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# Supporting Integration Services for the Immigrant Children in Finnish Early Childhood Education

A Handbook For Educators and Parents

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<p>Early childhood education and care plays a crucial role in the development and wellbeing of the children. In the recent years, Finland has been getting a growing number of immigrant children from multicultural backgrounds, and therefore it becomes even more challenging to provide high quality child care. The goal of this thesis is to support the integration services for these children in early childhood education.</p> <p>Through this functional thesis a handbook has been developed in cooperation with the Y.E.S day care center in Vantaa. This handbook aims to serve both the early educators as well as the parents. It provides the practical ideas and activities for supporting the integration process of the immigrant children into the Finnish day care centers.</p> <p>The study has a qualitative approach, wherein data have been collected through the case studies of two parents and two teachers. The semi- structured interviews were conducted and focused on the experiences, needs and challenges faced by the immigrant children in the Finnish day care centers and suggestions for implementing suitable methods for a better future. The theoretical framework is based on the social pedagogical concepts of participation, psychological development in early years and parent –teacher partnership as a salient part in enhancing the integration process.</p> <p>To evaluate the usefulness of the handbook, feedback was been obtained from the day care staff. Based on the results and the feedback it was concluded that undoubtedly the immigrant children have to undergo a lot of difficult situations and thus there is a need for improvising the routine day care activities supported by the cooperation between the professionals and the immigrant families. In addition, further research is required to be done on immigrant children's' integrational experiences so as to promote their wellbeing and learning on equal terms throughout the country.</p>	
Keywords	Early childhood education and care, immigration, integration, multiculturalism, inclusion

Tekijä Otsikko	Shweta Phull Maahanmuuttajanlasten kotoutumisprosessin tukeminen suomalaisessa varhaiskasvatuksessa.
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<p>Varhaiskasvatuksella ja hoidolla on iso rooli lasten kehityksessä ja hyvinvoinnissa. Viime vuosina Suomeen on tullut yhä enemmän maahanmuuttajien lapsia, joilla on monikulttuurinen tausta. Siksi on entistä haastavampaa tarjota korkealaatuista lastenhoitoa. Tämän tutkielman tarkoitus on auttaa päiväkodeja kotoutumisprosessin tukemisessä.</p> <p>Tämän toiminnallisen opinnäytetyön yhteydessä on kehitetty käsikirja yhteistyössä Y.E.S. päiväkodin kanssa Vantaalla. Käsikirjan tarkoituksena on palvella sekä varhaiskasvattajia että vanhempia. Se tarjoaa käytännön ideoita ja toimintaehdotuksia maahanmuuttajien lasten kotoutumisprosessin tukemiseen Suomen päiväkodeissa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyössä on käytetty laadullista lähestymistapaa, ja tiedot on kerätty haastattelemalla kahta vanhempaa ja kahta opettajaa. Haastatteluissa keskityttiin niihin kokemuksiin, tarpeisiin ja haasteisiin, joita maahanmuuttajalapsen kokevat Suomen päiväkodeissa. Haastattelujen perusteella opinnäytetyössä esitetään ehdotuksia sopivista menetelmistä, jotta käytäntöjä voidaan kehittää tulevaisuudessa. Teoreettinen viitekehys pohjautuu osallisuuteen, varhaisvuosien psyykkiseen kehitykseen sekä vanhempien ja opettajan kumppanuuteen keskeisenä osana kotoutumisprosessin edistämistä.</p> <p>Käsikirjan hyödyllisyyden arvioimiseksi päivähoiton henkilökunnalta pyydettiin palautetta. Tuloksien ja palautteiden perusteella pääteltiin, että maahanmuuttajalapsen kokevat epäilemättä paljon vaikeuksia, jonka takia on tarpeen parantaa päiväkotirutiineja tukemalla maahanmuuttajaperheiden ja ammattilaisten yhteistyötä. Lisäksi, on tarpeellista tehdä lisätutkimusta maahanmuuttajien lasten ja heidän perheidensä kotoutumiskokemuksista, jotta voidaan edistää lasten hyvinvointia ja oppimista tasavertaisesti kaikkialla maassa.</p>	
Keywords	Varhaiskasvatus, maahanmuutto , kotoutuminen, monikulttuurisuus, osallisuus

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## 1 Introduction

The aim behind this functional thesis is to develop a handbook to support the integration services for the immigrant toddlers or the pre-schoolers in Finnish early childhood education system with the cooperation of the working life partner; Y.E.S day-care centre. This is a case study of couple of parents and teachers which deeply examines the current early childhood education practices and suggests the measures to support them. The main reason behind conducting this study is to provide the new immigrant children with an easy and a comfortable start into the new environment. An attempt has been made to focus on the importance of language, mother tongue, and culture in the development, wellbeing and the positive adaptation of the immigrant children, highlighting the role of the educators and the parents in the whole process. Matsumoto as cited in Korhonen (2010, p.75) talks about both positive and negative adaptation outcomes. Positive adaptation leads to language competence, self-confidence, interpersonal relationships and stress reduction whereas on the other hand negative consequences leads to psychological and psychosomatic problems like anxiety, depression impaired school and work performance and difficulties in human relationships.

Every child brings with her own culture, thus for a successful integration process it is important to understand one's culture. In support of this, in a publication of Finnish National Board of Education, a chapter on teaching of immigrant children called 'very different cultural background' (hyvin erilainen kulttuurista) very clearly suggests that illiteracy is something which is related to culture rather than the socio-economic structures prevailing in one's native country (Korhonen 2010, p. 48). Therefore, we as early educators has a responsibility to enhance the positive adaptation and learning of the young immigrant learners by respecting their culture and their home country.

The increasing immigration status in Finland has been a motivational factor in conducting this study. Finland has a growing number of children and parents of multicultural backgrounds, so the developmental task in this area is more and more important. Also, my own experience as being an immigrant mother has motivated me to conduct this study.

The theoretical backgrounds which support this thesis are the child's integration into the day care centre, pedagogical methods supporting the integration process, parent's participation and inclusion and the role of the educators in supporting the language and culture of immigrant children. The other chapters focus on the process of the study, the data collection and its analyses, results and findings from the interviews, the handbook and its evaluation and the ethical considerations taken during the whole process.

## **2 Labour Market Partner**

My working life partner for this thesis is the Y.E.S Day Care Centre in Vantaa. It started as a private kindergarten in 1993. Later in the year 2003 Y.E.S became a part of Vantaa City municipal Early Childhood Education services. The center also got new premises in part of new Pakkala Learning and Information Centre, POINT. The Y.E.S day care center follows 'the incredible years', working method. The main goal is to provide a safe and multicultural learning environment to children based on the principle of "Learning by playing".

There are seven different groups including 2 preschool groups in the day care centre for children aged between 1 to 6 years. Though as the name suggests 'Young English speakers' (Y.E.S) mainly it is an English speaking day care centre but there are two Finnish speaking groups as well. The centre also runs a Y.E.S club, two times a week for children aged between 2, 5 to 5 years and also a YES Family Club for children and guardians. I chose this particular day care as I thought it can provide me with a wider scope of looking at the things from the perspective of both Finnish and English day care centres.

## **3 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Finland**

Early childhood education is defined as educational interaction with children in different settings with the aim of fostering the child's healthy growth, development and learning. ECEC is a service for children from 1 to 6 years and for their families. The content of ECEC is guided by the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC (2002). The curriculum guidelines aim to promote children's wellbeing and learning on equal terms throughout

the country. It focuses on the professional awareness of the day care workers, parents' participation in the day care services, and supporting the services through multi professionalism that are provided to the children and their families. ECEC also prioritize the child's way of acting, which is defined as playing, physical activities, artistic experiencing and self-expression and exploration.

In addition to these general guidelines, ECEC also highlights the importance of culture and language of the minority group. It states that children belonging to cultural minorities should be provided with opportunities to grow up in a multicultural society as members of both their own cultural communities and Finnish society. It means he should be able to interact joyfully with other children and the educators, and should have a feeling of being treated fairly irrespective of his culture, language and ethnic background. For this purpose it is expected that each municipality organizes its ECEC services according to the needs of the families in the best possible way. I also strongly believe that the needs of the families are best met when their respective culture and language is being appreciated and is seen as important as of the other, and this serves as one of the important base for this whole study.

The early childhood education and care is also governed by some fundamental acts of the Finnish laws. The child day care services provided by the municipality, communal centers or private day care center is covered under the The Child Care Act (451/1990, 1 §). According to the child care act, 1973, the aim of the day care should be to offer such services to the children which meet their individual needs requirements, taking into consideration their cultural heritage. Day care needs to provide a warm and safe environment which supports the child's aesthetic, intellectual, ethical, and religious education. Religious education means respecting child's parents' or guardian's religious believes. . (Child Care Act, 1973.) In support to this the Finnish law states that nobody may be discriminated against on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics the Non-Discrimination Act 21/2004).

Though efforts have been made to support the integration process but however, steps taken are not enough. One of the study of multiculturalism in day care centres in Helsinki region was carried out by Niina Resmu (2005). The results showed that there is a strong need for the support for the immigrant children with different linguistic backgrounds. She



stated in her report that though there are some day cares which are working in this direction through the help of the language teachers speaking same language as that of the child's mother tongue, but there is a need for a uniform framework providing such support in others day care centres as well.

#### **4 Immigration and Integration**

The number of immigrants in Finland are increasing significantly. According to the Ministry Of The Interior (2015), In September, close to 11,000 asylum seekers arrived in Finland and the revised estimate of the total number of asylum seekers this year is approximately 50,000 as per the Finnish immigration services. According to Statistics Finland, (2014) 31,940 persons immigrated to Finland from foreign countries during 2013. The number is 660 higher than in the previous year and the highest during Finland's independence. The highest number of immigrants live in the capital area of Finland i.e. Helsinki and some smaller cities, which makes it the most important developmental area for multicultural education. The number of foreign-language residents in Helsinki, at the beginning of 2013 was 73,608. These foreign-language residents i.e. other residents than those with either Finnish, Swedish or Sami as their mother tongue, made up 12 per cent of Helsinki's population. (Foreigners in Helsinki 2013) This also means an increasing number of children in daycare settings and preschools with such backgrounds.

It is crucial that the needs of the immigrant people are met and required services are provided so as to enable them to integrate into the Finnish society. Integration means inclusion in a broader entity. According to the ministry of economic affairs and employment, (n.d) integration is a two way process, which requires commitment from both sides, i.e. immigrants as well as the native country and its people. If we see here, the Finnish Integration law, it wholly supports the immigrants and their culture. In the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (1386/2010), integration is defined as an "interactive development involving immigrants and society at large". The aim of integration is to provide immigrants with knowledge and skills that are required in society and working life, and to support them in maintaining their own culture and language. The means are defined as being "measures and services provided by the authorities and other parties". (Finlex n.d.). This very well states the importance of integration in a society.

## **5 Integration into the Day-Care through Social Participation**

According to Vygotsky and Dewey social interaction is essential to children's learning and cognitive development as children work with more skilled partners in sociocultural activity. Vygotsky stresses the importance of participation through the use of cultural tools in fostering the cognitive development of the children. (Woznaik, R & Fisher. 2014.) Through participation an individual transforms his skills and understanding for the betterment and he is able to develop his feelings, values and thoughts through everyday activities. We also see the importance of the participation in core curriculum education, Finland. In the Core Curriculum of pre-school education in Finland, participation is viewed as taking part and it is emphasized that child participates in pre-school groups regularly. Taking part in education is considered as one way of creating experiences of participation. (Finnish National Board of Education 2010.) I believe that in order to encourage children in everyday activities at day care their smooth integration into the system is of utmost important because once they have a feeling of belongingness towards the learning environment it is only then that they will freely and joyfully give their participation.

Every child bring with her a cultural story and at the same time learns from what others bring in. So the social pedagogue has not only to be aware of the environment in which the children are participating and learning, but also create the best learning environment for them. (Fog 2003, p.33.) According to The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study in the U.K, among the various factors, one of the most important factor contributing towards student learning differences, is the quality of the learning environment. Another significant result of the study showed that respect for diversity was the most influential single quality predictor for early childhood education and achievement in the school in the later years. Especially when talking about the children from foreign countries, from cultural minorities or other disadvantaged backgrounds, quality of education and care in day care centers and schools holds much more importance. One more important finding in this study revealed that children getting poor quality education in day care centers and preschools, and undergoing other disadvantages, when moved to less academically effective primary schools were subject to high risk of poor outcomes. (Ojala 2010, pp.13-32.)

This in turn raises the question about what constitutes the best learning environment for young children, especially the immigrant children. The answer can be seen in the Piaget's theoretical model of adaptation, in which he describes accommodation and assimilation which suggests a way in which learning takes place. Assimilation means using an existing schema to deal with a new object or situation whereas accommodation happens when the existing schema i.e. knowledge does not work, and needs to be changed to deal with a new object or situation. (Piaget 1953, pp 407-419.) He believed that peer support helps the children to get assimilate into the society, into the new environment. He portrays the children's relationship with peers as balanced and egalitarian. Peer support influences the children how they think about themselves, their social worlds and social behavior.

Like Piaget, Sullivan as cited in Lamb & Bornstein (2011, p.310) believed that the concepts of mutual respect, equality and reciprocity developed from peer relationships. The social learning theory also guides the research on children's peer relationships. According to this theory peers are viewed as behavior control and behavior change agents for each other. This means children observe each other and learn how to behave within their social world. In the context of the immigrant children, peer support proves very beneficial. It serves to provide social learning, self-esteem enhancement, positive self-evaluation and emotional security. (Lamb & Bornstein 2011, pp. 310-316.)

Roberts (2002, p 73) illuminates our understanding of the Piaget's theory by suggesting that in order to have long term benefits from early childhood education, it is crucial to provide the young children with the opportunities to play, let them explore the environment with the help of those things with which they are already familiar and value imagination, creativity and originality in them. For any kind of new learning it is essential to 'start with the child'. A good learning environment is one which is socially, emotionally and cognitively interesting and challenging but at the same time safe enough.

## 6 Social Pedagogical Methods Supporting Integration

Social pedagogy can be viewed in many different ways. More often, the term 'pedagogy' refers to education or upbringing and the word 'social' emphasis on the shared work of the parents and the society which they undertake in providing services for children and young people. In early childhood education work, social pedagogy reflects the holistic education and care by centralising the child as a whole. (Cameron & Moss 2011, pp. 9-10.) In this chapter the importance of smooth integration has been highlighted based on the social pedagogical considerations.

### 6.1 Psychological Development During Transitions

Children's emotional and social development is influenced by a various factors, of which transition is one of them. During various transitions it is very important to support children's emotional development. When moving from a familiar setting to an unfamiliar setting a child goes through challenging situations. It is important not to underestimate the range, number and impact of transitions that a young child experiences. According to one study which was conducted to examine the stress levels of the toddlers when making a transition from home to childcare found out that stress levels were high as much as five months after first attending the day care centre. This study alarms the need to manage the transition process efficiently and sensitively. (Miller, Cable & Gill 2010, p.93.) In order to support the transition process it is important for the educator to be aware of how each transaction may make different demands on the child. From an immigrant's child perspective when moving into a new cultural setting he has to learn new rules, new language, culture and people. So thus his self-identity and self-esteem are changing continuously. If the early educators and the other children in the day care centre responds him well, values him, he will have high self-esteem and self-identity otherwise low self-identity and thus low self-esteem.

### 6.2 Language and Learning

Language is a corner stone for learning. According to Piaget "language expresses commands or desires and serves to criticize or to threaten in a word to arouse feelings and provoke action" (2010, p.2). According to the Finnish National Board of Education (2010)

in order to strengthen children's emotional life, creativity and self-esteem, Pre-primary education should support the development of children's thinking, sociability, emotions and interaction skills and their learning processes with the aid of language in particular. So what other language can play a better role in this process than the child's own mother tongue. Berk and Winsler, (1995, pp. 24-26) emphasis on the Vygotsky's idea of development. Vygotsky suggests teachers' use cooperative learning exercises where less competent children develop with help from more skillful peers within the zone of proximal development. (ZPD). ZPD is defined as the distance between what is already learned and mastered and what can be learnt through interaction with others. (Berk and Winsler, 1995, pp. 26.)

Looking from this thesis idea perspective, in a day care setting teachers can very well help the new immigrant children getting adjusted in the environment by speaking with them few words in their mother tongue and at the same time enhance their development by introducing them to the new Finnish words and supporting peer communication.

### 6.3 Culture and Learning and the Role of the Educator

Culture and the context of family are central to children's sense of identity and learning. Educators have a very significant role to play in supporting children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds so as to build their trust in the services offered to them. Forte as referenced by Malcom Payne (2005, p. 280) proposes that social workers develop toolkits of information about values associated with different cultures. Adapting to a new culture is a complex and dynamic process. In many studies it has been proved that the intercultural adaption and learning process is most effective when both parties are involved as it provides an opportunity to create new modes of understanding and participation through various learning strategies. So it is a shared learning process. Vygotsky as cited in Korhonen (2010, p. 71) in his sociocultural learning model claims that learning and development take place in socially and culturally shaped contexts. The social constructionist theory of Berger and Luckman also supports the Vygotsky's point of view, which views the relationship between individuals and society as dialectical; meaning persons depending on each other and learning from each other. In this kind of mutual learning processes people learn without fear and they feel to explore and search for new information and opportunities. (Korhonen 2010, pp.70-75.)

The intercultural learning process includes cognitive, behavioral and affective domains of learning. It is therefore very important for the educators to be intercultural competent i.e. they understand the main cultures they work with and also that they are culturally sensitive. Collecting information just by studying the literature is not sufficient, there needs to be a “real communication”. The intercultural approach is based upon following the rules of dialogue, which means the professionals listen empathetically to the children and show respect for the child, his views, values and needs. Entering into the child’s culture by the educator requires an open attitude, personal effort and a large dose of curiosity. Children should also be encouraged to develop non-verbal communication skills. A training programme for teachers for building intercultural competence is crucial. This may include theoretical lessons, practical ideas, for instance different games, arranging workshops where people from different countries work together in groups and communicate in different languages to promote patience, collaboration, positive interaction and friendly relationships. (Onorati & Bednarz 2010, pp.161-166, 243.)

#### 6.4 Parent –Teacher Partnership Towards Inclusion

In Rosemary Roberts view (2002, p. 82) parents are the experts in knowing their children, how they are developing socially, emotionally, cognitively and physically. They know their strengths and weaknesses. No one else can understand a child better than his parents. When it comes to differentiate between the ‘normal’ and the ‘special behaviour’ of a child, parents know the best. An educator can enrich his knowledge and understanding of the child through the shared knowledge of the parents. In fact the best way is that both parents and staff use each other’s knowledge to support the child’s learning. For the parents it is important to have access to the information and the ideas they need to enable them to provide that support. So it is the responsibility of the staff to provide the parents with all the required information. (Roberts 2002, pp. 82-83.) The regular parent - teacher meetings are very crucial in supporting child’s learning especially in case of immigrant children.

According to Harrington (cited in Sutton 2000, p.175), isolation resulting from geographical factors may lead to depression in children. To overcome such difficulties, Carole Sutton (2000, pp. 163-166) has suggested some measures to be incorporated together by the professions and the parents. The very first task of the educator is to build a supportive and empathic relationship with the parents. It is important to show kindness and concern towards the immigrant family not only by the day care staff but also by the other

workers such as the interpreters. It is crucial that both the professionals as well as parents identify the main areas of difficulties being faced by them and their child. They should also discuss the strengths and the potential of the child so as to make a plan for the desired outcome. Lastly a baseline should be developed against which the progress has to be measured.

In Finland, in every day care centre, the information about the child is shared through various forms like “Basic Information on Child”, “Early Childhood Education Plan, and ‘Special Diets. These forms are filled annually, jointly by the parents and the staff. It is very useful tool in knowing the child’s interest, abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Efforts can be made to have this kind of communication more frequently between the teacher and the parents of the immigrant children.

## **7 Conducting the Study**

This chapter focuses on the procedure of the study. First of all, the method of the study and its designing will be described, followed by the process of data analysis.

### **7.1 Study Methodology**

This study had a qualitative approach. Qualitative research interviews with the early childhood educators and parents have been conducted based on a semi structured style. (Robson 2009, p. 278.) Qualitative research helps to find out the individual perceptions about the topic to be studied. During the interviews a list of pre-determined questions were asked but the interviews were very flexible as we also talked about the things other than those which were not mentioned in the list beforehand. Face to face interviews were conducted with the aim to get the in-depth information through both verbal and non-verbal responses. It also provided with the opportunity to examine the underlying hidden meanings which could not have been possible through other methods like questionnaires. But, because of such focus the qualitative approach is time consuming and also it limits the sample size specially if there is only one person conducting the study.

## 7.2 Designing the Study

My own experiences of being an immigrant mother and those of my immigrant friends with children in Finland have always motivated me to study in this context and to do something meaningful for the immigrant society. Later during a work placement in a day-care centre, my observation regarding the challenges faced by the immigrant children and their families triggered an idea of conducting this study for the thesis project. I talked with the director of the Y.E.S day care centre and expressed the desire of carrying out the study with their cooperation and guidance. The director was delighted to hear the idea and informed me about the research permissions to be taken. In our second meeting she suggested me the names of the two teachers of the Y.E.S day care centre bases on their high qualification and experience to be interviewed for the study purpose. After that the interviewee questions were designed and later these interviews were conducted in the day care centre. The interviews with the parents were conducted a month after at their place of choice. The interviews were recorded on the cell phone which was pre tested at home by me. The questions were formulated on the basis of the social care interviewing principles (Allen & Langford 2008, p. 113). Open and direct questions were used to obtain the background information about the participants. To fill the blank gaps which emerged out during the interview the intermediate questions were asked. The structure used in the actual interviews can be seen in appendix 3 and 4.

The Target group was designed with the aim to have in-depth information about the needs, challenges of the immigrant children and the measures to support their integration process. The first choices of the target group were the day care teachers as the study's main aim was to provide the children of foreign origin with a smooth and comfortable learning environment in Finnish day care centres. The teachers to be interviewed were selected by the director of the Y.E.S day care centre after discussing the study and its purpose. As parents are the expert of their child, knowing their perspective was equally important. The criteria for their selection was to interview the immigrant parents whose children have been to the Finnish day care centres. The second criteria was that their mother tongue should be other than English so as to justify the aim of the study. The motive was to see the challenges faced by the immigrant children in the Finnish day care centres with no-common language, neither Finnish nor English. The third criteria was to have participants from different nationalities so as to have a more diversified data. As I conducted the study alone, the sample size was kept limited, comprising of four interviews; two teachers and two parents.



### 7.3 Conducting the Interviews

The interviews were conducted between the months of March and August 2016. All the interviews were conducted at different places according to the preferences of the participants. Teachers were interviewed at the kindergarten in their offices. The time and was arranged suitably not causing any kind of inconvenience to anybody, neither the children nor the other staff members. One parent was interviewed at the cafeteria of her choice and the other at her home. A calm and peaceful environment was ensured in order to have a smooth and relaxing conversation with the interviewees. Before conducting the interviews, the motive of the study and a list of questions were sent to the teachers and the parents so that they get familiarize with the whole situation. In the beginning of each interview a letter of consent was got signed by the interviewees explaining them their rights. The interviews were also recorded at peace after taking the permissions of the participants.

As mentioned above the data was collected through semi structured interviews, which provided flexibility and easiness to both the parties. Also, it gave room to some of the new questions which were not predefined, which arose from the conversation. Some supplementary questions were also asked during the interviews to have a more clear understanding of the views expressed by the participants. In the later interviews some questions also merged out as a result of my experience gained from the prior interviews. (Allen & Langford 2008, p.113.)

Before arranging the interviews the participants were asked if it they were comfortable to give the interviews in English so as to avoid any kind of anxiousness. Though during one of the interviews it emerged out that the participant was not very comfortable with the English language, so she was asked to use some finish words whenever necessary. With one of the other interviewees Hindi was as a medium of conversation at some points. It was natural since the interviewer and the interviewee shared a common mother tongue.

The duration of the interviews varied from 20 to 40 minutes. The interviewees with the parents lasted longer than the teachers. The probable reasons behind this in my opinion might be the professional skills, language proficiency, and the more experience of sharing the relevant information of the teachers than the parents.

#### 7.4 Data Analysis

The raw collected data needs to be examined, interpreted and analyzed in a significant way. Analysis is a test of both the data as well as the enquirer: it is the test of the ability to think and to process the information in a meaningful and useful manner. (Robson 2009, p. 459.)

The data analysis began with transcribing the data. At first only the main points were transcribed but soon it was realized that in order to have a more in-depth information and to have impactful direct quotes in the results the data needs to be transcribed word to word. Though transcribing the four interviews completely was a time consuming process but it was worth doing it. It enabled usage of the direct quotes which provides a through description of the views of the participants not only to interviewer but also to the other readers. They helped to look out for the implied meanings of the discussion and also acted as an evidences for the arguments constructed in the study. (Denscombe 2010, p. 286.)

The data was then organized keeping in mind the motive of this study; the answers to the questions this study aims for (Robson 2009, p. 352). Content analysis was used to analyze the data. According to Robson (2009, p. 352) Content analysis is a codified common sense, a modification of the ways that might be used by amateurs to understand the different aspects of the world around them. It provides a means of quantifying the contents of a text. I decided to analyze the data from two different perspectives, teachers and the parents. The data first of all was divided into smaller component units to look for the key words and the patterns (Denscombe 2010, p 281-282). The data obtained from the teachers had four important patterns, so the data was arranged under four themes; parent partnership and inclusion, low stress environment, language support and peer support. The data obtained from parents was categorized into three themes; home visits, language assistance and food and culture.

## 8 Results and Findings

In this chapter results from the data collection have been presented. Information obtained from the teachers has been examined first followed by the parent's views.

### 8.1 Teacher's Views

Teacher's views have been divided into four main themes. These reflect their experiences, opinions and suggestions about what should be done in order to strengthen the integration services for the immigrant children in a day-care centre.

#### 8.1.1 Parent Partnership and Inclusion

For the purpose of supporting integration services for the immigrant children into the day care centres, teachers emphasised on the healthy relationship between the staff and the child's family and the active role of the parents. One teacher described the role of the parents in the following way:

*Parent's role is very important in integration, it cannot be separated. The smaller the child, more crucial is the role of the parents. It is helpful in knowing the correct needs of the child. They tell about child's habits, likes and dislikes. - int.1.*

Further, the teacher underlined that for the parents it is very important that they trust the day care centre, their services and their staff. Because doing so will not only make them feel comfortable but also their child.

*Children are very intelligent. When kids know their parents are at ease, they are at much ease and when parents are anxious or worried, kids get worried too; it reflects the child. – int. 1.*

*Join two worlds in child mind- day care and family. - int. 1.*

The teachers suggested that more cooperation is needed from the child's family and that there should be a healthy pedagogical partnership between parent and staff. For this purpose it is crucial that parents visit their child day care group often so as to make their

integration process smoother and easier. It is important that the immigrant parents coming from a different culture not only understand but also respect the rules and norms of the new place.

*Country is different, culture is different, there are so many big and small differences that a family needs to understand (...) our main support is being there with them, supporting them, telling them how this place (day care) works. For example what kind of clothes your child needs, different inside clothes, different gym clothes, different rain clothes, different slippers for inside. These kind of things some parents don't understand. - int. 2.*

According to the day care staff, among other things, celebrating different cultural festivals is also seen as one of ways to promote multiculturalism and involving parents in the day care activities. It was suggested by the teacher that though different cultural events are being organised at different times in the day-care centres but still it needs to be done more regularly with children of all age groups, especially the young ones.

*Opening up to the cultural events of the family, what is most important to them and then bringing them to the day care is important. Just as the way we celebrate any Finnish festivals we can celebrate their festivals in the group. We just had the Chinese New Year celebration. Last year we had a Muslim boy and so during the id time we were looking into the Muslim culture, we had book material and the child talked about how it is celebrate (...). Especially with the pre-schoolers it is done more as they have more skills to express. With the small ones it is equally important but they are not done so much. We should do it (cultural events) more. As it is their life outside the day care so it should also be their life inside the day care. - int.1.*

### 8.1.2 Low Stress Environment

*We provide a calm conduct to the child, example we smile. Child cannot really process the information that comes through ears but they register a smiling face. – int.1.*

The teachers emphasised on the low stress environment for a child, especially in case of new immigrant children. During the interview a teacher described how sometimes small immigrant children feel isolated, and unacceptable in the day care groups. She

narrated an incident about a girl who was feeling very inferior to others because of her different nationality and different language and how the teacher tackled the situation

*We try to speak our own mother tongue sometimes... I did once...there was a somalin child who had very low confidence level. She used to sit in one corner, feeling shy. And when her parents used to come to the day care to pick her up, she used to push them back, stopping them from talking in their mother tongue. Then I thought maybe she is feeling bad because her mother speaking in her native language. And then once I had a phone call from my son and I was deliberately speaking my mother tongue. After the call ended she was looking very curious. Few days later her mother told me herself that since that day the situation is better with her daughter (...) so we have to make them realize that they are not different.*  
– int 2.

### 8.1.3 Peer Support

According to the teachers interviewed, peer support is very beneficial in supporting integration process of a young immigrant child in the day care centres. It not only helps the child to learn social skills in a foreign country but also gives him a sense of belongingness. The teachers acknowledged that it is their responsibility to see that a new child makes friends, plays with other children and takes part in the daily activities. For instance small group activities are arranged and guided by the teachers to assist the support from groupmates. The teachers gave very useful example of group games which not only promotes inclusion but also fights against racism in the day care centres

*The biggest support they need is to make them feel that they are one of us, they are not different and this will boost their confidence level (...) for example if there is child from a totally different country, who looks different from others, we sit with the child, we take other children with us, we play some table games and other games. For example, we have some dolls both men and women of different colours and we play with them so that the child has a feeling that he is same like others.*  
– int. 2.

#### 8.1.4 Language Support

The teachers acclaimed that language support is being provided to the immigrant children as well as to the children's guardians through different means. If the situation demands, an interpreter is used during meetings with the parents, which is easily available. Some of the basic agreement forms to be filled in by the family are available in different languages like English, Russian, and Somali etc. With the children, they use different games, flash cards with the words and the pictures drawn on it.

*Especially with the little ones (small children) using pictures is very concrete, it helps. (...) especially with the immigrant children you could have really simple pictures, example you could have a smiley face or a cup of glass with water so that these can immediately help the child (...) Something that is very concrete is that you not only use your voice as means of communication, you also use your body language. For example, if you tell a child to please sit down, you would say please sit down and you can show with your hands so you also use body movements to aid in the communication. – int.1.*

*We play different games for supporting the language of the immigrant children, for example we have a game called who is who, it has different kinds of faces, the child learns different words and different senses as well. – int.2.*

When asked during the interview from the teacher about how it will make a difference if a child starting the day care services is already familiar with the few basic Finnish words, she replied in a very concrete and simple way as; *"The child will not feel like lost, not understanding anything if he knows some words before". – int. 2.*

Teachers admitted that the new immigrant children starting day care services in a foreign country have to undergo lot of difficulties. Although the teachers of the Y.E.S day care centre appreciated the curriculum designed by the municipality of Vantaa and their way of working in a multicultural environment yet they acknowledged the fact that more activities promoting multiculturalism should be done on regular basis and with children of all age groups.

## 8.2 Parents' Views

The data collected from the parents has been presented in a different way as compared to the data obtained from teachers. The latter has been conveyed more in a form of the suggestions about what should be done for supporting the integration services whereas the former has been stated as a combination of the suggestions made by the parents and their worries about their child related to the day care.

### 8.2.1 Home Visits by the Staff

During the interviews all the parents admired the idea about the early educators visiting their home especially before the child starts going to the day care or during the first week of the day-care. But out of the interviews conducted, only one family with the special child acknowledged the visit being made by the day care staff at their home. Parents talked about the speech therapy their child got in his early years which is not so common in their native place. They also cherished their child's teacher's gesture to participate in the discussion meetings with the speech therapist. After the home visit they felt really happy and it boosted their and their child morale a lot. The mother expressed her views like this,

*A month before my child started his daycare Special educational needs staff arranged a visit to our house to identify the needs of my child and motto was to provide home similar possible environment to him. It gave me a confidence as a mother that I can trust that my child is in safe hands. . - int. 3*

### 8.2.2 Language Assistance

All the immigrant families interviewed, articulated the problem of communicating with the day-care staff. Where on one hand they specified how challenging it was for them to understand the teachers talk and sharing their own views, on the other it was revealed that even a little language support from the teachers can bring positive results.

On recalling the past days of her child's day care, the interviewees narrated her worries regarding the foreign language and also suggested the ways on how to improve the situation as;

*There were quite many situations and days that I experienced which left me in a constant fear doubting my child's care, is he expressing himself? , can people understand him? etc. (...) Finnish being the only means of communication at the day care always created a worry in us of the need to be understood and also understand. And it still continues. (...) Some basic important words from our native language which teachers can use at the daycare should be used to make the child feel more secured and bring the enthusiasm to communicate more. Using more pictures and body language and signs to communicate should be done more. I feel it helps both the care taker and the child to make the bond between them grow faster and stronger. – int. 3*

The other family who have just started sending their child to the day care center expressed the same problem concerning their child being quite at the day care as follows,

*He is completely quite at the daycare, maybe because he doesn't understand how to talk or don't understand what is happening. So still it remains a big challenge for the whole family on how to improve his communication skills. - int.4*

While having discussion with the special child's mother it was highlighted that though in the beginning the unfamiliarity of Finish language hindered her child's mental and emotional growth significantly but later on due to the teacher's efforts her child's language skills improved remarkably.

*We expected that the child would be given more attention because he fails to understand the surroundings due to lack of language skills but rather things started getting bad.(...) He became more passive and quiet and started sticking to only few objects to spend his time at the daycare. We could only notice this during the holiday's period how active and exploring he would be! (...) Later we had a meeting with the care takers and the staff also asked me for more information about his needs, some important words in my mother tongue, we also got the picture book and this really helped a lot and things started getting better. – int.3*

During the interview Parents also applauded the way the Finnish early childhood education system gives all the parents the opportunity to be there with their child in his day-care group in the starting days. But it was stressed out that they should be given more information regarding such opportunities and should be made more flexible. As according to one of the mother's interviewed, the day care staff did not have enough resources to provide her child with the day care services well in advance. The family was told that



their child can start the day care the same day when the mother is starting her work. So as a result, the mother could not accompany her daughter in the starting days of her day care.

### 8.2.3 Food and Culture

People from different cultural backgrounds eat different foods. Immigrants often use food as a means of retaining their cultural identity. During the interviews the parents appreciated the way, the Finnish day care centers take into consideration the special diets of a child not only due to food allergies but also due to religious beliefs. But however, when their children started going to the day care center, it was very difficult for them to immediately adapt a new food taste. Parents reported about the adverse health effects of their children because of not eating proper food in day-care center during their initial days.

*“At home he was used to eating different food and he completely stopped eating food at the daycare. When he would come home he used to be so fussy and cranky and he even went underweight and still the problem continues to be so. int. 3*

Overall, the results indicated that the starting journey of the immigrant children and their families into the Finnish early childhood education system was filled with lots of challenging situations. The parents expressed that due to the changing physical and social environment and the language hindrance their children are not able to express their emotions, grow their skills or achieve what the native children can easily do. However, they are very optimistic and have a lot of hopes from the early childhood educators. The results indicate that teachers need to be more cultural sensitive, and should be willing to share all kind of information with the parents about the child and other matters related to his upbringing. They believe that a little extra effort made by the professionals can improve the integration process remarkably.

## 9 Handbook

The end product of this thesis is the handbook which is solely based on the data obtained from the interviews done with the teachers and the immigrant parents during the thesis process. This handbook aims to serve both the early educators as well as the parents. It

provides with the practical ideas and activities for supporting the integration process of the immigrant children into the Finnish day care centers.

Handbook describes various aspects related to the subject. The first and foremost is the parent teacher partnership and the active role of the immigrant parents in smoothening the integration process for their child. Organising orientation sessions for the families and celebrating different cultural festivals is also one of ways to promote multiculturalism and involving parents in the day care activities. Handbook talks about the different means by which language support can be provided to the immigrant children as well as to the children's guardians, for instance, small dictionary can be made. Most commonly used words can be written in native language in the first row and in corresponding rows their translations in different languages can be included. Peer support too is very beneficial in supporting integration process of a young immigrant child in the day care centers. It not only helps the child to learn social skills in a foreign country but also gives him a sense of belongingness. Suggestions have been made for creating a low stress environment in the classrooms so as to make the new children feel comfortable. The importance of the home visits and the ways to make them more effective have also been shared in the handbook. The detailed handbook can be seen in appendix 5.

In my opinion sharing this kind of handbook with the parents, especially exchanging this Finnish-mother tongue vocabulary between the parent/child and the day care staff even before the child join day care, for instance two weeks before would be really helpful.

## **10 Evaluation of the Handbook**

The feedback obtained from the Y.E.S day-care staff has been used as a base for evaluating the usefulness of the handbook. Feedback questions were formulated and sent to the director of the Y.E.S day care centre and to one of the teachers who has also participated as an interviewee in the thesis process. The feedback form included both closed and open-ended questions. Because the aim was not to limit the feedback answers by any boundary, open space was provided to answer the questions. The purpose of forming the questions was just to facilitate the evaluation process and saving the respondents' time. The actual questions can be seen in appendix 2.

A very positive and valuable feedback has been received from the day care staff. According to which, the handbook topic is very relevant. All the titles are easy and simple to understand. It was mentioned that the topic is very important and will be getting even more important as number of immigrant children is growing in ECEC and especially in Finnish speaking centers. It was emphasized that it is always important to try to get the message through to administration in order to get enough translated information, forms etc. for the immigrant citizen. The feedback highlighted that this kind of material is not only useful for the immigrant parents but it also helps ECEC staff to understand and learn about different cultures and children's lives and behavior

The teachers also gave feedback about the author's ability to cooperate in a productive and constructive way. It was added, that the author has succeeded in performing challenging task of developing a handbook by giving the whole process a lot of thought. It was suggested by one of the teachers to simplify the language so as to make it easily understandable by a non-native English speaker.

## **11 Ethics**

According to Denscombe (2014, p.284), research ethics is a fundamental feature of all good research. For the purpose of carrying out any kind of research a predetermined procedure needs to be followed. First and foremost the motive behind the study and the prospective benefits to the society were discussed with the director of the Y.E.S day care center. Since the main purpose of this study was to support integration services in Finnish day care centers, and since my labour market partner is a Finnish public day care center located in Vantaa, research permission from the city of Vantaa was then sought out. For this, a thesis draft was sent to the Vantaa city enlightening the motives, methods and procedures of the study. As for this study, data were collected through interviews, the basic principles of conducting the interviews were followed which includes; Confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation of the interviewees (Denscombe 2014, p.284-300). Before the interview a brief about the purpose of the study, the list of questions to be asked and an estimated duration of the interview were emailed to the interviewees so that they feel comfortable. On the interview day the consent form (appendix 1) was got signed by the interviewees which clearly stated the purpose of the study and familiarized them with their rights. Other than the rights of privacy and voluntary participation they were informed that they can leave any question unanswered or/and withdraw

from the interview anytime if they feel uncomfortable. They were also acknowledged of the interviews being recorded and documented for the study purpose. As only two teachers of the Y.E.S day care center have been interviewed it would have been very easy to recognize them through their nationality or background. Thus the anonymity has been ensured by concealing any kind of the information about them and so teachers' interviewed have been coded as "int 1" and "int 2" and parents as "int 3" and "int 4". By doing so, it increased the chances of receiving honest answers from the participants which in turn enabled the acquisition of valid data, valid results and conclusions.

Though the parents were concerned about the risk of being identified, yet disclosing their nationalities was not a problem with them. Keeping in mind the comfort of the interviewees, and respecting their privacy and sensitivities, the places of the interviews were selected. One of the parents was interviewed at her home and other at a restaurant. Teachers were interviewed at their office at the work place during their free time which was scheduled plenty of time beforehand.

Following the ethical principles, it was taken care that no personal harm is caused to the participants (Denscombe 2014, p 294). It was ensured that no such questions are asked during the interview which might cause some strong unwanted emotions, especially while interviewing a parent of a disabled child.

Though this study is followed by prescribed ethical principles, yet according to me it has some limitations. First of all as this is my first research so apparently it lacks the necessary skills of an experienced researcher. Secondly, the number of interviewees could have been added more so as to obtain more information on supporting integration services for the children and which in turn lead to more generalized results. Thirdly, the main medium for the interviews was English, which is not a native language of neither the interviewee nor the interviewer. Though all the participants had a good command of the English language except for one parent who had some difficulties in expression. In my opinion the participants could have expressed much more if they were given the chance to express themselves in their mother tongue, especially the parents which could have produced more in-depth data and thus more valid results.

## **12 Reliability and Validity**

A good qualitative research needs to demonstrate the validity (credibility) and reliability (dependability) of its data. A study is referred to be reliable if the results produced by it are consistent over time or can be reproduced using similar method. Whereas, validity determines the truthfulness of the research results. To prove the appropriateness and trustworthiness of this particular thesis, two practices have been adopted namely triangulation and respondent validation. (Denscombe 2010, pp. 299-300.)

Triangulation strengthens the study by combining methods and provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question (Denscombe 2010, pp. 299-300). In this thesis process, an attempt has been made to enrich the findings of the research by obtaining the data from two different sources. The perspectives of both the teachers as well as parents regarding the immigrant children's integration process have been perceived and analyzed. The results obtained from the interviews with both the parties were closely related which in turn enhanced the confidence regarding the accuracy of the findings.

Following the respondent validation approach, at the end, a copy of this thesis was sent to all the participants involved including the working life partner for their approval. Initially during the interviews in order to increase the validity of data the interviews were recorded and then transcribed completely on my own. Avoiding the risk of the data being misused, all the recorded interviews after listening three times were deleted. The participants were asked the same questions to have the unanimous answers. The interviews were done in English and then transcribed in the same language so as to avoid any probable errors occurring due to translation.

## **13 Discussion**

The purpose of the study was to examine the needs and challenges of the young immigrant children in the Finnish early childhood education and providing measures to support them. Through the case studies conducted, it can be said that the study has succeeded in getting the results it was looking for, for the development of the handbook. Although the handbook is aimed for day care centers and early childhood education, the activities and methods suggested can easily be modified to be applied with school aged children or even adults. However, given the number of interviewees, the results cannot

be generalized to a large population. There is a need for further research on the integrational experiences of the immigrant children and their families all over Finland and thus suggesting and implementing suitable methods for a better future. However through the feedback received from the day care center and the parents about the handbook based on the data collection, it is evaluated that the information on the related subject is very important and at the same time it is equally important that this message gets through the administration so that the real changes can take place.

### 13.1 Process

I have a personal interest in this study even before I started studying social services. . As a mother, I have experience of early childhood education in Finland, both in English day care as well as Finnish day care centre. The initial days of the day care in Finland have been very challenging both for me as parent as well as for my children. I really like the day care system here, the teachers are well qualified, there are same facilities in every day care centre whether private or public and same quality of services available for every child; whether the parents are working or unemployed, unlike my home country. In spite of the framed curriculum, my children as well as I faced difficulties in their starting days of going to the day care, their integration to the new learning environment was not smooth enough. My children didn't speak any Finnish or English at that time so it was really difficult for them to understand the educator and also to make the educator understand them. This is one of the reasons why I am so interested in this thesis project.

The main aim behind conducting this thesis has been to produce some effective and useful material for the immigrant families and also for the professionals so as to strengthen the integration services. For the fulfilment of this goal I decided to interview both the recipients as well as donors of the early childhood education services so as to have a deeper understanding of the subject from both perspectives. The data obtained is a blend of the positive experiences, challenging situations, disappointments and fruitful suggestions for a healthier prospects.

During the interviews with the families, some parents got very emotional while expressing the challenges they had been through. But however it was observed that the families in general were happy about the day care services they receive in Finland. They appreci-

ated the quality of services being delivered in Finland in comparison to their home country. According to the parents interviewed, day care centre's staff is very cooperative, polite and friendly in nature. Despite of the difficulties their children had in their initial days of the day care centre, after couple of weeks they felt quite happy to go to the kindergarten.

During the interviews, cultural influence was observed in the needs and challenges expressed by the parents. For instance the need for different types of clothes to be able to wear under different weather conditions is a need which is seen inversely by different cultures. Parents stated that in their home land they never needed such variety of clothes for their child in their day care centers. It was difficult for them to understand that the child needs to have season varied clothing in his locker as no matter what, he will go outside to play, either it is raining, or chilly cold. When I shared these things with native peoples, some were really surprised. They never thought or realized that such things which are so obvious and simple for them can be so big and different for someone else who's from another culture.

It was discovered that the immigrant parents generally don't give any feedback to the early childhood educators regarding the services they receive. The feedback which can be used as a very powerful tool in effecting the quality of services is remained unused most of the times. Different reasons behind this were expressed by the immigrant families during the discussion. One of the reasons is the lack of knowledge. Most of the families are not aware of any kind of feedback system prevailing in Finnish society, whether verbal or written. Secondly, most of the families hesitate to share their opinions with the professionals because of the cultural shyness. They struggle in expressing their views as they are not aware of the customs and traditions of the foreign country; the daycare center where their child goes now. Some families also hesitate to share their critical feedback with the professionals because of the fear of the negative consequences of doing so. They are afraid that their child may be neglected or treated unfairly as regard to other children. According to me, the reason behind this kind of thinking is very much influenced by the different cultural background and lack of knowledge.

I feel that this thesis is valuable for my working life partner as thorough the feedback received it has been ensured that the handbook is very useful for both the educators as well as immigrant families. Though the Y.E.S day care center is already using a lot of

multicultural practices, I hope they would use other ideas mentioned in the handbook on more regular basis. I also hope that this project will inspire other daycare centers, especially new ones in making the integration process easier for the new immigrant children arriving in Finland.

This thesis project has been a great learning experience for me both as a student as well as a prospective professional in the field of early childhood education. Now, when looking back at the whole process and its outcome, I feel that I have succeeded well. The social pedagogical theories and the other material studied for the study purpose has enriched my knowledge and understanding of the early childhood education.

### 13.2 Limitations

Despite of the fact that qualitative research uses a natural approach to have an in-depth study of a subject in question, it has some drawbacks which cannot be overlooked. In my opinion the biggest disadvantage is that it takes into account a small number of participants, as in this study only four interviews have been carried out therefore the results are difficult to generalize to a larger population. One of the other challenges was the transcribing of the interviews. Some part of the recordings were not very clear to hear and so I had to rewind it many times to know the exact text. It consumed a lot of time and there were many such sentences which needed to be reconstructed to make a sense in the written form. But then due to the ethical issues, I did not want to misinterpret the data, so I decided to leave out those sentences in their original form. However, therefore I could use only few of such sentences because of their vagueness.

During one of the interviews the sitting arrangement was not very ideal. I had to interview one of the parents in a restaurant. After we started some children came roaming about in that area. Though we had a nice corner place to sit and communicate but later when I heard the recording at some points there were disturbances caused by the background voices.

One of the other disadvantages of qualitative study is that data collected and analyzed has a risk of being influenced by the researcher's own identity and background (Denscombe 2010, pp. 276). As my self being an immigrant parent it was challenging to



interview the other immigrant parents, especially one from my native country. I had to make it sure that neither I interpret their views according to my wishes or beliefs, nor I put words in their mouth.

Interviewing deeply, requires a lot of practice and patience. There were times during the interview when the parents just stopped talking all of a sudden or they were taking lot of pauses. At those times, I tried to make them feel comfortable, let them take their time and encouraged them through my body movements and both verbal as well as nonverbal cues to keep on the conversation. There were also some sentences which were left in completed. The probable reasons behind this kind of communication, according to me were sometimes the lack of words, sometimes interviewees were too emotional to express their thoughts and at some points they were feeling shy to disclose the facts. But, then again, these are my personal views and opinions based on my observation, thinking and values. As a first thought, it was planned to use this ambiguous information under the results, but soon it was realized that to draw meaning from what is left unsaid is a very risky and challenging task which may lead to wrong interpretations. (Denscombe 2010, pp. 281). Due to this reason, I decided to exclude lot of such sentences containing indirect and unclear communication from the results so as to protect the content analysis from becoming less valuable.

## **14 Conclusion**

In the results, the needs and challenges of the immigrant families, the experiences and suggestions made by them as well as by the teachers have been presented. Following the results, the handbook has been developed suggesting the ways for improving the integration services for the immigrant children in early childhood education. In this chapter conclusions have been drawn by connecting all these results to the theory.

Based on the findings done by many well-known researchers such as Vygotsky and Fog, to foster children's learning it is very important to create a best learning environment for them in which they participate with joy. During the interviews as well, the teachers emphasized on the importance of low stress classroom environment and accordingly it has been included in the handbook as well. It has been suggested that the classrooms should

look and feel welcoming for all children and should reflect the multiculturalism, this will surely give the new children a sense of belongingness.

Importance of peer support was also highlighted in the results obtained during the study which is supported by the social learning theory by the famous psychologists Piaget. It underlines the significance of peer support in helping the new children to get assimilate into the society. The results also justifies another concept mentioned above, of zone of proximal development, where the children (new) learn new skills related to emotions, thinking and language development by interacting with other (old) children through the medium of play.

This study is based on some social pedagogical methods supporting integration process. One of the important notion is about the parent teacher partnership towards inclusion. The results obtained from interviewing the teachers stressed the importance of active role of the parents in the day care activities for the betterment of the services. The opinions of the day care teachers were closely connected to that of the views of Vygotsky and Rosemary Roberts as mentioned earlier under the theory. This dual relationship not only helps the parents and the teachers to understand each other's culture but also respect each other's culture. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the concept of integration and the theory of social pedagogy are closely connected to each other.

To sum up, early childhood education and care plays a crucial role in the development of the children and it is therefore very important to provide high quality child care. However with the changing society it is not an easy task and it becomes even more challenging when we are dealing with the immigrant children. Finland is already facing new challenges as lot of refugees arriving here with their families and so it is indeed the need of the hour for the whole system to start working for the smooth integration of the immigrant children into the Finnish day care centers.

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## Consent Form

I agree to participate in the interview held by Shweta Phull which is a part of her bachelor thesis.

I understand that the purpose of the study is to support integration services for the immigrant preschoolers

I am participating voluntarily and give permission for my participation to be documented.

I understand that I have a right to interrupt, deny answering questions or stop participating in the interview at any time.

I understand that the interview is handled confidentially and that anonymity will be ensured and the information provided will only be used for the purpose of the study.

Name

Signature

Place and date

**Feedback form for the day-care staff**

1. According to you is the handbook's topic relevant?
2. Is the handbook easy and simple to understand?
3. Do you feel you can use the handbook and apply it in your daycare center
4. How you rate the student's ability to cooperate in a productive and constructive way with the working life partner?
5. What do you think about the student's professional growth, his ability to reflect?
6. Overall, what is your opinion regarding the whole process and the final product?
7. Any suggestions you would like to give?

### Interview questions for the parents

1. Basic information about the family; their background, how long they have been living in Finland?
2. Basic information about the child; gender of the child, age of the child when the family moved to Finland and later when the child started going to the day care.
3. What was your child's level of knowledge about his mother tongue; how well he understood and spoke his mother tongue when he started going to the Finnish day care center?
4. Describe your experience when your child started going to the day care; what went smoothly and what was most challenging and why?
5. How similar or different is the Finnish early childhood education and care is from your own country?
6. Did you have any expectations from the day care staff members in the beginning? If yes, what were they and were they met?
7. How was you and your child welcomed the very first day by the day care center's staff? How would you like a teacher to welcome a new immigrant child on his first day?
8. According to you what are the most important needs of a small child, especially when coming from a different country, which should be met by the day care centers?
9. In your opinion, what kind of cooperation is needed from the Finnish early childhood education and care?
10. Any suggestions you would like to give to the professionals of Finnish early childhood education and care system for supporting the future parents?



### **Interview questions for the teachers**

1. Background information: native language, qualifications, experience in teaching?
2. How do you support the new immigrant children in your group / day care?  
(Methods, procedure, strategies?)
3. What according to your experience are the most frequently used words in A Finnish speaking group?
4. What according to your experience are the most important need of the new immigrant children?
5. Any suggestions for the better integration of the immigrant children?

HANDBOOK  
ON SUPPORTING  
INTEGRATION  
SERVICES  
FOR IMMIGRANT  
CHILDREN

in early childhood education



# INTRODUCTION

- The aim of integration is to provide immigrants with knowledge and skills that are required in society and working life, and to support them in maintaining their own culture and language. Especially when talking about immigrant children, smooth integration into the day care centres is of utmost importance. Positive adaptation leads to language competence, self-confidence, interpersonal relationships and stress reduction whereas on the other hand negative consequences leads to psychological and psychosomatic problems like anxiety, depression impaired school and work performance and difficulties in human relationships .
- This handbook aims to serve both the early educators as well as the parents. It provides with the practical ideas and activities for supporting the integration process of the immigrant children into the Finnish day care centers.
- The handbook is based on the study conducted by me with the cooperation of the Y.E.S day care center and the interviews made with the teachers and the immigrant parents.

# PARENT – TEACHER PARTNERSHIP AND INCLUSION



- For the purpose of supporting integration services for the immigrant children into the day care centres, healthy relationship between the staff and the child's family and the active role of the parents is of utmost importance. It is emphasised that both the parties, i.e. the early educators as well as the immigrant parents coming from a different culture not only understand but also respect each other's culture.
- Parents can be invited to the day care centre to get familiarize with the day care premises, its staff and the services provided. They can be invited to see the work done by the children in a display once a month. This will also enable the educators to meet the families with different background and to know more about their culture. In Finnish day care centres, a lot of information about the child is shared between the educators and the parents through various forms like, 'Basic Information On Child', Early Childhood Education Plan, and 'Special Diets'. For getting the best out of these discussions, it is very much important that the professionals are culturally sensitive. It is the responsibility of the staff to make the families feel comfortable so that they do not hesitate to ask for any information from the early childhood educators or to share their opinions with them.

- It is also expected from the parents to follow the rules and norms of the new place and help their child adapt those. Also, The early childhood educators make sure that they provide the parents with the proper guidelines so that the families have a clear idea what is expected of them, for instance, regarding the social norms such as playing with other children, respecting the day care's property, table manners, different clothes to be needed ( rain clothes, outside clothes, gym clothes, inside slippers, rubber boots etc., which can be easily found at the stores like, City Market, Prisma, H&M, Jesper junior etc.)

# LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE



- Language support should be provided to the immigrant children as well as to the children's guardians through different means. For the families, if the situation demands, an interpreter should be used during the meetings. Some of the basic day care agreement forms to be filled in by the families should be made available in different languages.
- Immigrant children's language can be assisted through different activities during the morning circle, outside play or at other times of the day. Using word building games and play is very important. Use of flash cards with the words and the pictures drawn on it for most commonly used actions and sentences is very beneficial in supporting language. Also, Inside the classroom, educators can use charts with simple explanations through pictures for daily routines or other regular activities
- There are many websites such as 'Papunet' which provides useful information and material on various games and activities for supporting the children's language especially for the immigrant children. Information related to all such useful the web sites should be shared with the parents as well.

A small dictionary can be made both with the help of the parents and the educators. Translators should be used if needed. Most commonly used words can be written in native language in the first row and in corresponding rows their translations in different languages can be included. It would be highly beneficial if this Finnish-mother tongue vocabulary is shared between the parent/child and the day care staff even before the child join day care, for instance two weeks so that his integration into the new environment becomes smoother.

Finnish	English	Somali	Vietnamese	Hindi	Others....
KYLLÄ					
Ei					
Tämä					
Voi					
kiitos					
Pissa					
Kakka					
Nälkkä					
Jano					

# HOST SOCIAL/ CULTURAL EVENTS



- Traditional celebrations are some of the core aspects of any culture. Celebrating different cultural festivals is one of ways to promote multiculturalism and involving parents in the day care activities. Especially in case of new immigrant children, celebrating one of their traditional holidays can brighten up their mood for weeks as they absorbed in preparations for the event and the excitement of the day.
- Equally important is exploring and joining in the celebration of the local holidays and traditions of the adopted country. Getting deep into the local culture is a fantastic way to adapt to one's new home.
- One main festival of every culture including the local culture can be celebrated in a day care centre where parents are also invited. They can share their views on the festival, what is it about and how is it celebrated. Parents and children should also be given an opportunity to share words or phrases from their language, songs, music, food, traditional dance and costumes.



# PEER SUPPORT



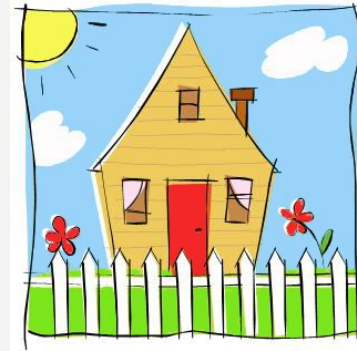
- Peer support is very beneficial in supporting integration process of a young immigrant child in the day care centres. It not only helps the child to learn social skills in a foreign country but also gives him a sense of belongingness. The early childhood educators' guidance in arranging the group activities and assisting peer support for the ones who need is very crucial. Teachers should think of some games or play which not only helps an immigrant child to make friends but also gives him a feeling that he belongs to the 'new group'. For instance, having multicultural books in the classroom, playing music from other parts of the world, playing with different colour dolls, not only supports social skills but also fights against racism among groups.

# LOW STRESS ENVIRONMENT



- When a child comes from another country, everything is new for him/her. People are new including both other children and adults, physical environment, language and as well as culture. Under such circumstances it is of utmost importance that the stress which that child is going through is lowered down. An immigrant child may not be able to recognize the foreign language but certainly he will register a smiling face. The parents and early educators must pay special attention to their voice tone, and speak softly to the child, respect the child's view that everything is new, give space to him and should never force the child for anything.
- Physical environment: The early childhood classroom environment should look and feel welcoming for all children and should reflect the multiculturalism. It is good to have images that show diversity in culture, family styles and configurations. The pictures or flags of different nations to which the children belongs can be pasted on the walls. Educators can make a point of acknowledging where all the children in the group come from by simply hanging a world map in the middle of a wall. A tag with the child's name can be put on corresponding to the country of origin attached to a string connected to the center. This map can then be used for programming curriculum development.

# CONDUCT HOME VISITS



- Home visits benefits both the family as well as the early childhood educators. For the parents home visits provides them with the opportunity to share their expertise regarding their child with the teachers which in turn helps the educators in understanding the child and his culture in a better way and thus providing the services accordingly. For making the home visits effective, bilingual teachers and a translator (if needed) should visit the child's home. This will make the communication process easy. It is an effective practice by the teachers to visit the family in pairs of two to ensure safety as well as enabling one teacher to interact with the parents and the other with child separately at the same time.

# ORIENTATION SESSIONS

- Holding orientation sessions for the immigrant families by the day care centres or the educators is very fruitful in smoothening the overall integration process. Professionals may held these sessions in different languages depending on the number of languages being spoken by the families. One of the other beneficial ways may be to hold these orientation sessions in cooperation with the bilingual families, offering native language support and an insight into the cultural differences.
- Welcome videos can be shown or the handbooks explaining the general guidelines about the early childhood education services can be distributed among the families on the first day or few days before the child starts the day care services



# MULTICULTURAL FOOD DAY

People from different cultural backgrounds eat different foods. Immigrants often use food as a means of retaining their cultural identity. A very appreciable thing in the Finnish day care centers is that they take into consideration the special diets of a child not only due to food allergies but also due to religious beliefs. But still when the immigrant children start going to the day care center, it is very difficult for them to immediately adapt to a new food taste.

Not eating proper food in day care centers is seen as one of the problems faced by the immigrant children during their initial days. So a multicultural food day in a week can be organized where it is possible to serve food from different nationalities on different days. This will definitely improve the children's mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

