forward by the amplifying undercurrent shaped by the neoliberal mainstream that landed the education systems across the globe. Along with this neoliberalism-inspired undercurrent landing in the Finnish ECEC field too, the idea of evaluation as a practice of assessing the performance and skills of individual children was introduced. While this practice had been resisted earlier by the Finnish ECEC policy discourse, under the pre-primary education trial accompanied by the need to demonstrate the effectiveness of two-year pre-primary education, the measurement of individual children's skills and self-esteem entered the policy discourse and legislation.

These transformations in policy and practice reflect a step toward a new kind of rationality and reasoning of ECEC, under which ECEC is increasingly considered a part of the formal education system providing educational capital for society in the context of the global economy. Given this reasoning, the evidence on the efficient functioning of the education

system, early education as part of, has received increasing attention in the discourse. In the earlier literature, the trend called the schoolification of ECEC has been widely reported in neoliberal educational contexts (e.g. Bradbury, 2019a).

Consequently, under the evidence wave, evaluation is no longer exclusively a pedagogical task of ECEC professionals. Rather, it is also carried out nationally, with a focus on individual children, to attain research-based evidence on the effectiveness of the ECEC policy trial in supporting educational political decision-making. While the discourse shapes the orientation toward evaluation toward an idea of evidence, the emphasis on lifelong learning raised by the second wave continues to be highlighted. Following this, the idea and practice of children's self-evaluation emerged in the discourse. The reasoning sedimented in the Finnish basic education assessment culture and curriculum since the late 1990s (Pitkänen, 2022a) now supports the claim that ECEC should also develop children's self-evaluation skills. This emphasis on children's self-evaluation is a trend visible across education systems (e.g. OECD, 2019b), where self-evaluation is considered a key competence for lifelong learners with the ability to adapt to the changing requirements in the economy and society. Thereafter, in the evidence wave, under school aged children, positioned as participating lifelong learners by the pedagogization wave, are now transformed as assessed subjects whose lifelong learning process is continuously examined, while the discussion on the role of parents is de-emphasized. Therefore, it seems that parents, as informed guardians raised by the pedagogization wave, have now become sedimented.

In conclusion, the Finnish ECEC policy discourse and practice on evaluation and data, albeit showing resistance toward neoliberal policy trends, has been taking shape at the intersection of national and international or global policy ideas and practices throughout the research period. However, the landing of the evidence wave prompts us to consider whether the traditional social democratic undercurrent that has been filtering the global flows and pushing the biggest waves backwards to the sea is now settling down, enabling global swirls and flows to reach the shoreline. Using Peter Dahler-Larsen's conceptualization, this might reinforce the trend of the audit society (2011), characterized by the continuous presence and trust in evaluation and data coupled with the evaluation machinery. Ultimately, we have yet to see which undercurrents will remain, which will disappear along the swirls of political discourses, and which will rise to the surface and potentially sediment on the shoreline.

Research material

Act (540/2018). Act on early childhood education (540/2018)
Act (1046/2020). Act on two-year pre-primary education trial (1046/2020)
Act (580/2015). An amendment to the Act on Day Care (580/2015)
CR29/2014. Committee Report CR29/2014
CR5/2018. Committee Report CR5/2018
CR11/2020. Committee Report CR11/2020
GP341/2014. Government Proposal GP341/2014
GP40/2018. Government Proposal GP40/2018
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Notes

1. As in Finnish, the word 'arviointi' refers to both evaluation and assessment, we use the definition by Gullo Dominic's (2005), who referred to assessment as practices in which professionals collect information on children in different ways. Evaluation refers to data collected using for example informal, formal and standardized information about knowledge.
2. Currently, all children have the unconditional right to ECEC. At the age of six, children move to pre-primary school, which is compulsory, free of charge, and follows its own curriculum until at the age of seven, at which point the children start the 9-year-long comprehensive schooling.

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