



# Developing Cultural Competence in ECEC; A Brochure for Educators

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# **Developing Cultural Competence in ECEC; A Brochure for Educators**

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Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Working Life Oriented Competence Module

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Cultural competency is important because it may foster an inclusive classroom where kids from different origins feel accepted, respected, and encouraged. The primary objective of this thesis was to provide ECEC educators with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to develop cultural competence in their practice.

The number of children from diverse backgrounds, such as those with different languages, religions, nationalities, and cultural traditions, is increasing especially in Finland which has over the years seen an increase in bilingual Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres. This thesis which was conducted as a development-based thesis in a portfolio format in bulb, was aimed to create a brochure for educators to help in developing their cultural competences in dealing with children from different cultural backgrounds in ECEC settings to ensure that all children, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, receive equitable access to top-notch education.

The thesis was implemented in collaboration with one of Pilke Playschool centres in Helsinki. The target audience was to provide a brochure that will help the educators in Pilke daycare in developing their cultural competence when educating the culturally diverse children in the ECE centre.

The thesis output is a training brochure detailing the knowledge and information needed in developing cultural competence in ECEC settings. The brochure also gives examples of scenarios that educators can encounter and how to deal with such situations. The thesis also recognised some limitations about the brochure, the brochure provides a broad framework for developing cultural competence, it may not fully capture the unique cultural dynamics of every community or classroom and so educators make adjustment depending on their own situations in order to ensure that every child is recognised and accepted. The brochure that was created was planned to be implemented by the educators in the daycare centre from January 2025 and it will be in the facility for about 6 months after which it will be distributed to other daycare centres. We believe that this brochure can help many educators especially educators that are involved with children from diverse backgrounds. By increasing their skills in how to deal with every child under their care and create an environment that fosters participation and growth

Keywords: early childhood education, cultural competence, inclusivity, multiculturalism

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1. Introduction and Objectives

In an increasingly globalized world, cultural diversity has become a defining characteristic of many societies. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) environments are no exception, where children from various cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds come together. Cultural competence—the ability to understand, respect, and effectively work within cultural differences—has become an essential skill for educators in this context. The importance of cultural competency in early childhood education is becoming more widely acknowledged. This is especially true in multicultural cultures where educators must address the needs of children from various cultural backgrounds.

The Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE) in the curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) states that each child in ECEC has a right to systematic and goal-oriented education, instruction, and care. (FNAE 2022, 7) the Act also outlines the importance of ECEC in promoting equality and equity among children and preventing social exclusion. Knowledge and skills acquired in ECEC strengthen children's participation and active agency in society. (FNAE 2022, 10).

The Curriculum promotes the democratic values of Finnish society, such as equity, equality, and diversity. Every child must have the opportunity to develop their skills and be able to make choices independently of reasons associated with, for instance, gender, origin, cultural background, or other reasons related to the person. ECEC personnel are responsible for providing an atmosphere that recognizes diversity. the diverse cultural heritage that ECEC is built on, continues to be formed in the interaction between the children, their guardians, and the personnel. (FNAE 2022, 18)

The topic of developing cultural competence in ECEC is critical as it fosters inclusivity, equity, and positive developmental outcomes for children, irrespective of their background. The ability of educators to recognize, respect, and adapt to cultural diversity is increasingly crucial in diverse societies to ensure fair and inclusive treatment (Edwards, 2009).

Further, cultural competency is important because it may foster an inclusive classroom where kids from different origins feel accepted, respected, and encouraged (Horn, 2003). Also, it is critical to address the challenges that ECEC professionals face throughout their training since inadequate readiness might result in lost opportunities to support children's cultural identities and foster meaningful intercultural communication (Peeters and Sharmahd, 2014).

The thesis was done in collaboration with Pilke Playschool in Helsinki, an English—and Finnish-speaking daycare center with branches throughout Finland.

### **Thesis Objectives and Limitations**

The primary objective of this thesis is to provide ECEC educators with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to develop cultural competence in their practice through the development of a training brochure. The specific goals include:

**Raising Awareness:** Educators will learn about the importance of cultural competence and its impact on children's development and well-being.

**Providing Practical Strategies:** The brochure offers practical approaches for integrating cultural competence into everyday interactions with children, families, and colleagues.

**Encouraging Self-Reflection:** Educators are encouraged to engage in ongoing self-reflection to recognize their biases and assumptions and challenge these in their work.

**Supporting Collaboration with Families:** The brochure emphasizes the importance of building strong partnerships with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, recognizing that family engagement is critical to culturally competent care.

However, there are limitations to this work. First, while the brochure provides a broad framework for developing cultural competence, it may not fully capture the unique cultural dynamics of every community or classroom. Educators are encouraged to adapt the strategies to suit their specific contexts. Additionally, cultural competence is an ongoing process rather than a one-time achievement. As such, this brochure should be viewed as a starting point rather than a comprehensive solution. Continued professional development and personal reflection are necessary for educators to fully integrate cultural competence into their practice over time.

### **Project need and justification**

As authors of this training brochure, we are deeply motivated by our own personal and professional experiences in working with culturally diverse children. With backgrounds in social work, education, and psychology, we have witnessed firsthand the challenges and opportunities that arise in culturally diverse educational settings. Our interests in child development, social inclusion, and multicultural education have led us to explore how educators can better support the needs of all children, particularly those from minority and immigrant backgrounds.

Our work is also informed by a growing body of research that highlights the importance of early intervention in promoting cultural competence. The early years of a child's life are a critical period for social and emotional development, and educators play a pivotal role in shaping children's perceptions of themselves and others. Recognizing this, the authors aim to provide educators with practical strategies for incorporating cultural competence into their daily routines and interactions.

Additionally, we are concerned with addressing gaps in current ECEC practices. Despite the growing diversity in classrooms, many educators feel unprepared to navigate cultural differences effectively. The brochure aims to bridge this gap by offering concrete, research-based approaches to cultural competence.

### **Justification for the Development of Cultural Competence in ECEC**

The need for cultural competence development in ECEC is underscored by the demographic shifts in many countries, with growing numbers of immigrant and minority populations. In Finland, for example, the foreign-born population has steadily increased, contributing to greater diversity in classrooms. This makes it crucial for educators to understand and address the varied needs of children from different cultural backgrounds. Developing cultural competence is significant because:

**Fostering Inclusion and Equality:** Children from minority and immigrant backgrounds often face challenges such as language barriers and social exclusion. Cultural competence allows educators to create an inclusive environment that recognizes and values diversity, promoting a sense of belonging for all children. (FNAE, 2018)

**Positive Developmental Outcomes:** Research shows that children who feel respected and understood in their cultural identity are more likely to thrive emotionally, socially, and academically. Cultural competence enables educators to cater to children's individual needs, enhancing their overall well-being and development. (Vavrus, 2015)

**Legal and Ethical Responsibilities:** Many countries have educational policies that emphasize equity and inclusivity. Developing cultural competence is not only a professional skill but also a legal and ethical obligation for educators to ensure that all children receive fair and equal opportunities in education. (FNAE, 2018).

The thesis will be implemented in collaboration with a daycare center in Finland. Pilke Playschool is a multicultural daycare center with children from different parts of the world and with different and unique cultures. The Finnish National Curriculum on Early Childhood Education explains that, when there is good interaction among people from different cultural

backgrounds among children, there is a major impact on their identity, functional capacity, and their overall well-being. (FNAE 2022, 23) As ECEC educators, it is our responsibility to provide the right environment for the children to play and learn. Equal opportunities must be provided to each child in ECEC irrespective of their cultural background. To make sure that the right kind of support is provided, educators must have the skills and knowledge to understand every child in their care and make sure that their needs are provided for.

In collaboration with the work-life partner, the thesis aimed to create a training brochure for the educators in the Pilke daycare center which ultimately can be distributed to other Pilke daycare branches later on. This brochure will help develop their skills and cultural competence in providing inclusive early childhood for all children.

Pilke Playschool (our work-life partner) would benefit significantly from the development of a cultural competency brochure for several reasons:

**Diverse Student Demographics:** Pilke operates as a multicultural daycare center, catering to children from various cultural backgrounds. This diversity requires educators to be equipped with the skills and strategies necessary to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. A training brochure would help standardize best practices for cultural awareness and inclusion. (Banks, 2015)

**Alignment with National Curriculum Goals:** The Finnish National Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (VASU, 2022) emphasizes promoting equity, respect for diversity, and creating environments that support every child's identity and cultural heritage. The brochure would provide actionable strategies to ensure these goals are met in day-to-day teaching practices.

**Professional Development:** Research identifies a lack of ongoing professional training on cultural competence as a gap in Finnish ECEC (Hellman, 2020). This brochure can address this shortfall by equipping educators with reflective exercises and actionable practices to engage children and families from diverse backgrounds effectively

**Addressing Challenges in Multicultural Classrooms:** Educators at Pilke may face challenges such as cultural misunderstandings or biases. The brochure would provide case studies, problem-solving strategies, and communication techniques to navigate these effectively, ensuring a respectful and harmonious classroom environment.

In summary, the brochure is a crucial tool to support Pilke's mission of delivering high-quality, inclusive education while meeting the evolving needs of its diverse student body.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### Background and challenges

The growing variety of civilizations globally has made cultural competency a crucial aspect of excellence in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Educators with cultural competency are more capable of engaging meaningfully and productively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, respecting and valuing their differences while fostering an inclusive learning environment. In an ECEC setting, it is crucial to have the ability to ensure that children from various cultural backgrounds feel understood, supported, and valued, as this contributes to their overall development. Teachers in these environments have a unique opportunity to influence children's views on cultural diversity during this important early developmental stage. Therefore, developing cultural competency among ECEC professionals goes beyond improving individual practice; it also involves promoting social justice, fairness, and inclusivity in early childhood education. (National Association for the Education of Young Children)

The number of children from diverse backgrounds, such as those with different languages, religions, nationalities, and cultural traditions, is increasing. These children need to be recognized, accepted, and included. Without teachers who understand different cultures, the unique experiences of minority children may be overlooked or pushed aside, while the dominant cultural stories are upheld. Without a doubt, creating inclusive and culturally sensitive environments significantly boosts the achievement of children, particularly those from marginalized communities. As stated by Derman-Sparks and Edwards in their research, these benefits encompass higher academic performance in the future, stronger social connections, and enhanced self-worth (Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2009). Consequently, early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals need to develop cultural competence to ensure that all children, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, receive equitable access to top-notch education.

The Finnish National core curriculum on early childhood education and care lists cultural competence as one of the foundations of transversal competencies needed in early childhood and care education (FNAE 2022, 21) The Curriculum explains that children are growing up in a a diverse world culturally, ideologically and linguistically. The Finnish daycare currently has children from diverse cultures all around the world. It is therefore important to point out the importance of social and interaction skills needed in the ECEC settings.

In the field of ECEC, numerous challenges often hinder the achievement of cultural competency, especially during professional training. This thesis aims to identify and overcome these challenges by offering a training manual as a practical solution to equip ECEC professionals with the skills and resources necessary to become culturally competent educators. Training programs often inadequately cover intercultural competency, leaving teachers ill-

prepared to navigate the complex cultural dynamics in the classroom. This thesis addresses the disconnect between theory and practice in cultural competency training, focusing on developing strategies that teachers can implement in their interactions with families and children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### **Challenges in developing a training brochure**

Studies show that there are significant challenges in current ECEC training programs, despite the acknowledged importance of cultural competence in early childhood education. Research consistently indicates that training programs often do not adequately equip teachers with the necessary tools and support to develop this skill. For instance, there may be a lack of culturally relevant resources, or insufficient attention may be given to intercultural communication skills—an essential aspect of cultural competence (Chang and Viesca, 2022). Additionally, teachers may have to develop these skills independently, sometimes with inadequate supervision, as many training programs provide limited opportunities for hands-on experience in diverse educational settings.

Professionals in early childhood education and care (ECEC) who work in urban, multicultural settings often report feeling unprepared to navigate the complex cultural dynamics in their classrooms (Horm, 2003). This is particularly concerning because creating inclusive learning environments necessitates an understanding of and ability to address the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. According to Horm, ECEC training programs should emphasize cultural competency more, equipping teachers with practical tools and hands-on experiences to help them adapt their approaches to meet all students' needs (Horm, 2003).

The lack of opportunities for culturally competent professional development presents a significant challenge. Educators may not have access to ongoing training that would help them enhance their intercultural competencies throughout their careers. With the increasing diversity in classrooms and evolving public attitudes towards diversity and inclusion, educators may struggle to maintain cultural competency without these opportunities. This thesis aims to address this gap by creating a comprehensive training manual that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application, equipping early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals with valuable tools and strategies to enhance their cultural competency from their initial training and throughout their careers.

### **Key Concepts**

Inclusivity in an Early Years setting refers to a learning approach that gives value to diversity and respect. It promotes a setting environment where the aim for every child is to feel valued and included as well as support their development regardless of the differences, abilities, or backgrounds. The child can be supported with an inclusive curriculum and teaching practices

that accommodate different learning styles, abilities, and interests to ensure that all children have equitable access to learning opportunities. Differentiated instruction, flexible grouping, and individualized support are key elements of inclusive teaching ((AGENCY) in 2016 ). Adequate funding and resources are essential for ECEC settings to implement inclusive practices effectively. Funding mechanisms that support staff training, specialized services, and accommodations for children with disabilities contribute to inclusiveness.

As stated in the Finnish National Curriculum for Early Childhood and Care (FNAE, 2022), “A child who attends early childhood education and care is entitled to support, regardless of who the ECEC service organizer is. ECEC is organized and developed in keeping with the principle of inclusion. This means that all children have the right to participate in ECEC together, regardless of such aspects as their support needs, disability, or cultural backgrounds.” The ability of educators to acknowledge and respect the diverse cultural, linguistic, and ideological origins of children and their families while fostering an inclusive learning environment is known as cultural competency in the context of early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The operational culture of Finnish early childhood education is based on the principles of inclusion. It states that an inclusive environment promotes children’s participation and learning and caters to the different needs of all children. Every child has the right to belong to a group, and participate in all activities that will enable them to grow into their full potential, this can be achieved when their strengths are supported, and they have positive learning experiences when they are together with their peers. The children are offered suitable learning challenges, and the necessary support is provided. These learning environments should be developed and evaluated together with the children. (FNAE 2022)

### **Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism in early childhood education and care takes many forms. It’s taking a culturally sensitive approach to understanding and valuing each child’s background and culture. This is reflected in everyday encounters, celebrations, and curriculum content. Activities and events are organized in early childhood education to explore different cultures through music, dance, stories, food, etc.

According to estimates, about 25 percent of schoolchildren in Finland have multicultural backgrounds. This means that there is an increasing number of children from multicultural backgrounds in daycare settings and preschools. Access to quality education has become more and more important in modern society, and respect for diversity is seen as the most powerful single quality predictor for early learning experiences and later for school achievement (Ojala, 2010). It is also important to recognize that children’s ethnic background is not necessarily an obstacle to school success. Language acquisition and learning are especially recognized as

important tools in educating and schooling children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Ojala emphasizes that in pedagogy, it is important to combine both social and educational approaches to assist socially excluded families and children. A good deal of attention must be paid to recognizing diversity among children concerning their social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Furthermore, embracing cultural variety and incorporating other points of view into routines are also aspects of multiculturalism in the Finnish ECEC. Children are encouraged to appreciate and understand one another through this method. When taken as a whole, these concepts lay the groundwork for creating educational settings that are both egalitarian and culturally sensitive, in keeping with The Finnish National Curriculum on ECEC values (FNAE, 2022).

### **Examining the knowledge base**

Numerous research studies have investigated and acknowledged the significance of cultural competency in education, particularly in ECEC environments. Substantial research emphasizes that cultural competency is essential for establishing inclusive and fair learning environments (Chang and Viesca, 2022). Recognizing and valuing cultural diversity represents just one aspect of cultural competency within the ECEC context; another crucial facet involves implementing measures to actively address and challenge any inequalities that may arise in classroom settings.

Paananen and Mika (2019) highlight the need for professional development in intercultural teaching techniques while identifying the common difficulties Finnish educators face as they adapt to the country's increasing linguistic and cultural diversity. In their 2019 study, Heikkola and Alisaari examine multilingual practices in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC), revealing shortcomings in implementing successful strategies to support multilingual kids. Similarly, Karila (2012) explores the professional identity of ECEC teachers, emphasizing that the evolving cultural landscape demands a shift to inclusive and reflective practices. These studies highlight how important it is to link theoretical frameworks with hands-on training. This thesis aims to close this gap by proposing a comprehensive guide to help Finnish ECEC practitioners become more culturally competent.

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2009) contribute significantly to the dialogue on cultural competency in early childhood education. Their research on anti-bias education in ECEC settings is part of a comprehensive framework that encompasses social justice, equity, and cultural competency. They argue that addressing personal and societal biases that could negatively impact children's development necessitates anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2009). Socioeconomic status, gender, and race-based biases can subtly influence how

the curriculum is designed, classroom dynamics, and teaching methods, potentially perpetuating stereotypes or marginalizing specific groups of children. Derman-Sparks and Edwards recommend that educators not only incorporate practices that honour and value each child's cultural identity but also adopt a reflective approach to examine their own beliefs and biases (Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2009). This introspective practice is especially impactful in early childhood environments, where attitudes toward diversity, justice, and inclusivity begin to form and shape children's future perspectives.

In addition, Derman-Sparks and Edwards emphasize the importance of educators actively addressing prejudices in the classroom and acknowledging cultural differences. This means that educators need to intentionally create environments where diverse cultural backgrounds are not just showcased but valued, while also recognizing how culture shapes children's sense of self, learning experiences, and behavior. Their research suggests that by guiding teachers to understand the multifaceted identities of their students and respond in ways that affirm and support those identities, an anti-bias approach can greatly enhance cultural competence (Derman-Sparks and Edwards, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) has been the subject of extensive research in early childhood education, along with anti-bias education. In their research on culturally responsive pedagogy, Chang and Viesca (2022) highlight a consistent lack of cultural competency training for educators, especially those in the early childhood education field. They note that while many teacher preparation programs emphasize the importance of cultural competency, they often fail to provide teachers with practical, hands-on strategies for implementing these concepts in their daily practice (Chang and Viesca, 2022). The disconnection between theory and practice creates a challenge for teachers who understand the importance of cultural competence but struggle to apply it in real classroom scenarios (Chang and Viesca, 2022). Chang and Viesca emphasize the need for hands-on experience in diverse classroom environments, interactive workshops, and opportunities for reflection as essential components to incorporate culturally responsive teaching into teacher training.

Furthermore, their research highlights that culturally responsive teaching not only acknowledges and respects cultural differences but also addresses the historical context and power dynamics that influence them (Chang and Viesca, 2022). Educators, who are culturally responsive need to be ready to thoughtfully address issues related to race, language, and socioeconomic status as they can result in unequal power dynamics in educational settings (Chang and Viesca, 2022).

Similarly, Horm (2003) offers valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals working in various, often urban, settings. Horm's research emphasizes the shortage of training opportunities and culturally diverse

resources for educators who interact with students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Horm, 2003). Due to this lack of resources, many teachers feel ill-equipped to navigate the cultural complexities of their classrooms (Horm, 2003).

According to Horm, the professional development of ECEC professionals should prioritize the practical application of cultural competence and equip teachers with effective strategies for use in the classroom. The use of culturally relevant teaching materials, adaptation of the curriculum to align with the cultural backgrounds of the students, and the development of effective cross-cultural communication skills are all essential for creating an inclusive learning environment where every child is respected and engaged (Horm, 2003). Rather than just attending one-off training sessions, Horm's research underscores the importance of continuous professional development in cultural competence. This is particularly critical in the field of early childhood education, where educators constantly encounter new cultural contexts and the diversity within classrooms is constantly evolving. Teachers can enhance their expertise in culturally responsive teaching methods and refine their intercultural skills through ongoing professional growth (Horm, 2003).

The importance of effective strategies for improving educators' cultural competency, particularly in ECEC settings, is consistently emphasized in current research publications. Also, they stress the necessity of hands-on learning experiences to allow educators to refine their skills in real-life scenarios, in addition to theoretical knowledge. This is where the proposed training manual in this thesis plays a crucial role, aiming to provide ECEC professionals with practical techniques to enhance their cultural competency and bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### **3. Output**

#### **Collaboration with WLP**

The thesis was implemented in partnership with Pilke Daycare in Helsinki. Pilke Playshool is a warm, English and Finnish-language daycare center where children can both learn and maintain their English and Finnish language skills. Unlike before, many parents in Finland enroll their children in English-speaking daycare centers rather than just Finnish daycare. This I believe is to give them the opportunity to learn a different language other than their native language. As English is a universal language and easier to learn, children who learn it at a young age, gain confidence in speaking it.

However, with each daycare group having more children from different cultural backgrounds, educators may be overwhelmed when they do not know the kind of cultural competencies needed to cater to the children. The Finnish National Curriculum stresses that ECEC personnel

are encouraged by continuous self-assessment, sharing of knowledge, and most importantly constant professional development. As there are different culturally diverse children in ECEC, it is equally important for educators to be equipped with the right skills and knowledge to provide the right kind of support and environment to ensure children's participation and interaction. ECEC personnel should be knowledgeable in different cultures and worldviews and also can view things from different perspectives. (FNAE 2022, 30).

This training brochure aims to equip educators with the knowledge and tools needed to integrate cultural competence into their daily practice, shaping a more inclusive and enriching environment for all children.

By working together with the Working-life partner ie Pilke Playschool, it is hoped that this training brochure will serve as a roadmap for educators to gain the skills and knowledge they need and to increase their cultural competencies in working with children from different cultural backgrounds. By gaining the knowledge and understanding of the children's cultural practices, educators can provide the right kind of support needed by each child, this will ensure acceptance and ultimately improve participation and interaction.

The Working-Life partner intends to use this brochure for about 6 months in the daycare center. This will allow both old and new educators to gain the knowledge and skills this brochure is intended to provide. By providing ECEC personnel with this brochure, we hope to increase their skills and knowledge and equip them with the tools needed to increase their professional skills and cultural competencies in providing the children with the right environment needed for their development irrespective of their cultural background.

The goal of the training brochure is to promote culturally responsive teaching methods that teachers may use in their daily work by establishing a methodical approach to building cultural competency. This entails addressing any biases or prejudices that could emerge in the classroom, developing inclusive learning settings, and improving their ability to engage with kids and families from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

The training brochure will focus on several crucial topics:

- Assisting teachers in identifying their own cultural identities and prejudices: Identifying their own cultural identities and biases, as well as those of the students and families they work with.
- Intercultural communication: Offering resources for effective cross-cultural communication, highlighting language, nonverbal cues, and culturally appropriate response.

- Pedagogical strategies: Providing practical methods for adapting educational materials and teaching approaches to better reflect the cultural backgrounds and experiences of the students in the classroom.

There is a wealth of research showing how culturally responsive approaches can enhance the developmental outcomes of children, particularly those from minority backgrounds, which underscores the increasing importance of cultural diversity in early childhood education. The research conducted by Chang and Viesca (2022) emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive, practical training programs that move beyond mere discussions of cultural competence and equip educators with tangible skills (Chang and Viesca, 2022). The primary goal of this thesis's outcome, a comprehensive training manual, is to bridge this gap by providing early childhood education professionals with valuable tools to foster cultural competence in their daily practices.

### **Implementation Process**

The primary outcome of this research will be a brochure designed to fulfil the cultural competency needs of practitioners in Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The brochure aims to help educators identify, understand, and address the challenges related to cultural competency they encounter during training. This educational resource, based on the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (VASU 2022) and relevant research findings, will emphasize practical strategies to support teachers in applying culturally aware and inclusive methods in early childhood environments.

This training brochure's main goal is to give early childhood education and care (ECEC) professionals the abilities, information, and viewpoints they need to create inclusive and encouraging settings for kids and families from different backgrounds. According to VASU (2022), promoting equality and respect for diversity is a core goal of ECEC, guaranteeing that each child has the chance to express their cultural identity and have a feeling of belonging. Following these tenets, this manual will provide educators with useful tactics for incorporating cultural competency into their everyday work, empowering them to more effectively identify, appreciate, and meet the unique needs of every kid.

The training brochure will address the shortcomings present in ECEC curricula, which often lack hands-on approaches to promoting cultural competency. By focusing on actionable strategies, self-reflective exercises, and real-life examples, the handbook will help educators integrate cultural competency concepts into their practice instead of just presenting theoretical aspects. Including these elements, the brochure will support teachers in fostering the inclusive and respectful environment that VASU 2022 aims to achieve in Finnish ECEC settings.

The training brochure will focus on the following key areas

#### Cultural Awareness and Self-Reflection:

Under VASU (2022), which emphasizes the importance of respecting other points of view and each child's cultural heritage, this section will focus on fostering cultural awareness via introspection. Using case studies and organized reflection exercises, educators will critically examine their own cultural backgrounds, prejudices, and preconceptions. VASU's emphasis on culturally and linguistically sensitive practices emphasizes that the first step in creating an inclusive atmosphere is acknowledging one's own opinions and prejudices.

#### Communication and Building Relationships Across Cultures:

Developing trust and inclusivity involves communication that is mindful of cultural variances. This part of the brochure will provide resources highlighting the significance of conducting respectful, open dialogues with families that honour their language and cultural background, as pointed out by VASU (2022). We will explore effective strategies for navigating language barriers, demonstrating empathy in communication, and engaging in active listening to enable teachers to forge trustworthy relationships with children and their families. As emphasized in VASU's guiding principles, these skills are crucial for creating safe spaces where every family feels their identities are valued.

#### Inclusive Teaching Practices and Culturally Responsive Curriculum:

The importance of incorporating children's diverse cultural origins into daily activities and the larger curriculum is emphasized by VASU (2022). The brochure will help with this by offering helpful advice on how to create lesson plans that acknowledge and represent each student's cultural identity. Teachers will be urged to celebrate ethnic holidays, use a variety of materials, and use storytelling to get kids interested in learning about other cultures. VASU's viewpoint that ECEC practitioners should not only recognize diversity in their classrooms but actively appreciate it as an essential resource for learning and development is in line with this emphasis on inclusion.

#### Addressing Common Challenges in Multicultural Classrooms:

This section will provide educators with techniques for problem-solving and real-world case studies, as multicultural classrooms can be challenging due to misunderstandings, biases, and varying cultural expectations. This part of the manual aims to assist teachers in addressing cultural conflicts constructively and nurturing an inclusive, respectful atmosphere that aligns with VASU's principles of equity and cultural awareness.

### Language Support Strategies:

Since many children in Finnish ECEC may speak a different home language, a section dedicated to language support would be valuable. In addition to offering strategies for communicating with children who are multilingual or learning Finnish as a second language, consider emphasizing methods for incorporating children's home languages in daily activities. This could include basic vocabulary integration, bilingual resources, or involving families in language-sharing activities. By reinforcing multilingualism, educators can help children feel a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage.

The development of the thesis and brochure followed a structured process involving close collaboration with the working life partner. The thesis topic was chosen after a thorough discussion with our working-life partner on how we can improve cultural competence at the workplace. Since the collaborating daycare centre is a bilingual daycare, most of the children are from different diverse backgrounds and cultures. It is sometimes difficult to navigate between parents' and guardians' expectations as well as following the national curriculum. It is however our responsibility as educators to have all the needed knowledge and skills to be able to provide the best of care to the children. This can only happen if we know and incorporate the children's backgrounds in our daily activities. Together with the working life partner, we agreed that developing a training brochure that highlights some steps in helping the educators improve their cultural competencies in ECEC will not only improve participation but will also ensure inclusivity which is one of the operational cultures of ECEC in Finland.

### Initial Research and Planning:

We started by reviewing VASU (2022) and relevant literature on cultural competency to establish a theoretical foundation. The working life partner provided insights into the practical challenges faced by ECEC educators, ensuring the brochure addressed real-world needs. The WLP emphasized the need for more research and education on improving cultural competence in ECEC to cater to the many diverse children entering the Early childhood education system.

### Content Design:

Based on the research, we outlined the brochure's structure, focusing on key areas like self-reflection, communication, inclusive practices, and addressing multicultural challenges. The partner shared feedback on these topics, suggesting areas to emphasize based on their experiences.

#### Co-Creation of Materials:

Practical elements, such as case studies, exercises, and examples, were co-designed with the partner to ensure they were relatable and actionable. They provided classroom scenarios and cultural dilemmas educators commonly face, which were used as the basis for examples in the brochure.

#### Pilot Testing:

Draft sections of the brochure were shared with the partner's educators for pilot use. Their feedback was collected to refine strategies, ensure clarity, and improve usability.

#### Finalization and Dissemination:

After incorporating feedback, the brochure will be finalized with a focus on practical applicability. The working life partner supported the dissemination by sharing the resource with ECEC educators as soon as possible and arranging training workshops for its implementation.

The collaboration ensured the brochure was both theoretically grounded and practically relevant, addressing the real needs of Finnish ECEC professionals.

### **Training Brochure**

#### **Enhancing Cultural Competence in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

##### Definition:

Cultural competence is the ability to understand, respect, and effectively interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves recognizing one's own cultural perspectives and biases, as well as gaining knowledge and empathy for the unique backgrounds of others.

Example: In an ECEC setting, cultural competence might mean adapting activities to include stories and images from the cultural backgrounds of each child, fostering a sense of pride and belonging.

Purpose: The goal of cultural competence is to create an inclusive environment where every child feels valued and accepted. This approach promotes self-esteem, social skills, and cognitive development by recognizing and celebrating diversity.

Example: Educators might integrate cultural songs and games into their weekly routines, giving children the chance to share and experience each other's cultural practices.

**Why it Matters:** Cultural competence is essential in early childhood because it helps combat biases before they take root. Children who feel seen and valued are more likely to develop a positive self-image and respectful relationships with peers.

**Example:** A teacher might introduce words in various languages during circle time, fostering curiosity and a sense of unity among children from different linguistic backgrounds.

This training brochure is designed to equip ECEC educators with practical tools and strategies to foster cultural competence in their daily practices. It emphasizes the significance of understanding and respecting diverse cultural backgrounds and provides actionable methods to create inclusive environments for children and families. The brochure aligns with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (VASU, 2022), which highlights the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusivity in fostering every child's development and sense of belonging.

The brochure aims to:

1. Introduce the concept and importance of cultural competence.
2. Provide educators with practical methods to apply cultural competence in real-world scenarios.
3. Support continuous professional development through reflective practices and skill-building activities.

Educators can use this brochure as a flexible tool for self-assessment, team discussions, and ongoing professional growth. Its visual and interactive format ensures ease of use, with sections that allow for quick reference and deeper exploration as needed.

Sections with Enhanced Detail and Practical Examples

#### 1. Introduction to Cultural Competence

- Definition & Purposes:** Emphasizes the creation of environments where all children feel valued.

- **Practical Example:** Start each week with a “Cultural Sharing Circle,” where children bring an object or story from home to share.

- Significance:** Acknowledges the role of cultural competence in combating biases early and fostering respectful relationships. Banks (2015), VASU (2022).

## 2. Self-Awareness and Bias Identification

### - Deepened Activities:

- Reflection Exercise: Add prompts for educators to explore how cultural norms influence classroom management styles.

- Example: How do cultural attitudes toward authority shape your expectations of children's behavior?

- Practical Tip: Incorporate diverse materials such as global storybooks or multicultural art supplies. Hellman (2020), Sirin et al. (2011).

## 3. Building Cultural Knowledge

- Cultural Profiles Expanded: Include templates for creating profiles, such as significant holidays, values, and common child-rearing practices.

- Example: Incorporate visual aids like a “Cultural Map” where children can place pins on their family origins.

- Research Assignment Detail: Add guided steps for educators to collaborate with families during research. Hellman (2020), Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE, 2022).

## 4. Cultural Competence in Practice

- Scenario-Based Learning Expanded: Provide scenarios that educators can role-play during team meetings.

- Example: A family prefers not to celebrate birthdays for cultural reasons. How do you handle this with sensitivity?

- Inclusive Communication Techniques: Offer a list of welcoming phrases in multiple languages to incorporate into daily interactions. VASU (2022), Sirin et al. (2011).

## 5. Continuous Learning and Reflection

- Journaling Framework: Include sample prompts and goals for educators to track their growth.

- Example Prompt: What new cultural practice did you learn about this week, and how did it impact your teaching?

- Professional Development: Suggest online courses or local workshops focused on multicultural education. Banks (2015), VASU (2022).

#### Visual and Interactive Format Suggestions

1. Visual Design: Use a modular format with clear headers, bullet points, and color-coded sections for quick reference.

2. Interactive Features:

- Add QR codes linking to external resources or videos demonstrating inclusive teaching methods.

- Include checklists for self-assessment and classroom diversity audits.

3. Evaluation Section:

- Provide a feedback template for educators to share their experiences with the brochure and suggest improvements.

#### Conclusion: Making the brochure Practical and Impactful

The brochure serves as a concrete, user-friendly tool for ECEC professionals to enhance their cultural competency. By integrating theoretical insights, practical activities, and reflective exercises, it empowers educators to create inclusive, culturally sensitive learning environments. Pilke Playschool staff can adapt the brochure to fit their unique needs, ensuring all children feel valued and respected, as emphasized by VASU (2022).

below is the link to the brochure.

[https://www.canva.cn/design/DAGXqbVL-  
YM/GYY6C2eVbRuuVthAvZEVfw/edit?utm\\_content=DAGXqbVL-  
YM&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link2&utm\\_source=sharebutton](https://www.canva.cn/design/DAGXqbVL-<br/>YM/GYY6C2eVbRuuVthAvZEVfw/edit?utm_content=DAGXqbVL-<br/>YM&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton)

## **Evaluation**

### **Evaluation of the training brochure**

The goals and guiding principles of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (VASU 2022) are fundamentally connected to the outcomes we expected from the proposed training brochure. Essentially, the brochure seeks to create inclusive and culturally aware ECEC environments by providing educators with the knowledge and skills required to appreciate and celebrate each child's individuality while promoting a sense of belonging and community. VASU (2022) highlights the significance of acknowledging and appreciating the unique cultural identities of children, as these early years play a crucial role in shaping their social and cultural self-awareness. Therefore, the brochure specifically targets this aspect by equipping educators with strategies and resources to promote environments that embrace equity and cultural diversity.

One of our primary objectives is for ECEC professionals to develop and implement teaching methods that acknowledge and celebrate cultural diversity. This involves integrating children's cultural traditions into daily activities, fostering an appreciation for multiculturalism, and encouraging respectful interactions among peers. The brochure assists educators in establishing settings where every student feels acknowledged and appreciated, which boosts their personal growth, social connections, and self-worth. This is in line with VASU's objectives. Furthermore, the brochure offers practical advice for addressing problems such as unintentional bias, cultural misconceptions, and communication barriers, ensuring that teachers are equipped to effectively navigate complex intercultural dynamics.

The brochure also highlighted the importance of working together with communities and families, which is a core principle of VASU (2022). Since families play a crucial role in the cultural growth of children, the guidance encourages educators to maintain open lines of communication with parents and guardians to promote mutual respect and understanding. By incorporating these collaborative strategies, the brochure aims to enhance the connections between teachers, children, and families, ensuring that every child's cultural identity is recognized and embraced within the ECEC framework.

### **Lifelong Learning**

To cut a long story short, this training manual aligns with VASU's (2022) focus on continuous learning and encourages a mindset of perpetual professional development among ECEC educators. To meet the evolving needs of Finnish society, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their cultural biases, consider diverse perspectives, and familiarize themselves with teaching methods through hands-on learning experiences.

The brochure allows educators to effectively achieve VASU's objectives of justice, inclusiveness, and cultural awareness by providing everyday resources and a theoretical framework. It fosters an inclusive early childhood education and care (ECEC) environment where diversity is regarded as an asset instead of a challenge, reinforcing the belief that every child deserves an education that recognizes, embraces, and celebrates their cultural heritage. The primary aim of the brochure is to reshape ECEC environments into spaces that prioritize children's sense of identity and belonging alongside their developmental needs.

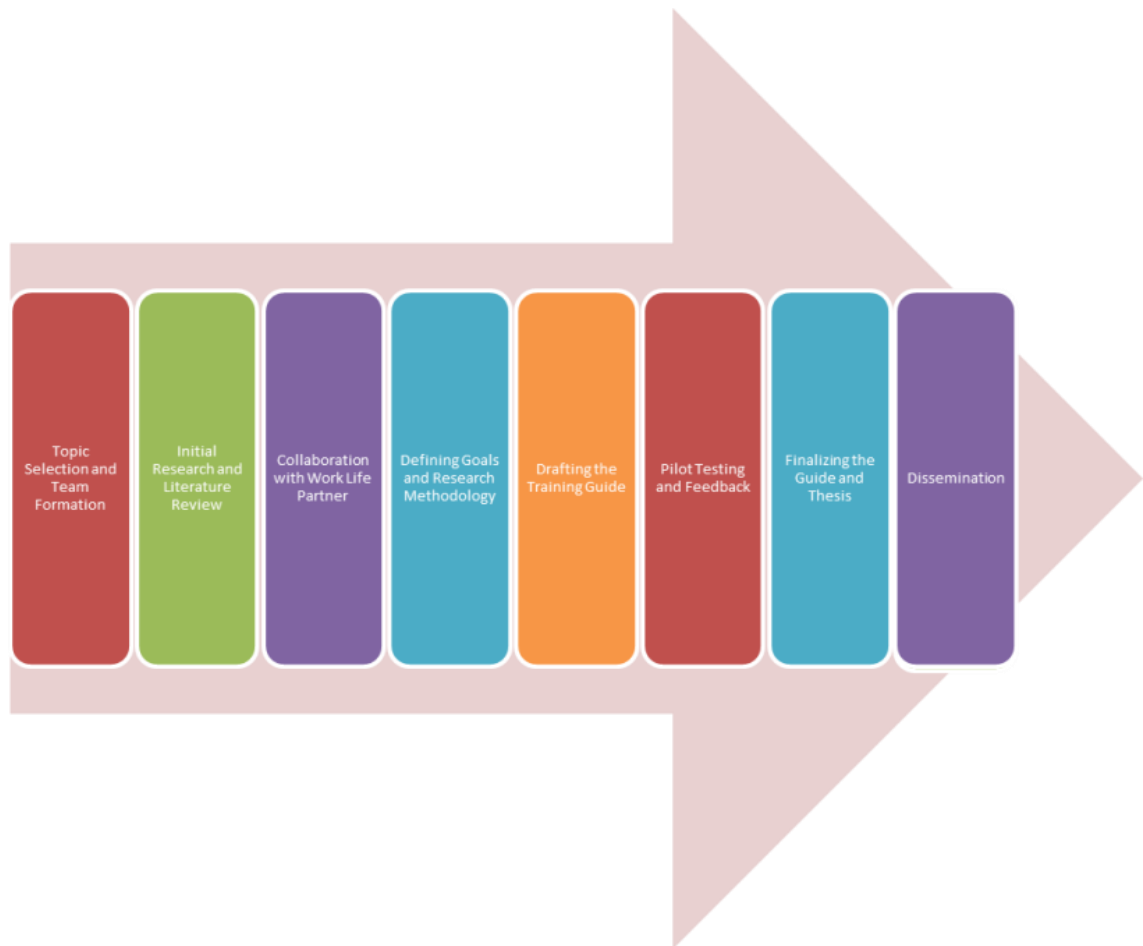
### **Evaluation of the thesis process**

The thesis began when we as educators decided to create something that will help educators navigate through different backgrounds of the children under their care. We must enforce a type of pedagogical practice that can foster active participation and its initiates, especially among families irrespective of their cultural background. To make sure that the right kind of topic was selected, we had a conversation with the WLP on what we think will be a good topic that will help not just children but to give educators the skills and knowledge needed to ensure culturally acceptable ECEC settings. This brought about, the creation of this brochure.

As a group, we ensured there was constant communication between ourselves and especially with the WLP because effective collaboration ensures effective results. Research, brainstorming, and efficient collaboration ensure the right and needed kind of information is used. As ECEC educators, we strived to create a simple yet informative brochure that will not only help ourselves but also help other fellow educators learn and improve their cultural competencies at their work.

However, the thesis did not proceed without some challenges. With many different cultural backgrounds in ECEC, it was a challenge to know which information could work for all children irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Also, the brochure might not work for daycare centres with just one language such as a Swedish or Russian daycare thereby not fulfilling the objective of ensuring inclusion for all.

Communication with the WLP was sometimes very difficult as the manager had several daycare centres which are under her supervision and this made it sometimes challenging to discuss certain situations with her and come up with the right answer, during such situations, we as a group were forced to make some changes without the WLP.



## 4. Conclusions

### Conclusions and Reflections

#### Group Reflections

As early childhood education teachers in Finland with many years of experience, we must constantly increase our knowledge and skills following the changing world. As educators, we must ensure every child feels included, acknowledging the increasing diversity of families in our society. To foster each child's growth, we need a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses individual needs and removes barriers. Only after when these barriers are removed, we can ensure participation and growth in the ECEC settings.

As stated in the Finnish National Curriculum, for educators to develop their cultural competencies, they must develop the ability to listen, identify, and understand different perspectives, which will help them reflect on their values and attitudes (FNAE 2022, 23). Positive interactions between children from diverse cultural backgrounds significantly impact their individual identity, abilities, and overall well-being, according to the curriculum. This brochure will therefore serve as a tool for educators to develop and harness these skills to ensure participation for all children.

To help not only ourselves but other educators to improve and develop their cultural competencies, this brochure was created to aid and provide guidelines for working at the ECEC. As ECEC professionals working with children from various diverse backgrounds, we can understand and incorporate our knowledge and experiences in making sure the brochure is suitable to be applied in the ECEC settings. Constant cooperation with the working-life partner also provided insights and knowledge which helped in creating the training brochure.

The training brochure will be implemented by educators starting January 2025, we will not be able to get and analyze the evaluation of the brochure once it has been implemented. In the future, more research could be done on the evaluation of the training brochure by educators to assess its effectiveness and applicability in the ECEC setting in an attempt to develop their cultural competencies. Detailed evaluation will provide more information on what is relevant and what needs more assessment.

#### Division of Work

All members of the group researched, implemented, and compiled this thesis. From the beginning of the thesis, a group agreement was drafted between all members to ensure effective collaboration and accountability. To ensure efficiency, we constantly communicated

through various channels like WhatsApp, emails, and Office. When work was divided, every member was required to finish their work on the agreed day and time so as not to fall behind.

All members were required to report any changes to the work and must be accepted by all members before they can be implemented. Although work was divided among us, we ensured that all texts and information provided were linked together and reflected our objectives for the thesis. Having a WLP also helped us get professional expertise throughout the entire thesis process and made sure our thesis's objectives were aligned with the National Curriculum goals for ECEC in Finland.

All in all, we as a group successfully walked towards the outcome of the project. With positive feedback from our WLP and colleagues, it is clear that we touched a timely and most needed area through our thesis.

### **Feedback from WLP**

As a working life partner, collaborating on this thesis has been an insightful and productive experience. The development of the cultural competency brochure reflects the practical needs of Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals, ensuring alignment with the VASU (2022) framework while addressing gaps in current practices.

From the early stages of identifying challenges to co-creating resources and testing the brochure in real-world settings, the process emphasized relevance and usability. The focus on practical strategies, such as self-reflection, inclusive teaching methods, and language support, equips educators with tools to foster culturally sensitive and inclusive environments.

This project underscored the importance of bridging theoretical knowledge with actionable strategies, enabling ECEC professionals to meet the diverse needs of children and families effectively. It also highlighted the value of collaboration between academia and practitioners in driving meaningful change in early childhood education. This brochure is a step toward promoting equity, cultural awareness, and a sense of belonging for all children in Finnish ECEC.

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Appendix : link to the bulb portfolio

<https://eu.bulbapp.com/u/barriers-to-cultural-competence-in-early-childhood-education-and-care-e0?sharedLink=d9e343d1-8a69-4a8e-acb1-2a6e9b4fb320>