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Epistemic Injustice in a Parenting Support Programme for Refugees in Norway

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss epistemic injustice in the International Child Development Programme (ICDP), a universalised parenting-support programme in Norway that is mandatory for all newly arrived refugees in Norway. We show that despite the programme's good intentions, the programme constitutes a form of epistemic injustice because it enforces a state-endorsed epistemology that proffers the right way of parenting. Using data collected during ICDP training for a group of newly arrived refugee parents from Syria, we explore how the ideals embedded in the programme influence the interactions and epistemic exchanges between participants and mentors. This study contributes to discussions on parenting support for marginalised groups by revealing the functioning of epistemic injustice as new inhabitants in a welfare state are targeted by a social support programme aimed at enhancing their parenting skills.

Introduction

In a welfare-state context, certain groups are understood to be particularly vulnerable and are therefore provided with opportunities to learn various necessary social skills (Hier, 2016; Prieur et al., 2019). In Norway, newly arrived refugee parents are obliged to attend a mandatory parenting course as part of their introduction programme (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020: para. 1, 2). The intention is to give parents an opportunity to share their experiences and to reflect upon what they have to do to succeed in Norwegian society (Integrerings og mangfoldsdirektoratet (IMDI), 2021). One of the most commonly offered parenting support courses is the International Child Development Programme (ICDP) (Rambøll, 2020: 4).

The ICDP emphasises that emotionally competent and caring parents help their children develop a healthy emotional life, making the children more capable of overcoming difficulties later in life (Rambøll, 2020: 3). Even though ICDP draws on and acknowledges the cultural and personal experiences that each participant brings to the training context, the programme upholds specific values regarding good parenting (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 33). The programme draws its legitimacy from various scientific sources, such as developmental and cultural psychology, and represents a certain epistemology of good parenting, which in the

case of Norway is endorsed by the welfare state (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016; Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2020).

We pose two questions in this article. First, we ask whether making ICDP mandatory for a specific social group constitutes a form of epistemic injustice, as this requirement positions the group as lacking appropriate parenting skills. Second, we enquire whether injustice is perpetuated during the ICDP training sessions. These questions are explored as we study how the interactions and exchanges between teachers (called mentors) and refugee parents balance prioritising the principles of the programme and participants' own experiences and understandings of their parenting practices. To provide a point of reference for our analysis, we adopt Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice. Fricker's theory is frequently used to explain why some groups are allowed to actively contribute to knowledge that concerns them, while others are not (i.e. Haga, 2015; Kelbert, 2018).

Fricker points out that epistemic injustice is embedded in both structures and practices, with the consequence that some groups are deprived of the possibilities of participating in knowledge production that concerns their own lives. The concept of epistemic injustice helps us understand ICDP as a state-endorsed epistemology that, when made mandatory, deprives refugees of the possibility of equally participating in and contributing to definitions of good parenting.

We base our research questions on two empirical sources. Our first argument, that offering ICDP to a specific group is an epistemic injustice, is substantiated by official documents on how and why this programme is to be taught to refugees arriving in Norway. These data reveal that refugee parents are considered to need parenting support and that they are subsequently targeted for training. The pressure to attend the training is strong because parents lose out on economic compensation if they do not attend the training sessions. Our second argument, that epistemic injustice can be detected during the trainings, is based on data from ICDP training sessions with a group of Syrian parents who had recently arrived in Norway and their mentors. Our analysis showed that mentors encourage participants to align themselves with the principles of the programme and that participants are rewarded when they do so. Furthermore, the parents made several attempts at epistemic interactions and were, to some extent, allowed to do so, but these interactions were still located within the logic of the ICDP framework; in fact, it was difficult for both the mentors and the participants to go beyond this logic, given the setting of the training programme.

In recent times, several authors have discussed the epistemological dilemmas and ethical challenges related to parenting support programmes. Gustafsson (2020) described parenting programmes in Sweden as both culturally imperialistic and empowering. Bråten et al. (2021) suggested that ICDP can be labelled a form of epistemic governance through which the welfare state steers specific groups in desirable directions. Erstad (2015) underlined that the ICDP is a form of model power with a civilising agenda. We contribute to this discussion by considering the specific context of the migration policies that have made ICDP mandatory for one specific social group, namely refugee parents. By creating greater awareness of how epistemically unjust practices embedded in Norwegian migration policies prevent reciprocity and equal participation of refugee parents, we shed light on how policies can deprive refugees of their intrinsic parental skills, knowledge and values used in their lived experiences.

ICDP

The ICDP is endorsed by the Norwegian welfare-state, and all newly arrived refugees are obliged to attend it as part of their overall introduction programme (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet [IMDI], 2021). The programme is publicised through various government websites. The programme is publicised through various government websites, which list the programme modules and provide descriptions (Barne, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2022). While attending the programme, the participants learn basic social and cultural skills considered necessary in the Norwegian context. The participants also receive a small salary to cover living expenses while they are in the programme. Attending the introduction programme is considered work and is hence subject to the same regulations as the rest of the labour sector (IMDI, 2021). For example, the participants are entitled to sick days but are subject to economic sanctions if their absence is not justified. Therefore, missing training sessions has an economic cost in terms of lost compensation.

There is consensus among policy makers at both the state and municipality levels that parenting support programmes should continue to be mandatory for parents with children below the age of 18 years because this will strengthen “their motivation and mastery when they meet a new society, new expectations and a new system (...). This will create secure parents who can provide a good upbringing in Norway and thereby contribute to integration” (Regjeringens forslag til ny integreringslov - faktnotat, 2019: 6). In addition, ICDP is justified by the argument that migrant parents face greater challenges than most parents (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 120–121; Bråten et al., 2021: 27). Official migration policy

documents do not spell out that this group is “at risk”; however, in the government’s strategy for parenting support, refugee parents are considered particularly vulnerable because it is assumed that parents with migration experiences may face challenges in their roles as parents (Barne- og likestillingsdepartementet 2018, p. 11). The policy of making ICDP mandatory, which is supposed to improve integration and which sanctions those who do not attend the programme, turns participation in the training into an epistemic duty that is difficult to escape without economic and, perhaps, even social repercussions.

The ICDP was developed in the 1960s by two psychology professors, Henning Rye and Karsten Hundeide, and has been implemented in over 30 countries worldwide (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 12). The ICDP handbook states that perceptions of parenting vary and acknowledges that parents have different cultural values when it comes to raising their children (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 33). The ICDP handbook suggests that alternative ideas and existing experiences should be met with empathy by the mentors. Nonetheless, the handbook underlines that there are universal values across different cultures – for example, that all children are human beings with basic needs and require love and respect (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 33). Based on ideal dialogues and specific themes, the aim is to strengthen children’s development and improve parents’ relationships with their offspring (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 60).

Several evaluations of ICDP have emphasised its usefulness to parents (Clucas et al., 2014; Skar et al., 2015). One criticism of these evaluations has been that they were conducted by scientists with a vested interest in the programme’s continuation (Sundsbo, 2018: 433). However, other studies have approached the interactions taking place during the training sessions more critically (Bråten and Sønsterudbråten, 2017; Erstad, 2015; Levernes Solberg, 2020). A study by Furlong and McGilloway (2014: 1815) indicated that when such programmes are implemented among vulnerable groups, their effectiveness relies on a variety of external factors, such as screening of the parents and group composition. In a study of how ICDP is implemented for parents with children deemed at risk of being radicalised, ICDP mentors assessed their relationships with the participants as either troublesome or proximate and professional (Bråten and Sønsterudbråten, 2017: 20). This finding hints at a power asymmetry involved in ICDP training and suggests that mentors prefer parents who do not challenge their authority. Erstad’s (2015: 170). study of ICDP training for Pakistani mothers showed that ICDP mentors held national integration ideals and treated the mothers as in need of being civilised in order not to reproduce undesirable childhoods. Moreover, Erstad revealed an assumption

among ICDP mentors that Pakistani mothers would be better integrated in the welfare state if gender patterns in their families were changed and if they became employed, tax-paying members of the welfare state. There was surprisingly little resistance among Pakistani mothers to the parenting models presented in ICDP, and Erstad (2015: 170) wondered whether the course filled a void in their mothering practices.

Erstad (2015) suggested that ICDP training should be seen as proffering *model power*. The term “model power” was coined by Norwegian sociologist and social psychologist Stein Bråten, and Erstad (2015: 174) used this concept to make sense of the interactions between mentors and participants in ICDP training. Model power denotes how one type of model gains precedence over the others. By approaching a specific model as the sole source of valid questions, a dialogue can claim to be open while, in fact, being dominated by the model’s principles, thus becoming a “pretend dialogue” (Erstad, 2015: 174; Bråten, 1998: 76). Erstad’s points are particularly relevant for understanding how epistemic injustice occurs when refugee parents attend ICDP training.

Several authors have noted that parenting programmes should be seen in the context of migration policies, as migrant parents are often viewed as culturally different from others and in need of change. Kristina Gustafsson (2020: 317–18) discussed programmes in Sweden targeting parents with foreign, ethnic background. She identified the inherent contradiction in the programmes, which are normative in their standpoint on what good parenting entails, and concluded that the implementation of such programmes contains elements of cultural imperialism due to the official motive to change the cultural practices of specific groups (Gustafsson, 2020: 326). At the same time, the programmes can be seen as democratic practices because they enhance parents’ self-confidence (Gustafsson, 2020: 325). However, the power relations and structural prejudice we describe here may undermine refugee parents’ faith in their abilities to make sense of their own social experience “owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource,” as Fricker put it (2007: 155).

Bråten and Sønsterudbråten together with Gustafsson have suggested that governments in both Sweden and Norway not only guide but also govern through parenting programmes, like the ICDP, which constitutes a form of “epistemic governance” (Bråten et al., 2021: 32). The authors stated that even though the programmes are organised in friendly and bridging ways, they still contain implicit understandings of modern parenting values as being more suitable than traditional parenting values, which are presumably held by programme

participants (Bråten et al., 2021: 31–32). The friendliness in the programmes becomes elusive, according to the authors, and the agenda of what good parenting means remains implicit rather than overly stated, which prevents parents from participating as equals. ICDP thus becomes a powerful way for the welfare state to nudge parents in desirable directions by governing them through the programme (Bråten et al., 2021: 31–32). This perspective is an important reference for our upcoming discussion, in which we show how the ICDP works in practice. Bråten et al. (2021) uncovered these underlying ideals by analysing the texts in the programme handbook. Our study contributes data on the interactions between mentors and participants that took place while the programme was being taught. As our analysis will show, the participants attempted, at times successfully, to participate as epistemic subjects but were repeatedly coached back to the intentions and ideas of the programme when interacting with the mentors. As this dynamic occurred when the programme was being taught, the findings may not be surprising; however, they illustrate how a structural epistemic injustice is perpetuated in micro-interactions whereby people meet and negotiate their own experiences in relation to state-endorsed epistemologies.

Methodology

Our study of ICDP training for refugee parents was part of a larger project aiming at exploring refugee children’s encounters with the Norwegian kindergarten system. During our fieldwork, we were invited by informants to participate in their parents’ training course. This was an intriguing trace to follow, and in the upcoming months, we attended several ICDP sessions in a city municipality in Norway. The ICDP course usually contains 12 sessions (IMDI, 2016). We attended eight sessions. In this article, we present empirical data from one particular ICDP course, but our understanding of the implementation of the ICDP rests on a broader empirical base because we also followed two other ICDP groups in addition to conducting in-depth interviews with mentors and attending a mentor training class.

The data presented here are based on an ICDP course for newly arrived Syrian refugee parents. Each session had 10–12 participants (not all participants attended every time) and two mentors. Most of the participants were couples. Often, there were four fathers and seven mothers, but this varied as some of the participants had difficulties attending every session. Two mentors led all the sessions. One was referred to as the “main mentor” – she had a Norwegian majority background and had significant experience working with children. In the minority version of ICDP, it is recommended that a minority mentor be present who speaks the “heart language of the participants.” In the case of our study, the minority mentor was of Syrian

origin but had lived longer in Norway than the participants. She was bilingual and translated what the participants said in Arabic into Norwegian so that the main mentor could follow the conversation.

The data were collected before the ICDP became a mandatory part of the introductory programme. The refugee parents attending were there because the kindergarten employees in the institutions where they had their children had recommended the programme to them. At the time, the parents were attending the introductory programme. We assume that the interactions in ICDP remained similar in other settings after the programme was made mandatory; if anything, the pressure to adhere to ICDP might have increased. What we encountered in the sessions was similar to other descriptions of mentor-participant interactions by, for example, Erstad (2015) and Levernes Solberg (2020).

We took real-time notes on the exchanges between the mentors and the participants; these notes constituted the empirical material for our study. The participants spoke in Arabic, and their statements were translated into Norwegian by the minority language mentor. We noted the translation-based form of the interaction. In addition, we wrote down our observations of the mentors' and the participants' body language. Before we entered the group, the mentors asked the participants whether they accepted that we would be there. We started our first session by explaining who we were, and we gave oral information about our stance on anonymity and the right to withdraw from the study. In collaboration with the mentors, we decided not to distribute consent papers for them to sign, as the mentors advised us that signing papers could be perceived as dangerous and risky, both in the cultural context from which they recently arrived and in the new context of parenting. We did not record the sessions on tape because we believed that this could prevent the participants from speaking freely.

We were invited to sit at the table together with all the participants, and we both experienced a warm and welcoming attitude from both the participants and the mentors. We were asked from time to time to share our own perspectives as parents, including the dilemmas and struggles we experienced as majority mothers. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1996, p. 112), participants are often concerned with what kind of people the researchers are, whether they are friendly and/or trustworthy. We carefully considered the impression we made, and by being friendly and partly participating, we tried to provide full information regarding our role there.

During the sessions, we had short conversations with the parents, and several times we discussed the possibility of conducting separate interviews with the attending parents. However, as our main interest was the implementation of the ICDP and the communication between the participants during these sessions, we concluded that valuable data were to be found by observing the interactions between the mentors and the participants. We also attended the mentors' debriefing sessions after all group meetings. In these sessions, we asked some questions, but in general, we listened to the mentors' bilateral reflections and ad hoc evaluations of the course. This fieldwork was a typical instance of an opportunity that arose during the research process as we were invited to attend the sessions.

The information that we obtained during the sessions had certain limitations. We did not use tape recordings and did not, therefore, have verbatim transcriptions of what was said. In addition, the parents' statements were based on translations from Arabic to Norwegian by one of the mentors. This implies that all the statements we noted were filtered through the translation of the minority mentor, potentially deviating from their original meaning. We could have interviewed the parents separately to expand our understanding of epistemic injustice, but that was unfortunately beyond our scope due to time limitations. However, we believe our interpretations are justified as we depict instances of praise and interruptions that occurred between the mentors and the refugees. As we took a specific interest in how the mentors responded to the participants' inputs, we could observe and understand such feedback as it was given by the majority mentor in Norwegian. This strengthens the validity of the data. Moreover, the findings we present here are similar to those of other studies on parenting support programmes, and hence, they contribute to the larger discussion on how such programmes can be understood as epistemic practices (i.e. Bråten et al., 2021; Gustafsson, 2020).

The interactions between the mentors and the group were characterised by warmth and friendliness, as were the interactions between the participants themselves. This resembled what Bråten et al. (2021: 32) called the friendliness of the programme, which, in turn, contributes to its elusiveness. We have published another article on this issue, exploring how mentors use emotional expressions to underline the intentions of the programme, becoming an extension of the migration authorities (Steen-Johnsen and Skreland, 2021). As we did not follow the group outside the training room, we did not gather enough information to determine whether there were antagonisms between the participants. After all, they all fled from a context of conflict, and there may have been social and cultural boundaries in the room that we did not fully understand. However, we did observe one thing: the minority mentor did not wear a hijab, but

all the participating women did. The mentor told us that she had stopped wearing it in an attempt to adapt to Norwegian society. She assumed that the participants might not approve of this, but she did not let it interfere with how she conducted her job.

To make sense of the empirical material, we conducted a collective thematic analysis inspired by Ryan and Bernhard (2003) and Eggebø (2020). We used Eggebø's stages of collective analysis because we, the two authors, first performed a broad review of the data before deciding on the themes and categories, which we adjusted during our discussions and analysis. We did not use the concept of epistemic injustice until we became familiar with the material over a long period of time by discussing what occurred between the mentors and the participants. When we discovered Fricker's (2007) theoretical concept of epistemic injustice, it seemed to shed light on the interactions between the mentors and the participants in new ways, and the concept spurred the development of the themes of praise and dismissal, the core concepts in our study. Ryan and Bernhard (2003: 93) stated that one strategy of thematic analysis is to look for theory-related material, and as we got to know Fricker's theory, we could look for theoretical content in the empirical data.

Miranda Fricker identified two types of epistemic injustices: "testimonial" and "hermeneutic" (Fricker, 2007: 1). Testimonial injustice occurs when the credibility of what a person says is affected by that person's attributes – for example, as occurs in sexism, racism or when someone is categorised as a high-risk-parent (Treloar, 2018: 344). Hermeneutic injustice occurs when a gap in collective interpretative resources puts someone at a disadvantage in making sense of their social experience. According to Fricker (2007: 161), hermeneutic injustice is structural, involves asymmetry and occurs in concrete social and practical situations but becomes apparent in discursive exchanges between individuals (Fricker, 2007: 7). Due to their social position, disadvantaged individuals are not given the space to be equal co-creators of knowledge. The main harm of hermeneutic injustice is that subjects are placed in contexts in which it becomes impossible for them to communicate something that concerns their lives, thus rendering them powerless to understand the situations in which they may find themselves (Fricker, 2007: 162; Nikolaidis, 2020: 466). Moreover, hermeneutic injustice harms people's understanding of themselves, which Fricker refers to as loss of epistemic confidence (Fricker, 2007: 163), and influences how their social identities are constructed, with the psychological burden potentially negatively affecting their well-being (Nikolaidis, 2020).

Lobb (2017) brought an ethical and emotional dimension to the discussion of how epistemic injustice can be addressed. Lobb claimed that critical empathy could be a way of countering epistemic injustice. Critical empathy entails sensitivity to the situation of the sufferer – it establishes a “rogue channel for the transmission and reception of what is otherwise excluded by the work of power” (Lobb, 2017: 602). This means going beyond political consensus and being open to neologistic flexibility. It entails accepting a reality that there might not be any fixed answers to perceived problems we are facing (Lobb, 2017: 603). This point is especially relevant for ICDP, which oversimplifies parenting by presenting models for the otherwise ethically messy and difficult task of raising children. Lobb’s perspective reminds us of the complexity of most epistemic questions; in addition, she reminds us to be careful in anticipating and making assumptions about other people’s hermeneutic capacities. This latter point was underlined by Mason, who advocated a clearer acknowledgement of resistance against epistemic oppression to not portray social groups that are subjected to epistemic injustice as mere victims (Mason, 2011: 295). These are important perspectives that highlight the connection between policies, structural reference points and individuals’ lives, reflections and experiences.

Nikolaidis (2021) explored epistemic injustice in educational settings and underscored the significance of creating an epistemic environment that is enabling and does justice to students’ self-formation. He called for an educational setting that does not privilege the ideal of education based on learning outcomes but, instead, preserves students’ formative capacities in “as many directions as possible” (Nikolaidis, 2021: 385). Nikolaidis pointed out that the analysis and critique of educational settings helps teachers and mentors recognise the power and influence of the epistemic practices in which they are engaged (Nikolaidis, 2021: 396).

Fricker, Lobb and Nikolaidis are among the many scholars interested in epistemic injustice and its consequences. They show how epistemic injustice occurs, how it overlaps with and reinforces other injustices, how it is both structural and operational in educational settings and how it can be challenged to achieve change. These perspectives informed our examination of the ICDP and our argument that the programme can be considered a form of epistemic injustice because it is offered to a specific group of refugee parents.

When collecting the material, we noticed several times that the participants were only given space to talk when their examples illuminated the principles of the ICDP. We noted that they were subtly disciplined when this was not the case. Fricker’s concept of epistemic injustice

provided us with an analytical lens for making sense of what we had observed. However, seeing communication in light of epistemic injustice carries the danger of not capturing the participants' attempts at participation. To counter this possibility, we systematically looked for such attempts, which Medina (2012: 211) would have labelled "embryotic." We included instances of participation and scrutinised how these instances were approached by the mentors. This process was similar to what Ryan and Bernard (2003: 92) labelled "looking for missing data" as a thematic category.

Epistemic injustice and epistemic participation in ICDP sessions

In this section, we present our analysis of the ICDP interactions between the mentors and the participants. This section contains two parts: in the first part, we examine how the participants were met with praise when they were in line with ICDP principles; in the second part, we show how the participants sometimes became epistemic subjects who contributed to the exchanges. We conclude that there were attempts at epistemic participation, but given the nature of the programme as a complete framework taught in a state-endorsed context, full epistemic equality was hard to achieve. It is, therefore, the structural context that stood in the way of epistemic equality – as everyone was there to teach and learn the principles of the programme, it was hard to break free of this context. This supports Fricker's point that epistemic injustice must be understood from a structural perspective, even though epistemic encounters and interactions take place at the micro level (Fricker, 2007: 7).

In the training sessions, parents and teachers cooperate to fulfil the ICDP requirements and follow its themes. What becomes apparent in the examples we give here, as well as in several others in our notes, is that the mentors praise the participants when the latter show that they understand and agree with the intentions of the programme. In this first example, the participants were presented with the notion of "shared focus." "Shared focus" is one of the eight themes for good interaction adopted by ICDP. As homework, the participants had been told to come up with examples of how they enacted principles, which we presented earlier as ICDP dialogues. The parents were asked to share their experiences of attempting to establish a shared focus with their children.

One mother gave the following example of how she established a shared focus with her child:

Mother: My son likes to hide, and then he jumps out and says, “Ooo” [mimics the sound]. He wants her [his mother] to join him. He starts to hide and looks if she is joining and is very interested to see if she is.

Mentor: Of course, he likes it! And do notice that the child is able to remain longer in a situation because you are together with them.

In this interaction, we see how the mentor praised the mother for establishing a shared focus with her son and therefore doing what the ICDP wanted her to. The mother’s example presents her as emotionally competent and capable of tuning into the needs of her child, which corresponds well with the emotionally competent parenting that ICDP seeks to encourage.

There were many such interactions in which the mentors praised the parents for completing the tasks that the ICDP recommended. We will share some more examples of this dynamic. Below, a mother is explaining how she established a shared focus with her daughter:

Mother: My daughter likes to cook with me in my kitchen. And she only wants to do it with her [the mother]. She lets her do it but tries to keep her away from things that are dangerous. There is a lot of chaos, and sometimes, it is not very good looking what they made, but her daughter is very proud and happy and there is a lot of chaos when they are doing this.

The mentor replies with a smile on her face: We have a saying that indicates what you do with the child today, it will do alone tomorrow – so maybe you will have cake soon?

Minority mentor, also smiling: Yes, I believe that she will have cake soon.

Mentor: Was this the first time you made anything together?

Mother: Yes, she is very interested and looks on YouTube for recipes.

Mentor: Yes, that is always a good starting point when you are aiming at a shared focus that you do something that you both like.

This interaction involved several aspects of cooperation, affirmation and praise. When the participants shared stories of how they related to their children and shared their emotional and practical focus, the mentors related in a positive manner.

At first glance, this exchange is interactive and relational and, in many ways, creates a space for dialogue between the participant and the mentor (Medina, 2012: 202). However, this dialogical and pedagogical form does not preclude epistemic objectification from taking place. As we showed in the field notes presented above, the participants were allowed to speak but were praised specifically when they cooperated and presented examples that agreed with the given homework. The examples provided by the mothers were used as a pedagogical tool for elucidating the ICDP principles, and the participants were treated as givers of specific requested information regarding “shared focus” and “giving meaning” (Fricker, 2007: 133).

The ICDP may be understood as a standardised educational programme. It follows a certain logic and uses building blocks based on the ICDP's epistemology. Bråten et al. (2021) pointed out that such programmes harbour ideals of "modern" forms of parenting as being more appropriate than more traditional ones. They stated that such ideals, packaged in a friendly and dialogical manner, are elusive but nonetheless present in the programme (Bråten et al., 2021: 31–32). From this perspective, asking the participants to do homework and praising them when they do it correctly can be seen as part of a culturally imperialistic practice that is epistemically unjust.

However, despite numerous examples of praise when the participants aligned themselves with the ICDP, our data showed that the mentors often deviated from the programme. Sometimes, they would allow the participants to interrupt them, or they would ask for input from the participants, which they acknowledged and commented on. As we will show, such deviations from the standards are essential to co-constructing knowledge, which provides all participants with a chance to become givers of knowledge (Fricker, 2007). In the following extract from our fieldnotes, the group was talking about children's feelings and how important it is to tune in to small children's emotional expressions when one father suddenly interrupted the conversation:

Father: The children come from different cultures. It is easier for the smaller children to become a part of the system, but for the older children it is harder. These children are told to only cope with a certain amount of yelling from their parents, then they may call the Children Protection Services. They become very afraid of this!

Mentor: Do you remember that we talked about this at a parents' meeting? That Child Protection Services will help so that the children do not decide everything.

Mother: But the children **do** decide everything now!

At this point, many people raised their hands and wanted to share their perspectives. There was a lot of discussion. After a while, the father said the following:

Father: Earlier I hit my child if he did not go to bed, and the child did everything he said. But when I came here, I stopped being strict, and then everything just disintegrated.

Mentor: [points to the ICDP house which is pinned to the wall] We are going to talk a lot about setting boundaries for children. We are in the basement now [points to the house], and we build it floor by floor [points to the floors of the house]. I understand this is important to you, but we will eventually have tools to make boundaries. This will come eventually.

The mentor then changed the subject and said that they were now going to talk about praise and recognition.

What is interesting here is that there seems to be real epistemic dialogue in this interaction. The parents contribute knowledge and oppose the perspectives proffered in the ICDP. The mentors hear out and acknowledge the inputs. This underlines the messy nature of understanding epistemic exchanges. Are the participants really co-creating knowledge in these instances or not? We see the above example as an epistemic attempt to influence definitions of parenting and start a discussion on parental control when physical disciplining is not allowed. However, as the programme is taught as a holistic structure of understandings built on scientific and ethical stances, including the position that boundary making can only take place non-physically when all the other elements between the parent and the child are in place, this understanding takes precedence over parents' attempts to broaden definitions of parenting. The dilemmas faced by the parents were acknowledged by the mentors, but they were acting as gatekeepers of the officially sanctioned understanding of parenting and were only doing their job by conveying these principles.

We saw several attempts at epistemic subjectivity and the co-creation of knowledge among the attending parents during our fieldwork. On another occasion, a father mentioned a dilemma he was facing as a parent:

Father: My child wants to go to the city mall. I don't know what to do.

Mentor: Even if the child is older, it is OK to set boundaries. I do not let my 12-year-old hang out at McDonald's at night, for example. But we shall talk more about this later.

As we see in the above quotation, deviations and interruptions are met and recognised, and our field notes show that the participants often dwell on these themes for quite some time. According to Fricker, a speaker is epistemically objectified when she is undermined "in her capacity as a giver of knowledge" (2007: 133). A speaker can also be undermined in her capacity as a producer of knowledge; as Medina (2012) argued, a producer of knowledge is an investigative subject who asks questions and issues interpretations and evaluations. It is at these moments of deviation that we find the parents being allowed to state their own knowledge and opinions – they come forth as subjects, and we understand these autonomous moments as occasions of full and equal epistemic cooperation.

However, as is visible in the quotations above, the mentor remained the main authority in handling and responding to the participants' inputs. This fit well with the mentor's overarching role as the "knower" of good parenting in this context. The mentor took on the role of the mediator of the inputs, which were allowed and acknowledged, but in our observations, the inputs never led to the mentor deviating from the programme principles.

Our data also showed that critical empathy, as Lobb (2018) called it, was at stake in the interactions between the mentors and the participants. Critical empathy entails, as discussed earlier, horizontal perspectives and political solidarity with the other. At its foundation, critical empathy entails an openness to taking on others' perspectives and is an antidote to epistemic injustice. However, one of the challenges related to engaging in critical empathy is that critical empathy cannot be extracted from the context in which it occurs (Lobb, 2017: 604). Here, the mentors were responsible for teaching the principles of the ICDP, and in order to do so, they could not be open to a symmetric relationship in which they would look for neologisms and new solutions. Even though there were fleeting moments that had a semblance of epistemic equality, as shown in the extracts, the data revealed that the parents succumbed to the mentor's recognitions, assessments and interpretations, as questions need correct answers in the ICDP. As pointed out by several scholars, the ICDP and similar programmes employ specific epistemic principles of what good parenting entails (Bråten et al., 2021; Gustafsson, 2020). The mentors' job is to teach these principles to the participants. The mentors might accommodate inputs from the participants during discussions, but they have to ensure that the programme's principles are conveyed to the participants. Therefore, epistemic injustice is both contested and perpetuated in the implementation of the ICDP.

Discussion

In this article, we have shown that epistemic injustice occurs when the programme is taught. Mentors praise participants when the latter are in line with ICDP and allow space for discussions but also gently coach the participants back to the programme principles. In this way, the epistemology of the ICDP dominates during the teaching sessions. Based on the data from the sessions, we suggest that there is a danger that the ICDP, rather than improving immigrant parents' skills, silences their knowledge because what they may know, understand and interpret is suppressed by the principles and universal-development truths that only pretend to be culturally sensitive. There is also a risk that learning about parenting through the ICDP course simplifies the contradictory and complex reality faced by parents. In addition, the dominant

discourses of development psychology in the ICDP privilege certain truth claims and interpretations of reality. By being aware of these mechanisms, the mentors teaching the programme could help create more epistemic space for the participants to contribute alternative and competing views on parenting (Nikolaidis, 2021: 396). The programme most likely holds significant “model power,” but increased awareness may at least acknowledge the embryotic attempts at formulating alternatives that arise during training (Erstad, 2015: 174; Medina, 2012: 209).

ICDP can be seen as a tool for integration in a political context that seems to consider one group of parents, namely the refugees, as potentially problematic and in need of learning new skills. According to research, there is a higher level of parenting violence among immigrant families (Mossige and Stefansen, 2015) and parents belonging to immigrant groups are seen as at of applying physical disciplining. This might be one of the justifications of making parenting training mandatory for newly arrived refugees in Norway. Even though prevention of potential future violence is an understandable concern, Anderson (2012: 171) rightfully argued that group segregation along the lines of social inequality is a key structural feature that turns otherwise innocent, if cognitively biased, epistemic transactions into vectors of epistemic injustice. Designating a marginalised group as being in need of training is problematic, especially when the training is mandatory. This understanding hinges on what Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002) would have called a binary opposition between the migrant and the citizen, so often visible in work with migrants in liberal democracies.

Norwegian immigration policies regarding newly arrived refugee parents considers them to be a group that needs to improve or change their parenting skills. A valid question to ask is whether this is a political indication that they may participate in majority society only if they adhere to the accepted principles of parenting. Several studies have underlined how minority parents already put in considerable effort to adapt to majority ideals for parenting (i.e. Handulle and Vassenden, 2020; Tembo et al., 2020). On the other hand, the ICDP’s adherence to majority ideals for parenting can be utilised as a resource that helps participants improve their knowledge of the Norwegian language, learn new parenting skills and gain insights into parenting practices in Norway (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2016: 51–52; Reichelt et al., 2021: 312). A similar point is made by Gustafsson (2020: 317) as she describes parenting programmes to be democratically empowering as well as culturally imperialistic. Placing ICDP at the core of immigration policies sends a strong signal about what parental values are accepted, thus forcing immigrant parents to adhere to majority ideals. In doing so, we as a

society risk violating immigrants' own experiences and knowledge, instead painting them as careless, unknowing and/or unloving parents. We argue that welcoming parents' views, reflections and experiences contributes to new and important knowledge that enables and empowers both parents and teachers in the important act of parenthood in Norway. The concept of epistemic injustice may expand our analytical horizon and expose the power and politics in the ICDP that dominate and regulate refugee parents. Having Norwegian political authorities recognise the limits of the ICDP could be one way of reducing epistemic injustice. Strengthening mentors' sensitivity and professional judgement would be another way of containing epistemic injustice in ICDP. According to Anderson (2012: 163), hermeneutic injustice should be recognised as structural because it takes place in the social structures that enables it. Changing the policy framework of integration practices, of which the ICDP is a part, would match Anderson's position that institutions should assume greater responsibility in countering epistemic injustice.

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