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# Children's Participation in Creating the Local Action Plan for Oulunkylä English Kindergarten

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Social Services

Degree Programme in Social Services

Thesis

9 October 2017

Authors Title Number of Pages Date	Adraina Agyei, Réka György, Anna Vinberg Children's Participation in Creating the Local Action Plan for Oulunkylä English Kindergarten 41 pages + 2 appendices 9 October 2017
Degree	Bachelor of Social Services
Degree Programme	Social Services
Instructor	Mervi Nyman, Senior Lecturer
<p>The Local Action Plan in the Early Childhood Education Curriculum has been obligatory since 1.8.2017. The purpose of this thesis was to make the children of Oulunkylä English Kindergarten involved in creating their new Local Action Plan through participation. Our objective was to help the staff at Oulunkylä Kindergarten to create a Local Action Plan where the children's opinions were heard.</p> <p>The thesis is a functional thesis, where we were trying to find out what the children want and have their voices heard. The thesis consists of a literature part and the results of the interviews. We discussed about participation and the different degrees of participation. As a method we interviewed children by using a self-made board game, which was based on the floorplan of the kindergarten. The interviews were carried out in Oulunkylä English Kindergarten. Through the interviews with the children, we collected information that can be included in the Local Action Plan. We asked what they like and what changes they want in their kindergarten. Moreover, we asked for the children's opinions on the kindergarten's activities and ideas for promoting their well-being and safety in the kindergarten.</p> <p>As expected the children had many useful ideas and wishes that we collected during the interviews. After we had analysed the interviews, we made a summary and gave it to Oulunkylä English Kindergarten to use it for the planning of their Local Action Plan. We came to a conclusion that interviewing children with an engaging method, such as using a board game, is an excellent way of promoting children's participation. Furthermore we emphasise that children can participate even in official matters concerning them, such as in our thesis in the making of the Local Action Plan.</p>	
Keywords	children's participation, kindergarten, local action plan

Tekijät	Adraina Agyei, Réka György, Anna Vinberg
Otsikko	Lasten osallisuus Oulunkylän englanninkielisen päiväkodin paikallisen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman laatimisessa
Sivunmäärä	41 sivua + 2 liitettä
Päivämäärä	9. Lokakuu 2017
Tutkinto	Sosionomi (AMK)
Koulutusohjelma	Sosiaali-ala
Ohjaaja	Lehtori Mervi Nyman
<p>Koska paikallinen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma on tehty pakolliseksi uudessa varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteissa, alkaen 1.8.2017, tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli saada Oulunkylän Englanninkielisen Päiväkodin lapset mukaan päiväkodin paikallisen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman laatimiseen osallisuuden kautta. Lasten osallisuutta korostetaan nykyään paljon varhaiskasvatuksessa. Tavoitteenamme oli auttaa työntekijöitä Oulunkylän Päiväkodissa luomaan paikallinen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma jossa lasten mielipiteet kuultiin.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyö on toiminnallinen, jossa lasten mielipiteet ja toiveet tulevat kuulluiksi. Työ koostuu kirjallisuus osuudesta ja tuloksista. Kirjallisessa osuudessa toimme esille muunmuassa osallisuuden eri näkökulmat ja osallisuuden eri asteet. Menetelmänä me haastattelimme lapsia itse tehdyn lautapelin avulla. Lautapeli oli päiväkodin pohjapiirrustuksen näköinen, joka auttoi haastattelun etenemistä. Haastattelut tapahtuivat Oulunkylän Englanninkielisessä Päiväkodissa. Haastattelujen avulla me keräsimme tietoja lapsilta, jotka voidaan sisällyttää paikalliseen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelmaan. Me kysyimme heiltä mistä he pitivät ja mitä muutoksia he haluaisivat päiväkotiin. Lisäksi kysyimme lasten mielipidettä päiväkodin aktiviteeteista ja ideoita hyvinvoinnin sekä turvallisuuden edistämisestä päiväkodissa.</p> <p>Haastattelimme kaiken kaikkiaan 28 lasta. Odotetusti, lapsilla oli monia hyödyllisiä ideoita ja toiveita, jotka keräsimme haastattelujen aikana. Haastattelujen analysoimisen jälkeen teimme yhteenvedon ja annoimme sen Oulunkylän Englanninkieliselle Päiväkodille käyttöön paikallisen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman suunnitteluun.</p> <p>Tulimme siihen tulokseen, että lasten haastatteleminen käyttäen kiinnostavaa menetelmää, kuten lautapeliä, on erinomainen tapa edistää lasten osallisuutta. Lautapeliä voi muunnella oman tarpeen mukaan. Lisäksi korostamme, että lapset voivat olla osallisia myös heihin liittyvissä virallisissa asioissa, kuten opinnäytetyössämme paikallisen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman teossa.</p>	
Avainsanat	lasten osallisuus, päiväkoti, paikallinen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma

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## 1 Introduction

Lately children's participation is becoming a more and more important matter. Especially in the Finnish early childhood education it has been the most talked subject in the past 2 years. In 2010, a new basic Curriculum of Early Childhood Education (Opetushallitus 2016) has been released for kindergartens. The main change and focus in the new curriculum is children's participation and the Local Action Plan becoming obligatory to implement.

Children's participation appears primarily under the general objectives and tasks of Early Childhood Education. It states that active and responsible participation is the base of a democratic and sustainable future. Children's views should be listened to and heard. Children should be given opportunities to take part and have an influence on actions and the practitioners should ensure that every child has a chance to do so. Under the performance culture (toimintakulttuuri) of the Early Childhood Education inclusion, equality and gender equality is emphasized. It is stated that both children and their parents should participate in the making of the kindergarten's action plan. Therefore each kindergarten should make sure that the children and their parents are given the opportunity to participate in the local plan for early childhood education and its development. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

For many years, there has been widespread acceptance, that children are entitled to their fulfilment of their social and economic rights to education, to health care, to an adequate standard of living for proper development and to play. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child introduces an additional dimension to the status of children by recognizing that children are subjects of rights, rather than merely recipients of adult protection, and that those rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard. (Lansdown 2001.)

Article 12 in The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) says that children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously, which also insists on visibility of children in their own right. Children's rights have become synonymous with the word participation and over the last 20 years there has been a lot of work done in advocating and promoting and also analyzing to put participation of children into practice. It is upon

the governments to introduce all the right legislations and policies to ensure that participation of children is known and used so that children are enabled to practice their right to be heard and be a part of decision making (Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010).

The aim of the Finnish Early Childhood Education (ECE) is to promote children's learning development and growth. An essential factor in ECE is creating an educational partnership between the parents and the professionals by interaction and cooperation. The municipality monitors, organizes and supports the implementation of the ECE. For this in Finland there is a general curriculum concerning the ECE. It is a base that can be regionally extended and each kindergarten can write based on the general curriculum their own Local Action Plan. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

In this thesis, based on the research done on participation in the Finnish early childhood education, the aim is to enhance children's participation in Oulunkylä English Kindergarten. By interviewing the children, the children have a say and have a chance to participate in the decision making of their Local Action Plan. The interview will give the adults a chance to see the daily routines in the children's point of view and their wishes about modifying it. The children are considered as relevant members of the kindergarten community.

Municipalities must create a Local Action Plan based on the Basic Early Childhood Education Curriculum. Which is to be used after 1.8.2017 (Opetushallitus 2016.)

The data collected will provide the educators of Oulunkylä English Kindergarten the needed information to create a suitable Local Action Plan. The data will show the children's point of views and their opinions of their kindergarten and their activities. This gives the children a chance to participate in the planning of the Local Action Plan.

Our goal is to have the children involved and create a tool and method that the kindergarten can use before its yearly planning together with the children and possibly with parents.

## 1.1 Oulunkylä English Kindergarten

The working life partner for the thesis is Oulunkylä English Kindergarten. It is located in Helsinki next to Oulunkylä train station. The kindergarten's clients are ordinary families who want their children to learn English in a family safe environment. The kindergarten has 30 children and 4 teachers. The children are 3-6 year olds and are divided into 4

groups based on their age. They gather in the mornings with their small groups for morning circles and do different activities alone or combined with the other groups together. The children learn English from the beginning and they are with a native English teacher from the age of 4 to 5. In the preschool they learn in Finnish but everything else is in English for them. All the children play together for the rest of the day. The kindergarten's values are equality, child-centeredness and security. They listen to the children and their parents as well, respect and appreciate diversity and the teachers are working professionally in a team.

The kindergarten has an association and all parents are members of it. They elect a Board among the parents. The parents of the kindergarten also have a Committee who organizes events for them. Therefore the parents have an active role in the kindergarten's action planning.

## **2 National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care 2016**

### **2.1 Basic curriculum on early childhood education**

The role of the basic curriculum on early childhood education is to support and lead the organization, implementation and development of early childhood education. The basic curriculum sees an equal and a good quality early childhood education throughout the whole nation. The Act on early childhood education and care states the curriculum to be a strategic and goal oriented entirety built up from upbringing, teaching and care, where pedagogy is emphasized. (Act on Early Childhood Education 2015, Opetushallitus 2016)

### **2.2 Local Action Plan in Early Childhood Education Curriculum**

Planning the Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum there are things that should be looked at and be considered locally. These are the decisions concerning the early education, children and families, the preschool curriculum and the basic education curriculum. Also, the children's and young people's welfare plan based on the Child Welfare Act and the integration plan. Furthermore each child has their own educational plan that is created in cooperation with the child's representatives and the professionals locally. (Opetushallitus 2016.)



The Local Action Plan is formed by the organizers of early child education and it is based on the national curriculum guidelines on early childhood education. The Local Action Plan is obligatory and is to be evaluated and developed. The organizer of early childhood education has to make sure that the child, staff and guardians are given a chance to plan and develop the local plan.

The curriculum is made to define, support and guide the arrangement of early childhood education locally. The different aspects of the local community have an impact on the composition of the plan. The Local Action Plan can detail the national curriculum guidelines but it cannot leave out anything that is bound by the law or the basic curriculum's goals and content. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

### 2.3 Child's Individual Curriculum

The Act on Early Childhood Education and Care secures a child, in early childhood, the right to a planned and goal oriented upbringing, teaching and care. For this to happen, every child in childcare has a planned curriculum based on the child's needs and the benefits of the child. The child's curriculum is formed when the child has started childcare. The faculty of the childcare forms a curriculum with the parents' cooperation. The child's opinion and wishes are to become clear and taken into account when planning the curriculum with the parents. The faculty's responsibility is to find ways to see the child's point of view. The common goals that are found in the children's personal curriculums are taken to the group activities. A kindergarten teacher is responsible for planning and implementing the child's early childhood education curriculum.

The child's early childhood education curriculum works as a document to record the child's goals, development and education. The child's aptitude, strengths, interests and individual needs are met when planning the child's early childhood education curriculum. The child's cultural and linguistic views are taken into consideration. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

The child's individual curriculum shows the child's resources, strengths and individual needs visible. It works as an agreement and a plan on how the child is seen as an individual in early childhood education. The child's curriculum observed and evaluated regularly. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

## 2.4 Updated Early Childhood Education Curriculum 2017

Opetushallitus 2017, instructed for the Local Action Plan to be made obligatory after August 1st. 2017. This means that the municipality has the responsibility to see that the curriculum and action plan is used in both municipal and private kindergartens. This means not only the local plan is for preschoolers but also for the other groups.

The Local Action Plan is based on the National Curriculum Guidelines of Early Childhood Education and for the first time they are obligatory. Beforehand they were optional and recommended. The Local Action Plan offers equal early childhood education no matter where it is being offered. (Opetushallitus 2017.)

In the old curriculum guidelines under the child's individual plan it is emphasized that the child's opinion and wishes are to become clear and considered when planning the curriculum with the parents. In the new curriculum guidelines, it states that the individual curriculum is to be planned with the faculty, parents and the child. It also regards the private service to also plan and implement the local plan in the early childhood education curriculum.

The Act on early childhood education emphasizes the importance of participation among the parents and the children. The caregiver, in this case the teacher, is responsible for listening to the child's needs and opinions. The new national curriculum states that the child is to participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the early childhood education. The parents have to be informed of the plans and goals of the early education and they also have the right to influence and participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the child's early childhood education. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

The Local Action Plan obligates the educators to commit to operate based on the values, objectives and contents of the national curriculum guidelines on early childhood education and the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The local plan responds to changing world, it is not to change or reform the information from the old curriculum. The way of working and thinking is always good to update and the new curriculum provides the tools for that.

Every child has the right to a quality upbringing and the curriculum sees that a child starts on the right educational path in life. There is a big emphasis on pedagogy in early childhood education; there is always a need to think about the child's benefit when

planning and implementing the curriculum. The starting point of early childhood education is from the child's experiences, for that the planning, implementing and evaluation should be done with the child.

Early childhood education is now building and emphasizing on a large scale know-how (Laaja-alainen osaaminen). This means that, there is attention put into knowing how to take care of oneself, daily interaction, reading, different kind of skills in interaction and cultural knowledge. A good early childhood education is a great basis for these skills to develop. (Opetushallitus n.d.)

### **3 Participation**

#### **3.1 Definition of participation**

Participation is one of the key concepts of social pedagogy as it is referred to as one of the "P"-s of the Three P's of Pedagogy concept. It implies that pedagogy should consist of personalization, participation and productivity. To be able to teach children in the kindergarten settings the aim is to create them a space to engage in the "social process of knowledge creation rather than the mere consumption of instructor supplied information." (McLoughlin & Lee 2008). This idea supports that children's participation is essential and should be thoroughly considered by professionals in early childhood education settings. Participation means being open to dialogue and connection between people to share ideas and solve problems efficiently. It consists of communication, collaboration, community and connectivity. (McLoughlin & Lee 2008.)

#### **3.2 Participation as a right**

Participation is the fundamental right of citizenship. There are different opinions on children's participation. Some think of children as saviors of the society and when it comes to participation children do not have the same decision-making power as adults have. Some feel like children must be protected from the involvement and the responsibility from the problems in the society. In other words, children must have a carefree childhood. Children must be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved. (Hart 1992.)

For various years, there has been broad acknowledgement that children are entitled to the attainment of their social and economic rights to education, to health care, to an adequate standard of living for proper development, and to play. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child introduces an additional dimension to the status of children by recognizing that children are subjects of rights, rather than merely recipients of adult protection, and that those rights demand that children themselves are entitled to be heard. (Lansdown 2001.)

Article 12 in The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) says that children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously, which also insists on visibility of children in their own right.

It requires us to begin to listen to what children have to say and take them seriously. We must recognize the value of their own experiences, views and concerns (Lansdown 2001). The curriculum on early childhood education has these aspects taken into account and they can be seen in the curriculum.

### 3.3 Different Degrees of Children Participation

From birth, children start to develop competences and skills to participate. When adults respond, and respect the children's participation, it supports and enhances the characteristics of participation. If children are given the chance to express their views, the adult has the responsibility to give the child an opportunity to express the views (Lansdown 2005.)

In the case of participation, children are active and aware of their surroundings in a deliberate way. (Gibson & Pick 2002). Children get to familiarize and comprehend the world through their own activities and communication with others. When children experience involvement with adults and their peers, there is the ability to carry out tasks successfully and encourage development. Children's capacities to participate effectively are influenced by the level of support provided by the adult, respect that the child will get and trust and confidence to show that the child is capable. (Lansdown 2005.) Vygotsky (1978), argues that there is a gap between what children can achieve with or without assistance, which is called "the zone of proximal development", it is within this zone that cognitive development takes place.

When children work collaboratively, each doing their own part as serving as a resource for one another, by taking alternative roles, and taking responsibilities according to their own understanding and expertise, that is the effective model for developing competences. (Taylor et al. 1999.)

Children's participation can affect them in matters of different degrees. The deeper the level of participation the deeper the child can influence in what will happen to the child and the better the child can develop themselves personally. There are three degrees of participation, which give a broad overview of participation. This gives a chance to commit to listening to the child and take the child seriously, it also allows different degrees of engagement. It is important to see that the boundaries between them are rarely clear cut and many initiatives can span more than one level. (Lansdown 2005.)

Consultative processes happen when adults recognize that children have great views and experiences that are valuable contribution to areas that affect them. Participatory processes allow children to be actively involved with development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of different projects and activities. Even though the participatory process is adult initiated like the previous one, it gives the child a chance to share power with the adult involved. Self-initiated processes are those when children are themselves empowered to act and adults serving as facilitators rather than leaders. In the process children, have also the chance to be controlling the activity. Adults respect the children's capacities and create a partnership with the child. (Lansdown 2005.)

### 3.4 Methods of Supporting Participation

There are various reasons why children's participation in planning and decision-making is necessary and desirable. Participation is considered to be a democratic, moral and human right and also a duty in the new model of the welfare state as well as to solve problems between the global and the local. According to Horelli, Kyttä & Kaaja (2002) children are glad to participate in issues that evolve their environment especially when there are guarantees that the deficiencies can be corrected according to their own needs. Horelli, Kyttä & Kaaja (2002) explain shortly how the interrelationship between people and the environment works. The relationship with humans can be seen as a circle formed by activity and experience. People and children try to form their environment according to their self-image. The environment will give people the opportunity to

reflect on themselves and be "identical with itself". The environment in terms of controlling has its own life cycle. When born, a child owns their own regulatory instruments which they practice as they grow. The developing child expands their territory and movement activities in their surroundings and at the same time deepens and broadens their relationship with the environment.

There are different tools to help children's participation in environmental issues and designs. For example, analytical or projective techniques, analyzing relevant places of childhood. Secondly the individual's ability to read and express their environmental needs, for example expressive techniques, such as sticker charts, drawing and internet-assisted design. Thirdly mind mapping and future planning- charts for self-exploration and silent information sharing. Fourthly handling conflicts and planning workshops for communication between the groups, as well as data networking and systematization. Lastly it's important to teach the kids about the media and networking and go through with them the whole process and keep up with it, so that the children can follow clearly and be participating the best way. (Horelli, Kytta & Kaaja 2002.)

### 3.5 Children's participation in decision making

Paying attention and considering the children's perspective and opinion became a concept starting in the 90's. This was due to the new view of the children's rights that emphasized participation and the contribution of children. Thanks to that, children were considered as individuals who can be expected and can form own thoughts and opinion about their own life. (Skivenes & Strandbu 2006.) In early childhood education children's participation is often seen as just listening to the children, which is quite a narrow view. In a more general view the child is seen as an active participant that interacts with the environment and the people in it. "This viewpoint has been adopted more often in recent years when the new sociological paradigm about children as competent actors and active agents rather than needy and helpless beings has been adopted as a part of early childhood education" (Leinonen, Brotherus & Venninen 2014). Also the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 31 states that the 191 Parties that signed the convention "shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity."

However trying to recognize children's perspective and participation in the society may not be sufficient as such. People should try to understand what children think and listen

to their opinions, perspectives and through understanding they should include them in terms of participation. Especially in situations when a decision making that concerns children is present they have the right to be heard and participate in the process. As the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 12 describes that the "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Also it states based on this principle that children should be given the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings.

It's not enough to only invite children to participate in decision making but it is also important to take into consideration how it's done. What are the circumstances and how are the children included in the process of the decision making. Skivenes & Strandbu (2006) suggests that there are four agenda needs to be considered. These include both adults and the children's opinion forming, the expression of both adults and children's perspectives, the recognition of the child as an essential body in the decision-making process and informing the child about the outcome of the decision with clear justification and explanation.

In line with the Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998), Shier (2001) has created a model of participation based on Roger Hart's "ladder of participation" (1992). The ladder represents the different stages of children's participation from manipulation (lowest stage) to child initiated shared decisions with adults (highest step). The original ladder consists of eight steps which of the first three are non-participatory stages and the five highest steps are the actual participatory ones.

Shier (2001) new model completely cut of the first three non-participatory stages from the ladder and focusing on the participatory stages created his new model. This new model was created in order to reveal different aspects of participation mainly for professionals. It consists of five levels of participation.

The first level is when children are listened to. In this stage the adult's do not make any effort to ask for the children's perception and opinion but they are ready to listen when children are expressing their views.

The second level is when children are supported in expressing their views. In this stage professionals encourage children to express their views and opinions. The professionals have to support children in expressing their views by understanding that many chil-

dren are suppressing their thoughts for one reason or another. Therefore the practitioners try to find time and space to help the children express themselves and listen to them carefully.

Level three is when children's views are taken into account and not only listened to like in the previous stages. This is also the stage that is supposed to be met according to the Article 12.1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However this stage doesn't imply that during decision making every opinion of the children should be taken into consideration in favor of the children.

Level four is when children are involved in the decision making process. This level is although not mandatory according to the convention it is still recommended. Involving children in the decision making process can be beneficial for the professionals because children's views on a subject might open up new possibilities. For example when designing a new play setting at a kindergarten would be best to execute with involving children at the decision making process. (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989.)

The final level five is when children power and responsibility for decision making. This stage differs from the previous one because in this stage children are not only given an opportunity to participate in the decision making process. They also have the right to influence the decision that is being made and take responsibility. (Shier 2001.)

There are arguments that children's participation is important and should be encouraged. For that Mannion (2007) suggests that our understanding on children's participation should be reframed. He implies that children's participation should be looked at as adult and children relationship. Furthermore he suggests that there should be a common space between adults and children for engagement and to create dialogue, and we shouldn't only look at children in their "own space". And the place is also important as the participation is a form of the social inclusion. These implications were based on the idea that even in the previously mentioned studies the focus was on the children how they should be involved and empowered to participation with no focus on the adults. As Mannion argues the role of the adults should be significant when we are talking about children's participation. They should help the children to create the space where they can participate and share their views. Adults have their own childhood memories which can help them empower children's participation. (Mannion 2007.)



### 3.6 Challenges in Children's Participation

Sometimes it may be hard for the adult to trust in the process of children's participation completely because they don't know the end result or the possible process. Children's engagement and participation are sometimes slow processes and the temptation to intervene and speed up the process can be very huge. The co-operation between the adults and the child must be smooth in order for the child's actual thoughts and purposes would be brought to light. The adult must see the child as an active and competent actor whose views are important. In addition, adults must be able to interpret the child's ideas with an open mind and remember that how they interpret it is only one way to understand what the child is trying to say. One of the biggest challenges of communication between a child and an adult it is the diversity of linguistic skills. It's important for the adult to pay attention to the child's body language and other ways of expression. Participating children should not feel like a chore for the adults and it should not change the settings of the kindergarten completely but rather be a routine for everyday life for the children in kindergarten. (Korppi & Latvala 2010.)

There is also argument and reluctance that challenges participation of children, because some feel that for example very young children lack certain competences to be able to participate in their own decision making. With young children you may not be able to get efficient answers out of them by asking difficult questions, but for example through art and pictures young children can tell you a lot about their likes and dislikes or their ideas and dreams. All children can take part in issues that are important to them. "Babies and toddlers can be seen as participating in varying degrees depending upon our orientation to their development". Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998) declares that participating is not an obligation for children, but rather a right. Still some argue that giving children the right to have opinions and decisions about their lives will take away from their childhood that they will grow up too fast. That, however, is not the case because even small children make decisions about their lives every day for example choosing what book they want to read or which friend they would like to play with. Giving children the opportunity to participate will not take away from them, it will give them more. Additionally, arguing that children's participation will lead to lack of respect for the parents is not true. It has the opposite effect. Listening to children and allowing them to be a part of their own life and decision making shows love and respect. When children are given respect and a voice of their own, they will give that back and learn that that is a good moral. (Lansdown 2001.)

#### **4 Previous study on children's participation in kindergarten**

A study was done in Finland, by The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area (SOCCA), to find how participation is seen in the kindergartens in the metropolitan area. Questionnaires were sent to various kindergartens around Helsinki Metropolitan Area, about 37% answered the SOCCA (Pääkaupunkiseudun sosiaalialan osaamiskeskus) agency which is 61 kindergartens. The questions that were asked were centered in the theme of how do kindergartens define participation and how do they deal with it. (Stenvall-Seppälä 2008.)

The answers were analyzed how is participation defined, how is it seen in kindergartens and what kind of good practices are used for participation. The answers were then put into themes: Participation in the daily life of a child in kindergarten, participation as a tool for the adult and participation as a group activity.

In the theme of participation in daily kindergarten life, the answers were about the child being a part of the kindergarten's daily life and routines. The participation is seen in the child's point of view. The child is a member of the kindergarten, whose ideas and views are taken into consideration and are respected. Even though there is an adult present in the kindergarten the child is still being given the chance to be independent and explore in peace. In the theme of the participation in kindergartens daily life, the child acts as an agent in participation in kindergarten. Participation in the first theme of answers was only seen as an active act and not keeping in mind that participation is beyond an active act. (Stenvall-Seppälä 2008.)

Participation as a tool at the kindergarten, the adult is either seen as someone who encourages or discourages participation. Participation as a tool was defined the most. The child is someone who is being listened to, the children in the kindergarten might have had a children's meeting with the peers. The children and the adults were put into the same level when it came to participation, there was more the action. Children can contribute to plan theme days and more. The age of the child is always a factor, the extent of the participation varies due to age. Participation with the smaller children need the support from the adult. (Stenvall-Seppälä 2008.)

The third definition for participation was participation being a group activity. The emphasis was put into the communality and group activity rather than thinking about the differences between the child and the adult. The adults and the children work together according to their abilities also keeping in mind that there is continuous interaction with one another. Keeping in mind that the adults and the children have their own roles in the kindergarten, there was still a respect for the children to have their voices heard, not to be in the shadow of the adult and to let the children have their own space to learn and interact. The views of both the adult and the children create activities at the kindergarten. Something that came up a lot was that as the child learns, the child is an active learner at the kindergarten and it is also participation when other peers are involved. (Stenvall-Seppälä 2008.)

In the study, participation was defined through three themes. 92% of the participants thought that participation is more than just active participation, which means increasing participation is going the right way. It is all about how a person relates to participation and the attitudes towards it. The answers always varied due to the attitudes of the adults and the way the kindergarten works. To increase participation, the faculty has to be trained and there is a lot of time that has to be used to excel in facilitating participation. The training can affect the attitudes of the adults and their ways of ing. (Stenvall-Seppälä 2008.)

A 3 year long research held in Iceland in a kindergarten was focusing on the children's perspectives of their early childhood education setting. They focused on children aged from 2 to 6. The aim was to listen to and hear children's opinion and views how they perceive being in the kindergarten. Also an aim was to find out what is good or bad in the kindergarten and what the children can or cannot decide on. This research was based on the uprising ideology of hearing children's voices and listening to them. The Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was taken as a strong base for conducting the research. In this research the researchers were cooperating with the kindergarten teachers first by educating them so that they could conduct the research together. They focused on the children and their interviewing from a different angle, seeing the children different from adults. They used different methods like photographs, different questionnaires and pictures etc. to gain the knowledge from the children, as they see the world differently and these methods fit their knowledge, competence and interests better (Einarsdóttir 2007.)

One research focuses on seven different methods used in interviewing children and adults the same way and argues how that can cause dilemmas especially for adult researchers working with children. The research argues that research done with adults and children is potentially different because of children's position in adult society and the way adults see children. The research was carried out in rural Bolivia, drawing on classroom-based research which focused and explored children's everyday lives at school, home, play and work. The research talks about advantages and disadvantages of using five task-based methods, which are drawings, PRA (participatory rural appraisal) techniques, photographs, diaries and worksheets. These methods have each their own benefits and bad sides considering research with children compared to adult research.

It is highlighted that the way adults see children affects the way they also listen to them. Those who see children as being very different from adults use ethnography as a method to understanding children and their views on life. According to the research the difficulty in using this approach is that the adult can never fully participate in children's social worlds because they can never be children again themselves. Then those who see children to be similar to adults use methods based on children's skills have helped to develop new techniques in researching, such as drawings, pictures and workshops. There should still always be critical reflection when using these methods that focus on children's competences. (Punch 2002.)

Pia Roos (2015, pp7-8) studied children from four to six years of age about their daily routines in the kindergarten through drawings and interviews. Through the stories told by the children she interpreted how the daily routine of the kindergarten is constructed. The research was done to clarify the weekday through the children's perspectives. She also gave insight on how children explain their perspectives. The reality that children build up is strongly linked with play and children's point of view, adults are the ones who organize activities and keep up the order.

The research gave an insight on the interactions between the adult and the child. The interaction is seen considering, how does the adult meet the child in the weekday of the kindergarten. It also considered the way the child builds up relationships with peer in the kindergarten. It was a reflection of the kindergarten, adults and the children and themselves. It is obvious that there is more need in the interaction between the adult and the children in the kindergarten. To empower children there is a need for more

chances to participate and adults must be more aware of the children's points of views and opinions. (Roos 2015, pp 159-160)

Participation among children is constantly been worked on and there is work to be done to make it happen. Adults must be aware of the phenomena and for participation to be active, adults have to understand the different degrees and they have to accept participation.

## **5 Looking at the kindergarten from the children's viewpoint**

The experience of starting kindergarten varies depending on the child. Some adjust to the new environment very quickly and can engage in social activities with other children easily. With some children the transition is not so smooth. It may be very hard for some children to be away from their mother for example and the first shock when the mother leaves them, can be very hard to overcome. The start of kindergarten is a big change for the whole family and it comes with lots of expectations, wishes and hopes. When transitioning into kindergarten it's important to participate the child into the process as much as possible. Parents can prepare the child for the upcoming change by for example reading together books about the topic and visiting the kindergarten beforehand and meeting the teachers. The point of view of children is often left unnoticed and that's why it is important to highlight that as part of children's participation. Often all the surveys and studies focusing on children and their behavior look only at the professionals and parents point of views, therefore the information is often dedicated to the adults' perceptions. (Virtanen 2016.) Each child should be seen as a learning individual rather than a group.

At the kindergarten, the child has to be given the chance to suggest and have a say in the way the daily routines work at the kindergarten. The adults of the kindergarten should listen to the suggestions and take them seriously as seriously children take the adults seriously. There has to be an open atmosphere of trust and honesty, for the child to have the courage to talk about the needs and wants. (Korhonen 1989.)

In many situations, when children are being given the chance to make a difference the adults tend to ask questions that the adult wants to hear, instead of asking open ended questions for the child to explore the mind. (Karlsson 2003.)

The adult has to have faith in herself for the child to also believe in herself. If the activities are activities that are not interesting to the adult, it can have an impact on the child's performance. The adult also has to be a participatory factor in the activity. (Gretschel 2002 pp 20-25.)

A child's participation can be understood in a child centered view, where both the adult and the child are in mutual presence and have the sense of communality. From this the child centered activity, you move up to reflection. (Stenvall – Seppälä 2008.)

Participation is an activity but also a feeling. It is something that comes from within and it is something that one is aware of. Empowerment is something that can describe the process of participation. When a child is empowered the feeling is coming from within. The freedom, acceptance and respect the child gets will enhance the feeling of empowerment in the child. It is also a feeling of self-confidence which empowers the child's ability to communicate with peers and adults. (Siitonen 1999.)

The basics of participation with the child is done in the close network of the child, which in this case are the kindergarten and home (Stenvall-Seppälä, 2008). At the kindergarten, the participation is coming in different parts, which always change according to the circumstances. One part of participation is the chance for the child to decide. Even if the child is not willing to participate it is a participatory action, this way the child has a chance to decide whether she wants to do an activity or not. (Oranen 2008.)

Another part of participation in kindergarten is to let the child know as much information as possible and to help the child be aware of their role in the participatory action (Oranen 2008).

The third aspect of participation is to give the child a chance to express oneself and own thoughts. This is in the sense that the child is encouraged to reflect and show their own views and opinions on a subject. For some children, they need help in these aspects. (Oranen 2008).

The fourth aspect of participation is the child's opportunity to make choices that affect oneself. Even though children are small and they are still capable of thinking about what they want, just as much as an adolescent can do the same. Oranen (2008) ar-

gues that the adult must recognize the things that even the smaller children can have a say in.

Non-participation in the kindergarten is when the child does not have a chance to influence the kindergarten's activities or the child does not have friends or the child is not encouraged to participate in the activities facilitated by the staff (Gretschel & Kiilakoski 2007 pp 11-12).

Not all children have the same kind of courage as some children do. Some children do suffer from loneliness. Which means the child has a hard time to go through the events of life. (Uusitalo-Laakso 2005.) It should not be taken as a bad thing when a child is alone and likes to be independent. This is something that must be encouraged and seen as good strength. A child, who is independent is more likely to unravel creativity, whereas a child that is lonely and scared is more likely to be clingy and will not get the opportunity to be creative. (Peltonen 2004, pp 29-38.)

## **6 Methodology**

We started the preparations of the interviews by familiarizing ourselves with the theory of children's participation, the curriculum of Oulunkylä English Kindergarten and understanding the national curriculum guidelines of early childhood education. Based on the theory and knowledge we have, we were able to come up with interview questions and themes in the interview.

### **6.1 Research questions**

The aim of this thesis is to find out how the children of Oulunkylä English Kindergarten perceive their early childhood education setting. Furthermore, to promote their participation by hearing their perspective on matters concerning the kindergarten's actions.

In order to include children's participation in the kindergarten's actions it is important to ask for their opinion. Through interviewing the purpose is to hear what the children do or do not prefer in the kindergarten. What kind of decisions and/ or changes would they like to make about the kindergarten?

Creating a kindergarten's Local Action Plan benefits from many people's ideas. It also includes the children's perspective. Therefore the objective is to find out if there would

be any ideas or suggestion from the children that could be considered in the kindergarten's new Local Action Plan?

## 6.2 Research ethics

There are principles that build an ethical approach in research they come from principles like respect, equality and nondiscrimination. The principles can be driven into a set of rights, like self-determination, privacy, dignity, confidentiality and fair treatment. (Hill 2005). To have the best results in the research, the children must be seen as equals and researchers should not have power over the children. As researchers we must keep the goals of the research in mind. In Mohann et al's (1996) viewpoint, she states that children should be protected from invasive questioning which exploits the children's understanding and lack of power.

When children are respondents in research, they are active participants by having a set of limited themes to explore on, this way the children contribute to the research agenda. In our thesis, we are researching the children's needs and wants (Hill 2005).

Having the choice of taking part in the research or not is not only a right but it also contributes to the child's wellbeing. It is seen as respect that the child has control to participate or not. As the interviewing process is going on the consent must be asked at different stages. (Hill 2005.)

Children will be asked for their direct consent but parents will be asked first for permission to interview their children. Hill (2005), gave issues for the consent to be valid, it need to be well informed. The children and the parents have the right to know:

1. the aims of the research;
2. what time and commitment is needed;
3. who will know the results;
4. whether there will be feedback;
5. whether confidentiality is promised.

We as researchers, must understand and listen to the children literally. The children also must understand what we are saying and what we are asking from them. This enables a valued research. All children are different, which can arise as a problem when interviewing, since children are in different developmental stages and age, this must be



considered when finding the right interview method that suits the developmental aspects. For example, when interviewing an older age group, a face-to-face interview seems more appropriate for the age group than for the younger age group. This requires finding the right approach for the age group. (Mohann et al 1996.)

### 6.3 The choice of research method

In this research, the aim is to interview each child in Ounlunkylä English Kindergarten about their satisfaction with the kindergarten. The purpose is to help plan the kindergarten's new Local Action Plan by providing an overview of the children's ideas and recommendations what to change. Interviewing is a qualitative research method hence this research would be a result of a functional thesis. The interviewing method used in this thesis is a semi structured interview.

#### 6.3.1 Semi Structured interview

Qualitative research has the characteristics of finding answers to a question, it manages us to get answers that were not determined in advance. Qualitative research allows us to find the answers from the perspectives of the ones involved in the research. The answers from a qualitative research are valued among the people involved in the research and in the focus groups community. The population have their own opinions and behaviors which are essential in the answers from the qualitative research. A qualitative research is a learning experience at the same time, there is strength in the answers. The answers are descriptions of the experiences of the people in the research topic. The data from the qualitative research can be used to gain understanding from a population, in this case the data will help us with the action plan for Oulunkylä English Kindergarten. (Family Health International n.d.)

#### 6.3.2 Qualitative research with children

Doing a qualitative research in a kindergarten setting with young children aged 3-7 can be challenging. Therefore finding the right method for the interviewing is essential. In Finland children's interviewing methods and its development have been looked especially through a doctorate research conducted in Northern Finland in 2003. The researchers suggest that interviewing in a kindergarten setting first and foremost requires the interviewer to get to know the children in their own setting. That means observation

and also getting to know the children but not from a teacher-children point of view. (Kyrönlampi & Määttä 2007 pp 52-55)

Cremin and Slatter (2004 p 461), highlight that it is possible to interview younger children about themselves, this requires for the researcher to be familiar with the child's age and development stage. When the interview is a research method, it has a tendency to bring out the child's point of view and the child's voice to be heard. (Alasuutari 2005, p 145.)

In this thesis two of the interviewers are completely new to the kindergarten therefore they have a chance to observe and get to know the children as "friendly adults who ask questions". One of the interviewer however is a known substitute teacher for the children. This fact might have its benefits considering she is known to the children but not seen every day therefore there is not a strong teacher-children relationship.

Interviewing children is also challenging because the questions asked from the children should be addressed in such way that the children can understand. For that it is crucial that the questions asked in this research are created in a child centered point of view. Also combining the interview with other activities such as drawing can encourage the children to open up. (Kyrönlampi & Määttä 2007, p 56.)

Interviewing children can be done through individual or group interviews. Usually the older the children are the group interview is more possible. However, this thesis is focusing on each children's individual ideas therefore individual interviewing method is chosen.

Concerning the length of each interview it is important to listen to the need of the children. Ideally the aim is to ask all desired questions from each child, however taking into consideration and checking the personal needs to end the interviewing is essential. (Kyrönlampi & Määttä 2007, p 60.)

#### 6.4 Interviewing children

Interviewing children can be very refreshing because children can have a totally different perspective on everything. Getting children to open up and speak may not be so easy but it's worth the wait. McCrum & Hughes (1998) asked children about how they

felt children are usually portrayed in interviews and in the media and also what they don't want to see. The children said they don't like when adults don't take their statements seriously; they make them into a joke or just something cute. Also interrupting and putting words to their mouths send a completely wrong message for children. The children in the interview wanted to be treated equally and with respect and to take their opinions seriously. Listening is the key when interviewing children. Not just listening but really hearing and understanding them. McCrum & Hughes (1998) say that "it is extraordinary how often children involved in the research said things like: "this is the first time anyone has asked us what we think." This shows how vitally important it is to give children the chance to participate and to really focus on the interviews.

When planning the interview, it is good to do some research on the kindergarten for example and the children in it; are there children from different backgrounds, how many children etc. "Children, like adults, are not impressed by ignorant visitors who waste time asking obvious questions" (McCrum & Hughes 1998). It's also good to think in advance whether you are going to interview the children individually or in small groups. Sometimes children open up more when talked to individually and sometimes in groups. If the subject doesn't talk about an individual child's private issues, it might be good to try the interview in small groups first. Also being aware of cultural conventions and expectations is important because of the rights you may not have for interviewing a certain child for example.

If there is a chance to visit the kindergarten before the interview that would be good. That will give the children a chance to know the interviewer and also for the interviewer to get to know the children. Also if you are planning on using any equipment like a camera or a voice recorder, you have a great chance to show those to the children and explain what they are and how they are used, so they are already comfortable with the equipment when the actual interview will happen. (McCrum and Hughes 1998.)

While doing the actual interview it's important to make the child feel comfortable and relaxed. It can be helpful to ask the child share something about themselves and sort of let them move towards you and the interview (Vasquez 2000). Different games and plays may help to break the ice and make it easier for the child to relax and enjoy the interview.

Being patient is a key factor when interviewing children. Adjusting the pace of the interview according to the child's abilities to open up is important and it will make the interview easier. Try to use a language that is understandable for the child and use phrases that only contain one question or thought and don't use double negatives. When talking about a family member for example, use first names like Aunt Susan, not personal pronouns; he or she. Remember to be specific with the questions because children are very literal. Lastly, controlling your own emotions is important, do not show shock or curiosity no matter what the child says. (Keller-Hamela n.d.)

When doing a child-oriented research the research is built on the child's terms. It takes into account the needs and interest of the child as well as activities. Ylärinta (2013) says in her research that children often participate through storytelling and body language. The questions and interviews should be made so that it's understandable for children and their answers can be interpreted into more professional meaning. It's good to start off with a defined topic and strictly limited topics will guide the children and their answers. The purpose of child-oriented research is to seek children's perspectives and knowledge, as well as information. The topic is approached from the child's point of view. When children are the information providers in research studies and their point of views are considered as comprehensively as possible, then we can call it child-oriented research. (Ylärinta 2013.)

## 6.5 Practical implementation and scheduling

In this thesis the interviewing was done through a board game created by us. The semi structured interview questions include both open and close ended questions. The former for more information with reasons and the latter to help engage the children to the interview. Previous researchers suggest that in the beginning of the interview using close-ended questions with young children can be conducive. It makes it easier for the children to answer in the beginning and despite it doesn't give an insight to the children's own thoughts it can help understand the children and create further open ended questions towards them. Likewise interviewing the children one by one makes it easier to use the most suitable questioning style for each child. (Irwin and Johnson 2005).

The board game was based on the layout of the kindergarten including the yard. The function of the board game is to help engage each child during the interview and make

it more interactive. Interviewing children with a help of another source than simple questioning makes it possible to ask more question and make the children more focused. The alertness and natural way for a child to understand is considered in the interviewing. In a child oriented research, playing is a natural way to learn and children's play and storytelling overlap together, and the children tell us constantly. (Ylä-ranta 2013.)

The interviewing took place at the kindergarten. Each child whose parents agreed to the interviewing, took part individually. Each child was asked the same questions with the help of the board game to make it more interesting and participatory from the children's point of view. The list of the interview questions is included in Appendix 1.

## **7 Data analysis**

In this thesis, we interviewed children from the Oulunkylä English Kindergarten to help the educators plan and create the new Local Action Plan for the kindergarten. The thesis required us to begin to listen to what the children have to say and take them seriously. We must recognize the value of their own experiences, views and concerns (Lansdown 2001). The curriculum on early childhood education has these aspects taken into account and can be seen in the early childhood education curriculum.

We started the interviewing with having one of us filming the child from an angle, one interviewing and one taking notes. It did not work for the first two children. They were more nervous about being filmed than being interviewed. We then tried another way that was without filming and only having someone taking notes and one interviewing. This was a better solution but we got a good idea to have a small character, which the child moved around the board game. With this the child was more comfortable and the threshold was lower.

After the interviews were done, we listened to each interview with care and transcribed it all; this helped us with the analyzing of the interviews. Transcribing happens when a recording is listened and the contents is written word by word to a document. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniikka 2006). After reading out the transcriptions, we gathered up all the documents and listed the answers and finding into themes. "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and rep-

resents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.”(Braun & Clarke 2006, p.82).

In this case, the board game worked as a bridge to understand the questions and to put the results and findings into themes. The rooms of the kindergarten worked as our theme basis and from there we collected the data into sub themes, like activities of each room and other suggestions according to the whole kindergarten experience.



Figure 1. The self-made board game, the different rooms marked with numbers.

The results were put into themes based on each room on the board game (Figure 1). We wanted to know what the children liked and their opinions of each room of the kindergarten. As the results were based on each room, we got a clear picture of what the children thought of each room. Theme identification is one of the most significant tasks in qualitative research. Themes are identified before, during and after data collection by reviewing all the literature and data collected and researched (Ryan and Bernard 2017). This can be called thematic analysis, which means a qualitative analytic method that analyzes, identifies and reports patterns, in this case themes, within data.

Thematic analysis describes and organizes the data set in affluent detail. However, thematic analysis usually goes a little further than that, and describes various aspects of the topic at hand (Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2009).

We analyzed the data based on each room of the kindergarten and what the children had to say about each room. The 3D board game worked as a basis for the interviews and helped the children visualize their opinions better. In a thematic interview, the person being interviewed has to understand the interviewing situation. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.)

We also asked questions concerning the kindergarten's activities and actions. Finally we had a group discussion with the children about safety, wellbeing and sustainable lifestyle where the children came up with ideas how to improve those things in the kindergarten.

The manager of the kindergarten gave us a perspective based on the kindergartens needs that helped us with the analyzing. With the given perspectives we could look at the interviews from an important point of view and see what would be beneficial for the kindergarten.

## **8 Results and findings**

Based on the interviews we got a variety of different answers and point of views, but some were definitely at the top as most popular ones. The children surprised us with how detailed some of the answers were and how each room of the kindergarten held a different meaning to them.

Certain rooms turned out to be more popular among the children than others, but we got a lot of great feedback from each part of the kindergarten.

We got loads of ideas and feedbacks concerning the kindergarten's activities and actions. Also about the safety, wellbeing and sustainable lifestyle what steps the kindergarten could take in order to be considered in their daily life.

As seen in the photo of our board game, we interviewed each room in the same order. The interview process started from the first room which was the preschool room (Figure 1. nr1). In this room where the 3-4 years old children eat their breakfast, lunch and

snack, the preschoolers have their morning circles and preschool activities. Because of this the kids have different feelings about that room. For the preschoolers, this room was important because they learned a lot throughout the year and for the little ones who love to eat. Some also had very bad memories because of some food they didn't like. And there were children who were completely neutral towards this room. However, the interviewed children had ideas for the room. They wanted to have dinosaurs in the room to play with during the free time play and suggested that there would be more games in general to play with in the room.

The preschoolers complained that there should be more preschool tasks for them especially mathematics related. The interviewed children said that the preschool book, which they worked on throughout the year, could have been a bit more challenging. They felt like it was too easy and the tasks in the book didn't give enough challenge for them to really work on and develop.

There were also suggestions to have more pictures hanging on the wall.

One child thought that the preschool room was not fun because there was not enough stuff there to play with. When asked why or what the child would want there it was hard for them to give reasons to what he wants and why.

*Interviewer: Joo, Mikäs muu huone tää on?*

*Child: Eskarihuone.*

*Interviewer: Joo, hyvä, no mitäs sä tykkäät täs huoneesta?*

*Child: En yhtään.*

*Interviewer: Et yhtään? No miksi?*

*Child: Mmmm, on niin vähän tavaraa.*

*Interviewer: Okei, eli vois olla enemmän tavaraa. Mitäs tavaraa tääl vois olla. Mitä sä haluisit tonne?*

*Child: Kasinon, mm, en mä tiä.*

*Interviewer: Ai kasinon, no mikä on kasino?*

*Child: En mä tiä mut silti*

From the preschool room, we proceeded with the petshop to the second room which is the Blocks room (Figure 1. nr2). This room is almost every child's favorite place in the whole kindergarten. This room was the easiest to recognize. Also this room is the "Squirrels" group's morning circle room and the 5-6 years old children's resting area after lunch. The room got its name after the big semi soft blocks they have in there.



The children love to build different things from the blocks during the free time play. Therefore every child had some recommendations for the room.

They wanted a real live dinosaur, and were wishing for toy dinosaurs to play with. The children wished for more blocks and donuts in the room. They even mentioned that in the cellar there are more blocks and it would be nice to use them.

*Child: Tota tän päiväkodin varastossa on lisää blokseja.*

*Interviewer: Oikeesti?!*

*Child: Ne kaikki sinne!*

The children enjoyed gymnastics, so the suggestion was that they could build a small gymnastics area in there with a big mattress and a ladder.

The children wished that there would be tables in the room; to sit and read books and also bookshelves for the books. We learned that the children enjoyed reading a lot.

A dart board was also something the children suggested to put in the room. As we can see, the ideas varied from one end to another, but all were very interesting and described the children's interests well. The children wanted more diverse activities for one room.

The third room is the dining room (Figure 1. nr3). This room is the kindergarten's fore room where the 5-6 years old children eat their lunch and snack. This room is also used as a play area during the free time play mostly for board games, building, reading and dinosaur toys. Accordingly the children were mostly referring to this room as the place where they eat and play. The wishes from the children included more dinosaurs and ships to play with and more books on the shelves to read. They specifically wished for books about dinosaurs and for the "World of Cars" book. Dinosaurs were a popular interest amongst the children, as we could see based on the wishes on this room as well. Wishes were made also for blocks to this room and for a bed and more tables.

The children who eat in this room, also wished that they could decide or vote what they eat in the kindergarten.

Reading through the interviews the children have a lot of playtime and a lot of areas to play in. The small restroom (Figure 1. nr4) where the younger children rest in, was asked to be more home like. At the time of the interview there was only a sofa. The restroom could be turned into a multifunctional room for the children. The children said

that the restroom is fun because they can play football there. When asked what could be added there, they would add better goalies to the room.

The dress up room (Figure 1. nr5) has mostly dressing up clothes for different themes. It resembles a home with a small kitchen. This room has mostly clothing for girls. The children shared their opinion about the room saying it should have something different than only clothes.

*Interviewer: no miten sitten jos nimetön menee tähän pikkuhuoneeseen, mitäs siel on*

*Child: ei kivaa*

*Interviewer: ei mitään kivaa. No mites siitä huoneesta voi tehdä kivan*

*Child: en mä keksi*

*Interviewer: ei mitään, mite.., mimmonen se pitäis olla et se olis sun mielestä kiva.*

*Child: siel olis jotain muuta ku vaatteita ja*

*Interviewer: joo jotain muuta, no mitä vois olla jotain muuta, mikä sua kiinnostais*

*Child: umm, emmä keksi*

The children also suggested that there could be dress up clothes for boys also for example dinosaur costumes.

The art room (Figure 1. nr6) is used mainly for drawing and coloring during the free time play and for art workshops. The children like this room because during the workshops they can do interesting things and get messy with permission. However they had some wishes concerning the room. They wished for more coloring pictures, specifically for dinosaur coloring pictures. They mentioned the need of more scissors and the possibility of painting during the free time and more painting equipment. They specifically wished to have "Glitter and other cool stuff so you could make cool art pieces by yourself and not in a group". The children were wishing for better pencils and more colors. Concerning the design of the room there were recommendations to have flowers in the room and bookshelf with minion books on it.

The kindergarten had two different places to change the clothes. The changing rooms are downstairs of the kindergarten and the other one was upstairs (Figure 1. nr7) on the same floor as the kindergarten and the rooms. The teachers wanted to know which one the children preferred. The children gave good answers when asked which they preferred the best.

*Interviewer: noni, sä muistat et me puettiin täällä ylhäällä eks ni, ja nyt on taas alhaalla, mikä olis tai mikä oli paras, siellä ylhäällä pukeminen tai alhaalla pukeminen, kumpi oli parempi/kivempi*

*Child: se alhaalla*

*Interviewer: miks*

*Child: sielt pääsee nopeemmin ulos*

*Interviewer: nopeemmin ulos, okei, joo,*

According to the children dressing downstairs was better because it gave a better chance to speak and have a conversation with the other children.

*I: Niin eli puetaan päälle. Eikö niin? Muistatko että täällä ylhäällä puettiin ja nyt taas siellä alhaalla. Ylhäällä vai alhaalla?*

*C: Alhaalla*

*I: Miksi*

*C: Koska siellä voi aina jutella toisille kavereille.*

*I: Joo, okei, jutella toisille kavereille*

Some thought that upstairs was better for going outside.

*Interviewer: Joo, muistatko kun me viime viikolla me vielä puettiin tääällä ylhäällä.*

*Kumpi on parempi, ylhäällä vai alhaal pukeutuimnen. Kummasta pidät enemmän?*

*Child: mmm. Ylhäällä*

*Interviewer: Miksi?*

*Child: Mmmm.. Siellä on helpompi jos mennään pois*

*Interviewer: Okei*

Children's point of view of the outdoor area

We asked the children about their outdoor playground. They wanted remote controlled toys for outdoors.

*Interviewer: Okei, nyt ollaan ulkona. Mites sä tykkäät pihasta. Leikkikodin pihasta onko se kiva*

*Child: mm, aika kiva,*

*Interviewer: mitäs jos siel olis paranneltavaa, mitäs sinne voisi laittaa, että siitä tulis kivempi*

*Child: Mmmm... Ööö.. Radio-ohjattavia ulkoiluvälineitä*

*Interviewer: Radio-ohjattavia ulkoiluvälineitä, joo se olisi kiva*

Children's point of view of the trips

Children's wishes for themes to learn about

We asked the children what they would like to learn about in the kindergarten and have a theme week/month about. The idea for this came because the kindergarten has already had different kinds of themes, like Suomi 100 for example. The wishes were the following: To learn about dinosaurs, have an under the sea theme and learn about princesses. We didn't get that many wishes and suggestions about the themes, because it was difficult for most of the children to understand what we meant by weekly themes.

Children's activity suggestions

According to some children the rest time is nice especially the reading and it should always be so. They had specific wishes for activities to do with the kindergarten. These were going to Linnanmäki the amusement park, more trips to the library and more trips to the forest. Some children named place to visit such as Hiekka Hissi Park, Etupelto and a trip to Vääsky. The children said it would be nice to go to the theatre more often and to go hiking sometimes.

Looking at the activities inside the kindergarten some children were wishing that the teachers would play with them together in the blocks room. Also, that the children could decide the sleeping arrangement time to time. They said that they enjoyed long bus drives, so going somewhere far would be nice.

Children's recommendation for wellbeing, safety and a sustainable lifestyle

We discussed with the children what steps could they take to make sure wellbeing, safety and sustainable lifestyle are considered in their daily lives in the kindergarten. The children had many good ideas. The following ideas/rules came all from them:

- Everyone should be let play freely but according to the kindergarten's rules.

- Outside play should happen also by the rules agreed.
- Everyone should wash their hands.
- The little ones should not take any scissors or should not climb without permission and adult supervision in order to not to get hurt.
- No drinking straight from the jug nor from the milk carton.
- No one should lick the floor.
- No licking the others.
- Nobody should eat sand and pebbles nor grass to stay healthy.
- Nobody should put their hand into each other's mouths.
- If someone is sick they should not go to the kindergarten so that they don't get others sick.
- Always dress up according to the weather so that no one gets sick.
- Separating the trash so that paper, carton, bio waste, plastic, cans, glass, batteries and general waste.

The children had great ideas in what they would like in their kindergarten and what they would like to be changed in the kindergarten. The children gave their thought on very relevant issues concerning their environment where they spend most of their days in.

## **9 Discussion**

The purpose of this thesis was to help Oulunkylä English Kindergarten plan their Local Action Plan with the children's participation. The newest Early Childhood Education Curriculum (ECE) - that only got published after we started to write our thesis- requires each kindergarten to have their own yearly updated Local Action Plan. The new ECE curriculum also put an emphasis on the children's participation. (Helsingin Kaupunki 2017). In this thesis the aim was to make it possible that the children of the kindergarten participate in the making of the Local Action Plan.

In order to hear the children's voice and have them participate in the planning we interviewed 24 children of the kindergarten. The interviews were done in cooperation with the kindergarten and with the aid of a self-made board game.

Oulunkylä kindergarten has acknowledged the rights of children. They opened to the idea to give the children an opportunity to have an influence in their action plan. The

personnel in Oulunkylä English Kindergarten, like other kindergartens, have the obligation to offer the children a learning environment that has an emphasis on quality and equal education. (Opetushallitus 2016.)

### 9.1 The process

With the help of the interviews and the board game, we wanted to help the Oulunkylä English kindergarten support the children's participation in making the kindergarten's Local Action Plan. The kindergarten wanted to know how the children see the kindergarten and what would they change if they could. Supporting children in participation and doing it in a child-oriented way means seeing the child as an active participant in decision making and we wanted to ensure that the children in the Oulunkylä English kindergarten had that. Interaction is a core value in participation and without it participation is not possible. With interaction, the joy of learning becomes a relevant issue since it means the feeling of belonging, as well. (Leinonen, Brotherus and Venninen 2014.) In supporting children's participation, we understood that it is not enough to just invite the children into participating and making decisions, but to see them as active participants and an essential body in the whole process of decision making (Skivenes and Strandbu, 2006).

Before we started the interviews we visited the kindergarten in advance, so that the children could see us and we would not be total strangers to them once the interviews started. One of us knew the children beforehand from working at the kindergarten, which gave us an advantage. The interviews could have gone differently, if we all were strangers to the children.

The children were a little reserved at first, but most of them relaxed a lot during the interviews with the help of the board game. The children were very intrigued by the board game and were eager to look at it and ask about it. Most of them realized right away by just looking at it, what it was. It was interesting to see how the children reacted to the board game and moving the helping figure from room to room. Some children used the figure very willingly, while others had a more hard time understanding the meaning of the figure.

We could see that some of the children were much more open to answering questions than others. A few gave very detailed and elaborate answers that surprised us. It was

interesting to see just how differently the children viewed the kindergarten and its daily routines.

We based our questions based on the basis of early childhood education work in Helsinki and in relation to each room of the kindergarten and some questions were questions about the previous activities done at the daycare. Early childhood education work should be planned according to the goals of the Act on early childhood education, we wanted our questions to answer them and go according to the guidelines of early childhood education.

When asking the questions we had to be constantly careful that the questions were open ended and the answers could be used for the action plan. We had to be sure to not ask misleading questions or lead the questions to a certain answer.

Involving children in the process of making the Local Action plan is an immense step in supporting their participation in the kindergarten. When we give the children a chance to speak up and be honest about everything regarding their surroundings and activities, we empower them to participate. Through the interviews we got to hear what the children had to say about the kindergarten and how they would like to form the Local Action Plan. This is all part of decision making, regarding the Local Action Plan for the kindergarten.

Involving children in the decision making by interviewing them is part of level two in the Shier (2001) model of participation with children. This level is when adults are the ones who design and run the project and children are consulted. The adults explain the full process to the children and they understand it, then adults listen to their opinions carefully and take them seriously. "This model recognizes that there are many reasons why children, who have opinions on many issues, may not express those opinions to adults working with them" (Shier, 2001). Those reasons can include low self-esteem, shyness, lack of confidence, previous negative experience about being listened to etc. Through interviewing the children these barriers can be broken and the children can feel empowered to participate.

## 9.2 The participation

Participation comes in different degrees, it can come from the adult being the one that initiates the participation or the child initiates the participation and adults are to offer their help when needed. In the thesis, the adults became the ones that initiate the participation, as the ones who give the children the chance to have an effect on their daily life in the kindergarten. The children became the ones who help plan their activities and daily schedules and the adults are the ones who give the tools to do so. It is essential to have the full commitment of the personnel, to see that the results will be used for the good of the children. The personnel has to have the readiness to work alongside the children, in regard to listening to their opinions. (THL 2016.)

There is constant interaction between the workers and the group around them, this is the guardians and the children. Having the children part of the interest group, it offers the area for participation. Working with board game introduced a new way to help the personnel to develop their performance culture. Early childhood educators are trying to find new ways to increase participation and to give more light to pedagogy. (Opetushallitus n.d.)

The personnel in the kindergarten received the results of the interviews and are going to use it in planning the Local Action Plan. Participation can be implemented in various ways with the cooperation of the adults and the children depending on what the organization values. (THL 2016.)

## 9.3 Critical evaluation

It is important to look at one's thesis critically especially when it was done involving children. When writing an intellectual text based on interviews and its findings evaluating the whole process is necessary. Also critical thinking is needed to present one's ideas and findings of the study conducted in the thesis. It is essential that we not only present the findings and the theory behind it but also that we understand the concepts and the interrelation in between them. Furthermore, to avoid conceptual misunderstandings. (Paul and Elder 2006.)

In this thesis a huge emphasis was put on the children's participation and on the interviewing process and its analyzation. Planning the interview questions asked from the children is not easy because the children can easily be bored or non-respondent based on their mood or abilities. We gathered numerous possible questions to be asked from the children, taking into consideration the recommendations found in previous studies done with interviewing children. (Ylärinta 2013; Keller-Hamela n.d.) However, only part



of the questions were used and new questions also arose during the interviews. We used a board game to keep the children focused during the interviews. It was a learning process for us to realize a working method for the interviews. After the first interview immediately it became clear that filming the children would distract them therefore we changed into only recording their voice and taking some notes during the interviews to remember how the children felt during the interviews. Also after the first couple of interviews it became clear that we have to have an order of questioning combined logically with the board game. The board game was a big success because it really made the children stay focused during the interview and the pawn (a Pet Shop figure) they could move in the game made it even enjoyable. Looking back at the interviews we learned a lot how it could have been done differently and more effectively. For example when we got some extra information from the kindergarten regarding the Local Action Plan we did a group interview with the children. At that point we knew that gathering collectively ideas from the children would be the most effective way and we realized the importance of the previous interviews made in one-on-one sessions.

## **10 Conclusion**

The original idea of this thesis arose from the new changes made in the Early Childhood Education Curriculum. It puts an emphasis on participation especially on children's participation in the kindergarten's life. Also it requires a yearly renewed Local Action Plan from every kindergarten. The need for this Local Action Plan in Oulunkylä English Kindergarten (OEK) and their willingness to have their children participate in the planning and listen to the children's needs and ideas, gave us the opportunity to combine the needs and conduct our thesis.

In order to have the children participate in the planning of the kindergarten's Local Action Plan we interviewed 24 children out of the total of 30 before the summer break. To get as much information as possible from the children and keep them focused during the interviews we created a board game representing the kindergarten. The board game worked as a basis to the interviewing. It opened up the children and introduced a new way to work with them. It offered a clear view of what we wanted to know from the children. The board game helped the children see what room was been talked about and they could elaborate their answers better with the clear vision.

We also organized a group interview in the fall with specific needs from the kindergarten for their planning concerning safety, well-being and sustainability in the kindergarten.

After analyzing the interviews we made a report for OEK. It included all the children's ideas and suggestions thematized in a logical order again using the board game as an aid. The children had many eye opening ideas for the kindergarten's future actions. Also the children provided useful ideas for the planning of the Local Action Plan. Mostly on what activities and learning topics the kindergarten should have and how the safety and well-being should be secured.

The thesis opened a new way of working with children. The board game and interviews supported the path to participation for the group in Oulunkylä English Kindergarten. The aim was to find out how the children perceive the daily life in the kindergarten. Through the interviews we got a lot of feedback and opinions from the children that are useful for the personnel to plan ahead. Another aim was to find out the children's interests and their wishes for the activities in the kindergarten. For this the interviews with the children brought many fruitful ideas and wishes. This resulted into discussion on how to implement the answers into the action plan.

We were looking at the possibilities to find useful ideas and wishes from the children that can be applied in the planning of the kindergarten's Local Action Plan. Through the interviews we managed to get many helpful and practical opinions and suggestions from the children which according to the kindergarten's manager is very useful. To think further, we must think about how the kindergarten will use the information to the benefit of their Local Action Plan.

Starting the thesis process and contacting the working life partner was easy, because one of us was familiar with Oulunkylä English Kindergarten. The kindergarten was on board with it from the start and was happy we could help them with our thesis. The cooperation went smoothly with the kindergarten, we were welcomed to go in and get to know the children and have a meeting with the manager. We scheduled two days for the interviews, and the kindergarten gave us a space to do them in.

During the data collection process, the preparations for the interviews and the analysis we learned that there are certain things that need to be organized in different ways or can be further developed. For example the board game is something that could be used and developed for further use. It could be implemented in the kindergarten's daily life such as using it during workshops or getting feedback from the children. It could be built also together with the children by that improving the participation of the children. In the future, the interviews could be done in a more logically systematized way taking into consideration the children's abilities and attention span.

We had a great time interviewing the children. The idea of a board game can be modified according to the kindergarten and used to get feedback and ideas from children. The theory and results that we got opened our eyes to the future in working with children and having them participating. Through the thesis process the children's voices were heard and a new supportive method to interview children was introduced.

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## Interview questions

### Close ended questions

- -How are you?
  - Are you having a good day?
  - Do you like this kindergarten?
- -Is it easy to make friends here?
- -What do you think of the teachers in here?
- -Do you like to play a lot?
- -Do you like the yard and playground?
- -Which room is your favorite/least favorite in the kindergarten?
- -If you could choose something in the kindergarten what would it be?

### Open ended questions

- How do you like being here?
- Why do/don't you like the kindergarten?
- What is your favorite thing in the kindergarten and why?
- What is the worst thing in the kindergarten and why?
- What activity do you like the most/least?
- If you could have more of something in the kindergarten what would it be?
- If you could make something disappear from the kindergarten what would it be?
- What would you like to do more if it would be possible?
- What kind of places would you like to visit with the kindergarten?
- What would be an ideal day/week in the kindergarten if you could plan it?
- What kind of themes would you be interested in?
- Would you like to go for more trips?
- Do you like music would you like to have more or less of it?
- Do you like sports would you like to have more or less of it?
- Would you like to do more in pairs or in groups?
- How would you like to learn new things? -play? Etc?

### ART:

- Do you like to do art?
- What are your favorite kind of art activities?
- What would you do different in art room?
- How would you like to do your art activities?

### Playroom

- What is your favorite object in the playroom?
- What would you change in the playroom?
- How would you like to play in the playroom?
- What games do you like the most?



Preschool room

- How was preschool?
- What did you do?/What kind of activities
- What was your favorite thing in preschool?

Sleep Room

- How do you like this room?
- What would you change?
- What kind of activities would you like to do here?
- Would you like to sleep more here?
- Is it peaceful here when you are sleeping?

Dining room

- What do you do here?
- What more would you like to do here?
- Do you like the food?

Questions about the wellbeing, safety, sustainability

- What do you think what rules could we have in the kindergarten so that everybody is going to feel safe in the kindergarten?
- What should we do to so that everyone is going to be healthy?
- Should we have some rules?
- How could we help the environment?
- What could we do differently in the kindergarten?

## Parental consent

Dear parents!

We are three 3rd year students from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. Our names are Adraina Agyei, Réka György and Anna Vinberg. We are completing our Bachelor's Thesis in cooperation with The Oulunkylä English Kindergarten.

Our thesis will help the kindergarten to plan the new Local Action Plan where children's participation is emphasized. For our data collection we want to interview the children through a board game made by us. The board game is in 3D and it is the floorplan of the Kindergarten. Through the support of the board game, the children will let us know things like: what they like and what they would want in the ten.

Our plan is to film the interview to see the body language and record for our thesis. We are planning on interviewing as many children as possible to get a big picture of the children's viewpoints and opinions.

The interviews will be done from 1.6 for about two weeks depending on how many children we can interview.

We ask from you, parents, if we can interview your child.

Please fill in the section below and return it by 30.5.

The video data collected will be deleted after transcription as it states in the Personal Data Act 34§ and children's names will be changed.

Please contact us for more details

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Group

Can participate in the interview

Cannot participate in the interview

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's signature and name