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Raising awareness of gender sensitivity in a private English speaking nursery

Reflective guide on gender

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<p>The new National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) states that early childhood education needs to be gender-sensitive. A goal for this functional thesis was to create a guide on gender and gender sensitivity for a private nursery. The target group of the guide are the employees, and the request of a reflective guide came from the management of the nursery. The communication language in this nursery is English, thus the guide was written in English as well.</p> <p>The content was created for the employees, hence I wanted to hear their views and thoughts related to the subject. I also wanted to know about their wishes for the guide. The text was created based on the theory and the ideas received from the workers. The aim for the guide was not only giving information on gender and gender sensitivity, but also providing a tool to use in reflection.</p> <p>This thesis consists of a literary part and the guide. As the nursery suggested, in the literary part I introduced the National Core Curriculum for ECEC. In addition, the literary section presents gender, gender sensitivity and social constructionism. In addition, there is a section for the methods used in the interviewing process. The aim of the interviews was to find out what the employees already knew about the themes, and what they would like to know more about. The guide includes the theory part covered in the literary part, but it also covers the ideas received from the staff.</p> <p>As a theme, gender sensitivity is a topical issue in early childhood education, especially due to the new guidelines found in the core curriculum. For me the topic was, and still is, interesting. Interviewing was a good way of mapping the assumption the employees had on the theme and they felt these topics were important as well. During the thesis process, I was not able to gain feedback on the reflective guide's usability in practice.</p>	
Keywords	early childhood education, gender sensitivity, social constructionism

<p>Tekijä Otsikko</p> <p>Sivumäärä Aika</p>	<p>Jasminella Kangas Sukupuolisensitiivisen kasvatuksen tietoisuuden lisääminen yksityisessä englanninkielisessä päiväkodissa – Refleктоiva opas sukupuolesta 26 sivua + 3 liitettä Tammikuu 2018</p>
<p>Tutkinto</p>	<p>Sosionomi (AMK)</p>
<p>Koulutusohjelma</p>	<p>Sosiaalialan koulutusohjelma</p>
<p>Ohjaajat</p>	<p>Lehtori Jukka Törnroos Lehtori Mai Salmenkangas</p>
<p>Uudet varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet vaativat varhaiskasvatuksen olevan sukupuolisensitiivistä. Tämän toiminnallisen opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tehdä opas sukupuolesta ja sukupuolisensitiivisyydestä yksityiselle päiväkodille. Oppaan kohderyhmä on päiväkodin työntekijät, ja pyyntö refleктоivasta oppaasta tuli päiväkodin johdolta. Päiväkodin toimintakieli on englanti, joten opaskin kirjoitettiin englannin kielellä.</p> <p>Oppaan sisältö suunnattiin päiväkodin työntekijöille, joten halusin kuulla heidän ajatuksiaan aiheesta. Halusin myös kuulla heidän toiveitaan oppaalle, ja sisältö muokkautuikin teorian ja työntekijöiden toiveiden mukaisesti. Tarkoituksena oli, että oppaan avulla työntekijät saisivat tietoa sukupuolesta ja sukupuolisensitiivisyydestä, ja että he oppaan avulla voisivat refleктоida omaa toimintaansa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyöhön kuuluvat kirjallinen osa ja itse opas. Kirjallisessa osuudessa toin esiin uudet varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet, mikä oli myös päiväkodin toive. Tämän lisäksi kirjallisessa osassa esitellään sukupuoli, sukupuolisensitiivisyys ja sosiaalinen konstruktionismi. Kirjallisessa osassa on myös selitetty metodit, joita haastatteluissa käytettiin. Kysymykset kartoittivat työntekijöiden tietoja opinnäytetyön aiheista ja myös heidän toiveistaan oppaalle. Oppaassa käsitellään samoja teemoja kuin kirjallisessa osassa, mutta siihen on lisätty osioita työntekijöiltä saatujen ideoiden perusteella.</p> <p>Aiheena sukupuolisensitiivisyys on ajankohtainen, varsinkin kun uudet varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet ovat astuneet voimaan. Itse pidin, ja edelleen pidän, aihetta mielenkiitosena. Haastattelut olivat hyvä tapa kartoittaa työntekijöiden käsityksiä opinnäytetyön aihepiiristä, ja sainkin selville, että he pitivät teemaa tärkeänä. Opinnäytetyöprosessin aikana en ehtinyt saamaan palautetta refleктоivan oppaan käytöstä käytännössä.</p>	
<p>Avainsanat</p>	<p>varhaiskasvatus, sukupuolisensitiivisyys, sosiaalinen konstruktionismi</p>

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Background	2
2.1	Working life partner	2
2.2	National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care	3
2.2.1	Education (kasvatus)	4
2.2.2	Community and operational culture	5
2.3	Legislation	6
2.3.1	Act on Equality between Men and Women	6
2.3.2	Act on Early Childhood Education and Care	7
2.3.3	Human rights	8
3	Theoretical framework	8
3.1	Social constructionism	8
3.1.1	Norms and stereotypes	10
3.2	Gender	11
3.2.1	Biological view on gender	11
3.2.2	Social view on gender	12
3.2.3	Gender identities	12
3.3	Possible impacts on the professionals of ECEC	14
3.4	Gender sensitivity	15
4	Process of creating the guide	16
4.1	Aims	16
4.2	Data collection	17
4.2.1	Qualitative method	17
4.2.2	Participants	18
4.2.3	Setting	19
4.3	Data analysis	19
4.4	Results	20
5	Evaluation	22
5.1	Evaluation of the guide	22
5.2	Evaluation of the thesis	23
6	Discussion	24

7	Conclusion	25
	References	26
	Appendices	
	Appendix 1. Letter to the staff	
	Appendix 2. Interview guide	
	Appendix 3. Reflective guide on gender	

1 Introduction

Raising awareness of gender and gender sensitivity became one of the aims for this functional thesis. Gender sensitivity is officially part of the new core curriculum for early childhood education and care (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p.30). This means that all the early childhood education providers operating under a municipality must use the national core curriculum's guidelines in their planning. (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 1973/36, §9).

The aim of the thesis is to create a reflective guide. My working life partner, Carousel Nursery Schools, wanted to find a way to follow the new national core curriculum guidelines. After meeting with the managers, we agreed that a reflective guide on gender would benefit Carousel Nursery Schools. The target group of the guide are the teachers and other members of the staff working with children, thus the guide's content is adjusted for the teachers.

Interviews were conducted, in order to include the right information to the guide. Using a qualitative method, a semi-structured interview, eight staff members were interviewed. The interviewees were both females and males with various backgrounds. The results revealed that the gender theme is important to the staff members. They also showed, what the Carousel Nursery Schools' workers think about different themes. Furthermore, this method was a good way of getting to know the wishes the workers had for the guide. The data analysis was not conducted accurately, as the purpose was to get an insight of what to include to the guide, rather than to conduct a research.

The main theoretical background for the thesis and the guide, is social constructionism. Social constructionism challenges norms the society has. Time, culture, relationships and language are essential, when deconstructing norms and reconstructing views human beings have on the world. (Burr 2015.) Moreover, the concepts related to gender and gender sensitivity are essential parts of the theoretical background too. In this thesis, biological characteristics people have, are connected to the word sex, not to gender (Blakemore, Berenbaum & Liben 2013, pp. 39-68). Gender, however, is used in the context when the dimensions of social, cultural, personal and juridical gender are being viewed (Vilkkä 2010, pp. 18-22). The different gender identities and diversity of gender are also a part of the theory section. Gender sensitivity again, is an approach, in which

boys and girls are seen as individuals. This is one of key the issues in the theoretical framework.

At first, the context of the thesis will be viewed. The background section includes the presentation of the working life partner, the new national core curriculum for early childhood education and care and legislation related to equality. After these issues have been presented, the text will move on to the theoretical background.

As the end result of this functional thesis is a guide, chapter four will take a look at the process of creating the guide. The chapter includes the method used for acquiring information and also the analysis of data. Results is the last part of the fourth chapter. Evaluation of the guide and the thesis, will be presented after the process of creating the guide. Discussion and conclusion can be found in the end of the thesis. Appendices include the letter to staff, interview guide used in the interviews, and the guide itself.

2 Background

My initial thought for this functional thesis arose from my voluntary work placement with Youth Exit, where I was exposed to issues related to gender sensitivity. After my exchange experience in England, I was more aware of gender's impact on identity and aspirations too, and I wanted to expand my knowledge of this topic. For the Finnish speaking kindergartens, students have written a decent amount of thesis' in the area of gender, but for the English-speaking kindergartens the amount is a lot less. This was found out, when checking the Theseus' database. Therefore, I want to write about gender and raise the awareness of gender sensitivity in the private side of early childhood education too.

The background section has been dealt into three parts. At first, the working life partner Carousel Nursery Schools will be introduced. After that, the Finnish early childhood education will be presented from the viewpoints of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, education and operational culture. Legislation related to equality will be viewed in the end of this section.

2.1 Working life partner

Carousel Nursery Schools are providing early childhood education to children, who are from one to seven years old. Two of the private schools are operating in Espoo and one is operating in Helsinki. Carousel Nursery Schools are multicultural and all the units use

English as communication language. However, the children entering to these nurseries do not have to know the English language in advance. In their website, Carousel Nursery Schools are proud to say that there are 20 different nationalities amongst the children and staff. (Carousel Nursery School n.d.a.)

Carousel Nursery Schools aim at providing an environment, where everyone learns from each other and where every child has the chance to participate. (Carousel Nursery School n.d.b.) They also want to make sure that children would have a positive view on learning and that they would become curious and balanced human beings. Enjoying life-long learning, and developing individuals' confidence and the want to create and collaborate, are aims for the Carousel Nursery Schools too. Qualified staff and high-quality child care are included in their vision. (Carousel Nursery School n.d.c.)

Carousel Nurseries use Reggio Emilia approach in their work, which can be seen in their values and in the everyday life of the nurseries. (Carousel Nursery School n.d.a.) Reggio Emilia was created by Loris Malaguzzi, an Italian psychologist, who lived in a town called Reggio Emilia (Wallin 1996, pp. 13-14). This educational philosophy sees children as, participants, capable of learning through various ways, skilful and it is also very important to acknowledge that children are able to express themselves through multiple ways. Loris Malaguzzi talks about the hundred languages, which symbolizes children's different ways of expressing. (Wallin 1996 pp.91-93.)

The end result of this thesis process is a reflective guide on gender. My initial thought was to create a guide on gender, and after meeting my working life partner, we together agreed to create a reflective guide on gender for the staff working with children. The working life partner has given their permission to publish the guide on-line.

2.2 National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care

Based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the Finnish National Agency of Education has written the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p. 8). This core curriculum is made for the whole nation and they are legally binding in municipalities' kindergartens, other types of early childhood education the municipality offers, and also in the private kindergartens, which operate under the municipalities'. The local curricula and the children's individual plans need to be based on the guidelines found in the core curriculum. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p. 9.) City of Helsinki has also created their

own curricula, which follows the core curriculum. All the early childhood education service providers operating under city of Helsinki's, must use the curricula they have created. (City of Helsinki, n.d.) Thus, Carousel Nursery Schools are also obligated to use the core curriculum guidelines in their work as well.

Early childhood education is a part of the Finnish schooling system and an important phase in the path of growing and learning for children. Even though parents are primarily responsible for rearing up their children, early childhood education is also thought to be a significant part of children's lives (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p. 8.) As early education can be a big part of children's lives, kindergarten teachers need to know the framework they are working in. The national core curriculum for ECEC was created to support and guide the process of developing, organizing and executing early childhood education. Besides these objectives, one of the aims for the national core curriculum for ECEC is to make sure that the quality in early childhood education services will remain high. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p. 8.)

Early childhood education in Finland is about equity, equality and diversity, which are democratic values according to the Finnish National Agency of Education (2016 p. 19.) The national core curriculum for ECEC also states that every child has the right to develop their skills regardless of gender, cultural background or other personal factors one may have. Other important message these two send, is that early childhood education should enhance gender equality and prepare the children to understand and respect the cultural heritage one may have. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p. 15, Varhaiskasvatuslaki 19.1.1973/36, §2.) These are also issues this thesis is focusing on.

2.2.1 Education (kasvatus)

The concept of early childhood education (varhaiskasvatus) can be looked from different perspectives, and the terminology within the early childhood education field varies from country to country. (Hännikäinen 2013 pp. 30-35.) In Finland, early childhood education combines care, education and teaching into an entity. Pedagogy is emphasized in every area of the early childhood education and care. (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 19.1.1973/36, §1) Educators often think about the education (kasvatus) process merely from the developmental point of view. However, it is important to take a look at education from the social and society's point of view as well. Education is all about guiding children and giving advice and directions to the children without forgetting to support the children's growth. (Yli-Tapiola 2012, p. 18.) It can also be described as action, where the cultural values, habits and norms are being transferred, modified and renewed. One part of education is

to pass the cultural heritage from one generation to another. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p. 21.)

Through education, children are guided to have their own opinions and they are encouraged to be critical. Education is also a tool to teach the children, what being ethical means. Related to ethicality, one dimension of education is to consciously guide the children's identity processes, so that the children would be able to see how their actions affect others and the environment they are living in. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p. 21.)

2.2.2 Community and operational culture

Kindergarten is the most common form of early childhood education in Finland, and in the kindergartens individuals are divided into groups. Groups can be formed based on age, sibling-connection or the need of support. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p. 17.) These groups can form a community. Communities are always changing by the new ideas individuals have and by time too. They are seen important in educators work as communities have an impact on children's learning, well-being and development. (Hännikäinen & Rasku-Puttonen 2006, p.13.) Children create their own peer cultures too, but in this thesis, the focus will be on the educators' and their impact on children.

The national core curriculum for ECEC (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p.30) says that every member of a community has to be seen (kohdattu) and treated equally. Equity does not mean treating everyone the same, but giving the individual the attention they need. It is also stated that early childhood education has to be gender sensitive and the staff is ought to encourage the children to make decisions not based on gender or any other stereotype related to the individual. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p.30.)

Operational culture is historically and culturally formed way to act in a community, and it keeps on developing in the interactions between the members of a specific community. Every member of a community has their own impact on the operational culture and that impact will have an effect on each member. It does not matter whether the significance of the action was noted or not, it will still have an impact. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p. 28.)

As the communities' operational culture keeps on changing, it is important to evaluate and develop it. Reflecting the impacts of the operational culture and being able to notice

the unwanted characteristics is very important. The culture can be changed, but it requires the staff to be aware of it, and they also need to be ready to consciously develop the operational culture. In addition, the personnel needs to be aware of their own value basis, belief structures and knowledge that they have. Dialogue amongst the staff helps the development process. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, pp. 28-29.)

Acknowledging the current practice and ways of doing related to equality and gender in a kindergarten helps the children to respect diversity. When everyone respects each other in a community that will have a positive impact on the children's wellbeing too. This wellbeing can be seen in commitment to action. Actions aiming at equality also prevents marginalization. Furthermore, an environment, where individuals respect different kinds of people, will prevent bullying in the day care setting. The outcomes can be seen later too, as those children, who are feeling well in their childhood can have more tools to feel mentally well in their teenage years too. (Yli-Tapiola 2012, p. 19.)

2.3 Legislation

There are several acts related to equality in the Finnish legislation (National Institute for Health and Welfare 2017a). The Finnish Constitution states that discrimination based on gender, amongst other factors, is forbidden (Suomen perustuslaki 11.6.1999/731, §6). The Non-discrimination Act, as well as different acts concerning working life, families, and social and health care services all include sections of gender equality (National Institute for Health and Welfare 2017a).

The national core curriculum for ECEC is also based on early childhood education legislation. (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p.8) In this part of the thesis, the legislation relevant to early childhood education and gender will be presented, first presenting the Act on Equality between Women and Men, and introducing the Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2.3.1 Act on Equality between Men and Women

The purpose of the Act on Equality between Women and Men is to prevent discrimination based on gender, and thus enhance the equality between females and males. Moreover, the Act aims at improving females' status in the working life. Another important objective of the Act is to prevent discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression. (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 30.12.2014/1329, §1) According to the Act, gender identity refers to one's own experience of their own gender. Expression of gender then again refers to the ways one can express their gender, for example, the

ways one can dress up or behave. (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 30.12.2014/1329, 3§.) Also, it should be noted that Non-discrimination Act has created partially on the basis of some sections of the Act on Equality between Women and Men. (Yhdenvertaisuuslaki 30.12.2014/1325, §3.)

The fifth section of the Act (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 30.12.2014/1329) focuses equality in education. Education providers need to make sure that girls and boys, and women and men have the same opportunities for education. Teaching, research and learning materials should aim at achieving the goals of this Act. Equality must be promoted in education, but the education providers have to consider the children's age and development in this process. Section 5a also requires the education providers to create an equality plan. The plan should include a report presenting the institution's current situation in gender equality matters; the measures necessary in further enhancing equality, as well as an assessment of the previous measures taken. (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 30.12.2014/1329, §5a)

Furthermore, there is a section for gender identity and gender expression as well. (Laki naisten ja miesten välisestä tasa-arvosta 30.12.2014/1329, §6c). It is stated that education providers, amongst others, need to prevent discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression and that the prevention has to be goal-oriented and systematic.

2.3.2 Act on Early Childhood Education and Care

The Finnish national core curriculum for ECEC is based on the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. This Act has given the Finnish National Agency of Education the right to create the core curriculum for ECEC. The essential contents for early childhood education have been stated in this curriculum. The aim for the core curriculum is to ensure equal early childhood education and care within the country, and to achieve the objectives mentioned in this act. Also, the act secures that the quality of the services is high enough. (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 1973/36, §9)

The aims of this act are stated in the section 2a. Early childhood education and care should aim at enhancing every child's comprehensive growth, development, health and well-being. It should also support the children's abilities to learn, enhance life-long learning and gender equality in education. Amongst other aims, this act states that the learning environment is ought to be safe. (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 1973/36, §2a.)

In addition to these goals, early childhood education should aim at giving each child an equal opportunity to early childhood education and to promote gender equality. Creating the basis for the children to be able to understand and respect different cultural heritage, languages, cultural backgrounds and religious aspects is also mentioned in the Act. (Varhaiskasvatustaki 1973/36, §2a.)

2.3.3 Human rights

In addition to the acts mentioned above, Finland has also agreed to follow the United Nation's (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration states that, "...everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status". Finland has also signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (Ulkoministeriö n.d.) The UN has clearly stated that children have the right to have special care and assistance. (United Nations 1948)

Article 26 of the Declaration is about education and it declares that everyone has the right to education. It also states that education should strengthen the respect for human rights. Moreover, education is a tool for promoting tolerance and understanding between all different kinds of people and nations. As the Declaration, like The Convention on the Rights of the Child, states (article 28): that every child is entitled to education (Unicef n.d., p.28). The article 29, part 1, declares that education should aim at the child's personality's, talents' and abilities' best possible development. In addition, the Convention states that education should aim at preparing the child for being responsible in the future. The society ought to be free, tolerant and equal, and all different kinds of people would live in peace.

3 Theoretical framework

In this section, the theoretical framework of the thesis will be presented. At first, the theory of social constructionism will be covered and then the text will move on to gender and gender identity. The possible impacts gender and the key concepts of social constructionism can have on the professionals of ECEC will be pondered after the theory part of gender. The last part of this section is gender sensitivity.

3.1 Social constructionism

One of the elements in social constructionism is to challenge norms and normative thinking in a society. Social constructionism encourages people to see behind the structures, which human beings have created in order to make sense of the world. It also shows

that there can be more than black and white thinking. (Burr 2015 pp. 2-3.) Thus, this theory aims at critical thinking and challenging the taking-for-granted knowledge. (Burr 1995, Burr 2003.) For example, the categories of men and women can be challenged; does this society have to have two separate categories for women and men, or could they be seen as a continuum?

Another element is to take a look at culture and time. Social constructionism argues that people understand the world in the context of time and culture. History has an impact on the knowledge human beings have now, and the culture one lives in also modifies the ways they will understand the world. (Burr 2015, p.3.) An example Burr (2015, p. 3.) uses in her book is childhood. Understanding what childhood is has been under a change in the past 100 years. This is one way of proving that people reconstruct their knowledge of the world.

Other key elements in social constructionism are relationships and language. Knowledge is created in social interactions and people reconstruct their views and knowledge in everyday life when interacting with others. Relationship is a key word in this approach as it argues that the world, therefore the concepts and every actor in the world, become significant only when there is another actor responding to it. (Gergen 2009, pp. 3-6.)

Performance is a part of social constructionism too, and it implies that people perform for others in relationships all the time (Gergen 2009, 100-104). Judith Butler (2006) has written about gender performance as well, and she believes performing has two sides to it. She states that an individual performs based on how they think they should, even if they believe that they are acting according to what their inner feelings are saying. The other part is that gender is not only one act, it is rather about routines and repeated actions. (Butler, 2006, pp. 25-26.)

Related to Butler's ideas, Gergen (2009, pp. 99-100) believes performing means that individuals have learnt how to express themselves in a particular way in a society. For example, in western cultures individuals have learnt from their social interactions how to "do" feelings. If an individual is sad, but he is laughing and not showing any negative emotions, the performance would not be recognized as sad. Performing also gives an individual a possibility to act different ways in different situations. (Gergen 2009, pp.99-100.)

An example of performance and performing gender is Agnes' case. Juvonen (2016, pp. 45-46) tells about Garfinkel's study on Agnes, who felt like she was in "a wrong" biological body. She performed as a woman to others, and they accepted her, because she knew, how to "do" woman. This would imply that human beings are performing and interpreting others' all the time in social interactions. The way people move, the way they speak or even sit are interpreted as feminine or masculine. (Juvonen 2016, pp. 45-46.)

3.1.1 Norms and stereotypes

Gender normativity is one phenomenon, which is maintaining norms related to gender in a society (Transtukipiste 2016.) Also, heteronormativity recognises the binary system of gender as the only acceptable system (National Institution of Health and Welfare 2017c). Social constructionism is aiming at challenging people to rethink and rebuild their ideas of even self-evident issues (Burr 2015). Thus, norms and stereotypes will be discussed in this chapter.

Gender normativity sees men and women in different categories, and that is the norm for the society. They are expected to act according to their biological sex, and follow the "natural" roles they have been given. (Seta 2016) The same idea is behind heteronormativity, but in this phenomenon heterosexuality is also recognised as the only "right" sexuality (National Institution of Health and Welfare 2017c).

Stereotypes are being created by describing a phenomenon's most typical characteristics. Every individual tries to recognise these characteristics when interacting with their environment. Stereotypes help people to define "gender appropriate" faces, gestures, ways of speaking, body language and genders' desires and needs. (Vilkka 2010, p. 111)

Gender and sexuality stereotypes are being created, maintained and renewed with all the different sociocultural ways. For example, kindergartens, families, sports and internet create the expectations of how human beings should be as women and men. It is good to point out that each child starts to develop an understanding of their own gender based on the tools given to them. (Vilkka 2010, pp. 111-112.) Different norms and stereotypes can have an indirect impact on children. In a society, which have certain rules, boys can be more encouraged to engage with activities, which are connected to masculinity, whereas girls are pushed to act in a feminine way. Also, stereotypes about the characteristics different genders are connected to, can shape children's views on their abilities. (Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben 2013, p.92-94.)

3.2 Gender

Gender is a complex concept (Husso & Heiskala 2016). Gender is often seen as self-evident; men and women are the only genders existing, and this binary division is taken for granted. However, this binary division is not enough as gender has many sides to it. (Transtukipiste n.d.) In this section, biological gender will be introduced, but the emphasis throughout the thesis is on the social meaning of *gender*. Diversity of gender and gender identity will be presented in this section as well.

There are theories, which connect gender to biological factors. However, the biological differences are more linked with the term sex, not with gender. (Blakemore, Berenbaum & Liben 2013, pp. 2-17.) When defining concepts, it is good to recognize the nature of words. As in social constructionism, the word *sex* can be seen socially constructed concept too; human beings have constructed this concept, developed the knowledge of what we understand as sex and transferred the information to others.

3.2.1 Biological view on gender

Biology's impact cannot be ignored when thinking about sex and gender (Blakemore, Berenbaum & Liben 2013, pp. 39-68). In medicine, for example, the biological aspects must be considered. (Vilkka 2010, p. 21.) However, biology is only one part of gender (Venhola 2001, p.5).

Sex can be divided into three dimensions; genetical, anatomical and hormonal sex. A child's genetical sex is determined, when sperm fertilizes the egg. Gametes the child receives, will determine whether the child has two X-chromosomes (=female) or one X-chromosome and one Y-chromosome (=male). (Vilkka 2010, p.17.)

Anatomical sex includes the gonads. A male has a penis, a prostate, testicles and seminal vesicles. A female has a clitoris, a womb, and ovaries. Testicles and ovaries produce hormones, which determine the hormonal sex. Ovaries produce oestrogen and progesterone, testicles produce testosterone. (Vilkka 2010, p. 18.) Nonetheless, both sex's produce both hormones, the only difference is in the quantity (Venhola 2001).

In addition to these factors, also the environment a developing individual is living in during prenatal period, does have an impact on the babies' and children's development. (Blakemore, Berenbaum & Liben 2013, pp. 39-68.) However, as Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben (2013) point out, there are many other elements too, which affect people's actions and behaviour.

3.2.2 Social view on gender

Sex and gender do not have a direct causality between them, but the association between these two exists in peoples' minds. (Vilkka 2010, p. 20.) The word gender refers to those personal, social, cultural and juridical characteristics gender can have. It is important to remember that people always experience their gender in a unique way. (Vilkka 2010, pp. 17-18.)

Gender is being discussed in the society's level, for example when making decisions, which would somehow take gender into account. An example of this is enhancing gender equality by creating new acts. Related to the society's view, gender can be looked from the juridical point of view too. Juridical gender can be seen, when the child gets a name or when the social security number is being given. This number is based on sex. (Vilkka 2010, p.22.) At the moment, there are two juridical genders recognised in Finland, and these are women and men (National Institution of Health and Welfare 2017d).

Gender includes attributes like roles, style, manner of speaking, gestures and facial expressions. Through gender expression one can express their gender to others. This process can be conscious, but people also express their gender unconsciously. What is common for every individual, is that everyone expresses their gender somehow. (National Institute for Health and Welfare 2017b).

In addition to this, the way one perceives the cultural norms related to gender also has an impact on experiencing gender. (Vilkka 2010, pp. 18-19.) Like discussed earlier, stereotypes and norms will guide human beings' actions and ideas on gender. The society's ideas for norms, the assumptions what is right and wrong, will have an impact on individuals' thinking. Even small children will be affected by the norms, if not directly, at least through the adults' actions. (Seta 2013.)

3.2.3 Gender identities

In the western world, there is a common habit of dividing gender into two gender categories; women and girls representing the feminine females and men and boys representing the masculine males. Feminine means all those things seen as typical to women. For example, dolls, dresses and the colour pink are seen as feminine. Masculinity then refers to the stereotypical manly things, which could be cars, technology and the colour blue. The common factor between these two, is that the definition of what is masculine and feminine changes depending on the time and culture. (Naisasialiitto Unioni ry, n.d.a)

Gender identity, however, is not self-evident (Husso 2016). Despite the common division, there are many different gender identities and ways to express gender. Gender identity is about individuals' experiences of their own gender, and the concept also includes individuals, who do not identify with any gender (agender). It is also about the individual's inner feelings about their gender. Therefore, individuals can create their own identity. (Transtukipiste 2016.)

Diversity of gender is a concept, which always implies to more than two. This also implicates that a man and a woman are not the only categories for presenting gender. This challenge of words happens in different levels; performance, body and reality. Gender is diverse in the areas of body, culture, style and identity. It is also good to remember that an individual's experience of one's own gender is always unique. (Transtukipiste n.d.) Even though there are multiple terms for different genders, this thesis only presents few of the different options, as the main focus is on the kindergarten environment. It is good to notice, that the words used to describe a certain group tend to change fast. (Seta 2016.)

Cis-gender describes a person, who feels that they are born into the right body, and that the culture's idea of being a woman or a man is the right idea. The majority of people identify themselves as cis-gender. There is also a gender minority that is called transgender. It is important to notice that in the English language transgender refers to all the different trans-people. Trans-people do not identify themselves with their biological sex. Agender, then again, is neither of the above, but instead it means that an individual does not identify with any gender identity. (Seta n.d.) Approximately 5 % of people do not identify with their biological sex (Huuska 2017).

There are human beings who are born with having physical characteristics of both boys and girls. This is called intersex. Most of these individuals experience themselves as boys or girls, and some have a different gender identity. It is vitally important to remember that a child, who sees herself as girl, but who is anatomically different from a girl, for example missing a vagina, is still a girl. (Huuska 2017.) One in every 1500/2000 newborn is intersex. Estimating the number is difficult, as all the countries do not collect data. Also, the definition of intersex varies in different contexts too. (Intersukupuolisuus.fi, n.d.)

Children start to develop their understanding of their own gender when they are from two to three years old. Often adults give positive feedback when they act according to the

gender norm. However, some children feel that they do not want to follow the norm, and they feel different. Children cannot consciously change how they feel about their gender. These children, who do not act according to the gender norm, rarely start to follow it when growing up. (Huuska 2017.)

3.3 Possible impacts on the professionals of ECEC

Knowledge, skills and experiences have a significant impact on how one thinks about their own and other people's gender and sexuality. Different age groups are in very different positions when thinking about the topics gender and sexuality. Each generation has acquired knowledge and experiences in a way, which has been peculiar to a specific age group. (Vilkka 2010, p.107) In a kindergarten there can be colleagues, who come from various backgrounds, and the cultures and ages between the workers may vary a lot. For example, Carousel Nursery School is one of the places, where the staff members' have very different backgrounds. (Carousel Nursery School n.d.a.) According to social constructionism's ideas, the staff members' behaviours, beliefs and assumptions towards gender then varies a lot as well. Cultural differences are an asset, but in order to use it, the work place needs to find a way for everyone to work together (Yli-Kaitala et. al. 2013).

As mentioned before, gender identity is not stable or self-evident. The way men and women function has some unconscious aspects, which appear and develop in interactions. The society's development has deconstructed gender roles and behaviour patterns in many ways and levels. However, the beliefs related to femininity and masculinity are still guiding women's and men's behaviour and actions. The ideas, attitudes and tendencies are not easy to modify or challenge. (Husso 2016, p. 85.) For example, according to Hirvonen's (2014) research on care (hoivatyö) men are capable of retaining masculine course of action despite the care work's feminine nature. Hirvonen (2014) found out that men are not expected to be as empathetic, warm, listening, and emotionally supportive as women are.

As mentioned, human beings can have assumptions on gender (Husso 2016, p. 85). Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben (2013, pp. 373-382) take a look at the teachers' treatment of boys and girls in their book. According to researches presented in their book, teachers usually believe that they treat boys and girls the same way, or at least they try to. However, the research findings presented in the book, suggest otherwise; boys tend to get more attention from the teachers, because of their aggressive behaviour, but they also seem to get more instructions too. Girls are easily ignored, unless being physically

close to the teacher. Girls also tend to receive more positive responses from the teachers than boys. (Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben, 2013, p. 375.) Nonetheless, it is good to remember that the teachers are individuals, and situations differ too. (Blakemore, Berenbaum and Liben, 2013, pp. 378-379.)

Despite all the restricting powers there may be, Husso (2016, p. 85) points out that some of the structures related to gender, femininity and masculinity are being deconstructed. One way of doing this is gender sensitivity. In the next chapter, gender sensitivity in early childhood education will be presented.

3.4 Gender sensitivity

Gender sensitivity in early childhood education is about seeing (kohdata) children as people. Not making assumptions about the children's abilities, skills, personalities or interests based on their gender is also a big part of this approach. Gender sensitivity challenges and deconstructs socially accepted attitudes and action patterns. The idea behind this approach is to make assumptions related to gender visible, as those assumptions affect the people, who work with children. (Naisialiitto Unioni ry n.d.b, p. 4.) Like Yli-Tapiola says (2012, p. 17), it is important for educators to ask from themselves, do they know which gender-based assumptions they make. Furthermore, it is also important to see what kinds of assumptions the educators are passing on to children. Even though talking about the issues related to gender can cause uncomfortable emotions and situations, the discussion is very much needed.

Children's biological sex guides and directs adults' actions and the process of making decisions for the child. This is how gender, or at least the representation of gender, gives a frame to a child's life. The younger the child is, the bigger the adult's influence is on constructing the frame for the child. Thus, adults can control the children's ways of being. (Alasuutari 2016, p. 122.)

One dimension of gender sensitivity is to look at its impact on the children's development. Making sure that the educators talk about issues related to equality can result in ethical growth, which supports children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. (Yli-Tapiola 2012, pp. 19-20.) It is also important to discuss and ponder issues related to gender in early childhood education as it supports children's development in becoming respectful and tolerant individuals (Yli-Tapiola 2012, p.19). Gender sensitivity is also a part of ethical education and it can be the basis for accepting different kinds of characteristics in individuals. (Ylitapio-Mäntylä 2012, p. 57; Huuska & Karvinen 2012, p. 43.)

Gender norms can be seen in children's toys, games and plays, and clothing. This can lead to boys and girls experiencing the reality differently, even if they were in the same physical environment (Teräs 2010, p.24). When developing a more gender sensitive environment, the learning materials provided to children should take gender sensitivity into account (Jääskeläinen, Hautakorpi, Onwen-Huma, Niittymäki, Pirttijärvi, Lempinen, and Kajander, 2015 p.21). In addition to paying attention to the learning materials provided, the environment as a whole should be gender sensitive. (Naisasialiitto unioni ry n.d.b, p.28.) Everyone has an impact on a community, but it is the manager's responsibility to ensure that the work community's protocols and operational culture are being developed and assessed (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016 p. 28).

Gender sensitivity is not the same as gender-neutral approach, as the aim is not to make gender invisible, but to give each child a chance to be seen (kohdattu) as an individual and not as a boy or a girl. (Yli-Tapiola 2012, pp. 19-20.) In early childhood education, a gender-neutral approach would mean that gender, or its different meanings, would be ignored. Thus, gender-neutral approach does not guarantee equal early childhood education. (Naisasialiitto Unioni ry n.d.b, p. 24) Every child's wellbeing, which includes ensuring that each child feels comfortable in a day care setting, is up to the adults' actions (Yli-Tapiola 2012, p. 19).

4 Process of creating the guide

4.1 Aims

The themes gender, gender equality and gender sensitivity have become important in early childhood education, especially after the new national core curriculum for ECEC took effect in 2017. This core curriculum states that early childhood education must be gender sensitive (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p. 30). One of the aims for this guide is to raise awareness of gender sensitivity in early childhood education.

The purpose of the thesis is to create a guide on gender. The target group of the guide are the staff members. Thus, it is important that the content is audience-appropriate. The idea of a reflective guide came from the working life partner, Carousel Nursery Schools. The need for this kind of product arose from the new core curriculum for ECEC and one aim for the guide is to use it in the process of following this core curriculum.

4.2 Data collection

The aim of the thesis is to create a guide on gender and gender sensitivity. As the guide is created for the teachers, I want to know, what they already know about the themes. Moreover, I am interested in hearing about the staff members' ideas for the guide, as they will be the ones using it in practice.

4.2.1 Qualitative method

I have no clear hypothesis on what I will find, rather I am interested in what the participants' viewpoints are. These are the reasons, why the qualitative method was chosen. Qualitative methods' characteristics are suitable for the guide's aims; more value can be given to the participants' thoughts and there is no need for an accurate hypothesis of the findings. (Eskola & Suoranta 2000 p. 13-24.)

One method to collect data is to use interviews. Interviews are useful, when one wants to get direct information from the participants themselves. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.) As mentioned, getting to know the staff's assumptions and ideas related to the themes, is vitally important to this guide. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, p. 43) one must take care of few issues before entering the interview. Researchers need to know their theoretical framework, plan the interviews in advance, guarantee confidentiality and guide the interviewee during the whole process. As I have studied the topic and decided my theoretical framework, I choose to collect the data by using one type of an interview.

Interview types can be divided based on the structure of the interview. An interview without a structure can be called an open interview. This type allows an open discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee, and the interviewer has the possibility to ask more detailed questions based on the answers received. A structured interview then refers to a type, in which the researcher has created specific questions in advance. A semi-structured interview is an option, if one wants to have the best parts of both. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, pp. 43-47.)

A semi-structured interview means that a strict questionnaire is not needed, but the interview will not be an open interview either. A semi-structured interview does not include accurate questions, but it does have some structure as there are themes, which will guide the interview. One needs to think about the themes in advance, and within an interview all the themes will be gone through. An advantage in this type of an interview is that the interviewees can get their voices heard, and the discussion can be fluent. It is important

to remember that the meanings the participants' give and how they use the language are essential parts of the analysis of the data. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p. 48.)

The ethicality related to interviewing human beings needs to be considered in every step of the interviewing process. Here are few examples of different ethical guidelines; one needs to make sure there is a reason behind conducting a research, the confidentiality has to be ensured and the analysis has to be exact. Other ethical principles are consent, anonymity, understanding the consequences a research may have and privacy. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p.20.)

4.2.2 Participants

I have chosen to interview the kindergarten teachers and other staff working with the children, as the guide will be written for them. I contacted Carousel Nursery Schools' Helsinki unit via e-mail, and after meeting the managers, we together agreed that I could do the interviews. I sent the staff a letter, in which I explained how this process will proceed. I also explained that these interviews are voluntary and that they can withdraw from the process at any time.

According to the ethical standards of research, the participants' anonymity has to be guaranteed. This was explained in the letter. After sending the letter, the manager told about the thesis to the staff members, and the volunteers were advised to let me know about their willingness to do the interviews. Before the actual interviewing began, I once again went through the participants' rights and got their informed consent. Informed consent is one of the ethical dimensions one needs to think about when conducting a research. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, p.20). Due to anonymity reasons, I decided not to write specific information on their backgrounds.

I wanted to interview at least five people, but in the end, I was able to talk to eight people. Gender can be experienced in many ways, and there are different expectations for men and women. (Husso 2016, pp.73-91) That is why I wanted to get both males and females to participate. Out of the eight interviewees, there are two men and six women participating.

Other important factor is to interview people from different cultural backgrounds, and this objective was reached as well. According to social constructionism, people build their identities and the knowledge of the world based on the interactions between individuals.

Also, as said before, culture has the power of modifying the way people see the world (Burr 2015, p.3). Amongst the eight interviewees, there are people from six different nationalities. Most of them have also lived in other countries, thus I made an assumption that they had been exposed to different cultures and individuals too.

The participants have different educational backgrounds and work experience. All the participants have at least on-the-job-training in early childhood education, and most of the interviewees have a university degree in early childhood education. Working experience in early childhood education varies from months to more than 20 years of working with children.

4.2.3 Setting

The interviews were held at the Helsinki unit's office space as it was possible. This way the staff did not have to go anywhere and it was easy for them to go back to work. The interviews were carried out during their working hours. The environment was comfortable, and it was made sure that no one else could hear the interviews. Carousel Nursery provided an office room, where there was plenty of space, chairs and a sofa.

I recorded the interviews for later transcription purpose. In my letter to the staff, which I sent in advance, I explained the purpose of the interviews and the interviewees' rights. The recorder was placed on the table, so that everyone could see it, and that the quality of the sound would be as good as possible. During one interview, we were interrupted by the manager, but I stopped recording the interview at that point. Also, for a little while, there were two children in the interviewing room. I asked the interviewee whether she would like to stop or continue the interview, as the children were in the same room with us. The manager explained to us that these two children did not understand English at all and we decided to keep on recording. The children were with us in the room for 14 minutes. I feel that the fact that they could not understand English did not compromise the results of the interview. The interviewee told about her views openly even when the children were around.

4.3 Data analysis

The guide is aiming at raising awareness of gender sensitivity in Carousel Nursery Schools and possibly in other English speaking kindergartens as well. As mentioned, I wanted to understand how the workers feel about the themes. I also wanted to hear about their ideas for the guide. Interviews were used to get this information. However, it

is good to remember that the aim for the thesis is not to make a research, thus the data analysis is rather brief.

The previous section has explained the method used for getting information from the staff members. The interviews were recorded; thus, I began the data analysis process by transcribing the recordings. As my aim was to get an insight of the workers' thoughts on the different themes, I chose not to use strict verbatim transcription style, but I did use the smooth verbatim style. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, pp. 139-141) depending on the aim of the research, the researcher can choose how accurately they want to transcribe the audio recordings. The longest interview took 50 minutes, whereas six of the interviews lasted from 18 to 20 minutes.

After the transcription process, the answers received from the interviews were divided into theme groups. Having all the different answers related to a specific theme in the same place helped me to see the different viewpoints the workers had on each theme. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2001, pp. 141-142) point out, using the themes in the analysis process is one option for making sense of the transcription.

The analysis process has various steps, for example, describing the data (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, pp. 143-145.) However, I feel the information received only from structuring the transcription gave me all the information needed for creating the guide. Not trying to understand a phenomenon or to find new information gave freedom in the analysis process. The direct questions about the wishes for the guide also made it easier to get the information needed.

4.4 Results

The interviews revealed that the staff members have thought of the themes covered, at least to some extent at some point of their studies and/or career in the early childhood education. Everyone was open about their backgrounds, opinions and experiences. Most of the interviewees agreed on the themes covered, even though some variations between the answers were found too.

The themes related to this thesis were seen as important and interesting. One of the employees told that she wants to read the guide, when asking for comments and ideas for the guide. There were also other positive comments on the themes.

Interviewer: Or is there something that you would like me to write about?

*Worker 4 “All all I wanna say is that you chose a really really good subject...
...and it's very important to do”*

One theme in the interviews was one of the key ideas in social constructionism: culture (Burr 2015, p.3). All the eight interviewees referred to the operational culture in the work place and they felt that they could talk about different issues in team meetings. However, no one had had a conversation on gender topics with their colleagues.

Interviewer: ...for the teachers, for you guys, let's say that you're from Spain and someone is from Finland, do you think the same way or do you have different opinions on gender?

Worker 2: The truth is that I haven't talk [ed] about that with the other teachers, so I don't know what they are thinking, buut,

Interviewer: yea

Worker 2: I don't know, I didn't see any mm, difficulty or difference about that

In addition to this, culture and language were also discussed in different context. Most of the interviewees did not see the staff members' cultural background as a big influencer in the nursery. However, there were two people, who disagreed with this. Furthermore, language was seen as an issue causing stress for those, who were not comfortable speaking a foreign language. However, for those, who were comfortable with speaking the language, it was not a cause for stress. As Carousel Nursery Schools are all English speaking nurseries, speaking English is mandatory.

The possible problems related to gender were pondered too during the interviews. One theme especially was seen difficult; how to work in different situations with parents from different cultures. This topic came up in four interviews directly. Therefore, the reflection part of the guide will have a section for creating guidelines for challenging situations.

Gender sensitivity was not a familiar topic to the staff members. The interviews also included questions about gender in general. One might not notice the impact of gender in everyday life situations, and this thought arose in several interviews. Considering the answers received, the section for gender is important to include in the guide. Gender sensitivity will also be presented in the guide, especially because there was a request for it.

Interviewer: When you read it, is there something you would like to know more about?

Worker 5: *Yea, mm, explain more about gender sensitivity.*

The interviews revealed that the staff members have already a lot of knowledge about the themes. Nonetheless, the need for systematic development of the operational culture can be seen, especially now when the new national core curriculum for ECEC has come out. Also, the workers expressed that they would like to know more about the themes. As the workers are professionals within the field, the reflective approach in the guide seems to be the best choice.

5 Evaluation

5.1 Evaluation of the guide

The Finnish national core curriculum for ECEC was renewed in 2017 (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2016). The aim of the guide is to raise awareness of gender and gender sensitivity in Carousel Nursery Schools. The guide is ought to be a tool for the nursery, when following the new core curriculum.

The guide is comprehensive as it covers many topics from the core curriculum to social constructionism and gender sensitivity. It also has a section for reflection. However, in retrospect, other themes could have been emphasised as well. Themes such as Reggio Emilia approach and multiculturalism are both important factors in the everyday life of Carousel Nursery Schools. Yet again, the topics need to be outlined, and the themes included to the guide are essential too.

A request for a reflective guide came from the working life partner. Creating a useful guide was one of the objectives as well. The reflection section covers the themes dealt in the theory part, and the list for a gender-sensitive educator is good extra material for the teachers. There are also questions to ponder throughout the guide, which gives the readers a possibility to develop their own thinking processes even before the actual reflection section. The reflection section has three parts; it begins with personal reflection, the second part is a tool for starting a conversation with colleagues and the third one is for improving the work place's operational culture.

The guide is aimed at the staff members working with the children, thus the worker's ideas and wishes for the guide were seen important. Furthermore, understanding the

worker's views and knowledge they have on gender and gender sensitivity was essential, when creating the guide. To reach this objective, eight interviews were conducted.

The interviews did give many important insights, but I wonder were those interviews necessary in this process. As the goal was to receive ideas for the guide, a lighter version of the interviews could have been enough. On the other hand, the method used gave a lot of information for the guide. In addition to that, I feel that collecting the data and analysing it, had a big impact on my own learning process.

The layout of the guide was challenging to create. Thus, I asked for help from a friend and he helped in the imposing process. Unlike planned, pictures were not included in the guide, as it would have required more time and effort. Better time-management and planning from my own part would have been the answer to this problem.

Working with Carousel Nursery Schools has been a good experience. The managers and the staff members were collaborative and it was rather easy to work on the guide. In retrospect, more meetings with the staff members could have helped in the process of creating the guide. Furthermore, the time-management problems can be seen here as well; in the end, I did not get any written feedback on the guide. However, even though the process of creating the guide has taken more time than expected, the working life partner is still interested in the guide.

5.2 Evaluation of the thesis

Gender sensitivity is an important and a current topic. According to the national core curriculum on ECEC, early childhood education has to be gender sensitive (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016, p.30). The curriculum guidelines have come into effect in 2017. Having this in mind, my working life partner requested a reflective guide on gender and gender sensitivity. Together we agreed that the target group of the guide will be the staff members. Raising awareness of gender sensitivity in private nurseries is also one objective for the thesis.

The background of the thesis includes the introduction of the working life partner, the national core curriculum for ECEC, and legislation related to equality in Finland. The core curriculum is based on the early childhood education and care legislation; thus, it was reasonable to have the legislation presented. The early childhood education service providers operating under municipalities have to follow the national core curriculum. The

working life partner, Carousel Nursery Schools, must follow the new core curriculum as well. The background provided does explain the need for this thesis.

The theoretical framework presented in the thesis includes the theory of social constructionism, gender and gender identity, and gender sensitivity. Social constructionism challenges black and white thinking and norms the society carries (Burr 2003, Burr 2015). Gender sensitivity from its part also aims at deconstructing norms (Naisasaliitto Unioni ry n.d.b). These two combined with information on gender create an entity, which can help raising awareness of gender and gender's impact on the early childhood education professionals and on the children as well. In addition to this, understanding the different dimensions of gender and gender identity can help the professionals to improve their methods in everyday life in the nursery. The theory section is comprehensive, but the different parts may have influenced the thesis' readability. Also, the sources could have more variation than they do now. It was harder than expected to find reliable, but extensive, sources.

The product, this functional thesis was aiming at, is a reflective guide. The need for it arose from the new national core curriculum for ECEC and from the working life partner. The theoretical framework used in this thesis was adjusted to the guide as well. The guide is created for the staff members, thus the content is aimed at the workers. In order to find out, what kind of guide is needed in this nursery, the staff members were interviewed. By using a semi-structured interview, eight staff members were interviewed. The interviews provided valuable insights, but it is possible that the method was too extensive to this type of work. The process of creating the guide was started in the spring 2017. This process is evaluated in the section 5.1 more in-depth.

6 Discussion

The process of writing this thesis has taken a lot more time than expected. However, creating the guide has been educational, challenging, time-consuming, but also a great way of learning and developing my own professionalism. The themes covered in the thesis have been interesting throughout the process. Understanding how gender truly has an impact on the kindergarten teachers' work, has made me see the importance of this topic in new light.

Collaboration with Carousel Nursery Schools has been motivating, especially as I have been able to create something useful. However, I do not have the possibility to hear, how

the guide works in practice. Thus, one idea for the future could be to test the guide and develop it further.

In addition to testing the guide, one development idea is to make a brochure or guide to the parents too. The interviewees were feeling concerned, because they did not know how to work with the parents in difficult situations related to gender. More of a multicultural aspect could be added to this process as well, especially as the interviewees felt that cultural differences can be challenging to handle. In the reflective guide, multiculturalism is not discussed in-depth.

The guide will be in Theseus, and other early childhood education providers can use it too. As the new guidelines found in the core curriculum are now in effect, the professionals working with children need to take gender sensitivity into account. The theory section is informative and the guide's reflective approach will give the readers a possibility to develop their own thinking processes.

7 Conclusion

The need for a reflective guide arose from the changes in the early childhood education. The new national core curriculum for ECEC obligates early childhood providers to a service, which is gender sensitive. Carousel Nursery Schools is one of the private providers, but they are still obligated to use the Helsinki city's curricula. This curricula is based on the national core curriculum. Due to this, Carousel Nursery Schools wanted to find a way to include the guidelines to their everyday work. After talking to the working life partner, Carousel Nursery Schools, it was agreed that a reflective guide would be created.

Social constructionism, gender and gender sensitivity are the basis for the theoretical background in this work. The use of legislation and the national core curriculum for ECEC have also been essential themes in the process of creating the guide and the whole thesis. Especially as the target group of the guide are the staff members working with the children, it was important to choose the theoretical background carefully.

The guide has two parts; theory and reflection. In order to find out what to include to the guide, data was collected by using a qualitative method. Eight interviews were conducted in June 2017. The data was analysed and based on the answers received, the guide was created. The guide includes information on the core curriculum, social constructionism, gender and gender sensitivity. The last section of the guide is the reflection part.

The aim of the guide is to be a useful tool for the staff members to use. The thesis process did not allow enough time to find out, whether the guide serves its purpose or not. Carousel Nursery Schools gave a permission to publish the guide on-line, thus everyone can use it. However, due to technical issues, the version of the guide in Theseus will have a slightly different layout than the layout in the original guide

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Letter to the staff

Hello!

I am Jasminella and I am studying social services in Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. I will graduate in December (hopefully) and I will get the kindergarten teacher qualification as well. I am now writing my thesis and I was lucky enough to get a chance to work with Carousel Nursery. I have been interested in gender issues and I wanted to write about it too. In the end, we concluded that I will try to create a reflective guide for you, everyone who works with children in this nursery, which would give some ideas how to take gender into account in everyday work.

I would like to make a guide, which would be useful. In order to do my best, I need your help. I would like to interview the kindergarten teachers and other caretakers, like lastenhoitajat etc., but in case there are many qualified teachers, I think my resources will not be enough to interview everyone. However, I am hoping to interview as many teachers and/or other workers as possible.

It is my job to write the “results” and the guide in a manner, which will guarantee that readers will not know who has said and what. Also, it is your right to say no to the interview – even after the interview has already been done. One more thing: I can’t write as fast as people speak, that is why I will record the interviews.

I hope that I will get to interview you soon!

Best regards,

Jasminella Kangas

PS. If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me via email

Interview guide

Background Information

Age, gender, country (culture), education, how many years in this field, for how long have they worked in this place

Gender - What is it?

How do you see it? - Is it biological, psychological, social, what is it?

How would you describe boys and girls?

Have you heard about different gender identities?

How does it feel if a boy wants to wear a dress or a girl wants to be called by a boy's name?

Social Constructionism

How many different cultural backgrounds are there in this place?

How do you feel using English as working language?

Language used with children e.g. - do you use children's names or then "boys" or "girls" "kids"

Have you talked about gender related topics in:

-in your own home

-in your education

-with your colleagues

Have your views on gender changed at any point?

Have you noticed any different viewpoints on gender amongst the staff?

Have you noticed culture's impact on how one sees gender?

Gender Sensitivity in a Daycare Setting

Have you heard about it?

What does it mean to you?

Did you get any information on gender in your education?

Have you ever thought about how your own gender influences your actions?

Have you ever thought about how the child's gender influences your actions?

Have you ever thought about how gender is shown in the practices in the workplace? (How many women/men/other genders are working, how does gender show in activities or when making groups)

Do you feel you have the skills to take gender into account in everyday work?

Operational Culture and Community

Have you read the new National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC or do you otherwise know what it says about gender?

-What kind of introduction or on the job training did you go through when you started working here?

-Are you aware of the values, mission, vision, the principles this school is aiming at?

-How is the atmosphere - how does it feel to discuss different issues?

-Have you ever discussed gender issues or gender sensitivity in your workplace?

Content of the Guide

-What would you like to know more about?

-What would be useful information for you?

Reflective guide on gender

What are little boys made of? Snips and snails, and puppy dogs tails, That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of? Sugar and spice and all things nice, That's what little girls are made of.

Hello there!

I am a student from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. I have studied social services and chosen to acquire early childhood education qualification. This guide is a part of my functional final thesis: Raising Awareness of gender sensitivity in a private English Speaking Nursery – Reflective guide on gender. The new national curriculum guidelines on early childhood education and care talks a lot about gender and gender sensitivity, and my goal was to get to know more about the impact of gender in early childhood education. The idea to create a reflective guide came from the management part of Carousel Nursery School, which was my labor market partner.

Concept of gender and the meanings of it have changed tremendously over time. The knowledge there was regarding gender 50 years ago, has been under a big change, not to even mention where the world was 150 years ago. Now in this world and moment, it is time to open your eyes to something new – or if not new, at least to reflection. According to the theoretical background used in this thesis and guide, time and culture, language and relationships are vital when creating knowledge; maybe this guide in this time will help you to see something new or even change your views somehow.

In June 2017, I got the chance to interview Carousel Nursery's staff members. The content for the guide has been selected based on the interviewees' thoughts and questions, without forgetting the Guidelines. One aim for this guide is that it can be used when exploring the workplace's protocols and staff members' actions and ideas related to gender and gender sensitivity. I hope that the staff members can reflect their own behaviour and thinking, and also develop a more gender sensitive environment in the workplace with the help of this guide.

The guide has two parts. First, the theory used in my thesis will be presented. In the end, you will find the actual reflection part. This guide has been written into a form that it can be used without reading the whole thesis. However, for those, who would like to know more about the thesis and the process, you can find it online in Theseus.

I hope you will keep your mind open and enjoy!

Best Wishes,
Jasminella Kangas

Content

5	Riddle and short vocabulary
6	National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care + interviewees thoughts
7	Social constructionism
9	Gender
12	Gender Sensitivity
14	Reflection
16	Checklist for gender sensitive educator

Here is a riddle –can you come up with an answer easily?

A father and his son are in a car accident. The father dies at the scene and the son is rushed to the hospital. At the hospital, the surgeon looks at the boy and says "I can't operate on this boy, he is my son." How can this be?

Now, let yourself think about it first and then...

There are two simple answers to this question; the surgeon is the boy's mum or maybe the boy actually has two fathers. Both of these options are fighting against the normative thinking in our society. Being a surgeon requires some qualities that are often related to being masculine. Then, two dads is still seen as abnormal. Challenging the norms and normative thinking is a big theme in this guide as well!

Short vocabulary

Assigned gender

"Sex assigned at birth". Often seen as binary – one is born to be a girl or a boy – females are feminine and males masculine

Bigender/Third gender

An individual who can identify with being a man and a woman

Cisgender

An individual identifies with their "assigned gender"

Contradiction between gender and sex (sukupuoliristiriita), in medicine gender dysphoria

An individual does not identify with their assigned gender – can lead to transsexuality

Gender sensitivity

Noticing the differences between individuals and supporting everyone's own development in a safe and respecting environment – not to be muddled with gender neutral approach

Heteronormativity

Assuming everyone is heterosexual and behaving according to their assigned gender

Intersex

An individual, who can have ambiguous biological characteristics, e.g. genitalia

The words in this field change rapidly, thus even these words can be “old information” at some point. The recommended way to interact with children and parents (caregivers) is to be open-minded and respectful in all situations.

Bases for the guide

New National Core Curriculum on Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency of Education 2016)

- Early childhood education in Finland is about equity, equality and diversity
- Operational culture is created by the people in a community – thus every staff member will influence the community they are working in
- Every member of a community has to be seen (kohdattu) and treated equally
- Equity is the goal (=treating everyone the same way may not be equal – rather the educators should take action based on the individual’s needs)
- Early childhood education should enhance gender equality
- Education is a tool to challenge norms and teach ethical thinking
- Children have the right to develop their skills regardless of gender, cultural background or other personal factors
- It should prepare children to understand and respect diversity (gender, cultural heritage, different families etc.)

Some questions and thoughts from the staff

(8 interviewees – June 2017)

- This is a very important topic
- What is gender sensitivity?
- Language we use – is it important?
- Is gender really such a big deal in early childhood education?
- What is the biological foundation of different genders?

What is social constructionism about?

- It aims at challenging norms and normative thinking in a society

- Questioning black and white thinking
- People have created structures in order to understand the world – it is possible to deconstruct them too

Culture & Time

- Culture is a big part of human beings
- Culture & time have an impact on individuals' knowledge of the world
- Individuals from different decades and/or cultures may think differently about whatever topic

For example, do Finnish people think differently about socialism than Americans? Can you think of a culture, which is liberal/tolerant? What about a culture, which is more conservative?

- Culture can change over time – people are those, who need to change it
- Knowledge develops over time and human beings should use that knowledge! For example, children were seen as mini-adults not too long ago – now they are seen as children, who deserve protection, love, education etc. (This does not happen in every culture, but as we are focusing on the Finnish system I feel it is safe to say that the Finnish culture wants the best for the children)

Language & Relationship

- Knowledge is created in interaction – social interaction is the place, where people create their views of the world -> children will learn a lot about different things while interacting with you. They will also learn if they as children are accepted or not
- Words can have various meanings within a language – it is important to ask questions such as: “What do you mean by that?” Especially, if you are not entirely sure what the other one tries to tell you
- Meanings of words can vary from one language to another
- Language and the words we use are important! Children listen to you (at least most of the time) and the way you talk about different subjects will have an impact on them.

Why is social constructionism important for early childhood educators?

It has been shown that in social interactions people are being defined based on their genders and they will be categorized already starting from their birth. Adults create different cultural models to act and behave for boys and girls. Also, it is

culturally transferred where and how children can move and function in a space and little by little children start to learn how boys and girls are assumed to behave. Kindergarten teachers and others working with children on daily-basis can be seen as significant adults in the children's lives. Thus, you as a professional and a big influencer in these children's lives should be aware what influences you and how you will and want to influence the children. The words you use, the activities you provide and even the small gestures you make will somehow impact the individuals you are working with.

Does gender have an impact?

These are not problems in early childhood education, BUT the work towards gender equality can be started early on! In 2017, there have been issues like this:

Boys/Men

Boys are underachieving in schools: one in eight boys finishing comprehensive school (peruskoulu) cannot read

Men are underrepresented in higher education

Girls/Women

30% of girls in secondary school (yläkoulu, 7-9th grades) have experienced sexual harassment. The percentage for boys is 12%. (Kouluterveyskysely 2017)

Women are still in weaker position in the working life compared to men's situation. Women's euro is 83 cents. Women are also forced to take more temporary and part-time jobs not to mention that men use only less than 9% of parental leave. Women tend to stay home, which makes it harder for them to be economically in the same position as men.

Gender – How does it develop?

When talking about biological issues, this guide will refer to the term sex. The word gender is more reserved for the social and cultural aspects.

Biological viewpoint

- Genetical development has its own impact on gender development
- Chromosome pair XY makes a male, XX then makes a female
- Genitalia development is different between different sexes. Vagina makes a woman, penis makes a man
- Hormonal development is different between males and females; males produce more testosterone, whereas females produce more oestrogen. Females also produce progesterone
- Brain development and sex differences – in this case we have a chicken and egg situation. Researches cannot be sure do the social and cultural environment impact the brain or vice versa

In medicine, the biological factors are seen as the reasons, when explaining why someone does not identify with their birth sex. These factors are such as genetics and the environment a fetus lives in during prenatal period

However, it is also noted in medicine that there can be other factors than just biology influencing gender development

- Children start to identify with a gender at the age of 2-3

The feeling of being a boy or a girl does not pass, even if the surrounding environment would not accept the individual's own experience of gender.

Is biology the only way to define one's gender?

Houston, we have a problem, if biology is the only way to know one's gender!

- In Finland, 3 to 8 children per year are born with biological characteristics, which do not unambiguously refer to one sex

It is confusing to a child, if their body causes wonder in other people

- Transgender refers to all trans people in the English language. Approximately 5 % of people do not identify with their assigned gender
- There are many disorders of sex development

Sometimes hormonal development or genetical development do not go by the average development

For example, disorders of chromosomal sex (zygote has either only one chromosome or more than two)

Social viewpoint on gender (based on social constructionism's views)

Gender is not a binary concept – there are more options than boy/girl or man/woman

- 95 % of human beings feel relatedness to their assigned gender – this does not mean that all these people would act according to what they are expected (women -> feminine, men -> masculine)
- Masculinity and femininity can be challenged
- Gender is all about one's own inner feelings...

...however, the social environment can have expectations, which can make the individuals choose something they do not identify with

- Gender is diverse in the areas of body, culture, style and identity. It is also good to remember that an individual experiences their own gender in their own way
- Culture has an impact too! (We all live in it and we learn to obey the rules – or sometimes fight against them)
- Gender is a complex concept and gender identity is not necessarily stable
Masculine characteristics are traditionally connected to males. Men fix cars and like blue. They are stronger and less emotional than females. They are also more active and leader-type than females.

Feminine characteristics are traditionally connected to females. Females like pink and are great cooks. They like princesses and are more into books than sports. They are quieter than males, but more open to their emotional side.

Are these definitions accurate? Do you agree or disagree – why?

Why was this important again?

- Not letting a child be what they want to be will cause the feeling of confusion, being an outsider or even being somehow flawed
- Parents can be worried or they do not want to accept this part of their child – early childhood education professionals can help them to understand!
- When children grow up, they can feel that their bodies are horrible. The support in childhood can prevent these negative feelings from happening
- Being accepted makes you feel good – what happens, if a child does not feel that they are accepted, because of their gender?

Quick question: How often do you think, when you see a girly girl that that is just a phase, she will become more masculine after this period?

Gender sensitivity

So, what is this gender sensitivity?

First, let's see what it is **NOT**.

Gender sensitivity is **NOT** aiming at gender neutral approach. It is **NOT** trying to fade out different genders or force people to be genderless. It does not say that masculine toys and feminine toys should be taken away from children. It does not say that biology does not have an impact on the child's development.

Rather it is:

- Understanding your own impact as an educator
- Being sensitive to all different characteristics one may have – and supporting the children in their growth
- It aims at equity (=being equal in a way, which takes all the different sides of the story into account)
- Creating a safe place for individuals to explore their wants, needs and identities
- Creating a safe environment to be what they feel they need to be
- Making sure each individual feels comfortable in a day care setting
- Being aware of the unequal systems in a workplace – once noticing “a flaw” it is important to try to change the systems into better functioning ones!
- Teaching ethical thinking and being tolerant. Teaching the children how to be tolerant and respectful towards all the different qualities others may have will support their sense of ethicality

Let's give the girly girls, Finnish children, boyish boys, genderless children, princess-boys, Somalian children, car-lover girls and everything in between a chance to be what they feel they need to be!

Why is this important?

It is rather normal that a child's assigned gender guides the adults' actions. These adults teach children the basics of life and make decisions for them. This is how gender, or at least the representation of gender, gives a frame to a child's life. This same process also has a big impact on children's identity development – you as an educator have an important job to do!

Even though transgender and other sexualities than heterosexuality are still minorities, they are not less important than the majority ones. Every child's right is to feel comfortable and safe in a day care setting and that is up to the adults'

actions and behaviour. Children should also get the support they need if they come across a situation where they are not sure what they are gender-wise. It is also good to remember that gender sensitivity does refer to other characteristics than just gender too. It is important that educators understand to be sensitive in matters like religion, ethnicity, disabilities one may have. Moreover, being respectful towards different forms of families is essential in this field. Being tolerant and open to all the differences between individuals is as important as being open to all genders!

Reflection, reflection and REFLECTION

(Let the fun begin!)

The theory part has been covered now, and it's time to reflect some more! There are many questions in this section, but hopefully you will take your time to think about these issues critically and thoroughly. The questions have been divided into three sections and I see them as a tool too; one part for your own reflection, one for making it easier to start a conversation in your workplace and one for developing the action culture.

The questions have been created based on Hanna Vilka's (2010) book and the answers gotten from the interviews. The checklist for a gender sensitive educator is made by a project Gender sensitivity in early childhood education. The list was chosen to be included in the guide, as it can help the teachers and other staff to reflect their actions even better.

Part 1 - These questions are for your own personal reflection:

1. How do your primer caretakers think about gender? What about the opportunities to women and men?
2. If you disagree with their ideas now, how did you create the new way of thinking?
3. What does your culture say about gender and different sexual orientations?
4. How often do you reflect your ideas and your thinking processes? On daily-basis, monthly-basis, something else?
5. How does it feel to be a girl or a boy in a daycare center? If you have not been in a kindergarten, you can think of your time at home or at school
6. (It can be worthwhile to go down your own memory lane. Go back to the times you were a child. Did anyone comment your gender and how was it like? It can be hard to remember old times, but even one memory or picture in your mind can help.)
7. What is being a man? What about being a woman?
8. How would you describe the words masculine and feminine?
9. Is gender important to you? Can it be important to someone else?

Part 2. - These questions can be used to start a conversation with your colleagues and other staff members:

1. What different ideas of gender do your colleagues have? Do you know what they are? How do those opinions/ideas make you feel?
2. Gender, does it have an impact on children's lives? What about adults' lives?
3. How do you think people end up choosing their activities, friends, education or work place? Does gender have anything to do with these decisions?
4. For whom is gender being produced or made? When does the process of producing gender end? How and where do people create their gender?
5. Do teachers have an impact on gender development? Can you reason your answer?
6. How does it feel to be a female or a male worker in a kindergarten? Can you notice your gender's impact somehow?
7. Can you notice that there are differences in the way parents/children treat you, when comparing to other workers? Does your gender, cultural background, something else have an impact on this? How does it make you feel?

Part 3. – Continuing the conversation and developing gender sensitive work environment

It would be meaningful to discuss these matters in a team and then write your answers down. This way you can see concretely what you have agreed upon, you can follow your progress and also, in a complicated situation the paper can help you to solve the problem.

1. Do you think children's culture is aiming at gender equality? (Books, movies, music tv-series, learning material, clothes etc.) What is teachers' role in choosing the materials? Is it important to think about this when planning the activities?
2. Can you identify stereotypes related to gender/culture in your workplace? If yes, what can be changed?
3. Is there a possibility to work towards an even more equal kindergarten? Take a look at this from your customers' point of view but also from the staff's point of view.
4. How can a gender sensitive kindergarten be created in this unit?
5. How will you as a team explain your values and protocols to the children's parents? How will you as a team to deal with possible disagreements with parents?
6. Can you come up with a protocol how to work with parents, especially when working with sensitive subjects?

7. Can you find a way to keep on track how you are doing with the action patterns related to gender?
8. What would be the best measure in our group to see how we are doing with gender sensitivity and equality?
9. What is the best thing in your workplace? How can you embrace the good things you see in your co-workers, managers, employees, action culture?

Checklist for a gender sensitive educator

(by the project Gender sensitivity in early childhood education)

Who is allowed to interrupt others?

Do I talk about what a good listener is like with all children?

Do I laugh good-naturedly at friendships between a girl and a boy?

Do I choose children of different genders equally to assist in chores? Even in hectic situations, when help is needed fast?

How do I interpret different feelings of boys and girls: sadness, anger, joy, and fear? Do I equally recognize the feelings of all children?

What is my body language like when I am talking to children of different genders?

Do I use the same volume with all children?

Do I allow each child to take the same amount of space?

Do I make eye contact with each child of the group equally?

What activities do I suggest to a girl or a boy who comes to me saying she/he is bored?

Who do I assign the main role or supporting roles to in group situations? What are the features that every child needs in order to develop?

Do I often praise some children for their appearance or belongings?

Do I praise children for their personality or do I focus on evaluating their performances?

Do I give each child positive feedback every day?

How do I recognize, make visible and show appreciation for the experience of a gender nonconforming child?

Do certain children always play in certain spaces with certain playmates?

Can all children play with any toys? How do I know this?

What kind of books do I read to the children? If I notice gender normative set-ups in the books, do I discuss them with the children? For example, are boys often the protagonists, rescuing girls in the books?

Are girls nurturing animals or children and interested in issues relating to appearance?

Is every child's "no" equally important in the group?

What kind of role models do I present to the children?

What kind of gender-role do I represent in the nursery school?

Do I talk about "women's" and "men's" things in a restricting way?

How do I talk about individuals whose gender cannot unambiguously determined?

When I discuss home-related matters with a child, do I primarily refer to one or the other parent?

Which one of the parents do I primarily call when the child is ill? Do I give positive feedback to my colleagues every day?

Thank you for reading this guide!

Children must be taught how to think, not what to think. -Margaret Mead

Don't just teach your kids to read, teach them to question what they read. Teach them to question everything.

George Carlin

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

-Nelson Mandel

It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.

- Frederick Douglass

All of us have moments in our childhood where we come alive for the first time. And we go back to those moments and think, 'This is when I became myself.'

- Rita Dove

If a child lives with approval, he learns to live with himself.

- Dorothy Law Nolte