

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PARTNERSHIP IN  
FINLAND

Anupama KC  
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Tampere University of Applied Sciences

## **ABSTRACT**

Tampere University of Applied Sciences  
Degree Programme in Social Services and Health Care  
Department of Social Sciences

### **K.C, ANUPAMA: Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland**

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The purpose of the study was to describe and find Early Childhood Education and Care partnership (ECEC) in a certain day-care of Finland. The objective of the study was to find answers to two questions: 1) what is ECEC partnership and how does it work in Finland; and 2) what are parents' opinions and suggestions regarding the ECEC partnership.

The thesis is based on qualitative research. Unstructured interview was conducted with five different parents for obtaining the data. The designed questions were open-ended, which helped parents to answer in depth.

This study gives valuable information about Early Childhood Education and Care partnership. The study clearly shows that there is a need of improvement from parents as well as day-care staff to make continuous partnership approach. This study also makes us think about different methods to improve Early Childhood Education and Care partnership for day-care staff.

Hopefully, this study could serve as an inspiration for any day-care which is willing to improve the partnership approach and would like to be an instance in the day care field with strong Early Childhood Education and Care partnership approach.

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*Key words:* Early childhood education and care, partnership, day-care service

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Through the course of the English Bachelors Degree in Social Service and Health care, I completed my practical training periods in an English private day-care in Finland. Although I did my two practical training periods in one day-care but every time my mind used to be engaged with new queries.

National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland talks about parental engagement for the development of child. Further it clearly says that it is the main responsibility of the staff for employing partnership approach from the very beginning in the child early childhood education and care. On other hand, parents need to share their knowledge and experience about their child with the staff which helps to understand child's growth, development or learning and also may be useful in problematic situations

I wanted to learn how parents see ECEC partnership in the day-care where they send their child for such a long hours. What do parents know about Early Childhood Education and Care partnership as it has been an important issue in Finnish ECEC guidelines. Likewise, I wanted to know the ideas of parents to conduct the Early Childhood Education and Care partnership.

Thus, I was motivated to learn how parents see the partnership issues in Finland while cooperating with day-care staffs and about their wish for the partnership.

## **2. AIM OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of the study is to study the perspective of parents towards the ECEC partnership in day-care. The purpose of the study is mainly to find the expectations of parents towards day-care and search methods for make strong Early Childhood Education and Care partnership after the study.

### **The specific aims of the study are:**

1. To study what is Early Childhood Education and Care partnership and how it works in Finnish day-care center.
2. To learn what are parents' opinions and suggestions regarding the Early Childhood Education and Care partnership in day-care.

### **Research Questions:**

1. Do parents know what Early Childhood Education is and Care partnership and what do they think about it?
2. How often parents do Early Childhood Education and Care partnership with the staff and how happy they are about it?
3. What are parents expectations regarding Early Childhood Education and Care partnership?

### **3. RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION**

The thesis is based on qualitative research approach. According to Silverman (2000, 1) if you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behavior then qualitative methods are favored. Qualitative researcher wants to know where, when, how and under what circumstances behavior comes into being. What historical and movements are they part of. Each act, gesture is significant in the eyes of qualitative researchers (Bogdan & Knopp 1982, 1).

In this thesis the data was collected from unstructured interview of five parents in a certain day-care. The parents were divided into groups of three and two and were interviewed at different times according to their will. Thus, the interviews in the study are classified in two groups namely: Group 1 and Group 2 to make reader's to understand simply. The rules of confidentiality were explained before recording the interview to create the trust and comfortable environment for the parents.

Some children of these parents have been attending day-care for already one year and some have just started a few months ago. Some children are attending day-care five days a week or are full time and some are part time attendees. The interview was held in a private English daycare in Tampere, Finland. The daycare is open five days a week from 0700-1700. It has four groups: 3-4-year-olds, 5-year-olds and preschoolers. For 3-4-year-olds they have places for 25 full-day children and 10 half-day children. 5-year-olds and preschoolers work together at preschool premises. Although preschoolers have own preschool lessons too. For 5 and 6 year-olds they have 26 places. The day care also provides morning and after school care. Preschool is bilingual, so children learn both Finnish and English, because most of their native language in Finnish.

There may be differences as well as similarities between the parents in the same early childhood education and care services. The parents were chosen randomly and their participation was voluntary. These responses are solely used for the purpose of this study.

The interview was taped and was transcribed later. Theoretical background for the study was gathered from literature documents, internet articles and also previous research. This study consists of a large amount of theoretical work. The interview consists of

twenty open-ended questions where how, when, where, why used regularly. Open ended questions helped parents to talk easily. The interview was analyzed and presented according to the themes in the study. The interview related to the themes are picked and put under appropriate themes. Few opinions are presented in the study trying to avoid repetition of same kind of opinion from the parents.

## **4. DEFINITION OF ECEC SERVICES**

Early Childhood Education and Care are services delivered to children especially from 0-6 or children under the compulsory school age. For parents with young children, ECEC services are the first context in which their children come face to face with differences between the culture of home and the public culture. There are wide national variations in how early childhood services are delivered, organized, staffed, funded and places provided (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p1). There are significant variations of ECEC services between the countries in Europe, for example, Finland, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway. Generally ECEC is a way to combine parent and staff working with children, and the whole community to be aware of children living in that community and children's development.

### **4.1 Demand of ECEC**

Increasing demand for non-parental care as women start to join the labor market with men, education for young children to minimize social problems in future and local infrastructure are some main reasons for the demand of ECEC. The importance of early learning has been increasingly recognized; both on its own right and also because many believe it may enhance subsequent academic performance. Early intervention has come to be seen as a means of preventing or ameliorating problems in families with young children and in later childhood, as well as protecting children deemed to be at risk. Early childhood education and care is discussed as a condition for urban and rural development and as a part of the social and economic infrastructure of healthy and wealthy local communities (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p1). In Nordic countries ECEC services has been already well established by the state and these well established ECEC services are making parents to raise their child in a better way.

### **4.2 History of Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland**

The history of the Finnish day-care system could go back as far as the 18th and 19th centuries. Early childhood education in Finland has a long history. The founder of Finnish public education Uno Cygnaeus was the first to be interested in Frobelian ideas for young children's education. While developing his ideas for public education in Finland, he visited Germany in the mid-nineteenth. Frobelian kindergartens influenced him strongly so that, in 1863, he established the first crèche (for Cygnaeus 4 year's



olds) and kindergarten for 4 to 10 year- olds children at the beginning of his time at the teacher training school in Finland located in Jyväskylä. (Saracho 2005, 356)

Cygnaeus died in 1888 and his ideas for public education progressed. He is well recognized as the father of Finnish Comprehensive education. After him, two ladies, Hanna Rothman and Elisabeth Alander, had powerful influence on developing the ideologies and pedagogical practice for Finnish Childhood Education. Their impacts are still present in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care. Frobelian ideas had powerful impact on these two ladies as they experienced the Frobelian kindergartens in the late nineteenth century.

The first kindergarten was established in 1888 in Helsinki. Finland was the first country in Scandinavia to offer day-care for children and now has a very extensive day-care and family system (Huttunen et al. 1989, 6). Hanna Rothman and Elisabeth Alander's main idea was the social view of early childhood education and care, where the kindergarten has to take responsibility for working families, children living in poverty and poor condition including poor housing conditions. They created pedagogical philosophy based on Frobelian ideas for Finnish kindergartens.

Gradually in 1916 the state granted subsidies for kindergartens for the very first time, and since 1917 budgets for kindergarten activities was granted regularly. Municipal kindergartens only started in 1919. When the act was passed in 1927 on State Subsidies for kindergarten, and then municipalities started to take all the responsibility for kindergarten. Day-care was the new name given to kindergarten which is seen as a place to perform social and educational services. Day-care started to become defined as supporting the home in its upbringing task and no longer connected only with child protection and the poor. It was also established as a social service to all families and an educational service to all under school aged children (Utunen, 2005, 8).

Until 1996, day-care provided places for children whose mothers were at work or children from low income or solo parent families. In 1996, an amendment to the Act on Children's Day-care gave all parents a statutory subjective right to day-care place for their under school aged child, either in a day-care centre or family day-care. According to the law, if the day-care place is needed for the mother who is working or studying, it is to be allocated within 2 weeks of receiving the application, otherwise a place is to be

allocated to a child four months before it is needed (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2002).

A subjective right for a place in day-care has changed the status of parents. The increasing number of immigrants with children and integration of children with special needs into day-care, started to make a close connection between the day-care and the parents to ensure that the child's needs are being met. This connection between the home and day-care has created a strong learning environment for children.

Although the laws guarantee the right for parents for a place in day-care for their children in a municipal, not every child attend the day-care. Almost half of the children are cared for at home. The use of day-care becomes more common amongst mothers who have received a higher level of education (Utunen, 2005).

## **5. PROVISION OF ECEC SERVICES IN FINLAND**

In Finland, 0-6 year old of children are under ECEC benefits. The two important aims of Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care is to fulfill day-care needs of all the children under compulsory school age and to provide the early childhood education for all children. Thus, a parent of a child is entitled to get different benefits from the state. A new born baby is cared for at home by the parents themselves. The benefits from the state includes: maternity, paternity and parental leave, child allowances and care leave. Families can receive home care allowance for taking care of the youngest child in the family reaches until the age of three. All families can use parental and child health clinics. Clinic staff is, therefore, expected to talk about the Early Childhood Education services available in the municipality and opportunities provided for nurturing the child in cooperation with their parents.

The law itself safe guards the rights of a child to have day-care facilities as per parent's wishes right after the end of the period of parental allowances. Parents can choose: municipal day-care, private day-care, supervised family day-care and preschool for six-year olds, until the child goes to school. Children in Finland go to school at the age of seven. The diagram below presents the ECEC system for children aged 0-6 in Finland:

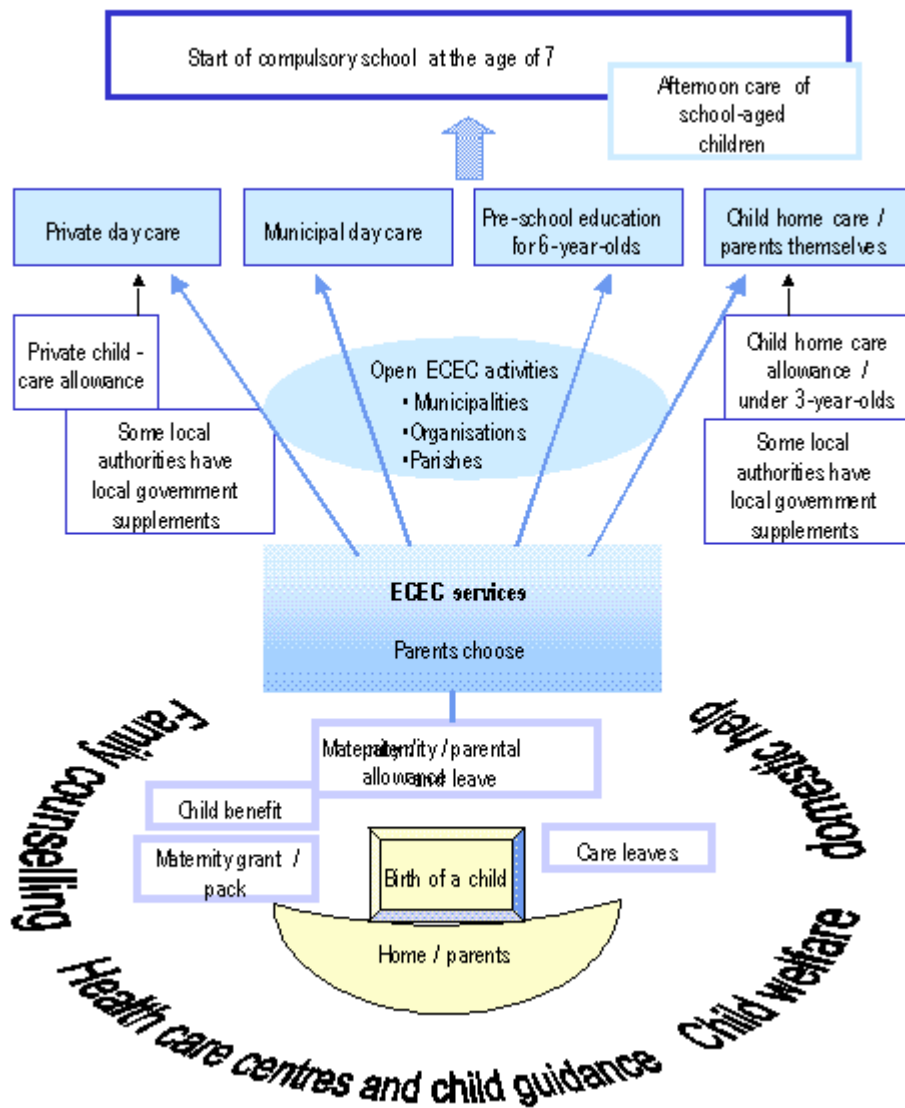


Figure 1: Finnish ECEC system for 0-6 in Finland (Early childhood Education and Care in Finland,

The diagram provided by the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health shows how parents can receive different kinds of benefits to raise their children below seven-year-olds and are entitled to get ECEC benefits. Parents have sole right to choose a best place for their child after the allowances provided from the state.

With strong the ECEC system, day-care staff in Finland comes from diverse educational backgrounds. Staff working in day-care is required to have at least a secondary-level degree in the field of social welfare and health care. One in three of the staff must have a post-secondary level education (Bachelors of Education, Masters of Education or Bachelors of Social Sciences). The occupational diversity has helped the Finnish day-care system to work in a more effective way and to achieve the educational objectives of day-care.

The adult-child ratio in day-care centers is one to seven for 3-6 years- olds and one to four for children under the age of three in full time day-care. Likewise, when part time day-care is arranged the ratio for 3-6 year- olds is one to thirteen and for children under three, it is the same as full time care (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2000).

A recent research by United Nations Children's organization UNICEF, reported 40 indicators for a child's well being across 21 industrialized countries from 2000-2003, including poverty, family relationships .and health. In its league table, the Netherlands occupied the top position, followed by Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Denmark was in the seventh position. Although a Nordic country, Finland could not score in all categories but this achievement cannot be considered poor. This is all due to the powerful ECEC system in Finland. (Hiilamo 2008, 15)

In Finland, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is the responsible governmental authority for the services for young children and families in cooperation with other government ministries. There are two main types of day-care system in Finland which are: Municipal (public) and private day-care. Municipal day-care is provided at day-care homes and family day-care. Some local authorities also organize open activities such as supervised play activities in play grounds and open day-care centre (Ministry of social affairs and health 2004, 14).

### **Day-care centers**

Day-care centers in Finland are mostly operated from 06:00am till 5:30pm. But this can be extended according to the needs of parents. Some day-care centers are run 24 hours per day. Meals are provided by the day-care including breakfast, lunch and snack. The children are divided into groups, depending upon their ages. The number of children in a group will depend on the number of children in the centre. There is no limit for the number of children per group as long as there are enough personnel (Utunen 2005).

Parents are to pay a monthly fee for the day-care service. The day-care fee is based on the size of the family and the family income with a maximum monthly fee of 200 Euros. For low-income families, the services are free. About 15% of the total cost of running the day-care is covered by these fees (Ministry of social affairs and health. 2004, 14). There has been a noticeable decrease in the number of children in municipal day-care.

In addition to a decline in the number of under school aged children, the introduction of a child home care allowance in 1997 has meant that more children are being cared for either at home or private day-care. At the end of 2004 there were 118,751 children in municipal day-care centers and 9,377 children in private day-care services outsourced by municipalities.

### **Family and group family day-care**

According to the Ministry of social affairs and health, other types of day-care provided by the municipalities are the family day-care and group family day-care. Mostly children are under three, and family day-care is provided in the home of the day-care personals. Family day-care staff is supervised and employed by the municipality. They are also trained by the municipality. The adult child ration in family care is one to four, including the child minder's own under school aged children. Additionally, the child minder can provide part time care for one pre-school or school- aged child.

In group family day-care, two child minders care for eight children in full time care and two in part time care. In some cases, there might be three care takers caring for up to twelve children. Group family day-care usually operates on the premises supplied by the municipalities. In some cases there premises may be attached to a larger day-care home. Over ninety percent of day-care services are provided by a municipality.

### **Private day-care**

As mentioned by Utunen (2005), since 1997 it has been possible for parents of children under seven-year-old receive a private childcare allowance in order to provide their children with private care. Private care includes private child care centers, family child care or private care givers whom parents choose and who are recognized by the municipality. At the end of 2004, there were 14,851 children in private day-care.

### **Play groups and after school care**

Play group and open care centers are provided by municipalities and offer activities for the young children and create social networks for people caring for children at home. Play groups provided by Lutheran Church and NGOs also offers activities for 4-6 years olds on one or two days per week.

### **Pre-school**

Preschool education is provided by every municipality 700 hours annually during the academic year, and this is in the legislation. It is voluntary and free of charge for the families and provided by day-care centre and some schools (Ministry of social affairs and health 2004, 5). When preschool education is provided in schools, the recommendation for the ratio is one to thirteen and the recommendation for the maximum group size is 20. When the group size exceeds 13, the teacher must have an assistant with at least an upper secondary level training (Ministry of social affairs and health 2004, 6).

### **Special needs**

Support for children in day-care who have special needs is usually provided in the municipal day-care homes. Children with special needs are integrated with other children insuring at the same time that the child receives the necessary services and that the personnel have sufficient training (Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2004:14).

## **6. DEFINITION OF ECEC PARTNERSHIPS IN FINLAND**

The commitment by parents and staff for supporting children's growth, development and learning is recognized as ECEC partnership, which is the most vital issue in Early Childhood Education and Care. It has four parts: engagement of parents in planning, evaluation of unit operation, an individual ECEC plan and its evaluation. The engagement of parents and evaluation of unit operation together can be simply defined as drawing the ECEC curriculum by the whole educational community, all staff members and parents. All parties should be aware of its contents and the meaning of principles underlying. In addition to this, parents have a sole responsibility to evaluate and monitor the attainment of goals set in the ECEC curriculum. The staff also evaluates and develops curriculum at regular time periods or whenever necessary. An individual ECEC plan and its evaluation are for each child in every day-care. It is done in collaboration with parents, and the implementation of the plan is assessed regularly with the staff. This plan aims to respect a child's individuality and parents' opinions for better care of the child. The staff has a vital responsibility to observe children's development and plan activities and evaluate individual ECEC plans. A child can also be included in drafting and assessing the plan in such ways as agreed between parents and staff. (Kaskela & Välimäki 2004,15.)

The educators have a vital role in informing parents about the daily educational activities and care of a young child. Sharing information and ideas requires respect, equality and mutual trust between both parties as this is essential for the well being of a child. Parents always have rights as well as responsibilities for their child's education and they know their child best level. Thus, understanding this staff should be able to use their professional knowledge and competences to create an environment of partnership and cooperation which may help to know the child better.

ECEC partnership combines the know ledge and experience from parents and the ECEC staffs as both have important roles in a child's life. The ECEC partnership is constructed to meet the child's needs, the realization of the child's best interest and rights being the guiding principle in all the ECEC activities which consist of physical activities, exploration, playing, etc. The values, comments and responsibilities are divided between parents and the staffs equally for the child's well being.



Considering the family's specific needs, staff has primary responsibility to use partnership approach at the very beginning of a child's early education and care which could help to meet the wishes and needs of both parties. Parents should be provided with the favorable environment where they can discuss their child's education with other parents and the whole staffs which slowly leads to co-operation between parents which is one of the aims of the ECEC partnership approach.

The ECEC partnership approach also deals with the early and immediate identification of a child's potential needs and support in some areas of growth, development, learning and collaborating with the parents to draw plans for supporting the child. The Partnership approach in ECEC should be helpful in problematic situation in the form of interactions between a child's parents and the staff.

The Act on the status and Rights of Social welfare Clients 812/2000, Finland, also stipulates that an individual ECEC plan is drawn up for the child in day-care in collaboration with parents and the implementation of plans is assessed regularly.(Kaskela & Välimäki,2004).

It enabled staff to be aware of child's individual needs and to meet child's need (Kaskela et al. 2004).

There are about 400 000 children under the compulsory school age of seven years in Finland. About half of all children under school age make use of municipal day-care services. Total number of 75% of all children in day-care is in full-time care. The statistic on the year 2003 show that 96% of all three years olds took part in preschool education and more than half of these children also attended day-care (Kaskela et al. 2004). In 1998, 53% of six years olds were in full-time day-care (Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland, 2000)

Due to the Nordic model in Finland, there are multiple systems for family policy activities and services; both services and benefits, maternity and child welfare clinics, maternity grants, family leave, child day-care and early childhood education and family allowances to name few. All these services and benefits are guided by Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Thus, Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland is one part of social services.

ECEC in Finland focuses on two specific goals which are: Fulfilling the needs of day-care to children of under school age and providing early childhood education for all children. ECEC in Finland also highlights the importance of the cooperation and partnership between parents and the ECEC staff. The Finnish Early Childhood education is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, constitutional provisions on fundamental rights and other national legislation.

## **7. IMPORTANCE OF ECEC PARTNERSHIP**

In Finland, National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care encourages parents to discuss all matters with the staff and other parents so that they could work all together to obtain a conclusion to raise a child in the best way. Parental support is always valuable in a child's life, but there are some stages of life, where a parent needs to be actively involved with the place they choose for their child's education and well being.

In the early stages when the children are in day-care centers, preschool or school it is vital for parents to work with the staffs, teachers or professionals to plan a suitable environment to learn, meet needs of each child and evaluate their development. A frequent complaint of the teachers is that the parents they most want to see seldom come into schools (Hornby 2000, 3). Nowadays minimal parental engagement in preschool and school is an international problem, the majority of parents having less contact with the staffs working with their children. There are two main demographic changes seen in the past two decades, which have made parental involvement in schools more difficult. Firstly, the majority of mothers of school aged children are now in work force, Secondly, since in many countries almost half of all marriages end in a divorce substantial proportion of children live in with single parent families.

Hornby (2000) also considered Epstein's (1990) studies of parental involvement which concludes that almost all parents from all backgrounds care about the education of their children. So it is lack of interest on behalf of parents which leads to low level of parental involvement. Epstein (1990) suggests that it is the fact that so few of them know what school expect from them or how they might contribute to their child's schooling which is at the core of the problem. It is lack of knowledge which acts as a barrier to the establishment of high levels of parental involvement.

There are complaints about parents not being involved with the staffs working with their children in schools or Pre School. It is also very clear that lack of parental involvement could be from the fact that they do not know how to act and help their child in cooperating with the staff. This is a hot issue and staffs educating children are already realizing the benefits which can bring huge changes in children, if they all work together and are committed to help each other.

Considering numbers of research which show that, supporting parental involvement increases the effectiveness of the education that children receive. Hornby (2000) discussed Swap's (1993) reports that effectiveness of education that children receive are made when parents are simply involved as supporters of their children's learning or are just kept informed about their progress at school. Swap (1993) also gives an example of successful projects at preschool and primary and secondary levels, where parental involvement was major component. One Perry Preschool Project in the USA(Swap 1993) which included 1 hour weekly home visits for all children in the project and their mothers. The children, who participated in the program, had significantly higher IQs than the control group children throughout their first two years at school. Although IQ differences disappeared after this, a follow- up study revealed that the program produced long term benefits. These included increased academic achievement, decreased need for special education placement, less unemployment and fewer contacts with criminal justice system. It has been suggested that involving parents was the key to maintain benefits of the program.

Hornby (2000) also pointed out Ballantine's (1999) work where he mentioned that parental involvement also includes: positive outcomes of improved communication between the parents and the children, higher academic performance of the children whose parents are involved; high school attendance and less disruptive behavior; increased likelihood of completing high school and attending college. In addition to this, she also concludes that parental involvement also increase the sense of accomplishment for parents; higher parental expectations of children; improved study habits among children and increase likelihood of parents deciding to continue their own education.

Policy and legislation on parental involvement such as in the USA and England, it is much easier to maintain high levels of parental involvement than in the countries where there is no strong legislation and policy, such as in Barbados.(Hornby 2000 ,12)

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 1, 22-27), a child's learning environment is like a set of nested Russian dolls. The smallest doll in the centre is the child as a learner engaged with the learning environment. Referred to as the micro system, these learning environments are places in which the individual interacts with others; home, day-care and the playground. The next level is immediate

learning environments and the relationship between them known as the meso-system. For a child, these would be the home and day-care and the relationship between the people in these environments. The third level or exo-system is the adult's environment and their interactions with the work. In their relationships it influences the way the adult is able to care for the child. The demands and stresses that adults face in their daily lives influences directly on their relationship with children either in the home or in an early childhood setting. The fourth level, or macro system, in relation to child, concerns the nation's beliefs and beliefs and values about children and early childhood care and education. It is clear that the intimate learning and development environment for the child are home, family, friends and day-care.

Different countries may have different kinds of partnership and views between parents and staff working in ECEC field. Parents and ECEC staffs/ teachers/ professionals may also have different expectations related to the development of children. In Sweden there is more agreement between parents and the ECEC staff in terms of what was considered important for children than in the United States. Hujala-Huttunen also studied how parents and teachers in Finland, the United States, and Russia assessed the educational goals in day-care. She concluded that in Finland, both parents and teachers considered social development as the most important goal, followed by emotional and cognitive development (Ojala 2000, P43).

Likewise Ojala 2000 (43) also describes in the United States both groups emphasized emotional development as the most important goal, whereas cognitive and emotional developments were regarded as equally important. In Russia, both parents and teachers focused on children's health issues as the most important factor. After health issues, both parties emphasized cognitive development goals followed by emotional development which was regarded as important for teachers and ethical development for parents.

## **8. COMMON BASE OF ECEC PARTNERSHIP**

Although there are differences in views and expectations as well as similarities between parents and staff related to child, the ECEC always focuses on and supports both parties in order to emphasize and create a healthy environment. Discussing, planning the expectations and sharing views related to child will help to safeguard the future of the child. Day to day communication between parents and staff is simple and has been proved to be an effective type of ECEC partnership.

Meetings, parties, discussion, interviews have been for parents and the ECEC staff to be together. Hornby (2000) mentioned one of the surveys conducted in the USA with 217 parents of children with wide range of special needs showed that 69 per cent of parents wanted to communicate with teachers by means of letters, 51 per cent by parent-teacher interviews, 45 per cent by telephone calls and only 19 per cent by home visits. In 1985, when another group of parents were asked to rank twenty different common methods of home school communication, the most popular were: directly approaching teachers by telephone or in person; and parent-teacher interviews.

The researches above showed that there is variety of ways that parents want to communicate with the staff working with their children. Therefore, it is very important that the day-care or school offers parent a range of communication options. There are five main methods for developing and maintaining two-way communications between parents and teachers. These are: informal contacts, telephone contacts, various forms of written communication, parent-teacher meetings, and home visits.

In this modern world, work and extracurricular activities of families keep life busy and parents may have less time for meetings with day-care staff. Yet, it cannot be ignored that parents have their own ideologies, plans and expectations for their children and for the day-care they choose for their children. It is also very important to know, whether the parents are aware of this ECEC partnership which is a base for the overall development of their child or not and how can it be developed in future. To make the communication powerful and strong, day-care staff has their sole responsibility.

Huttunen and Tamminin (Utunen 2005, 26) described that the basis of successful day-care education and cooperation with parents is the attitude that the staff have

themselves. Successful day-care education depends on their personality, their relationship with the children and education. Staff must trust themselves.

Smith (1980) found that he 'professional' and 'partnership' models were two ways of looking at relationships with parents. Smith's professional model would be anyone who took responsibility for other people's children but hoped to avoid contact with the parents. This would perhaps not be a trained professional. A genuinely professional, or 'partnership' model would involve recognizing that without partnership the professional expertise would be lost.

According to Tiikka (Utunen 2005, P29), a successful relationship between staff and parents requires of the parents, that they be well informed of day-care education and that they have a positive relationship with staff.

## **9. BUILDING MUTUAL TRUST BETWEEN DAY-CARE AND PARENTS**

Parents agree that the sole responsibility of a child is theirs, but when they send their child to day-care then the responsibility is shared with the day-care staff. Shared responsibility also needs trust and cooperation to continue:

“Obviously the parents who is responsible for the kids but again if you take your kids to the day-care, you trust the day-care fully before you can take. They are your kids ....you can't have kids and then and expect someone else to take care of them...Of course..... It's doing things together but it will be wrong to blame some one else if something goes wrong. ...but when you talk about the safety then of course it's the day-care job... we as parents cannot do anything if we are working somewhere else... and also education and all that ... that should be both...”(Group 1)

It is true that learning always begins at home and early childhood programmes outside the child's home play a important role in extending early learning, parent also agrees:

“Because, child life starts with a family...the first year are important for the kids...moral, basic safety ...it comes from the family. After the mother teacher is the second important person to the kid...when the kid is in the school or day-care...comes after the mother...”(Group 2).

According to Alasuutari (Utunen 2005, 28) the fact that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children is undisputed. However at some stage or other all parents need some form of support in raising their children and all the parents has same thing to mention.

Day to day communication between the parent and the day-care staff is one of the fundamental parts in Early Childhood Education and care. According to National Curriculum guidelines sharing information and ideas needs equality and mutual trust between both parties and this is essential for the well being of child. Parent acknowledges the fact about sharing information:

Yes....it is very important to have some kind of communication between day-care and the parents so that the parents know what is going on in a day-care and also vice versa .What is going on the family ...the day-care should know also.”(Group 2)



Parents focus on day to day communication so that there could be the smooth flow of information to both day-care staff and the parents. This will construct the strong partnership approach and help both parties to combine their knowledge and competences to know the child in better way. Further, parents want to know more about the things happening in day-care for the smooth flow of information:

“It would be nice to have more dialogue between parents and day-care also...it’s a common work between the family and the day-care because kids they spend eight hours something like that...in the day-care or school .So, parents cannot know what is going on there.”(Group 1)

Even the basic thing which is happening in a child’s life when they are in day-care is important for parents. Parents have their rights and responsibility towards the child and they are the ones who know their child best where parents share:

“How she is doing in the day-care and what kinds of problem she is having...or just basic stuffs... team work and how she is doing with others kids...because those are the things which I can’t possibly know. When we are talking about speaking English at home we know but we do not know what is going on here and time to time it is quite surprising what she has been learning here” (Group 1)

“Just basic stuffs and honest stuffs...even the things that parents hear they do not like it...it has to be spoken... is the kid happy and how he is doing...is the kid free in the day-care” (Group 2)

According to Ojala (2000, p43), Finnish parents focus on social development as the most important goal followed by emotional and cognitive development.

Parents seemed excited about their child’s education and day to day activities which are going in the day-care. When parents are aware of what their children do during the day, they are able to extend these activities to the home:

“My mother language is Finnish is also the emotional. It’s not natural for us to speak English. Sometimes she says Nana or dad and I even don’t know that she knows those things...its hard to tell... it would be great like see it from behind the window or through camera that they can’t see that we can hear and what ...how they doing.”(Group 1)

Parents are excited and willing to know about every small things happening with their children. This could bring new encouragement to day-care staff also to talk about children with parents frequently.

## 10. PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS

Meetings, parties, discussion, interviews have been used by day-care staff to communicate with parents. Parents recalled their last meetings, which could be one to one or in a group where all parents were invited together. Parents had variety of opinions about the meetings that they attended last time and topics in the meeting which they were discussing. Overall, parents were happy about the meeting that they attended:

“For me, I think, I remember that, it was last November 2008 after one month when my kid started this day-care. It was one to one meeting. It was surprised to me...That they had educational value for three year old boy. Is my child is aiming for English school? It was a surprise for me but in a positive way...” (Group 2)

“ In the general meeting ...my husband told about some ...cat singing... in private meeting with the staff...about my son because he is been in Russia and Finland...he can speak two languages already and two different cultures...so we were discussing on what is going on English side. I don't remember when it was...after Christmas 2008...or...”(Group 1)

Parents agree that they all have participated in all the meetings which have been organized by the day-care so far. According to Tillikka (Utunen 2009,29) a successful relationship between the staff and parents requires of parents to well informed of day-care activities and that they have a positive relationship with staff. For this, participation of parents plays vital role.

Encouraging parents to participate is also vey important as nowadays families keep busy with extracurricular activities. Parents may have their choice for the time and also different ways to communicate with day-care staff. Different time options for meetings could help parents to join the day-care staff:

Basically I think... during day is better for us because we both are working... and if the meeting is in the evening time...then we have to find some care for my kid. So, it's maybe better during day time... but the time...it has been from 4pm-5pm or something...during the kids was in the park...it was a good timing...” (Group 1)

“To organise meetings...evenings... kids were in the park and it was good timing...so you can pick your child after that...”(Group 2)

## 11. DEVELOPING ECEC

According to the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland 2004, staff has the primary responsibility for employing the partnership approach from the beginning of the child's early education and care, taking into considering the needs of each family.

Knowingly and or unknowingly parent are aware of the importance of communication with the staff in Early Childhood Education and care:

“Ya, staff did but I cannot recall the term...Early Education. I forget already but now I can connect all the dots so that I know that we have been discussing about the things and we probably going according to the plan, We took that kind of plan to the staff and talk how, my daughter is doing...what to do and what we expect...”(Group 2)

“Because then there won't be sort of mix messages. We have a same goal... I think kids are not silly...not stupid so they know that...I think they can tell if we are working together the staffs and the parents. They can feel it if there is no connection or tension...they will definitely know that...” (Group 1)

The communication between parent and staff help both parties to get same kind of information to work with children at home or at day-care.

“I think it is easier for the day-care staff when they know what is happening at home and what has happened and why he is acting...as he...is at the moment. There is some missed stuff or something...a bad day or bad night. He is tired in the morning...it effects the whole day.”(Group 1)

The responsibility of the child's education is shared when staff and parents are active in combing their knowledge and expertise for the education of the child (Utunen 2005, 28).

Parents wanted to talk with other parents who have their kids in the same day-care. They have limited time and busy schedule thus, they are unable to communicate:

“Limited time just leave the kids, undress and go to work...not that much time to talk. I do not know any kid's parents who are with my daughter. Probably one or two... (Group 2)

It is quite understandable that it is hard to get time and speak with somebody in the evening time when parents come to take their children home, but parents should be provided with a favorable environment where they can discuss their child's education with other parents, which is also very important in Early Childhood Education and care.

A mother recalls an incident in day-care:

Well..., in the normal situation when you take your kid from day-care sometimes...when you come in there might not be any one around it's a sort of 'leave your kid and go'...ok is there any one around...may be in those situation...but I know that there are lots of kid...its cannot always expect and also when you pick of your kid and you ask how is her day? ...there is someone who says Oh! I have not been around so I do not know about today. Maybe those things should be considered but I do not know how that can be improved...how everyone can know about every one's day. In those situations you feel like. Oh well who should I ask? Does any one know? Its little thing but that's important if you do not have any more meetings...these are the bits of information that you kind a want to hear...(Group 1)

Huttunen and Tamminen (1989) state that the basic of successful day-care education and cooperation with parents is the staff's attitude. Successful day-care education depends on their personality and they should trust themselves.

Parents requires suitable environment where they can discuss their child's education with staff, which will slowly lead to cooperation and then to ECEC partnership approach. Parent's suggestions should be heard implement and also accessed:

“Why do not they put some post box where we can write and put our feeling which we liked and disliked...” (Group 2)

“Open day for the parent just to come, sit and see because we don't know the routine. We have not been here the whole day. So it would be really nice to know exactly how things go...I think kids will be proud to show what they are doing here and just the routines ...eating and everything also because I feel like I could learn a lot of things from the day-care meaning all the habits...we have our own habits...and probably in day-care you have better things ...maybe couple of hours not the whole day. Also, open day is a way to get parents together...the only environment we meet each other is here...” (Group 1)

“I would like to have more meeting; and if there is meeting and everyone who comes then they should open them out and talk and participate as well.”(Group 2)

“If the staff does not talk with us or just inform this is going to happen...we are listening then it is same like getting a paper. Meetings should be interactive.”(Group 1)

“The smaller group is better. In big groups it is hard to open the mouth”.(Group 2)

It is true that parents are eager to know about their child and their daily routines. They wanted to join and wanted to be helped by the day-care staff. Cooperation is the only way to work together and staff should have their plan for it.

Parents’ opinion towards the day-care is also very important as it will also encourage staff to implement and create new opportunities and possibilities in future:

“My son finds nice to be here and all the staff is giving some feedback also.”(Group 2)

“I was quite surprise we had big changes in our personal life which affected the other day-care but we had really hard days like...it was hard to get her into day-care and she always waited for me to come. In here from the start...first of all they took the dummy off first day she was fine with that...she has not have one day where she said that I do not want to go to the day-care. And I think that’s a pretty big thing.”(Group 1)

Finnish law itself safeguards the rights of a child to have day-care facility as per parent’s wishes. If their child is happy in the day-care that they choose, it is a big reward for a parent also.

## 12. CONCLUSION

Finland was the first country in Scandinavia to offer day-care for children. Now, Finland has one of the best day-care systems and family systems in the world. Parents have plenty of options for their children's day-care as the law safeguards their rights. Parents can select between municipal day-care, private day-care, supervised day-care. In addition, there is preschool for six-year-olds.

For day-care, where children start to learn little by little there are also some laws helping to run it smoothly. Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland talks about several methods to work with the parents. Partnership with parents appears to be the most important one.

Although parents are not aware of word 'Partnership', they know the importance of cooperation with the day-care staff. They believe that it helps to give the same kind of messages to both parents and staff. In addition, they acknowledged the fact that a child is not stupid as s/he can figure out if the day-care staff and parents are working together or not. They know that the responsibility of the child is shared. Trust is important for the co-operation between parents and day-care.

Parents' always want to know the daily activities going in day-care and the child's routines. So, parents would like to organize an open day for them in day-care, where parents could come and join the day-care with the children. Meetings, parties and different programmes are times where parent meet day-care staff usually for a long time and they like it very much. But, due to busy time tables and hobbies they might not attend those functions every time. They have their suggestions for different timetables, for example, in the evenings, and some may like to come at day time. They are eager to choose the right time for themselves in order to cooperate with the staff.

Parents would like day-care staff to talk openly with them, which is very important for the partnership. Parents also request all parents to be active and take part in every event going in day-care. They would like to have one post box, which could be a good relief for them to drop their comments and suggestions, as day-care staff does not have enough time to talk with every parent visiting the day-care. Parents are quite happy

because their children have found this day-care a nice place to be. Although some of the parents have bad experiences about their child's last day-care, they are pleased with this place. They are also surprised about their child's development in English and in being independent.

I feel that this work has succeeded in pointing out the weakness and the strength of day-care. The thesis is basically focused on parents. But, I believe that I should have also focused on day-care staff so that I could have gained an overall view of day care. In addition, the thesis could have showed somewhat different results if there would have been some foreign parents, too. All five parents were Finnish. I also noticed while interviewing the parents that they were not very comfortable with the recording, because when the recording stopped, they were more relaxed and started to share all valuable information, which I could not capture because of the professional promise made at the beginning of the interview saying that recorded information will be used for the thesis. Probably this could have also changed some part of the results.

Overall, the interview with parents succeeded in giving practical examples of parents' views on their involvement in early childhood education. I gained broad knowledge of the partnership approach, parents' comments on certain issues and also their suggestions for future for themselves and day-care.

The entire process of this thesis has been a great learning experience for me. My mind was stuck with 'what parents think about the responsibility of their children and how they wanted to cooperate when I started my practical training. I appreciate that the parents know their responsibility and also have their own plan to cooperate with day-care.



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## 14. APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

Hello,

This is Anupama K.C and I am originally from Nepal. I am studying Bachelors in Social Service and Health Care in Pirkanmaan Polytechnic, Tampere. This is my third year and I will graduate on December, 2009. In present I am working as a trainee in Sunshine English Daycare.

I am writing my Bachelors Thesis on the topic called 'Early Childhood Education and Care partnership' or ECEC partnership. Thus, I will need help from parents and this is a note for you to help me.

I have planned to organize one small discussion group where parents will discuss together about the ECEC partnership. I would like to further know about opinions, views and ideas about ECEC partnership. The rules of confidentiality will be strictly maintained.

Lastly I appeal parents that their help will be the greatest achievement for me to write my Thesis as this topic has been one of the most interesting issue in all daycares. My findings could provide Sunshine Daycare some new ideas to develop ECEC partnership in a deep way in future.

If you have any queries about my Thesis or are eager to help me by joining the discussion you can call me or contact me in the following address:

Anupama K.C  
Phone no- 0445593534  
E mail address: [anupama.kc@piramk.fi](mailto:anupama.kc@piramk.fi)

Or, contact my Thesis supervisor

Marjo Harju-Tolppa  
Email address: [marjo.harju-tolppa@piramk.fi](mailto:marjo.harju-tolppa@piramk.fi)

Looking forward to hear from you!

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If you would like to join in the discussion group please fill the small form below and hand it to Daycare Sunshine:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact address, tel. either e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2

### Questions for discussion

Short Introduction and let each other know the names of the child.

2 Hours is the maximum but can be ended soon too.

Any questions are welcomed and please feel free and your participation means a lot.

And, the rules of confidentiality will be followed strictly, it means your interview and your names won't be used in any place without your permission.

#### **1. What are parent's expectations?**

- Who are responsible for the child? Daycare staffs or parents? And why?
- Do you think parents need to talk about their child with the daycare staffs and why?
- What do you want to talk with staffs about your child?
  - What would you like to talk in general (needs of kids, how kids are performing) and your priority (what comes first)
- Can you remember the last parents meeting with the daycare staffs AND how was your experience about the parents meeting?
- What did you talk in generally used to talk in the meeting?
- How many times do you have meetings and how often do you participate?
- What time is good for you to have meetings? (Due to busy timetable)?

#### **2. Do parents know what is ECEC partnership and what do they think about it?**

- Do you know what ECEC partnership is?
- Can you describe it, simply? (If they know)
- Have you ever seen any paper about ECEC from this daycare?
- Had the staffs tried to explain you sometimes about this?
- Now, do you think ECEC partnership is important and why?
- Why do think it helps for child?
- Do you sometimes talk with other parents about ECEC partnership and your child?
- What are the things to be considered while doing ECEC partnership?
- Is there some changes needed to continue this partnership?
- Would you like to give suggestions to improve the ECEC partnership in future?
- How happy you are with the communication you do with daycare staffs?

- What is ECEC partnership in general?( In case they do not know what is ECEC partnership)
- National Curriculum Guidelines and Finnish Early Childhood Education and plan are a book for daycare to helping to organize activities for children and also talks about their rights.

- Where, ECEC partnership is simply defined as a commitment or communication between parents and daycare staffs to plan evaluate and implement activities for children as it believes that if parents and staffs jointly work together then they can give child the best.
- It is must. Parents should be included to make curriculum, planning, evaluating, implementing and also for feedback with the staffs.