

KEMI-TORNIO UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
UNIT OF HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

ECEC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN DAYCARE AND FAMILIES WITH IMMIGRANT
BACKGROUND

Lippo Saana & Majala Antti

Community work and social protection

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KEMI-TORNION AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Authors:	Lippo Saana & Majala Antti
Title:	Care partnership between daycare and families with immigrant background
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Thesis description: This thesis investigates into how early childhood education and ECEC partnership happens in practice on particular individual cases amongst families with immigrant background and daycares in Finland.

Theoretical summary: Core theoretical concepts in the thesis are ECEC and the concept of ECEC partnership with parents in ECEC activity as defined in Finnish national level and also multiculturalism and multicultural work. What is included in ECEC and how ECEC partnership is used in ECEC and implementing it. How to implement this keeping in mind multiculturalism in cases where families with multicultural background.

Methodological summary:

This research was done by using qualitative research methods. We interviewed and documented the interviews with a recorder. We collected theoretical background from books, thesis works, internet sources, the Finnish law and other.

Main results:

We found out in the thesis work that ECEC partnership and its functionality in practice are highly attached to communication and language. If there is no common language with the parents with immigrant background then care partnership has very little room for existing. The staff mentioned the importance of interpreter services, but they are not available in day-to-day contacts.

Care partnership was also connected to education. Care partnership requires educated staff especially when working with immigrant background families. There needs to be information on how to behave and what to consider when working with these parents and children. There also needs to be language skills in order to communicate and sometimes they are lacking from the parents, or from the workers due to various reasons.

Conclusions:

ECEC partnership working in practice between immigrant families and daycare are very individual. One key factor found in this thesis work was the meaning of language in ECEC partnership. Strong common language is a key for communication, and through that it is a key for information and braking possible cultural barriers.

Key words: early childhood education, ECEC partnership, multiculturalism, immigrant background family, daycare, immigrant

KEMI-TORNION AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

Tekijät:	Lippo Saana & Majala Antti
Opinnäytetyön nimi:	Maahanmuuttaja vanhempien ja päiväkodin välinen kasvatuskumppanuus
Sivuja (+liitteitä):	69(+2)
<p>Opinnäytetyön kuvaus: Opinnäytetyömme tarkastelee kuinka varhaiskasvatus ja kasvatuskumppanuus toimivat käytännössä yksittäisissä tapauksissa maahanmuuttajataustaisten perheiden ja päivähoidon henkilöstön kesken.</p> <p>Teoreettinen ja käsitteellinen esittely: Keskeiset teoreettiset käsitteet meidän opinnäytetyössämme ovat varhaiskasvatus ja kasvatuskumppanuus käsitteenä, jota käytetään keskeisenä osana varhaiskasvatuksen toteuttamisessa. Lisäksi miten monikulttuurisuus ja monikulttuurisuustyö otetaan huomioon varhaiskasvatuksessa, varsinkin maahanmuuttajataustaisten perheiden ja päivähoidon työntekijöiden välillisessä kasvatuskumppanuudessa.</p> <p>Metodologinen esittely: Opinnäytetyössämme käytimme kvalitatiivisen tutkimuksen metodologiaa. Me haastattelimme henkilökuntaa ja vanhempia ja dokumentoimme haastattelut nauhurilla. Teoreettisen rungon keräsimme tälle opinnäytetyölle kirjoista, muista opinnäytetöistä, internet-lähteistä, Suomen laista ja muista virallisista dokumenteista.</p> <p>Keskeiset tutkimustulokset: Opinnäytetyössämme totesimme, että kasvatuskumppanuuden toteutuminen käytännössä on vahvasti sidoksissa kommunikointiin ja kieleen. Jos yhteistä kieltä ei löydy maahanmuuttajataustaisten perheiden kanssa, kasvatuskumppanuuden syntyminen on hyvin vaikeaa. Päivähoidon henkilöstö mainitsi tulkin tärkeyden, mutta se ei ole käytettävissä jokapäiväisessä kanssakäymisessä.</p> <p>Kasvatuskumppanuus on myös sidoksissa koulutukseen. Kasvatuskumppanuus vaatii koulutettua henkilöstöä varsinkin silloin kun työskennellään maahanmuuttajataustaisten perheiden kanssa. Erityinen tieto on tarpeessa, kun työskennellään tällaisten perheiden ja lasten kanssa. Kielitaito on otettava huomioon kommunikaatiossa ja joskus se on puutteellista vanhempien osalta – tai päivähoidon henkilöstöltä syystä tai toisesta.</p> <p>Johtopäätökset: Maahanmuuttajataustaisten perheiden ja päivähoidon henkilöstön keskeinen kasvatuskumppanuus toiminta on hyvin yksilöllistä. Yksi tärkeimmistä tekijöistä tässä on kielen merkitys kasvatuskumppanuudessa. Yhteinen vahva kieli on avain kommunikointiin ja jonka kautta informaatio on parhaiten mahdollista. Kulttuuriset erot ym. on murrettavissa yhteisen kielen avulla.</p> <p>Asiasanat: varhaiskasvatus, kasvatuskumppanuus, monikulttuurisuus, maahanmuuttajataustainen perhe, päivähoito, maahanmuuttaja</p>	

1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education and care, or in short ECEC is the term used in English language that is equivalent word to the Finnish term ‘varhaiskasvatus’. ECEC is considered to be interactive education and care for small children. The goal of ECEC is to enable balanced development, growth and education of small children. This may not be necessarily totally true depending on how to define ‘ECEC’ but most, if not all of the sources that we have been studying. When speaking of ECEC there has been a professional aspect in the context. This would mean that ECEC the specific concept used in various environmental contexts such as daycare or family day care. We are not able to back this up with any reference but instead it is more like an observation that we have made. Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet does however imply this with notions such as the strength of ECEC is the fact that one of the core aspects of ECEC is the professional staff. ECEC is based on wide-ranging and multidisciplinary knowledge and various ECEC methods. Holistic view on child's development, growth and education is the basis for all those disciplinarians and methods. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 11.)

Finnish ECEC is heavily influenced and controlled by various laws and acts. The main acts that we could pick up are as followed:

- Laki lasten päivähoidosta
- Asetus lasten päivähoidosta
- Laki sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista
- and ‘Laki lasten päivähoidosta annetun lain väliaikaisesta muuttamisesta. (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 12-13.)
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Other important documents that influence Finnish ECEC are National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland or as we have referred previously to ‘Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet’ (2005) which is the original Finnish text. Another document that we have found to be important for Finnish ECEC is ‘Decision in Principle of the Council of State Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care’ or in Finnish ‘Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista’ (2002). Especially the National Curriculum Guidelines is a document that guides all ECEC activity that is organized by public agents (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 8). The guidelines do however recognize and encourages public agencies on municipal level to organize their ECEC services however they wish as long as the values and goals and so forth set by the National Curriculum Guidelines and obviously other laws are fulfilled (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 7).

Early childhood education and care partnership, or in short ECEC partnership is an essential method in achieving successful and quality ECEC. ECEC partnership is the equivalent English term for the Finnish term ‘kasvatuskumppanus’. Professionalism and properly trained staff and workers are valued in Finnish ECEC and certain professional qualifications, for example are demanded by the law (Laki sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista 2005). To assure quality and successful ECEC, parent’s role in it is invaluable. Parent’s personal experiences and knowledge about his/her own child coupled with ECEC workers’ professionalism could be considered as the best basis for child’s welfare (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 31). In the end, what is most important is that the young child’s welfare holistically speaking is ensured and satisfied.

In this thesis work our emphasis has been especially looking at ECEC partnership from the perspective of how does it work with parents with immigrant background. Families where either the husband or wife or both husband and wife are from other than Finnish background have increased drastically. Comparing numbers from 1995 and 2009 the statistics show that there is double the amount of families with multicultural background (Maahanmuuton vuosikatsaus 2010, 5). Therefore it is reasonable to look into the multicultural aspects of ECEC and how things are done in modern daycare. After all if

we wish to continue to provide quality and successful ECEC alongside with parents – who may also be from multicultural background – more focus needs to be given to multiculturalism. It is not either that we should think about families with multicultural background also how multiculturalism is in relation to the other children who have Finnish background.

2 RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Qualitative Research Method

In this chapter we are going to describe the research methods used in this thesis work and why we chose the one we did. Research method is one of the first things we had to choose before going forward with the interviews.

For our thesis we interviewed workers from two different daycare centers. These two vary from each other considerably, as one of them which are situated in Kemi could be considered as a 'normal' daycare that has children with immigrant background. The daycare in Oulu on the other hand was rather different from an ordinary daycare because most of the activity in there is done in English. Some of the staff at this daycare are native English speaking and do not even speak Finnish fluently. This is a deliberate cause as it is one of the main goals for the children to learn English there.

We wanted to interview parents with immigrant background for our thesis work. We specifically wanted to look into the how cultural aspects would factor in ECEC partnership between parents with immigrant background and daycare workers. We were lucky enough to find two parents who were willing to be interviewed that had common communication language with us – namely English language.

While we had different questions for parents and workers we wanted to find out similar things from them. These then later became our research questions:

1. How is early childhood education and care partnership implemented in practice with families that have immigrant background?
2. What does multicultural work demand from the workers at daycare?

3. How do the parents view the ECEC done in the daycare and are there disputes on how things should be done in the daycare?
4. How is parental guidance and information flow implemented in practice?

It was important to find out if there are any sorts of problems with, for example communication. Do the parents with immigrant background feel secure to leave their children in daycare? Is there a trust between the parents and the daycare workers as there should be?

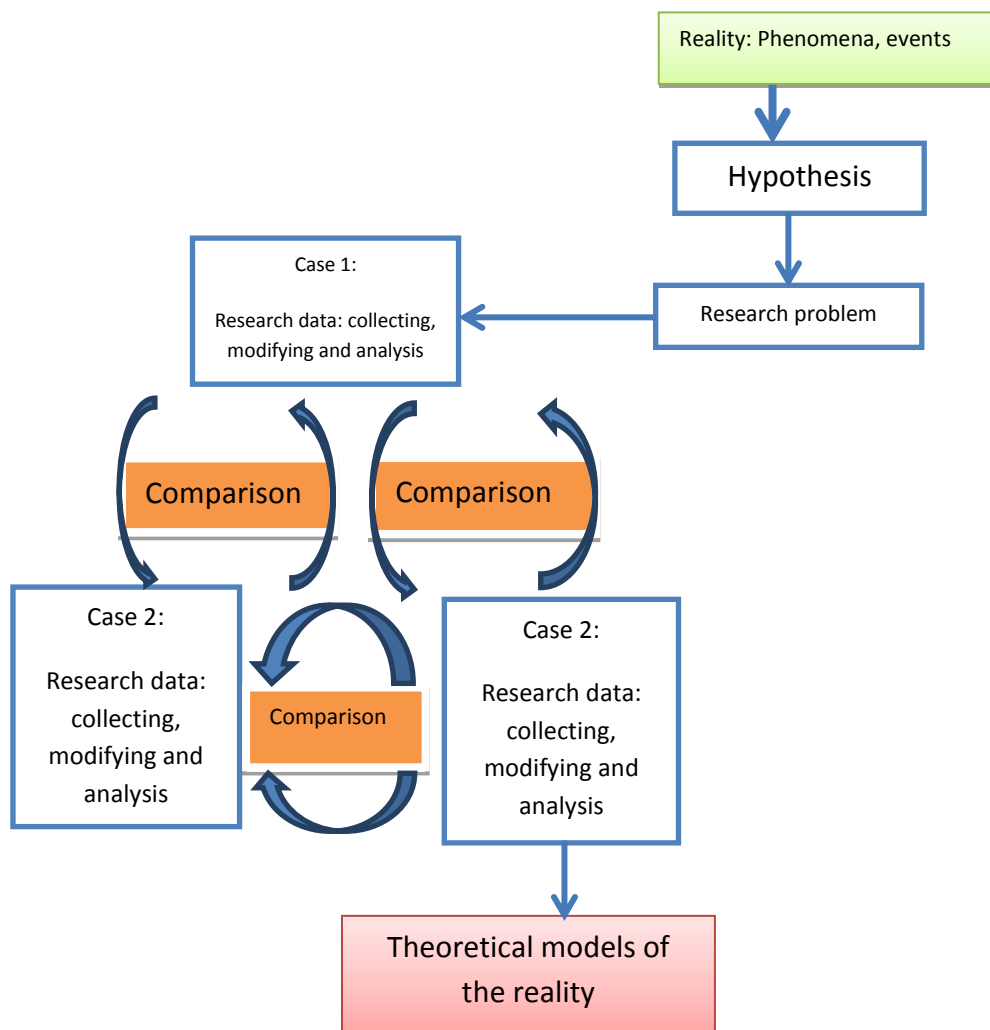
During our theoretical studies on research and research methods, one of the common themes that we encountered was that doing qualitative research was probably better option over quantitative research, although qualitative research was not directly implied to be better option over quantitative research. We did foresee possible and probable challenges and difficulties with quantitative research which we believed to have outweighed in comparison to qualitative research methods. Just as an example, one of the main concerns we had with quantitative research was the number samples we would have needed was going to be much larger. Larger sample rate in itself would have been a slight problem as we had problems with finding parents with immigrant background willing to cooperate.

Qualitative research is considered to be any research that attempts to discover new phenomena within a specific research subject by researching individual agents that are relevant to the subject. The purpose of qualitative research method according to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 22) is to aim for understanding the context, to interpret what is going on and to understand the active agents at hand. It is the concentration on individual case or cases what provides qualitative research its quality. Qualitative research provides a unique way to inspect a single phenomenon and its processes in a fashion that helps the people researching to understand as much as possible from an in-depth perspective (Kananen J 2008, 25)

In some fashion, Kananen (2008, 24) would compare qualitative research as an opposite to quantitative research. In qualitative research, statistics and numbers according to Kananen (2008, 24) are not as important in qualitative research because the purpose of the qualitative research is not to reach into generalized conclusions about the specific subject or phenomenon.

According Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, 21), the dualistic view between qualitative and quantitative methods has been a common belief for a long time in both scientific circles as amongst students in social sciences. Ideally though, both methods could be used to cover the weaknesses, or aspects that one of the methods is not able to cover. This kind of blending of methods is called triangulation. (Kananen J 2008, 26-27)

The following is an illustration which we borrowed from Kananen (2008, 26), translated into English and fitted into the text. It is qualitative research method explained in a visualization:



In our thesis work we did loosely go the same way as illustrated in the chart. While we did not have proper hypothesis, we did have ideas on what kind of things we would find out from our interviews. We came up with research problem, or questions from which we would then gathered data from. This was done by doing interviews and analyzing them. We had several group interviews which we could perhaps consider as separate cases. We also did do some small comparisons between them. We did not however go more into the theoretical models of the reality part.

2.2 Semi-structured Interview and Theme Interview

The qualitative research for the thesis was implemented by the use of semi-structured research interview in the form of theme interview. Semi-structured interviewing allows the use of partially standardized interviewing method where general outlines and questions, or as in the case of theme interview, general themes are predetermined. This form of interviewing helps to keep each individual interview on the same track, but at the same time gives the freedom for the discussion to bring up issues which a more structured interview might prevent. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47.)

Theme interview, *teemahaastattelu* in Finnish, while it has its roots in the focused interviewed by Merton, Fisk, and Kendall, it is explicitly mentioned by Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 47) that these two are considerably different methods. Theme interview centers around specific themes as the name implies, however depth of those themes and questions used can vary according to the needs. The theme interview is flexible when it comes to asking questions and how those questions are formed compared to other semi-structured and structured interview methods. Even when using the same set of questions with different interviewees, the questions do not necessarily have to be brought up the same way depending on the individual factors when discussing with each individual. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 47-48.)

2.3 Research Analysis

Our qualitative research method as stated before has been theme interview. Our two main and only sources, or guides for making theme interview were our supervising teachers. As our theoretical basis we used the book called 'Tutkimushaastattelu – teemahaastattelun teoria ja käytäntö' by Sirkka Hirsjärvi and Helena Hurme. In this book Hirsjärvi and Hurme also have written about the possible and recommended research analysis which should be used when analyzing theme interviews. When we mention 'research analysis' we refer to the research material that we collected from our interviewees by interviewing and recording the interviews with a recorder.

We are in a difficult position when it comes to choosing our research analysis. It was obvious for us that we should do contents analysis from the interviews. We had started our analysis of interview contents without even being aware of writing down something similar to transcriptions. We did not write down word by word transcription off from the interviews. According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 138) this is not absolutely necessary if it is possible to pick out deductions and/or coding themes. As such we inadvertently started our research analysis without looking into the methods that we should. According to Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001, 135) analysis methods for interview contents should be thought about even before having the interviews. Unfortunately because of our tight schedule back then to get the interview questions done, prepared and interviews done – we did not get much chance to think about what kind of research analysis we should use. Luckily we did start semi-transcription back when we did. There are no strictly standardized guides on how accurately transcriptions should be written. While we have not written a word-by-word transcription, we have written accurate that serves our needs. (Hirsjärvi S & Hurme H 2001, 135.)

We are nonetheless sticking with content analysis and interpretation as our method of research analysis for various reasons. The first reason is because we have already done semi-transcription which to our understanding of Hirsjärvi & Hurme (2001) is fine and allowed. Content analysis is good when working with research material (aineisto) that is

not too big and wide. If dealing with research data where there are many and long interviews done, it would become highly tedious to make transcriptions out of every single interview. While we only had three separate interviews, the amount of interviewees is seven as we interviewed the people in groups of two, two and three. Because we had relatively fewer interviews, we managed to make the semi-transcriptions without them becoming too tedious for us.

For interpretation of the interview contents we have chosen to deconstruct the interview contents according to the theme areas. This method is a good choice especially if, and as we have, used theme interview (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 141-142.). We did some basic color coding on the word document where we had written down our interview materials. Because of our interviews were few – only three group interviews and they were not extensive, or long at least quantitatively – we did not have many themes that we could use. We used the simple themes that our interviews were constructed of in the first place: ECEC, ECEC partnership, ECEC plan and multiculturalism. This was more than enough if we had to go back to the interview materials to see what someone said related to these themes.

2.4 Our Thesis Work Process

A good way to look at our process on thesis work is by marking the milestones that we considered to have and if there were any other issues surrounding those milestones or reaching them. No exact dates are really possible to give out as the different parts of the research process would perhaps partially overlap and also something that would slowly progress.

Our first milestone must have been finally to define and officiating our thesis subject, or topic and especially to get it approved by our tutor teachers. This was during the early 2011 winter/spring. We had considerable help from our teachers as we were floating around several ambiguous subjects surrounding daycare. As we were both aiming for

kindergarten teacher's qualifications, we had to relate the subject around early childhood education and care in some way. This restriction was a positive one as it helped us to pin down our project considerably. Looking back at it now, the topic of ECEC partnership at least as a general topic, we observed that it was – while relatively new – quite popular amongst other thesis writers all around Finland. On the other hand, from a scientific point of view it is not a bad thing to have more studying done on a specific topic.

The second milestone in our thesis work was implementing a research task – in our case to construct an interview form. This stage went relatively smoothly for us. At first we would come up with our early sketch on our own for what the interview would be like. After we submitted the first build, the tutor teachers gave us some advice and recommended to read about theme interview and using it in our interviewing. Afterwards we submitted a second questionnaire while using the theme interview methods. We were able to finalize the questionnaire as we went through point by point with the teacher after showing the second version. We were able to finalize the interview forms before the summer break 2011. In the end we came up with two interview forms – one for the parents and one for the staff of the daycare centers.

Our third milestone was to set up dates for interviews and then doing the actual interviews. We had to shift our interests slightly at this point because we had difficulties to find parents with immigrant background to be interviewed. Instead we had to focus on the staff's side of things – we did not really see this as a problem. We achieved the milestone during the early into our summer break – it was just before June.

The fourth milestone was to do the actual interviews. First one was done in Kemi daycare where there were two staff members attending. Antti was the one doing the interview there because Saana was not able to attend the meeting. This interview was relaxed and soon the questions were noticed to be good. We decided to use the same questions in the interviews in Oulu.

At this point Saana became a bit suspicious whether we are going to get enough material from these interviews by asking few questions, but after Oulu interview we noticed that material was enough. We needed to start the writing process.

The fifth milestone was the starting of writing. It was not easy. Saana had her work, so during June, July and half of August the writing process was very slow. After finishing work the writing process proceed fast and before we knew we had few pages done. It was easy to start writing when we had written the interviews on paper and cleared our heads about how to start the actual writing. Due to the fact that Antti lives in Kemi and Saana lives in Oulu meetings were not easy to arrange. We came up with the idea to communicate through Facebook and arranged numerous meetings there. We sent written text through emails and communicated through internet how to write certain things and how to combine texts in to one. Communicating through internet and phone was valuable for us. It was the most effortless way to communicate and it worked well for us.

When looking back at the writing process we see that it happened quite slowly. There were periods when we wrote numerous pages and suddenly writing and keeping contact ended for a week or two. One of the reasons for this might have been the start of our final practical training in August. After the practice we noticed that we were already late and we had to keep ourselves busy with the writing in order to graduate in time. We also had some other assignments besides thesis work.

Thinking about postponing graduation was not easy, but it was relevant when thinking about the writing process. In a way we did not take the process seriously enough and thought we are going to write the thesis on time. By thinking of postponing the graduation we faced the fact of not getting jobs before finishing the thesis and it gave us energy and motivation. Also after the practice we had more time to concentrate on the work and Antti got valuable information and knowledge from his practice in the daycare. This knowledge we could use in the writing process also.

Uncertainty of the text being relevant or not was something we needed to think and that is why we decided to send our unfinished text to our supervising tutors. We got the text back and there were many comments on how to improve the text. Getting feedback from the text was important and somehow kept our writing process ongoing.

If thinking about what we could have done better we could mention that timing and writing process could have been more thorough; by following timetables we could have written more during summer time and before practical training. Writing in periods was not good in a way because then we had to use more time on getting to know the text again and remembering what we had previously agreed and written.

We also should have interviewed more people to get more information about the functioning of care partnership in families with immigrant backgrounds and daycare. This applies especially to interviewing refugees, which may face the most difficulties in understanding and communicating with daycare. Even though our interest would have been to do interviews among them, due to lack of resources it was not possible. To some extent it limited our thesis results and we did not get, from our perspective, the most perfect results we would have hoped. By using the term perfect in this sense means the purest and most honest results.

What we learnt from this process was that we got more wide view about early childhood education and care. At the end of this process we are also got an idea about the functioning of care partnership between these families and daycares. We got information from the staff's side and also from the families. To some extent the results and answers differed from each other, but it only shows that there are different perspectives where they are looking at things and there is something worth doing better.

In order to get information of the functionality of care partnership between families with immigrant background and daycare there should and could be more researches done. This sort of researches would improve the functionality of daycares and also would give

staff's the idea what the parents might be thinking about Finnish daycare system and its multicultural side.

At the end of this somewhat long and difficult process we were left with interest of getting information about refugees and their ideas. As mentioned earlier in this thesis work we got only staff's idea about it and it left us with the question that is care partnership actually working also with refugees.

3 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

Our first theme in the interviews was the general topic of early childhood education and care or in short: ECEC. We used separate set of questions for the parents and workers at the daycare centers. We used similar kind of structure for the three other themes in our interviews which will be discussed later. From the parents we wanted to know the following: If they have had previous experience with daycare services – in Finland or somewhere else. We were also curious about knowing how the parents with immigrant background would describe Finnish daycare. As a last question in this theme we had for the parents was what kind of co-operation they have had with the staff of the daycare.

For the staff on the other hand we only had one question related to the general theme of ECEC: What is your education and working background? This was especially an interesting question when we went to the English speaking playschool in Oulu because they actually have workers who are from abroad and studied their degrees and qualifications outside of Finland.

ECEC according to Heinämäki (2004, 9.) is play-centered, organized and goal-orientated interaction and cooperation. ECEC is based on wide-ranging and multidisciplinary knowledge and various ECEC methods. Holistic view on child's development, growth and education is the basis for all those disciplinarians and methods.

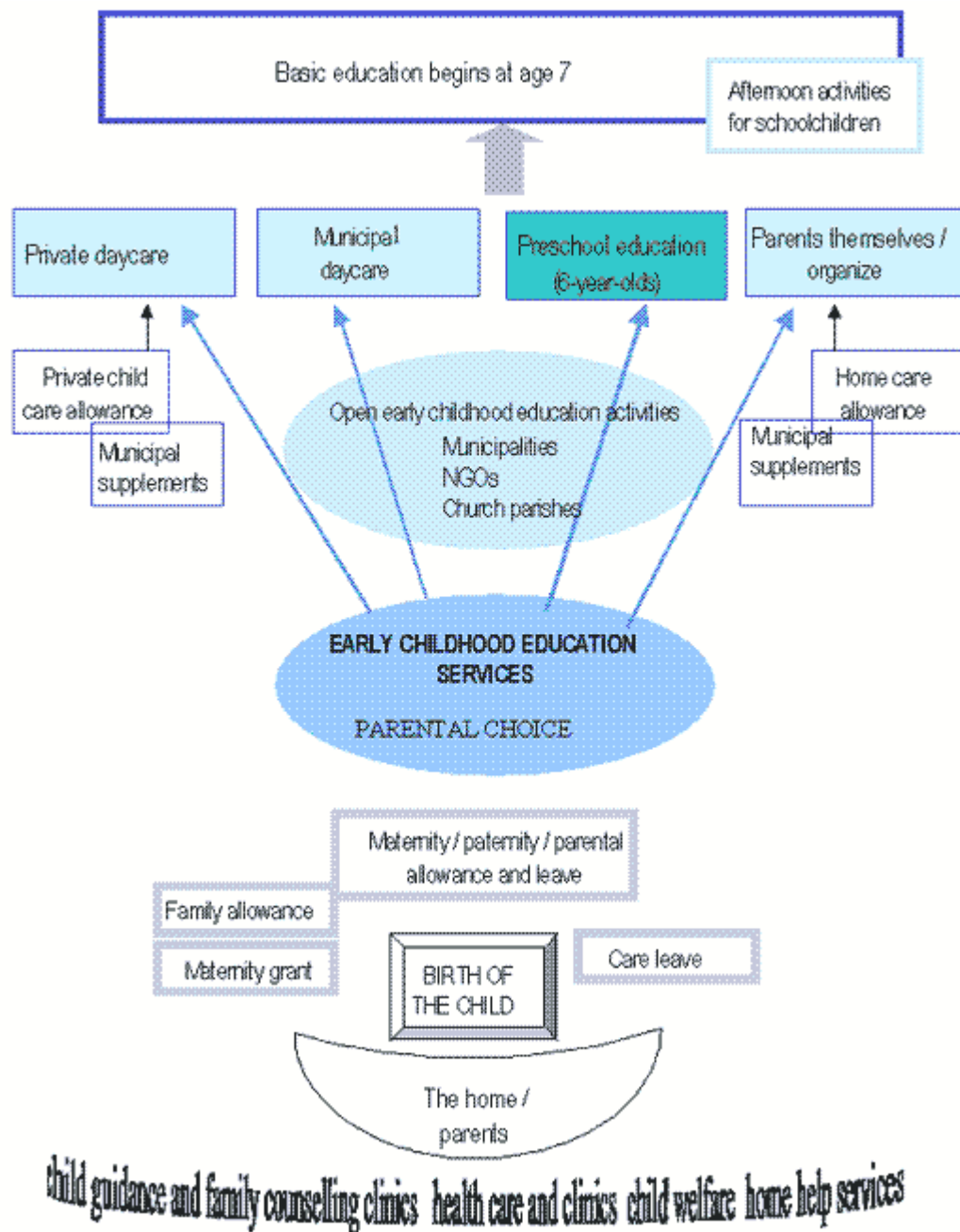
Decision in Principle of the Council of State Concerning the National Policy Definition (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 9) defines early childhood education and care as educational upbringing in different environments. ECEC's goal as stated is to promote healthy development, growth and education.

According to Alijoki (1998, 27-28.) however, the modern interpretation of early childhood education and care, there is less and less distinction made between what is

care and what is education or upbringing. The Finnish equivalent term ‘*varhaiskasvatus*’ is perhaps even better than the English term that is officially used at least in Finnish national term. The reason for this is because the word ‘*varhaiskasvatus*’ does not make any distinction between care and the more pedagogical educational side of *varhaiskasvatus*.

As an example we could use dressing a child with outdoor clothing when going out or feeding a child. Both of these activities are considered to be some of the most basic caring that are provided for the child. However, at some point when the child begins to develop and is able to do things on his/her own, we can begin to teach them how to eat themselves and how to dress themselves when going outside. For some children this will perhaps come naturally and they even start to want to dress up themselves. For some children it is not always as easy and there is the small problem if the parents keep dressing up their children on their behalf. In short, the parents are doing a disservice for their children in a longer run. While there is obviously a learning process which starts and continues slowly throughout as the child grows – the care part of it does not fade away. The parent will nonetheless have to make sure that the child is able to put on his/her clothes and that he/she puts them right and enough clothes – especially in a climate like Finland.

One of the goals behind ECEC is to prepare the child gradually for school which is an eventuality virtually for all children in Finland (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 10-11). The following is an illustration (Government Resolution Concerning The National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care) on how the different ECEC, social and health services and support systems provided by the public carries all the way to when the child is ready to go to school. This also includes some of the more private services such as private daycare, however families are usually able to get private child care allowance as can be seen in the illustration :



Social, health and educational institutions organize all of the service and support systems for young children and their families. Even though our main topic is the early childhood education and care services that are directed mainly towards the child and on some cases for the parents too, it cannot be stressed too much on how crucial it is that the whole family is feeling healthy even when thinking about a single child in a family. As it can be seen from the illustration above, the services and support systems that are offered are plural and there various services from which the family can choose from.

(Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 10-11.)

Most commonly here in Finland – perhaps the general rule in all municipalities – municipal, or privately organized daycare and preschool are the core ECEC activities that are present in any given municipality. To some extent there are other early childhood education and care services that are voluntarily organized – meaning not determined by the government – that supplement the ECEC services, such as daycare groups provided by parishes. Some municipalities also voluntarily offer children and parents open ECEC services in different shapes and forms. These ECEC services amongst other services and support systems directed at children and their families are meant to support children and their parents with their parenting. (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 10-11.)

Alternatively to municipal and privately organized daycare there are economical support systems in place when the child is first born and is taken care of at home by a parent and even at slightly older too – instead of introducing the child to a daycare while the parent(s) are working (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 10-11).

Municipal daycare services such as daycare centers and family daycares are the most popular forms of ECEC. In 2010 there were about 189000 children either in full-time or part-time daycare (Säkkinen S, 2011). Municipal daycare services are not just the most popular amongst the ECEC services but also a very large number of children Finland go to daycare. Daycare is very important part of Finnish society where the society encourages and outright needs every person possible to work in taxable work – considering that we are living in a welfare society with diverse public social and health care services.

From an ECEC point of view, these same services and support clinics are mainly the same ones that guide children and their parents who are from an immigrant family.

However special notice has to be given for children with immigrant background to ensure that these same services are enough for these children. They are on many or most occasions in a special circumstance because coming to a foreign culture and most importantly they do not have a common language to communicate with other adults and children here in Finland. Question then arises: Are these services enough to ensure the development, growth and education for a child with immigrant background?

From special early childhood education and care or SECEC perspective, a child with immigrant background is not considered as such someone who needs special support. What we mentioned in previous paragraph explicitly implied to this already. Child's learning readiness and capabilities most likely are adequate enough in his/her own cultural and language context. (Heinämäki L 2004, 52-53.) So certainly it takes somewhat more for example from daycare workers when a child with an immigrant background comes to the daycare. They certainly need some special attention even if it not considered as special support. Not just with learning Finnish language as the second language but also child should have some support for his/her own native language. If there is not support given for his/her native language there is the danger that the child will not learn any language fully. The main responsibility for teaching the child his/her native language before the school age are his/her own parents. There is no legal requirement for the daycare to support the child's native language and probably in most cases it is not realistically even possible if the daycare even wanted to support these children. (Heinämäki L 2004, 53.)

Our emphasis in our thesis is obviously the multicultural aspects of ECEC. As such we will naturally want emphasize on how the multiculturalism is taken into consideration in the laws that are relevant for ECEC activities. There are various documents regulating daycare activities. The main acts and laws regulating the ECEC plan and day care activities in general are:

- Laki lasten päivähoidosta
- Asetus lasten päivähoidosta
- Laki sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista
- and 'Laki lasten päivähoidosta annetun lain väliaikaisesta muuttamisesta

(Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 12-13.)

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Law that first stuck out from several different sources that the referred to for multiculturalism in ECEC was the ‘UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.’ The UN Convention gives a clear and strict policy for the nations that agrees to it, not to discriminate children based on their race, color of their skin, gender, language, religion or political or other views that they may have. The renunciation of any sort of discrimination is one of the important principles in the convention. Other principles that can also be viewed important in Finnish ECEC is: child’s interest, child’s right to life and the right for a balanced development and growth also it is important to listen to the child’s own opinions and what he/she has to say. (Hujala E 2011, 233-234.)

According to the section 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the respect towards: the child’s parents, the child’s cultural identity, language and values must be part of the child’s education. Also child’s native home land and divergent culture must be taken into account. The goal is to raise children who are capable of living responsibly in a society where people are understanding, peaceful, tolerant, where genders are equal and all nations, ethnic and religious groups are able to live in friendly spirit. Section 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives a special mention for minority groups and native cultures. The convention demands that people from minority groups and native cultures are able to enjoy their own culture amongst others of the same culture. Section 30 recognizes the right to practice one’s own religion and the use of their own language. (Hujala E 2011, 233-234.)

Section 2 of Laki lasten päivähoidosta (1973) makes a special mention that daycare needs to support children’s cultural background depending on the age and individual needs of the child. This is done while taking into consideration of the child’s physical, social and emotional development. Also daycare needs support child’s aesthetic, intellectual, ethical and religious activities.

Two kindergarten teachers that we interviewed mentioned how if there are children who are part of a different religion, parents have wished their children would not participate in those religious events that are mainly and only Lutheran Christian based.

Unfortunately back then it did not come to our mind to ask if they supported the child's activities just like the law mentions. In all likelihood, the answer would probably be no as they probably do not have the means or the will to support other religions' activities. It is odd to exclude one child's religion while supporting others though.

Other important guidelines for regulating daycare activities in Finland are the 'Decision in Principle of the Council of State Concerning the National Policy Definition', national guidelines for early childhood education and care which consists of national principles and development points on subjects such as what are the roles of different agents in the society and how to support the development and education of children. This document was already briefly mentioned at the beginning of the chapter when defining ECEC. Second important document for ECEC is the 'National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care'. National curriculum guidelines are a direct follow-up from the document/decision 'Decision in Principle of the Council of State Concerning the National Policy Definition'. The national curriculum guidelines will be discussed in the following main heading.

4 ECEC PLAN

4.1 National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland

Early childhood education and care plan was our second theme that we went through in our interviews with both the staff of the daycares and the parents. We wanted to learn what and how much parents with immigrant background knew about the ECEC plan. Another focus in our ECEC plan theme was to find out their experience with the implementation of ECEC plan.

As for the staff, we wanted to find out what were their personal ideas about what ECEC plan is. While there are official guidelines and documents that define what it is, there is still room for interpretation and application of their own ideas. Secondly, what is the ECEC plan based on and how are they implemented - if they for example use any special pedagogical methods. We could have easily found out what their ECEC plans are based on from the available written documents but what is on the paper is not necessarily how it is in practice.

Each and every child in a daycare has their own, individual ECEC plan. The individual ECEC plan is built from multilateral guidelines. The multilateral guideline that will be discussed more in the next sub-chapter is not of course set in stone. The Oulu daycare that we visited for our interviews is a great example. The Oulu daycare workers mentioned that when they founded their daycare, ECEC plan was brought from abroad. They had to base their curriculum for the principles and guidelines for that. That is how the principles of the mentioned daycare were invented. They also mentioned that they base their curriculum on the city guidelines as also in Kemi but they have to take the international perspective in to account. The daycare had to think the parents who are

totally English speaking that they also understand their ECEC plan. This is why they also had to take parent's perspective into account.

The base guideline that all ECEC plans from municipal to individual draw from is the 'National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland'. National guidelines purpose is, amongst others, to build more uniform early childhood education and care amongst the many daycare organizations within Finland. The National Guidelines' purpose is also to guide the development of the contents in ECEC and quality assessment. (Kemin kaupungin varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2011, 3.) The National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC is a comprehensive document that: considers and defines what ECEC is to what the contents and pedagogical methods that should be used in ECEC. It also has own section for the cooperative work with parents that should be done with them.

Notable here is how parents are supposed to be able to affect the unit's ECEC plan that his/her child in part. The idea is that the ECEC plan within any given using should be made up by the whole community that is formed from the daycare and the parents and children. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 32). In our interviews we touched upon what the ECEC was based on, it never came up what kind of role parents had on drawing up the unit's ECEC plan.

Second important topic for our thesis work is children from different cultural background and language. National Guidelines would include children from: Sami people, Romani people, children who use sign language and for our thesis work main group; immigrant children. Children, according to the National Guidelines, who are part of cultural minority, must have the opportunity to grow and live in a multicultural environment whilst becoming a member of both his/her own culture and Finnish society. It is left mainly for the parents to upkeep the child's native language. However workers need to discuss with the parents and try to make sure that the parents understand that teaching their child the native language is a good thing and something they should keep doing. ECEC is handled normally whilst taking into account the child's needs on social contacts in his/her group. A fine balance has to be made where the child's native language and culture is respected and support but also values such as gender equality is unquestionably brought up in ECEC even if it may conflict with the

other culture. However, a close cooperation with the parents must be kept in order to find common educational and care lines. For example parents should be discussed about the aims and goals that the Finnish ECEC has. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 39-41.)

4.2 Municipal and Daycare Units' ECEC Plans

Each municipality or sometimes in a cooperation with other municipality(s) draw their own ECEC plan. As expected, these municipal ECEC plans use the national guidelines as their basis. Each municipality has their own ECEC plan because each municipality has their own varying early childhood policies and strategies. It is important that the ECEC plan takes these policies into consideration wherever needed while of course following the national guidelines. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 9.)

National Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC in Finland has short but clear content guides on what the municipal ECEC plan should have. Amongst others it does make a clear mention that the municipal plans must have explained ECEC services provided for children with different language and cultural background. Also states to include ECEC partnership and parents' participation in ECEC. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 43-44.)

Whilst keeping in mind the requirements and expectations of National Curriculum Guidelines for ECEC in Finland, we studied a little bit the Kemi's and Oulu's municipal ECEC plans to see how in reality they are made up. Both Kemi's and Oulu's ECEC plans contain many of the same values that they wish to practice and uphold in early childhood education and care. Both cities have set what kind of early childhood services they are going to provide depending on the clients' needs. Other topics covered by the municipal ECEC plans are the pedagogical methods, goals and aims in ECEC and also especially relevant to our interest: parents' involvement in their children's ECEC.

Daycare units' own ECEC plans is the more specified ECEC plan that is drawn from municipals own general ECEC plan that was discussed previously. Each unit has their own ECEC plan because unit's child's and child group's needs and specialties have to

be taken into consideration. More specific goals are also stated in a daycare unit's ECEC plan. (Kemin kaupungin varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2011, 11.) This would naturally mean that goals, ECEC activities, code of conducts and context activities that are set in municipal ECEC plan are translated into unit's ECEC plan.

5 ECEC PARTNERSHIP

When writing about the concept of early childhood education and care partnership it needs to be defined for readers of this thesis work. In this following chapter we are going to give a better insight on the topic of early childhood education and care partnership, or also known as ECEC partnership.

ECEC partnership was one of the most important themes in our thesis work. We saw that it is important to interview parents and the staff on how they see their ECEC partnership in practice. We wanted to see whether parents understand the term and how do they see ECEC partnership working with the daycare. We also wanted to see whether the idea of ECEC partnership is different among the staff members.

The term; early childhood education and care partnership can be defined as parents and professionals being committed consciously to act together for the benefit of the child. By this it is not only meant to support child's growth, development and learning processes, but also to support the parents' primary upbringing responsibility of one's child. This requires common trust, equality and respect from the professionals as from the parents. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 31.)

Parents are the primary caregivers of the child; they have their own responsibilities and knowledge. The personnel working with the child have professional knowledge from their education and also the responsibility to create equal co-operation in ECEC partnership. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 31.) The professionals have more initiative and upholding role in the relationship. Parents should be active and participative when it comes to their child. (Oulun varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2007, 13.)

The earlier mentioned two different sides of knowledge create safe and supportive surroundings for the child to develop oneself and to grow as a person and give the best known results (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 31).

ECEC partnership requires concrete actions and dedication from the parents and from the daycare workers. The staff has the responsibility to make sure ECEC partnership is natural part of early childhood education and care. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 31.) It is mentioned in Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet (2005, 39-40.) that parents are the first to take care of child's cultural and religious teaching. Daycare workers are only making sure the education and religious matters in the daycare are going on as the parents would wish. This requires good communication and cultural knowledge from the staff.

In the interview done with the parents we noticed that the parents were quite open-minded when it came to religious matters. They wanted their children to be part of the religious holidays and events in the daycare. If there are those children who are not allowed to participate, for example, celebrating Christmas there had to be some other event arranged instead for these children. According to the interviews this was one of the things that require adaptability from the staff.

One of the aims of ECEC partnership is to notice any need of support as soon as possible in the life of a child and to create a common action plan with the parents (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 32). ECEC partnership is also ensured by the law (Laki lasten päivähoidosta 1973).

According to the Oulu's early childhood education and care plan, discussions are one important basis of ECEC partnership. Discussions done with the parents are the most important ways to carry out the concept of ECEC partnership. (Oulun kaupungin varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2007, 13.) These discussions can be carried out in the form of daily discussions when taking the child in to daycare, arranged meetings or, for example discussions based on early childhood education and care plan.

When doing our thesis work it seemed obvious for us to ask questions from the parents and from the staff about the trust and relationship among these two. We wanted to find out whether the relationship works as it is described in theory. Soon we found out that parents would have wanted more encounters with the staff concerning their child. They also realized that daily communications with staff is also dependent on the worker who is for example welcoming the child in the morning. The staff mentioned that sometimes they are taking so many children at a time that they do not have enough time to have deep discussions with the parents. In these cases parents should arrange an appointment with the staff. (Interview Oulu 2011)

When talking about the trust, the parents mentioned that they trust the staff members. Both of the parents had had previous experiences on Finnish daycares and also the other one had experience with a daycare in a country where she previously lived in. The workers of Kemi daycare mentioned that often, for example, in the cases of refugees the workers are highly appreciated and they are seen as authorities by the parents. (Interview Oulu & Kemi 2011) Trust aspect is discussed more closely later in this thesis work.

As mentioned earlier in this text; ECEC partnership requires concrete actions from the parents and from the staff. It means that there is an early childhood education and care plan done for every child individually. This mentioned plan is done with the parents and with all of the staff members working with the child, so that everyone involved with the child is aware of the plan's basics. It is used actively and it is followed through evaluations by the parents and personnel. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 32.)

Early childhood education and care plan is done when child goes to daycare. It is making sure the education of the child is individual and everyone working with the child knows the recent situation of the child. If there are any worries concerning the child, they are brought up in discussions between parents and personnel.

(Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005, 32.) If there is a situation where the parents do not have common language with the staff it is possible to have an interpreter in the discussions (Administrative Procedure Act 2003). This so-called language barrier was one of the things we were interested in; how is it possible to have daily discussions with the parents who might not know English or other common language with the staff members? These daily discussions and communication should be one of the key elements towards trusting environment. We wanted also find out whether the theory based idea of discussions happen in practice.

When interviewing Kemi daycare workers they mentioned that sometimes there is not a common language. Though it is possible to have an interpreter in the discussions but sometimes it is not possible when it comes to immediate encounters with the parents. Workers mentioned that there have been some challenges in immediate, daily discussions. Sometimes a worker needs to tell the parent something about the clothing of the child, or some celebration coming and the parent might claim to understand the matter. When the child need to have for example skates, or attend to the mentioned celebration it becomes obvious for the staff that the parent has not understood the matter.

Staff members also said that usually the parents coming from different cultures without any knowledge of Finnish want to make an effort to know the basic language, but some parents might also be shy when it comes to communicating in a foreign language. For example, these so called linguistic barriers challenge the theory of ECEC partnership. The possible challenge of language barrier is written more thoroughly later in this thesis work.

ECEC partnership could be said to be a support system between personnel taking care of a child and the parents of the child. These mentioned two sides of support have the knowledge provided by education and the knowledge of their own child, which could be said to be practical knowledge. The aim of ECEC partnership is to work for the benefit of the child in every aspect of one's life in order to make the child's life as safe and good as possible. The plan is requiring great amount of trust on both sides. It is also

making sure the personnel and parents have time to act if there is something worrying in the situation of the child. The plan is done for every child individually and it is making sure the education and relationships with the child are individual. In the cases of families with immigrant or multicultural backgrounds the theory based idea of care partnership might not always come true. In order to 'back up' our view we are going to go deeper in to the topic later in this text.

ECEC partnership in a broader sense is cooperation between staff and parents to build a trustworthy relationship in order to better child's early childhood education and care. This is in fact an old concept which has been in use from the first kindergartens in Finland - long before the term "ECEC Partnership" or in Finnish "kasvatuskumppanus" was ever brought up. In fact it could be seen as essential part of planning kindergarten at the late of 1890s and early 1910s when the concept of leaving your children to strangers to take care of your child was an alien idea for many people. (Hänninen S-L & Siiri V 1986, 75.)

The very first kindergartens in Finland were mainly directed towards the working class families in the more poor areas of Helsinki. Two of the main figures in developing and pioneering kindergarten services in Finland, Hanna Rothman and Elisabeth Alander realized that in order to support families they would have be seen as more of as 'friends' than authority from higher up. (Hänninen S-L & Siiri V 1986, 75)

This kind of 'partnership' must have been quite compact as some of the kindergarten workers put effort to even visit at a child's home in order to have a better understanding of a child's situation. Also the kindergarten at which Elisabeth Alander was at, would invite parents to the kindergarten for meetings where they would discuss various different topics about raise children and other relevant subjects. These kinds of meetings would have a two-way information exchange where both the parents would learn something but also especially the new kindergarten teachers would learn something valuable. This all was done while also enhancing the relationship – the partnership between kindergarten teachers and parents for raising the children together. (Hänninen S-L & Siiri V 1986, 76.)

It is interesting to compare how, it would appear that the daycare world has gone – to some extend – backwards in the progress when it comes to 'partnership' – the term

'partnership' here is used slightly loosely - between daycare staff and parents and between other parents. In 2002, during that time the Stakes' chief of development, Anna-Leena Välimäki stated in Helsingin Sanomat that while parents generally do trust the professional staff of the daycare, those parents usually know very little about what is going on with their children while they are at the daycare. (Keskinen S 2004, 106.) Parents do not know the other families and the other parents and the discussions that they have with the staff members according to Välimäki is mostly superficial, despite ECEC Partnership was officially stated as one of the important aspects of ECEC in 2003 when Stakes published the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland. (Keskinen S 2004, 107.)

Contextual ECEC

The so-called contextual theory defines early childhood education and care to be family oriented in Finland. From the perspective of parents it means that they have the so-called double role; role as parents and role as being partners with the daycare. (Opetushallitus 2000)

Contextual early childhood education and care theory is based on the idea that the family and the daycare are sharing the responsibility of raising the child. They are working together as a team and there the most important thing is to try to develop a natural continuum between home upbringing and professional upbringing. (Hujala E & Puroila A.M & Parrila S & Nivala V 2007, 83–85.)

From the perspective of contextual growth the daycare is meant to function from the basis of every child's development. Building of the mentioned continuum between the home and the daycare requires that the cultural values the child may face are not too far from the values the child has. (Hujala et al. 2007, 30, 61.) The central challenge in realizing the cooperation between the family and the daycare is in the development of family oriented work. It means that the daycare should plan its' activities based on the family situation of the child. This applies also to multicultural families and families

with immigrant background, where the daycare should be able to consider the cultural background of the child. (Hujala E 2003, 3-4.)

6 MULTICULTURALISM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

6.1 Multiculturalism in Finland

In order to explain our interest towards ECEC partnership between daycare and families with immigrant backgrounds, the term immigrant needs to be explained. It is important to explain what is meant by using the term ‘immigrant’. This is done through explaining wider concept of multiculturalism first and then moving in to more narrow term of immigrant and immigration to Finland.

According to Paavola and Talib (2000, 26.) multiculturalism is described to be ambiguous term and therefore it is difficult to use. It can only be used to describe societies’ and community’s situation, or defining more thoroughly a phenomenon inside them. As a describing term it can be used to tell about cultural diversity of a country. In that sense, Finland can also be said to be a multicultural country.

When using the term it is always somehow indirectly related to relationships between certain people groups, for example relationships between minority and majority groups of some country. It needs to be remembered that the term is also related all the way from individual attitudes to contracts between countries. The term can be used when talking about immigrants and anything related to them; for example when talking about different cultures and languages. It is also sometimes related to racism and negative thoughts. (Paavola H & Talib T 2000, 26.)

Overall multiculturalism may be seen as a state where different people come in to apparently unite population (Paavola H & Talib T 2000, 40). This may be interpreted

that people need to find their place in this population by absorbing habits and customs without losing their own culture at the same time. This requires high adaptability from individuals.

According to Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finnish society has become more multicultural within the last 15 years. This is visible also in the amount of children living in Finland who speak a foreign language. This number of children has sixfolded during the 15 years. In the report is also mentioned that a society becoming more multicultural sets different challenges for the health care services. This is also related to early childhood education and care. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007,15.)

Finland has set refugee families with children in to first place when it comes to taking them in to Finland. She also mentioned in her thesis work that almost in 80 percent of municipalities in Finland has immigrant background children. From this we can conclude that it is important to focus on early childhood education and its aspect of multiculturalism. (Kokkonen L 2009, 11.)

In the year 1990 there were 26 300 (0,5%) foreigners in Finland, but in the end of year 2010 there were 168 000 (3,1%) (Chart 1).

Chart 1



Approximately 2/3 of the foreigners living in Finland are from European countries. (Ulkomaan kansalaiset ja vieraskieliset.) These statistics are used in this thesis work to show the significance of multiculturalism for Finland and in our case the importance for our thesis work.

Even though the term multiculturalism is difficult to use due to its many aspects we have stated that Finland has become more multicultural within 10-15 years. Due to this it is important to focus on multicultural side of early childhood education.

6.2 Immigration to Finland

Immigrant is a term describing refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and remigrants. Immigrant is a person who is moving from country to another, who is living temporarily or permanently in a country where one has not been born but one has made social ties. (Paavola H & Talib T 2000, 30.)

We are using a term ‘immigrant background family’ to determine a family where there is a family member whose first language (or also known as mother tongue) is other than Saami language, Finnish, sign language, Swedish, Romani language, or a person who is using other languages than those mentioned above among one’s family (Vahaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 17.). The term immigrant background family can be used when describing a family with a person whose other parent, or both parents are immigrants. This determination is following the one done in the report of Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 17.)

Immigration as a term is also difficult to define. According to Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 17.) immigrant background children may be roughly divided in to two groups; children who have moved to Finland and children born in Finland, whose parents or grandparents are immigrants. Immigrant background families differ from each other also in their citizenship; child might have other country’s citizenship, Finnish citizenship or dual citizenship.

Many countries which have had emigration have later become immigration countries. This applies also to Finland. According to some predictions immigration to Finland is going to increase due to the increase of all immigrants around the world. One reason for the increase is fast population growth (Paavola H & Talib T 2000, 23.) and another one is free movement inside European Union.

According to Finnish government's strategy documents within the next two decades there are going to be 300 000-400 000 immigrants coming to Finland. (Paavola H & Talib T 2000, 23.) This immigration growth has become one of the reasons we are writing this thesis work; Immigration is growing in the future and due to that Finland is becoming more multicultural country. Early childhood education is one of those fields facing changes in the future. We wanted to see how the current immigrant situation has changed the work of daycare workers and also how the families of immigrant backgrounds see the Finnish daycare system.

According to Tilastokeskus 2009 majority of permanently living foreigners in Finland have moved to Finland due to family or work related reasons. Most of the immigrants come from Russia, Estonia and Sweden. Immigration to Finland is a quite recent phenomenon. Within the years 2000-2009 there have been 218 000 people moving to Finland from abroad. Every third of this number are remigrants which are people originally born in Finland. It means that Finns themselves are overpoweringly the biggest group of immigrants moving back to Finland. (Rapo M 2011.)

6.3 Multiculturalism in Early Childhood Education and Care in Finnish Daycare

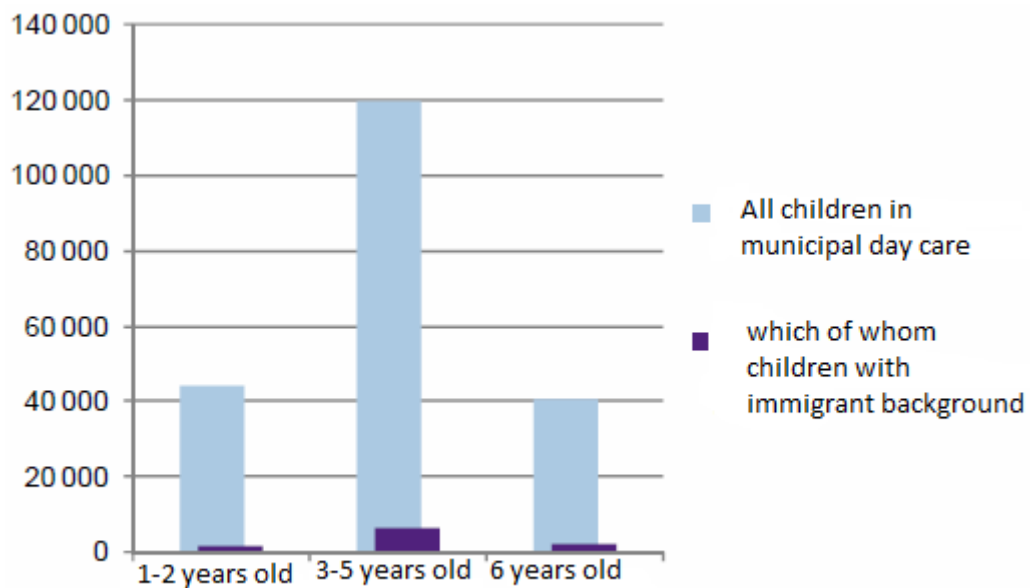
As we have pointed out in this thesis work; Finland has become more multicultural over the recent years. There are more immigrants and multicultural families living in Finland after the year 2000 than previous years. These changes are also reaching in to the field of early childhood education and care which is our interest.

According to educator and consultant Jonna Roos (2008, 129.), there are over 50 000 bicultural marriages in Finland and in these marriages lives over 50 000 children. It means that there are 150 000 people living in bicultural families and every year there are approximately 3000 new bicultural marriages tied.

According to statistic report of THL (2011) in the year 2010 there were 12 000-12 500 immigrant background children in municipal daycare in Finland. This is approximately 6 percent of all the children in municipal daycare. The amount of immigrant background children has increased significantly compared to year 2007. (Säkkinen S 2011, 2.)

It was also mentioned in the same report that there were 11 430 children with immigrant background in the municipal daycares who answered the questionnaire. All together there were 189 259 children in the municipal daycares. The variation between the municipalities is big. From these immigrant background children 15 percentage were 1-2 year olds, 64 percentage 3-5 year olds and 21 percentage over 6 year olds. (See chart 2)

Chart 2 Immigrant background children in municipal daycare in Finland in year 2010



According to answerer percentage there were approximately 12 000-12 500 children in the municipal daycare in the whole country. In year 2007 there were 8 500-9 000 immigrant background children in municipal daycare and from all of the daycare services provided by municipalities there were 4-5 percentage with immigrant background. (Säkkinen 2011, 4-5.) From these results one may easily see the change between the year 2007 and 2010 on immigrant background children.

The daycare plays a big role in the integration of children with immigrant backgrounds. Daycare might sometimes be the only environment where a child has an opportunity to learn new language and tie relationships with native children. By supporting the development of cultural identity and bilingual skills of these mentioned children it helps to prevent later learning problems. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 16.)

Laura Kokkonen (2009, 25-26.) refers in her thesis work that because in Finland the daycare system is part of public welfare system, daycare is connected to the situation of each society and time. This is why working in the field of early childhood education requires adaptability from the workers. This also means that changes needs to be made according to the needs of the time; today multiculturalism in daycares requires focus.

6.4 Parent's and Staff's Experiences of Multiculturalism in Daycare

By doing our interviews we wanted to see that how do parents from different cultures see Finnish daycare and the staff. Whether there are any dissatisfaction, or trust issues concerning upbringing methods and if so, how are they seen by the staff and parents? We also wanted to find out whether multicultural staff has any issues, or any different ideas on upbringing methods among themselves. These so-called challenges are delt more closely in a separate chapter.

We interviewed two parents. One of them was from India. She moved to Finland due to her husband's job. The family has lived in Finland for about 6 years or so. Both of them the husband and wife come from the same culture and country. The second parent was Chinese and was married to a Finn. She had lived in Finland for about eight years. Both of the parents had experiences from other Finnish daycares and both of the parents had daughters in Oulu daycare.

When thinking about multiculturalism we also wanted to see how international daycare staff gets along and if there are any challenges among them. To this we needed to find an international staff. We chose to interview Oulu daycare workers. They had workers from the UK and Finland. Kemi daycare workers were Finnish, but they had few immigrant background families as clients, so interviewing the staff of Kemi seemed as important.

When contacting the daycare we wanted to interview parents who might have had previous experiences of other daycares. It did not matter whether it was from Finland, or in other countries. We also wished to have parents whose cultural background was very different from our Finnish culture. We wanted to get as internationally diverse research done as possible and where it is possible to see the possible cultural differences if there are any. We started from the assumption that there might be differences and challenges when it comes to Finnish daycare and immigrant background families.

Both parents and staff were asked similar questions concerning how the multiculturalism or the different cultures are taken into account; How are they brought up in each child's individual early childhood education and care and in the groups that the children are part of. The actual questions are the following:

Questions presented for the staff

- “How have you acknowledged multiculturalism in practice?”
- “What sort of approaches do you use? Daily activities etc.”
- “Have the families presented any suggestions on these matters?”

And the questions presented for the two parents that we interviewed:

- “How is your cultural background taken into consideration?”
- “What do you think should be taken into consideration?”

However the questions may have not been asked word to word the same because of the flow of the conversation.

The two kindergarten teachers at the daycare of Kemi understood language as the main

objective in multiculturalism in daycare. This came apparent when they were asked the question “How have you acknowledged multiculturalism in practice?” The kindergarten teachers and possibly other staff teach everyday Finnish language for the children with immigrant background. For many of the children there is probably more than enough to work on with their language only. This is because on many occasions the children with immigrant background know very little to no Finnish according to the two kindergarten teachers.

The workers mentioned that nowadays they have children coming from Russian and Chinese families. These children learn Finnish in the daycare and speak their mother tongue at home. In Oulu daycare children mainly speak English in the daycare and at home their own languages.

We asked a follow-up question for the multiculturalism in daycare because of the language-centric answer to the previous question. The follow-up question was whether the multiculturalism or other cultures are brought up with the children. According to the two kindergarten teachers, they do not really bring up other cultures up in their work on most occasions. However, there are times when they do have to take them into consideration. For example they need to make sure whether the child is allowed to eat certain kind of food which may or may not be prohibited according to their culture or religion.

The last question concerning multiculturalism which we asked was whether parents with immigrant background had any wishes or suggestions on bringing up their own culture or multiculturalism with the other children. According to the interviewed kindergarten teachers, the parents generally did not have this kind of feedback. It is mostly left with the parents and possibly other relatives to make and keep their children attached to their native culture.

We were able to pick a phenomenon called ‘monocultural logic’ from the discussion we had with the kindergarten teachers in Kemi while on the topic of multiculturalism. Paula Eerola-Pennanen uses the term ‘yksikulttuurinen logiikka’ in *Varhaiskasvatuksen käsikirja*, which we have translated as monocultural logic (Hujala E 2011, 234.) According to Eerola-Pennanen the Finnish ECEC system still is heavily based on the mainstream culture. What this will entail is that many of the minority cultures are barely

taken into consideration in the Finnish ECEC system. This is certainly the kind of understanding we got from the interviews with the two kindergarten teachers in Kemi. We did partially touch this topic in the interview.

The kindergarten teachers at the Kemi daycare did mention that if a certain culture was much more greatly presented in the daycare, they might then be able to bring up multicultural perspectives in their ECEC. Also we got the impression that they themselves are not quite prepared to take their clients' cultures more forward due to the lack of training in that area.

In the national curriculum guidelines of early childhood education and care in Finland (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet 2005) is said that the child's cultural background and mother tongue should be taken into account. In order to understand the family's goals set for the child's growth and to understand the needs of a child it requires good cultural understanding from the staff to deal these matters equally among the staff members as with the parents.

From the interviews done in Oulu and Kemi daycares we found out that the staff would like to have more information on different cultures. Oulu daycare had workers coming from UK and they mentioned that they have good basis of cultural knowledge through personal experiences. By this was meant living and studying in UK, which is international, itself. Even though they had this experience they mentioned that they still need to find more cultural information on their own.

Parents and the workers said that the best information of cultures comes from the parents themselves. They are the ones providing good, solid information if the staff needs to know something. They also mentioned that the staff is not the one teaching the children about their cultures. It is the job of the parents. When the parents were asked the same question, they agreed that teaching children about their own culture is the job of the parents. They are the ones knowing the culture the best.

The use of term ‘multiculturalism in early childhood education and care in Finnish daycares’ also comprehends multiculturalism of the daycare workers, not only the parents and their children. We wanted to see what kind of education the staff has in order to work in a multicultural daycare and do they see their knowledge adequate.

When asking Oulu daycare staff about multicultural working environment they said that they have no challenges working in a multicultural staff. They are all professionals and they have the same knowledge of early childhood education and care and everyone learns new things from each other.

Multiculturalism might set its own challenges for the staff as for the parents and children. In the following chapter we are dealing some of the challenges more closely we found out during the thesis work.

6.5 Challenges Brought by Multiculturalism in Daycare

We started to do the thesis with an assumption that there are some sort of challenges in early childhood education and care partnership between daycare and families with immigrant backgrounds. These challenges might be results of various things and we wanted to see what causes them.

Challenges brought by multiculturalism in early childhood education and care may be said to be for example; challenges brought by the lack of communication between the daycare and the parents, lack of educated staff, the lack of information on both sides, differences in the upbringing methods, lack of trust and also lack of cultural knowledge on both sides. These mentioned challenges are based on our findings from our interviews.

Because we wanted to find an answer to a question that does ECEC partnership happen in practice, we need to take a look at the possible challenges brought by multiculturalism in early childhood education and care in Finland in order to answer the question. This consideration of challenges is important for our thesis work because there might be some challenges on the way of ECEC partnership happening.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis work; society faces different challenges when becoming more multicultural. These challenges reach also to early childhood education and care. In this chapter we are going to take some of the mentioned challenges in to more close examination and look at them in the light of theory and reflect them to the results we got from our interviews.

Integration and language

It is important to consider how the daycare workers can support child's integration, learning of a new language and prevent isolation. Language is said to be one of the most important things in integrating children in to new environments. If they know well their mother tongue they will learn new languages more easily. This on the other hand prevents isolation and helps the child to integrate more quickly. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 16.) This could be interpreted that if there are problems in language teaching, and then there might be problems with isolation and integration as well.

Integration of families with different cultural backgrounds happens often through the places where they live and through their day-to-day contacts. These contacts also mean the daycare workers. Daycare workers have a responsibility to answer also the needs of families coming from different cultures. This is ensured by the law (Päivähoitolaki 1973), mentioned in the National Curriculum Guidelines of Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland and in Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 15.)

When it comes to children with immigrant background the staff also needs to follow different laws and acts concerning language and different cultural backgrounds; the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers and the Non-Discrimination Act (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 15.)

Researchers have almost unanimously emphasized the meaning of child's mother tongue in positive development of one's identity. There have been thought that these children should be placed in to daycares which are teaching minority languages. In these daycares children should get teaching in their mother tongues. Practice shows that daycares have had to settle for compromises and immigrant parents have seen that without knowing the language of the country the children will not succeed in studies or in working life later on. (Alijoki E 1998, 35.)

We found out from the interviews that parents are usually those who want to teach their children their mother tongue. It is not seen as a job of the workers. In the English speaking daycare in Oulu the teaching was as said, in English. This also creates its' own challenges when working with a foreign language. Though, using the word "challenge" in this sense was not seen as a good choice of word. Instead the workers in Oulu daycare said it could be said to be more "of something they need to consider." (Interview Oulu 2011)

When making our interview in Oulu, we noticed that parents want to give their children more opportunities also through language. This was said by one of the parents that we interviewed. She said that she and her husband want to give their daughter an opportunity to learn 'proper' English so that the daughter can choose where ever she wishes to move when she is a grownup. In this context proper English meant the language without any special accent of Finnish or other languages. She also added that it is important that the child learns Finnish and English customs in the daycare in order to cope later in different cultures. This is not a straight quotation from the interview due to the free flow of the conversation. (Interview Oulu 2011)

Due to educated, international staff it is nowadays possible to teach children the so-called proper English in daycares of Finland. This mentioned wish from the parents that their daughter will learn English sets different challenges for the staff. The staff needs to know also proper English in order to teach the children. Among this they also need to be aware of cultures. When interviewing the staff of the same daycare they had teachers coming from the UK and from India. This means that they also had international and multicultural staff.

On the other hand in Kemi Finnish speaking daycare the issue was the lack of English and Finnish skills with the parents in some cases. Kemi is known to take many refugees and sometimes there is not a common language found. This was called as a linguistic barrier. This is also mentioned and noticed in a thesis work done by Sirpa Maijanen (2007, 27). She mentions in her thesis work that linguistic barrier prevents care partnership. According to her, there is a problem if workers and parents do not understand each other.

We found out from our interviews that if there are problems with communication either between the parents and the daycare, or child and the daycare, it creates insecurity on both sides. The staff of Kemi daycare said that in day-to-day contacts it is not possible to have an interpreter present, even though it should be a right. (Administrative Procedure Act 434/2003) Due to this sometimes parents do not understand what is said. It creates misunderstandings in some cases and misunderstandings lead to insecurity. (Interview Kemi 2011)

ECEC partnership requires good communication and contact, if communication is not enough, then ECEC partnership is not working in practice. As mentioned earlier in this chapter; in theory the parents and the daycare are ensured by law (Administrative Procedure Act 434/2003) to get an interpreter if needed. This shows that sometimes the idea of care partnership does not happen in practice which is part of our findings.

On the other hand in Oulu daycare, because it is an international daycare, they always have someone who speaks the native language of the parents and a Finnish speaking staff member is present in the important meetings. These important meetings can be, for example, the ECEC plan meetings. This also helps the English speaking teachers to understand what the parents are saying without getting in to any misunderstandings and everyone feel themselves comfortable. This applies also to day-to-day meetings. (Interview Oulu 2011)

Oulu daycare had an Indian worker and the staff members we interviewed mentioned that she has helped a lot with Indian families, which they have had more. The staff said that she (the worker) has showed the other staff members what is appropriate to say and how to behave without being rude. The Indian worker also helps the parents in matters which might otherwise be confusing for them. (Interview Oulu 2011)

The staff also said that they do not see challenges in ECEC partnership due to language barrier, but they said that sometimes parents might face some difficulties expressing themselves in written forms. These are backed up with discussions, so that nothing is left unclear. (Interview Oulu 2011)

Communication might be lacking for different reasons. It does not necessarily mean that there is linguistic barrier. As Oulu daycare workers said; parents are different, they share things about their family in different ways. Some are more open than others. (Interview Oulu 2011)

In our interviews we had no possibilities to interview parents with ‘real language barrier’, because we should have got an interpreter present and due to financial matters it was not possible. It would have been interesting to show how they see the communication and relationship with the daycare working and whether they understand how Finnish daycare system works and if there is any dissatisfaction towards the system amongst them.

Both of the parents that we interviewed spoke fluent English, so they had no communication issues with the daycare staff. In their cases the ECEC partnership worked, despite of few changes they wished; they wished more meetings and communication with the staff.

The parents we interviewed also mentioned that from their point of views daycare workers should see more effort with immigrant background parents to make them feel themselves secure than with native parents. They said that they also would wish more frequent reports from the daycare about their children's development. They did not see that meetings are enough. (Interview Oulu 2011)

These findings differed to some extend from the interview of the workers in the same daycare. The workers of the daycare said they have lot of discussions with the parents whether the parents have anything on their minds and if there are some special things about the child workers need to consider. Then they added that they make assessments periodically through the year whether there is anything the child might need help with. This is done in the class, or in other places. Then if there is anything to be concerned with by the parents or by the staff, there should be an extra meeting. Because every family is different, every child is different and every plan is different ECEC partnership is not working the same way with everyone. Workers need to be flexible in that sense. They also mentioned that it seems to work quite well and they have good relationships with the parents.

With children learning a new language is important and it opens new doors to new relationships and experiences. With parents, language might bring out new challenges when communicating with the daycare personnel if there is not common language found. In some cases there is not the possibility to find the language. Common language helps to prevent the feelings of insecurity on both sides.

There could be mentioned that language does not bring out challenges in the cases where there is a common language and where the staff has prepared for using other languages. On the other hand in daycares such as Kemi, where there sometimes might be refugees the common understanding between parents and staff might be difficult to find, despite the law mentioning parent being able to have an interpreter; it is not always possible in practice.

Education of the workers

According to Paavola and Talib (2000, 74.) cultural diversity has been visible more in the Helsinki metropolitan area, but there are more and more students and children getting also in to the smaller areas. This means that it is important to focus also on the education of the workers in the smaller areas.

In order to being able to answer different demands of language skills and cultural skills educated staff plays a big role. In the western countries today daycare centers have become one of the most important upbringing environments. Daycares have got its footing as being part of education- and upbringing system in Finland. This shows that it is also important to have educated staff in order to provide good early childhood education and care for everyone. (Karila K & Nummenmaa AR 2001, 7, 29.) Therefore the education of the daycare workers were one of the things we wanted to get answer for. Kokkonen (2009, 25-26.) adds that especially in small areas and municipalities it is difficult to find personnel with required language skills.

According to English webpages of Oulu there are seven international daycare centers in the city of Oulu. Two of those seven are Swedish-Finnish speaking and German-Finnish speaking daycares. The rest are English speaking. (Municipal daycare centers) It means that these mentioned daycares need special international knowledge. It might be knowledge about a language, or other kind of cultural knowledge which is brought by educated staff.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has stated in its report that answering the needs of immigrant background families in early childhood education and care requires good cultural knowledge. In the same report of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health it is mentioned that international education in Finnish science universities, universities of applied sciences and vocational schools needs more focus. Central development targets are seen as such; growing in to multiculturalism and bilingualism and the challenges of ECEC partnership. At the moment these mentioned studies does not form unite whole which is seen as a problem. Usually in science universities, universities of applied sciences as in vocational schools the studies related to multiculturalism are built inside to other studies which make them more difficult to perceive. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 15, 33.)

This is also noticed by Latomaa (2007, 179.) who states that due to immigrant population doubling by the year 2020, there is a long term impact with the decisions made in the field of education. This means that more studies related to multicultural education should be included in the education of early childhood education and care workers and also in the studies and education of other workers in the field.

In daycare environments special knowledge related to multiculturalism should be focused on supporting child's cultural identity and bilingualism. Facing parents requires different knowledge; there should also be ability to read their cultural behavior and among other, relationship skills. (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 28.)

Education of the workers is important when working in multicultural environment. According to Kokkonen (2009, 26.) the education of the personnel has become a topic of discussion. She adds that arriving 21st century there have been attempts to develop multicultural work in the field of early childhood education and care especially in practical level.

Multiculturalism in daycare does not only affect the children nor the parents, it also affects the staff. According to Paavola and Talib (2000, 74.) if there are many multicultural children coming in to the daycare, which is not properly prepared for it, it might bring a sense of uncertainty among the staff members. The staff might not know how to adapt and how to handle multicultural groups. This might happen especially in smaller areas. This uncertainty might be brought out by the lack of education and experience of cultural diversity.

If the teacher feels oneself insecure and feels the work too demanding there is a risk of denying these cultural changes. This, on the other hand, might lead to neglecting the aim of getting immigrant background children integrated. It is important for the children that they feel their culture and background valued. (Paavola H & Talib T 2000, 74-75.)

These mentioned situations set challenges for the worker; one needs to take a closer look at personal values and broaden one's world view. These mentioned values and views are passed on to students.

Education of the workers is important for various reasons; Staff needs to be able to answer the demanded language skills, they need to be able to support the child's cultural background so that the child feels oneself valued. The staff also needs to be educated so that they do not find themselves from insecure grounds with language and cultural information, which on the other hand mirrors into children as well.

More knowledge wanted

As mentioned earlier in this thesis; the workers in our interviews would have wanted more cultural knowledge. They also mentioned that usually if they do not know something it is best to ask parents about it.

This is also visible in the report of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta 2007, 16.) Which shows that workers of a more multicultural environment needs not only basic, but also updating education to reinforce their relationship and encountering skills. If there is a lack of education, or knowledge the workers find themselves from insecure grounds and it leads to different issues.

The workers of early childhood education and care should have a possibility to reinforce their knowledge through different education programs (Latomaa S 2007, 179) due to the fact, as mentioned earlier, the field of early childhood education and care is constantly changing according to the times.

The information got from the interview of the workers in Oulu showed that the workers feel that they are able to get education and different courses if needed. They also mentioned that they have the children's parents who are willing to teach them about multicultural things. (Interview Oulu 2011)

On the other hand in the interview done in Kemi daycare, the workers mentioned that the knowledge they get is from their own sources and they need to study by themselves about the cultural matters and backgrounds. Sometimes when cultural information and language skills are not enough they might miss some things what the parents are explaining about their cultures. (Interview Kemi 2011) This shows that there would be room for more education. The question is that is this kind of information and education easily accessed, or does it come with many years of experience in multicultural surroundings.

Interview results from these interviews do not differ from each other. Both of the staffs mentioned that there are always something new to be learned and every child is different and they come from different backgrounds. It seems that parents are very important source of information for both of the daycares and as earlier has been mentioned in this thesis work; the parents themselves find their knowledge important and valued.

Differences in upbringing methods and trust

By asking the parents a question: “How would you feel if the staff would give you an advice regarding upbringing your child? Would you see it offending? Why? Why not?” we wanted to see if there are differences in upbringing methods and how do parents see care partnership. This question was also presented in order to clarify the parents’ attitudes towards professionals and their guiding and whether there are any cultural differences.

According to interview done with the parents it was mentioned that there has been little dissatisfaction when it comes to differences in education methods between families and daycare. Indian parent mentioned as a one positive example that daycare had thought their daughter to use fork and knife for eating, as they usually eat by fingers. They were positively surprised and mentioned that in that particular case the teachers had brought out their professionalism. (Interview Oulu 2011)

There was only one ‘negative’ case mentioned where the parent had noticed her child learning selfish behavior at daycare. This had happened in another Finnish daycare where she noticed her child’s behavior changing in to more selfish. She noticed that it was due to teaching methods and the child had absorbed the selfishness from a daycare worker and it was not typical to behave in a selfish way in an Indian culture. (Interview Oulu 2011)

When asking the same question from the Kemi daycare workers there were only two observations done; she mentioned that in some cultures children are demanded to learn for example numbers too early and children need to grow up too early as in Finland the meaning of play is emphasized. She continued that sometimes the demands and goals are set too high for children. The other case was that sometimes a parent had mentioned that the boy child of the family is more important than the girl child. (Interview Kemi 2011)

Even though there are these few differences the worker added that there has not ever been any dissatisfaction towards the pedagogical ways they are using at the daycare. (Interview Kemi 2011)

The workers at Oulu daycare mentioned that certain food, religious matters and other things related to culture are not seen as a challenge but they are something the workers need to consider when approaching multicultural families. They also need to consider whether the families are multicultural, both coming from western cultures, eastern culture, where there are different attitudes towards different things. One should think what is asked and how the thing is asked. These are the only challenges. But these things apply also to Finnish families.

There has not been any trust issues, but there have been cases where the families assume that the workers know something which they do not know. The workers might assume that for example families coming from Indian cultures might be vegetarian, if the parents do not tell them. There are areas where the conversation and communication has not been quite as clear, but they are mostly little things and they are in the beginning of starting daycare and the workers phone the parents in cases where they are not sure whether it is fine to give the children some certain food. (Interview Oulu 2011)

The other UK teacher added that there has not been any trust issues, because there has to be 100 percent trust, because the parents are leaving their child in to the daycare for eight hours. (Interview Oulu 2011)

It is rather a communication issue than a trust issue and these might come up for example in the cases where the parents do not pick up the phone when the workers do not know whether to give the children some food or not. (Interview Oulu 2011)

As a conclusion there could be mentioned that all in all the workers are respected by the parents and if there are any differences in upbringing methods they are rare. There had been only one case by the parent where she felt her child had learned something the child should have not learned. The workers need to consider cultural backgrounds of the parents also in this context. The workers mentioned that if there are any trust issues, they are due to assuming things. Communicating is usually what helps, but sometimes there are difficulties for example reaching the parents by phone.

6 CONCLUSION

We decided to use in this thesis work qualitative research method instead of quantitative research method. It was a better option for us due to small amount of interviewees we got. If using quantitative research method it would have required a larger sample rate of, for example, parents which we were not able to have. The purpose of qualitative research method is said to be aiming for understanding the context, to interpret what is going on and to understand the active agents at hand (Hirsjärvi S & Hurme H 2008, 22). This also served our purpose from the perspective of our thesis work.

In our thesis work we decided to use theme interview which helped us considerably to figure out the questions for the interviews. Even though the questions had certain themes; ECEC partnership, ECEC, ECEC plan and multiculturalism in daycare, it gave us moving space to modify questions according to interviewees, which were parents and staff.

We interviewed staff members from daycares in Kemi and from Oulu. The daycares were different from each other because Kemi daycare was Finnish speaking, with immigrant background children and occasional refugee children and Oulu daycare was English speaking with immigrant background children and Finnish children. By doing interviews in two different places we got more information on the topic. Besides the interviews done with staff members we interviewed two parents from Oulu daycare. They were from India and from China. Both of the parents had previous experiences on Finnish daycares and other also had experience from Chinese daycare.

First theme of our interviews was early childhood education and care, or shortly put in this thesis work ECEC. ECEC is described to be play-centered, organized and goal-orientated interaction and cooperation (Heinämäki L 2004, 9). Decision in Principle of

the Council of State Concerning the National Policy Definition describes it to be educational upbringing in different environments. Its goal is also to promote healthy development, growth and education and to prepare child gradually for school which virtually is for all children. (Valtioneuvoston periaatepäätös varhaiskasvatuksen valtakunnallisista linjauksista 2002, 10-11.)

Finnish social, health and educational institution is organizing many different services for parents, children as for the whole family. Even though these ECEC services are to support children and their parents with their parenting we see that these services might not support immigrant children and parents as well as others. The mentioned immigrant parents and children might not have enough language skills to operate amongst these services, but despite the lacking language skills children are not entitled for special early childhood education and care services in daycare. Heinämäki (2004, 52-53.) has stated that the language and learning skills of immigrant child are usually adequate in one's language and cultural context, not in other surroundings. These children should get some special support from the daycare not only for learning Finnish but also support for one's native language even though the main responsibility of teaching native language is with the parents. By supporting language teaching the child will learn at least some language fully.

The second important theme for our thesis work was ECEC plan. Every daycare whether a municipal daycare, or a private has an ECEC plan. This plan is based on the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland. This is to build a more uniform ECEC amongst the various daycares in Finland.

Municipalities use National Guidelines as basis of their own ECEC plans, which then, on the other hand are used as basis of doing daycare's own ECEC plan. Every municipality has their own plans due to the fact that they have different early childhood policies and strategies and this was also seen when comparing Kemi's and Oulu's ECEC plan. It is important to take the different policies in to consideration when doing ECEC plan.

The third theme of our thesis work was ECEC partnership. It was seen as one of the most important themes for our thesis. ECEC partnership may shortly be defined as being parents and daycares conscious acts to work together for the benefit of child's upbringing. Parents and daycare should work in co-operation where parents bring their practical knowledge and professionals bring their professional knowledge together. This sort of working is seen to benefit the child and it is requiring a great deal of communication from both sides. Contextual ECEC theory, on the other hand, is based on the idea that parents and the staff is working together and sharing the responsibility of raising a child. They are trying to build a continuum between the home and the daycare. This requires the cultural values of a child to be taken into consideration so that they are not too far from the values of the daycare.

Common language and cultural knowledge is seen important for ECEC partnership. The staff should be able to consider the cultural background of the child in order to make the child feel valued. They also need to be able to act and communicate in a certain way with certain cultures and it requires great deal of cultural knowledge. Lacking of cultural knowledge was seen as one of 'the challenges' in our thesis work. Cultural knowledge is seen as something collected through long experience from the field, or through education. In the cases of some workers the knowledge was something they had to find by themselves. Cultural knowledge was also 'collected' from the parents.

As mentioned, language skills are important for ECEC partnership and when communicating with immigrant background families. There should be a common language in order to get the information moving from parents to the staff and from staff to the parents. If there is not common language, there should be an interpreter present who may move the information. If there is not an interpreter, or a common language there might be misunderstandings and feelings of insecurity on both sides. Interpreter is not also available for day-to-day discussions which are also relevant for working ECEC partnership. The lacking of language skills was mentioned to be one of the biggest challenges for ECEC partnership working. Language skills were also related to

education of the workers, where there might not be adequate language skills for working with immigrant families and children.

Multiculturalism also formed as one of the themes in our thesis work. It was mentioned in the interview done with Oulu daycare workers that it is important to consider whether a child and the parents come from multicultural families where parents are from two different cultures, or whether they are from western cultures, or from some other culture very different from Finnish culture. Multiculturalism was also connected by us to the multiculturalism of the working environment where we wanted to see if there are any differences among the staff members in values, or in upbringing methods. No such things were mentioned.

We were able to pick up a phenomenon called ‘monocultural logic’ from the discussions we had with the kindergarten teachers in Kemi while on the topic with multiculturalism. This term means that Finnish ECEC system is still heavily based on the mainstream culture and due to this it does not leave much room for the consideration of children representing minority groups in daycare. (Hujala E 2011, 234.) They mentioned that if there would be some culture more greatly represented they could bring up multicultural perspectives in their ECEC as well.

When interviewing the parents and the staff members we were also interested to ask about the possible challenges they might have in multicultural surroundings. Challenge was seen as inadequate word and the better term was said to be “something to consider”. As mentioned, one of the challenges was said to be language. It was brought up on many occasions due to its complex nature in this context.

Language is related to integration of families as well as children. Through language a child is making, for example, social ties in the daycare. Learning mother tongue helps the child to learn also other languages and it prevents learning difficulties and isolation in later life. Daycares should be able to support child’s native language even though it is seen as a responsibility of the parents.

Language skills were also related to communication with the parents and the staff. It is difficult to make ECEC partnership happening in practice without common language. Interpreters are not always available and information is not moving between the two parties causing insecurity and misunderstandings. Language skills of the staff were also related, as mentioned previously in this chapter, to education. Inadequate education in working with immigrant families might show as inadequate language skills, lack of cultural knowledge and, among others insecurity. This may lead to inability to answer the needs of immigrant background families, denying cultural changes, which on the other hand may difficult the integration of children and through that the children do not feel themselves valued.

International education in Finland is seen to need more focus. The education is not seen to form a unite whole and the studies are built inside to other studies which makes them more difficult to perceive. It is also seen that due to the changing nature of early childhood education and care, the education should be updated on a regular basis. This should be done in order to answer the demands of ever growing immigrant population in Finland.

When asking the parents and the staff about the differences in upbringing methods, there were only small observations done. The overall view of the topic was that parents trust the staff and there are rare differences in upbringing methods. There has to be common trust in order for the parent to leave one's child in to the daycare. If there is something to consider they are usually related, for example food and other cultural things and they are sorted by thorough communication.

In conclusion to our main research question on how ECEC partnership is implemented with families with immigrant background, we have come to one basic conclusion: As to how well ECEC partnership works with families with immigrant background is highly individual. In the end the only must-have and key to implementing ECEC partnership with families with immigrant background is language. Never mind all the lack of

cultural knowledge that either party may have but as long as there is a common language and when there is a will, these kinds of things can be worked amongst the two parties. If there is no strong common language it is difficult to get very deep into the partnership where the two parties; the family and daycare workers are not able to understand each other.

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8 APPENDIX

Questions for parents

ECEC

- What sort of family do you have? How many children, do you have any previous experience on daycare services?
- Why did you choose multicultural daycare?
- How would you describe Finnish daycare?
- What sort of cooperation do you have with the staff of the daycare?

ECEC Plan

- Have you been told about early childhood education and care plan?
- Have you done an early childhood education and care plan for your child or children?
- How has the cooperation been in practice?

ECEC Partnership

- What sort of idea do you have of ECEC partnership?
- How has it been implemented?
- Have you had any problems with the ECEC and partnership? If so, what?
- How is the information moving from the daycare to the parents? How is the done?
- Do you have a possibility to make suggestions or improvements?

Multiculturalism in ECEC

- How is your cultural background taken into consideration?
- What do you think should be taken into consideration?

Questions for staff

ECEC

- What is your education and working background?

ECEC Plan

- What is your idea of early childhood education and care plan?
- What is your ECEC plan based on?
 - If it's not based on national curriculum guidelines in ECEC in Finland then what is it based on?
- Do you have your own ECEC plan?
- How do you implement the planning with the parents?

EDEC Partnership

- How is ECEC partnership implemented in practice?
- What sort of challenges do you see in implementing ECEC partnership with multicultural families?
- What sort of cooperation do you have with the multicultural parents?

Multiculturalism in ECEC

- What kind of cultural background does the staff and families have?
- What sort of knowledge does the staff have about different cultures?
- For what is the knowledge based on? Education, special trainings...
- Do you feel you have enough understanding of cultures? Do you feel you have any need for extra training?
- How do you acknowledged multiculturalism in practice?
- What sort of approaches do you use? Daily activities...
- Have the families presented any suggestions on these matters?