



Brief

Belonging where you live: on parents' experiences of belonging through ECEC

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This article sheds light on how minority parents can form a sense of belonging to the local community through ECEC-settings. Minority is used in this context for parents with a migrant background. Local community refers to formal and informal societies, institutions, and organizations in the vicinity of the ECEC-institution. The study is part of a larger research project called *Politics of belonging* supported by Nordforsk. The article has two sets of empirical data; interview with six parents and eight group interviews with 21 employees conducted at the beginning and end of the project. Through these interviews, the research question of how parents develop belonging to the local community through the ECEC is discussed. The article is based on social scientist Nira Yuval-Davis' understanding of belonging and Mark Granovetter's theory of the strength of weak ties. Research on parents and ECEC has often focused on parent collaboration about the child and about what characterizes meetings between parents and ECEC. Less attention has been paid to the ECEC's effects on parents' social belongings.

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows: ECEC-institutions' events for parents are significant, although they do not occur very often. The informants express that they become acquainted with other parents, which then makes it natural to have a chat when they meet in other arenas. Furthermore, the data material points to the importance of the children's circle of friends being largely connected to the ECEC. The children's belonging through the ECEC has an impact on their belonging in the private sphere. If children live near friends from the ECEC, the children are drawn to these friends also in their spare time. The chance of this happening is greater if the home is close to the ECEC. This in turn affects the parents' opportunities to develop acquaintances of other parents. The meetings

in the ECEC will be part of several meetings in various arenas such as shops, centers and the children's leisure activities. The ECEC has the opportunity to strengthen these ties by giving parents insight into the belonging processes among the children and how families' belonging to neighborhoods and local communities can be strengthened. The ECEC can be a place where transversal belonging is more than an ideal. The belonging through the ECEC is formed mainly via weak ties. However, such ties should not be underestimated as an integrating factor in the local community where the ECEC is located.

Keywords: *integration; parents; belonging; local community; weak ties*