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Family learning environments in Scandinavia: dimensions, types and socioeconomic profiles

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we use data from 44 Danish families to develop a new conceptual framework for analysing family learning environments and how they shape children's opportunities in the Scandinavian context. We use data from qualitative interviews and a new smartphone app to outline six key dimensions of family learning environments that intersect in four types, which we label Expansive curators, Recreational home dwellers, Casual pragmatists and Disempowered strugglers. The dimensions and types of family learning environments provide a conceptual framework for (1) identifying a set of mechanisms that might explain intergenerational associations in socioeconomic outcomes; (2) linking dimensions of family learning environments often studied in isolation (e.g. family activities and networks); (3) incorporating dimensions of learning environments rarely considered (e.g. day care and children's use of digital devices); and (4) distinguishing socioeconomic gradients in family learning environments.

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Children; family learning environments; conceptual model; social inequality; Scandinavia

Introduction

The family environment in which children grow up is a key determinant of their later economic and social position (Björklund and Salvanes 2010; Black and Devereux 2011; Breen and Jonsson 2005; DiPrete 2020). Families provide financial resources, social and emotional support, and structure children's everyday lives (Kleemans et al. 2012; Pinquart 2017). Unsurprisingly, adverse family environments during childhood, for example poverty, instability, and lack of social and emotional support, are associated with poorer economic and social positions in adulthood (Almond, Currie and Duque 2018; Morin, Glickman, and Brooks-Gunn 2015; Waldfogel 2006).

Although there is widespread agreement that family environments matter, most research on these environments addresses *individual* aspects of environments rather than the *overall* family learning environment. In this paper, we ask: *What constitutes a family learning environment (FLE) and can we identify different types of family learning environments?* We define FLEs broadly as configurations of behaviours (e.g. family activities), relations (e.g. social

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networks) and resources (e.g. socioeconomic) in the family that shape children's opportunities (e.g. cognitive and non-cognitive skills and educational choices). To flesh out dimensions and types of FLEs, we use rich qualitative data on 44 families from Denmark collected over a period of 12 wk, including data from semi-structured interviews and a smartphone app (text, photos, videos and audio clips). We sample families from on a long-running cohort study with Danish born (non-immigrant) families.

We motivate our research from three observations on existing research on family environments. The first observation is that existing research shows that the quality of activities inside the family home correlates positively with children's cognitive (e.g. academic performance) and non-cognitive (e.g. self-efficacy, perseverance, leadership) skills. The second observation is that existing research focuses mainly on single family activities (e.g. games or reading) in the home rather than on the ways in which different activities intersect in different types of FLEs. This limitation means that existing research only captures parts of the FLE (which we define as including all everyday activities inside, as well as outside, the family home). The third observation is that most research focuses on Anglo-Saxon countries, in particular the United States (in the literature review we present below, around half of all existing research focuses on the United States). This limitation means that we know little, empirically and conceptually, about FLEs in other parts of the world, including in more economically and socially egalitarian countries.

We use qualitative data on 44 families from Denmark to address the three limitations highlighted above. The data enable us to flesh out different dimensions of the FLE (e.g. activities, everyday life and emotional climate) and how they intersect in different types of FLEs. Our main ambition is to develop a conceptual framework for analysing FLEs that is more comprehensive than the ones presented in existing research. Moreover, by drawing on data from Denmark, we contribute new evidence on FLEs in the Scandinavian context rarely addressed in existing research. Denmark is relevant not only because it is different, but also because some of its institutional features (e.g. extensive use of out-of-home day care and egalitarian gender policies) might foreshadow developments in other countries. The conceptual framework we present makes four contributions to existing research.

First, the FLE dimensions and types we present provide a framework for interpreting empirical associations between proxy indicators of the FLE (e.g. parents' education, income or social class) and children's socioeconomic outcomes. Consequently, the FLE dimensions and types we present offer a set of potential mechanisms for explaining intergenerational persistence in socioeconomic outcomes often reported in existing research.

Second, the FLE dimensions we present assist research on single dimensions of the family environment, for example family activities or networks, in relating this dimension to other dimensions of the FLE. While activities such as reading and playing games are key dimensions of the FLE, they intersect with other dimensions of the FLE, such as the emotional climate in the family, in shaping the overall FLE. Consequently, the FLE dimensions and types we present help to capture the 'big picture' of family environments.

Third, some of the dimensions of the FLE we consider are rarely addressed in existing research. For example, although most children now spend many hours per week in out-of-home day care (EACEA. 2019), most research does not treat day care as a part of the FLE. Moreover, we consider the role of digital devices in the FLE. For example, the FLE types we present below differ in the ways in which parents curate children's use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, phones and computers), with some types emphasising stimulation (e.g. using

apps to learn number and letters) and others emphasising recreation (e.g. watching YouTube videos). Consequently, we address overlooked but arguably important dimensions of the FLE.

Fourth, we consider how FLEs vary according to families' socioeconomic position (SEP). While existing research addresses socioeconomic gradients, for example, gradients in the provision of stimulating activities (Bodovski and Youn 2010; Lareau 2011) and parenting style (Altschul, Lee, and Gershoff 2016; Darling and Steinberg 1993), we provide a more detailed picture of how families' social and economic resources link to the FLE that they provide. In doing do, we add to the literature on middle- and working-class parenting (Calarco 2018; Reay, Crozier, and James 2011) by showing how FLE types relate to family SEP.

Based on analysis of data on Danish families, we present a conceptual model of FLEs with four FLE types. In the FLE type we label *Expansive curators*, families engage in many activities inside and outside the family home (e.g. word games, music lessons and visits to museums), the emotional climate is safe and everyday life is organised. Moreover, parents actively curate children's use of digital devices, have strong networks and actively involve themselves in children's out-of-home day care (which they treat as an extension of their 'in-house' FLE). In the FLE type we label *Casual pragmatists*, families also engage in many and diverse activities, but these activities are less academically oriented and supervised than among the *Expansive curators*. Moreover, the emotional climate is safe and everyday life is loosely structured, for example, with regard to children's meals and bedtime routines. In the FLE type we label *Recreational home dwellers*, everyday life is organised and the emotional climate is safe. Family activities mostly take place in, or close to, the family home, and focus on recreation rather than on stimulation. Finally, in the FLE type we label *Disempowered strugglers*, families engage in fewer activities than the other FLE types, the emotional climate can be volatile and parents have weak social networks and rarely involve themselves in children's out-of-home day care. We end the paper by discussing ways in which future research might use the conceptual framework we present and addressing limitations in our analysis, including the lack of immigrant families in our data.

The family learning environment

Literature review

We carried out a systematic review of existing empirical research on home learning environments as part of this project (for earlier reviews see Fan and Chen 2001; Jeynes 2005; Morin, Glickman, and Brooks-Gunn 2015). The purpose of the review was to map different conceptualisations of learning environments, as well as the designs and results from existing research. In total, we identified 120 empirical studies that address different activities in the home and their association with children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. We do not offer a detailed discussion of the literature review in the main text (Online Appendix A provides details), but instead discuss four key results that motivate the research we present in this paper.

The first result is that most research reports positive associations between the quality of family activities in the home (for example, the frequency with which parents provide stimulating activities) and children's outcomes. This result highlights that family activities are a key component of the FLE. The second result is that most research focuses on single family

activities (e.g. games or reading) rather than on how they intersect in different types of learning environments. This result highlights that existing research takes a narrow approach to FLEs. The third result is that there are non-trivial SEP gradients in home learning environments: parents in advantaged SEPs provide more activities than parents in disadvantaged SEPs. This result highlights the need for addressing SEP gradients in FLEs. The fourth result is that most research focuses on Anglo-Saxon countries, in particular the United States. In fact, more than half of the studies in our review originate in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia. This result highlights the need for addressing FLEs in other contexts than Anglo-Saxon ones.

Dimensions of the FLE

We draw on Brofenbrenner (1979) and Vygotsky (1978) to argue that the relevant family environment not only pertains to behaviours, relations and resources *within* the home, but extends beyond the home to include all the environments in which children's everyday lives unfold. Based on this argument, and on results from existing research, we outline six dimensions of the FLE: *Family activities, emotional climate, organisation of everyday life, social networks, expectations and values* and *out-of-home day care*. We now characterise each dimension.

Family activities foster children's skills. Reading and numbers and letters games enhance children's cognitive skills (Bojczyk et al. 2015; Crosnoe et al. 2010; Hartas 2012; Wasik, Hindman, and Snell 2016), while other types of activities, for example creative (e.g. piano and painting lessons), sports (e.g. athletics and scouting) or cultural (e.g. visits to museums and art galleries), enhance social and organisational skills (Bodovski and Youn 2010; Lareau 2011).

The emotional climate affects children's cognitive skills, motivation and psychological well-being (Altschul, Lee, and Gershoff 2016; Hao and Matsueda 2006). It refers to the quality of emotional ties between parents and children (Altschul, Lee, and Gershoff 2016; Darling and Steinberg 1993). An emotional climate characterised by warm and authoritative parenting (i.e. responsive and supportive) is associated with better outcomes, while an authoritarian (unresponsive and demanding) or permissive (unresponsive and unsupportive) climate is associated with worse outcomes (Baumrind 1971; Steinberg 2001; Watkins and Howard 2015).

The organisation of everyday life affects children's outcomes since children whose life is structured and predictable (for example, with regard to activities, meals and bedtime routines) have better learning opportunities than children whose everyday life lacks structure (Astill et al. 2012; Hale et al. 2010; Mindell and Williamson 2018). Moreover, parents' ability to set up and enforce rules, for example with regard to children's chores and use of digital devices, helps to structure children's everyday life and, in doing so, enhance their cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Kostyrka-Allchrone, Cooper and Simpson 2017). Finally, children whose parents cooperate, for example by taking turns in organising activities, have better outcomes than families whose parents do not cooperate (Teubert and Pinquart 2010).

Social networks, for example those comprised of family members (e.g. grandparents and siblings) and ties (e.g. friends and neighbours), promote children's outcomes by providing economic, practical and emotional support (e.g. Altonji, Hayashi, and Kotlikoff 1992; Belsky and Rovine 1984). In addition, social networks may compensate or accentuate gaps in other

dimensions of the FLE, for example by providing cognitively stimulating activities, practical help or a supportive emotional climate (Erola et al. 2018).

Expectations and values affect children's outcomes because parents communicate expectations, for example regarding children's desired educational choices and social behaviour, in everyday interaction (Froiland, Peterson, and Davison 2013; Pinquart and Ebeling 2020). Moreover, parents organise activities that shape children's academic self-efficacy and educational and occupational aspirations (Davis-Kean 2005; Pingault et al. 2015; Yamamoto, Yoko & Holloway 2010). Finally, parents transmit values, for example the extent to which they value freedom, creativity or social conformity, to their children (Park and Lau 2016).

Out-of-home day care affects children's outcomes through long-term environmental exposure. In the EU28, 95% of children age 4+ attended day care in 2017, and children age 3+ spent on average 29.5 h per week in day care (EACEA. 2019, 65–69). Day care shapes children's cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Bradley and Vandell 2007; Melhuish, Ereky-Stevens, and Petrogiannis 2015). Moreover, parents select day care based on factors such as cost, availability and quality and engage with day care institutions in different ways (for example, *via* social events and membership of representative bodies), which means that day care might complement the FLE that parents provide in the home.

SEP gradients in FLEs

Sociology has a long tradition of studying social inequality and reproduction as they manifest in families' everyday life, child-rearing practices and interactions with the educational system. Research in sociology shows that parents in privileged SEPs use their resources and knowledge about the educational system to maintain their relative social advantage (Ball 2003; Reay, Crozier, and James 2011; Gupta 2023). Bourdieu argued that families possess economic, cultural and social capital and make use of different strategies, reflected in the habitus and dispositions of family members, to reproduce their social position (Bourdieu 1986, 1996). Crucially, he reminds us that some aspects of FLEs, such as family activities (e.g. cultural trips) act as cultural capital that do not necessarily enhance children's skills directly but nonetheless enhance their opportunities because others (e.g. teachers and peers) perceive them as normatively 'better' than others (Calarco 2018). We stress this point because we do not make normative judgments about family practises. Nevertheless, parents in advantaged SEPs will often be able to provide more activities and to establish a family learning environment that benefits children later in life. For example, Lareau (2011) found that while working-class parents let their children develop 'naturally', middle-class parents cultivate children's academic skills *and* their 'outward facing' social skills, such as taking initiative and assuming a leadership role. Similarly, Vincent and Ball (2007) found that middle-class parents enrol children in 'enrichment' (e.g. creative and sports) activities to foster academic skills *and* a habitus that projects middle-class values and behaviours. The four FLE types we present below differ in the ways in which parents organise activities to foster children's skills, including skills that might act as cultural capital.

The Scandinavian context

Our research is set in Denmark, a Scandinavian country belonging to the Social Democratic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen 2015). Like the other Scandinavian countries, Denmark

is characterised by high income redistribution, generous family benefits, subsidised public services (including out-of-home day care) and egalitarian gender policies (such as parental leave schemes). Since economic inequality is lower in Denmark than in e.g. Anglo-Saxon countries, inequality in family environments will tend to reflect differences in families' (non-pecuniary) cultural and social capital to a greater extent than in other contexts (Jæger and Møllegaard 2015). For example, the four FLE types we present below differ with regard to parents' engagement in activities with their child and their engagement in the child's day care. Danish parents cannot directly purchase better day care for their children. However, they can 'work the system' by preferring specific day care institutions and by spearheading representative bodies at children's day care (e.g. parental boards) and social events. This means that parents' cultural and social capital, rather than their economic capital, likely shape the FLE types we find in the Scandinavian context.

Data and research design

We now briefly present the data we use to flesh out different FLE dimensions and types (Online Appendix B provides details). We collected data over a period of 12 wk from 44 Danish families with at least one child aged 3–6. The families were drawn from a long-running cohort survey starting with Danes born around 1954. This means that immigrants will only be part of our sample insofar as they have partnered up with cohort members. Operationally, we define the family as the household in which the focal child aged 3–6 has it main legal residence. In Denmark, the most common households with children are (a) cohabitating couples with one or more children (56%), (b) single mothers with one or more children (15%) and (c) single fathers with one or more children residing some of the time (15%) (Statistics Denmark 2023).

The families in our sample live throughout Denmark and differ in terms of SEP. We sampled families in which (one or both) adults (hereafter: parents) have, respectively, (a) no education beyond compulsory school, (b) vocational education (e.g. carpenter or hairdresser) or (c) college education. The college category includes two types of college education: *University College* (typically three to four years) that includes vocationally oriented educations such as school teacher or nursing and *University* (typically five years) that includes educations such as medicine or law. Below, we use the term 'families with college education' when referring to families in which one or both parents have a college degree and 'families without college education'when referring to families in which parents either have no education beyond compulsory school or vocational education as their highest level of education. Our sampling strategy was to 'sample for range' (Small 2009); i.e. we attempted to maximise variation in the subject of interest (FLEs) by sampling families with diverse SEP profiles. By doing so, we sought to insure that we would capture the main configurations of FLE dimensions and types in families with different SEP profiles.

We collected data in three steps. First, we collected contextual information on the focal child aged 3–6 and its family during an initial meeting. Second, we collected data *via* a smartphone/tablet app we developed specifically for this project. Parents used the app, designed as a digital dairy, for 12 wk to document family activities and everyday lives (parents could input data in their preferred format, such as text, photo, video or audio). Third, after 12 wk we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with one or both parents lasting about 1.5 h. We used data from the digital diary in the interviews, for example addressing topics not covered in the diary, and used diary entries (e.g. text, photos or videos) as a starting point for conversation (see Figure 1 below for an illustration of the data).

We analysed the data in three steps (outlined in Online Appendix B). First, we created thematic codes from the interview and app data. This step helped us map variation across families in each of the six FLE dimensions we consider. Second, we used the thematic codes to map empirical variation in the FLE dimension(s) associated with each code. To do this, we constructed a set of variables that measured the location of each family with regard to each thematic code. Third, as a supplement to the qualitative analysis we applied simple geometric data analysis on the resulting data matrix (families *x* variables) to identify latent factors that summarise correlations among the different sub-dimensions. In the next section, we use results from the analyses to characterise six dimensions of FLEs and how they intersect in four types of FLEs. We remind readers that our ambition is conceptual, which means that we focus on characterising dimensions and types of FLEs on the basis of our data rather than on 'reporting' general empirical findings.

Six dimensions of the FLE

We now present each dimension of the FLE, using quotes from interviews and entries in the digital diary app to illustrate key points. Figure 1 assists our presentation by illustrating the content of the different FLE dimension and types.

Family activities

In our data, the main types of activities in the home among the families include creative (e.g. painting/drawing and playing a musical instrument) and physical (e.g. playing games) activities, reading aloud, shared screen time (e.g. watching television or playing computer games), household chores (e.g. helping with preparing food or doing the dishes) and



Figure 1. Illustration of family learning environments.

Note: Each quadrant summarises key features of each FLE type using quotes from interviews and data from the app. Text in blue refers to characteristics of environments, text in red denotes activities, and text in green are quotes/examples from the app data. In our data, we classify 17 families as 'Expansive curators', 7 as 'Recreational home dwellers', 12 as 'Casual pragmatists', and 8 as 'Disempowered strugglers'.

'hanging out'. Although all families engage in some of these activities, they differ in terms of which ones they prefer and the frequency with which they engage in them. A college-educated mother outlines her daughter's busy weekly schedule:

> Well, maybe we have a bit too much on our plate, Monday she [the daughter] attends gymnastics, Tuesday it is violin lessons, Wednesday is spent with her grandmother, and Thursday she is picked up early [from day care] by her second grandmother.

College-educated families tend to engage in more and in a wider range of activities than do families without college education. Moreover, college-educated families also engage more often in deliberately stimulating (e.g. painting/drawing and games) than in recreational (e.g. watching television or relaxing) activities. As a college-educated father puts it: 'Both our boys (…) are keen on learning, so I want to expand their learning opportunities'. College-educated families in particular prioritise activities outside the home, for example capoeira, Suzuki violin and visits to arts museums. Families without college education, by contrast, tend to prioritise low-cost activities close to the family home (e.g. going to a local library, park or forest). For example, we see in the digital diary that parents without college education more often upload photos of out-of-home activities that take place near the home than college-educated parents. We also observe SEP gradients in a reading aloud to the child: college-educated parents read aloud more frequently than do parents without college education, and also more often discuss the content of the book with the child (i.e. 'dialogical reading'). A college-educated mother remarks the following:

> When we read aloud, she [daughter] is very interested, and we stop each time she asks about something, and we elaborate and talk about it, and then she might return to it the next day and we talk some more. And we talk about words she doesn't know and how to use them.

In the digital dairy, we see that college-educated parents upload photos or videos showing the child reading a book or engaging in a stimulating activity. In parallel, we observe SEP gradients in parents' justification for children's (non-)use of digital devices (e.g. tablets, phones and computers). In particular, parents without college education allow their children to use digital devices more often than do parents with college education, and more often for recreation than for stimulation. A parent without college education remarks that an IPad 'is a good nanny', while a mother with vocational education explains:

> […] he [the son] uses it [IPad] for relaxing and unwinding from everyday hustle and bustle. And I can relate to that, that he needs it, it's the same for me when I sit in the couch at night and turn on the TV.

College-educated parents, by contrast, allow their children less screen time, actively curate what the child watches ('We try to avoid YouTube') and believe that screen time detracts from other, and more valuable, family activities. We return to these differences in the presentation of the four FLE types.

Emotional climate

In our data, we find clear differences in parents' descriptions of their responsiveness, support and involvement in their children. Some families provide a consistently stable, safe and

supportive climate, while others provide a less stable climate. As an example of a safe emotional climate, some parents deal with a conflict by listening to the child's 'side of the story', talking about how they feel and resolving the conflict without losing their temper. By contrast, some parents provide a less stable emotional climate and respond to the child either by losing their temper or by ignoring the conflict altogether. College-educated parents tend to provide a more supportive emotional climate than do parents without college education. This socioeconomic gradient also applies to parenting style (see also Hoff, Laursen, and Tardif 2002). In our data, some parents use an authoritative approach in which they combine warmth and attention with clear boundary setting. Other parents rely on an authoritarian approach or, in some cases, a flexible approach in which they switch between a permissive and an authoritarian approach. Overall, in our data college-educated parents more often rely on the authoritative approach than do parents without college education. Parents without college education, on the other hand, more often face economic and health constraints, which means that, even if this is not their intention, they might resort to a permissive or authoritarian parenting style.

Organisation of everyday life

In our data, the organisation of everyday life is closely linked with family activities and with the emotional climate. We find considerable variation across families in the child's daily activities and morning and bedtime routines. Some families, often those in which parents have college education, have highly predictable everyday routines, with most activities taking place around the same time every day. In other families, everyday life is more laid back (as one parent puts it: 'Super-consistent rule enforcement just isn't for us'), despite these families not lacking in terms of economic and social resources. Some families, often those in which parents do not have college education, have less predictable everyday routines (as one parent puts it: 'We do whatever we feel like'). In our data, college-educated families tend to be more organised than families in which parents do not have college education, parents cooperate more, and the child has a more predictable everyday life. Some families have a 'laid-back' approach, with fewer rules (e.g. regarding household chores, screen time and bedtime routines) and parents being less involved in children's activities. Finally, families whose everyday life lacks clear structure tend also to have few shared activities and a more distant emotional climate.

Social networks

Most families in our data meet regularly with extended family members, and more than half receive assistance from their network on a weekly basis. Yet, networks are unequally distributed. Families without college education tend to have weaker networks than do families with college education, and networks more often help 'filling gaps', for example by caring for a disabled or distressed child, than providing additional resources and stimulation. For example, one mother states that 'When [son] has had one of his fits, a couple of times I have had to call my parents and say "you need to come and get him now … we cannot do this anymore"'. In our data, families in which parents have college education tend to have stronger networks that assist in providing stimulating activities for children. This means that networks enable parents to be more involved in the child's out-of-home day care, activities or to catch up on work. Moreover, parents with college education tend to use their

networks, and particularly grandparents, to augment the 'in house' FLE by organising stimulating activities with the child, either at home or *via* field trips outside the home.

Expectations and values

Parents in our data have different expectations of their child. While all parents wish for their child to be happy, we find SEP gradients in parents' educational expectations. In parallel to existing research (e.g. Bodovski 2010), college-educated parents often expect their child to complete college education, and some families are very explicit about this goal. One father states: 'It's going to be a university degree. That's what made me happy, and if he becomes an auto mechanic, I would have a harder time relating to that'. Another college-educated mother states: 'In light of his upbringing, a lot would need to happen for him [the son] not to get an education. He will become an engineer or something like that. I am sure of this'. By contrast, educational expectations are less clearly articulated in families in which parents do not have college education. In these families, parents are happy as long as the child completes 'any type of education'.

Out-of-home day care

All families in our data rely on out-of-home day care. About half proactively selected a day care institution, with the other half accepting the day care that their local municipality assigned to them (in Denmark, municipalities are required by law to offer day care to all children). College-educated parents, more often than parents without college education, search for information and select a day care based on its pedagogical approach (e.g. creative or musical), facilities (e.g. large interior space and organic food) and staff (e.g. qualifications and adult-to-child-ratio). They are also more likely to be involved in the everyday life in the day care institution (e.g. *via* representative bodies or social activities) and to interact with the staff on a day-to-day basis to check up on their child's well-being. By contrast, parents without college education tend to be less engaged in their child's day care and more often see a clear distinction between what goes on in the day care and what goes on in the home. As one mother without college education puts it: 'I do not attend those parent-teacher meetings. I do not get involved in those types of things'.

Types of family learning environments

Based on the description of the six dimensions of FLEs, we now outline how these dimensions intersect in four FLE types. As stated in the introduction, we think of these FLE types as analytical constructs rather than as representations of actual empirical populations. Overall, the six dimensions can be ordered along two axes: Activities and structuring of everyday life. As shown in Figure 1, these dimensions produce four quadrants, each capturing a particular FLE type. Below, we characterise each FLE type, including its SEP profile.

Expansive curators

We label the first FLE type, located in the upper-right quadrant in Figure 1, *Expansive curators*. This FLE type is characterised by many and diverse family activities combined

with a highly structured everyday life. Parents have a strong network and cooperate on organising stimulating activities for the child inside and outside the home (e.g. reading, playing a musical instrument and trips). Parents also actively curate the activities that they allow children to engage in (e.g. by limiting 'wasteful' screen time). In many regards, Curators behave similarly to Lareau's (2011) account of *concerted cultivation* in that they actively foster children's skills, cognitive and social, *via* stimulating activities. Moreover, everyday life is organised around predictable routines (e.g. meals and bedtime) and parents provide a stable, authoritative and supportive emotional climate. Parents have clear expectations on behalf of their children with regard to desirable education and social behaviour. Unlike the FLE types we describe below, Expansive curators actively project their FLE outside the home, for example by having extended family members take children on trips or by organising stimulating activities. Similarly, they involve themselves in children's day care *via* representative bodies and by selecting day care institutions whose pedagogical approach aligns with their own values. In our data, Expansive curators tend to have college education, often a university degree.

Casual pragmatists

We label the second FLE type, located in the lower-right quadrant in Figure 1, *Causal pragmatists*. Like Expansive curators, this FLE type is characterised by many and diverse families activities. However, Casual pragmatists focus less stringently on cognitive stimulation and more on leisure and outdoor activities. The main differences between Casual pragmatists and Expansive curators concern the organisation of everyday life and the emotional climate. Casual pragmatists are less organised, everyday life is more ad-hoc and parents work less as a team. This laid back approach extends to childrearing, which is neither particularly authoritarian nor authoritative. In terms of emotional climate, Casual pragmatists are less involved in children's activities than Expansive curators. They also set up fewer rules regarding children's use of digital devices and household chores and have less consistent strategies for resolving conflicts. Despite a looser organisation of everyday life, Casual pragmatists have clear expectations on behalf of their children, in particular that they complete at least high school. In our sample, Casual pragmatists tend to have a vocational education diploma or a University College degree.

Recreational home dwellers

We label the third FLE type, located in the upper-left quadrant in Figure 1, *Recreational home dwellers*. This FLE type is characterised by engaging in fewer and less diverse activities than Expansive curators and Casual pragmatists and, like Expansive curators, having a clearly structured everyday life. Family activities take place in or near, rather than outside, the family home. Family activities focus on recreation rather than on cognitive and social stimulation. For example, activities include 'hanging out' in the garden, sports, relaxing (sometimes by means of a digital device) and children playing on their own without parental supervision. Like Expansive curators, Recreational home dwellers provide a structured everyday life and a safe emotional climate. However, Recreational home dwellers are less academically oriented than Expansive curators and do not expect their child to complete any particular level of education. Moreover, they do not engage much with children's day

care and make a clear distinction between what goes on in day care and what goes on in the home. In this regard, Recreational home dwellers behave similarly to Lareau's (2011) account of *accomplishment of natural growth*: they focus on recreational activities, allow children more free time and relegate stimulating activities to the child's day care. With regard to values, Recreational home dwellers emphasise the importance of social and physical proximity, for example being close to one's family. In our sample, Recreational home dwellers tend to have vocational education and to work in vocational occupations.

Disempowered strugglers

We label the fourth FLE type, located in the lower-left quadrant in Figure 1, *Disempowered strugglers*. We use this label because families in this FLE type, many of whom include single parents on the fringe of the labour market, face complex challenges and often lack resources to provide the activities and opportunities that they wish to provide for their children. This FLE type is characterised by few family activities and an everyday life that lacks structure and parental collaboration. Activities focus on recreation rather than on stimulation, and children often spend time on their own in front of a screen. The emotional climate switches between distant or authoritarian, and parents have weak networks and rarely involve themselves in children's day care. Moreover, parents do not articulate clear expectations with regard to children's education or desired behaviour. In our sample, parents in this FLE type tend not to have college education (or, indeed, any education beyond compulsory school).

Discussion

We began this paper from the observation that while existing research emphasises the role of family environments in shaping children's outcomes, most research is limited by focusing on single dimensions of the family environment rather than on how they intersect in different types of environments. In addition, most research focuses on Anglo-Saxon contexts. We address the first limitation by proposing the concept of *family learning environment* (FLE), which captures configurations of behaviours, relations and resources inside as well as outside the home that shape children's opportunities. We address the second limitation by focusing on Denmark, a Scandinavian country very different from most Anglo-Saxon countries due to its high level of income redistribution, generous family benefits, subsidised public services and egalitarian gender policies. We use qualitative data on 44 Danish families collected *via* qualitative interviews and a smartphone app to identify four types of FLEs that combine six FLE dimensions in different ways. *Expansive curators* provide a wide range of activities for their children (often supported by members of the extended family network), a stable everyday life and emotional climate and actively project their FLE outside the family home. *Casual pragmatists* also engage in many activities, but these activities are less orchestrated and the organisation of everyday life is more laid back. *Recreational home dwellers* engage in recreational activities inside or close to the family home (e.g. relaxing or hanging out in the garden) and provide an organised everyday life and a safe emotional climate. Finally, *Disempowered strugglers* engage in only few activities with their children, have weak networks, everyday life lacks structure and the emotional climate is less stable than in the other FLE types.

While existing research focuses mainly on Anglo-Saxon countries, we contribute evidence on FLEs in a Scandinavian context. Moreover, while some of the FLE types we identify resemble those we might find in Anglo-Saxon contexts, others are, we think, particular to the Scandinavian context. On the one hand, privileged *Expansive curators* and *Disempowered strugglers* highlight how, like in Anglo-Saxon contexts, inequality in economic and social resources affect the learning environments and opportunities parents are able to provide for their children. On the other hand, *Recreational home dwellers* and *Casual pragmatists* reflect the Scandinavian context. Both FLE types belong to 'middle class' groups that do not lack in terms of economic and social resources. Yet, they differ in terms of organisation, priorities and values.

Our FLE types provide a conceptual framework that research on family environments in sociology might use to analyse the learning opportunities parents with different cultural and economic resources provide for their children. The concept of FLE serves as a useful construct in four important ways. First, it offers a useful conceptual framework for interpreting intergenerational associations between children's outcomes and parents' education, income or social class. Education, income and class are often interpreted as proxies for FLEs, and our FLE types capture a set of mechanisms that help to explain the transmission of resources from one generation to the next. Second, our FLE types and dimensions add context to research focusing on single dimensions of the FLE (e.g. family activities or the emotional climate). For example, while research on the home learning environment often focuses on stimulating activities (such as reading and playing games), it rarely considers how they intersect with other dimensions of the FLE, that is, how parents use networks, day care, digital devices and the emotional climate to augment the impact of these activities on children's outcomes. Consequently, the dimensions/types we outline help to describe the 'big picture' of family environments. Third, our FLE dimensions highlights areas of the FLE that are so far under researched. In particular, we highlight how day care can be viewed as an extension of the FLE for college-educated parents, and how the increasing use of digital devices impacts the FLE differently – as college-educated parents are more likely to curate and limit children's use of digital devices than are parents with no college education. Fourth, we provide a richer picture of how FLEs vary according to families' SEP. While existing studies tend to address single dimensions of the learning environment, we consider how families' social and economic resources shape the 'total' FLE.

While the FLE types we outline provide a new conceptual framework, we should highlight some limitations in our research. First, our concepts are based on data from a Scandinavian country and participants in a long running cohort survey. This means that immigrant or ethnic minority family members are heavily underrepresented in our data (as they are only part of the sample if they have partnered up with members of the original cohort study). Second, we identify FLEs based on their potential impact on children's *measurable* outcomes. Parents that place fewer constraints on children, i.e. families in which everyday life is loosely organised and there are few activities, do not necessarily lack resources, but unlike college-educated families, they are less likely to use child-rearing technique strategically targeted towards enhancing children's future outcomes. Third, while we provide a detailed account of FLEs, we say nothing about the impact of these FLEs on children's outcomes. Our aim in this paper is conceptual, that is to provide a conceptual framework that sociologists might use to analyse the ecology of learning environments that families with different

cultural and economic resources provide. In future research, we aim to identify the impact of FLEs on children's outcomes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics declaration

The research reported in this article meet applicable ethics approvals as stipulated in the Danish Data Protection Act.

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