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Co-operation with Families

Perceptions of Kindergarten Teachers

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<p>This bachelor's thesis is a case study of kindergarten teachers' perspectives on co-operation with families in a kindergarten in Porvoo. There are several ongoing changes in early childhood education in Finland, which makes this topic current. The changes include the new national core curriculum for early childhood education, which defines the work in kindergartens, and the new early childhood education act, which changes the work titles used in early childhood education and aims to increase the number of employees with university level degree.</p> <p>This qualitative study included a semi-constructed interview, where in total four kindergarten teachers were interviewed. Deductive content analysis was used to analyze the collected data. The collected data was analyzed through theoretical frameworks of participation, empowerment and dialogue. The study had three aims. One of them was to find out about the work done with families, what it include, what kind of challenges there are and how it is actualized. The second aim was to find out if their educational background affects their perceptions of the co-operation. The third aim was to find out about the usage of the planning time, for what is it used for and how it is organized.</p> <p>The results gained from this study follow the results of similar studies. All the interviewees saw the importance of co-operation with families and highlighted the importance of multi-professional teamwork. The interviewees with Bachelor of Social Services degree saw that they had gotten more tools for the work with families from their education than the ones with a Bachelor of Education degree. Further, this study indicated that even though there is a strong will to enhance the participation of parents in kindergartens, the employees do not find it easy to raise sensitive topics for discussion. This was the case especially with parents with challenging behavior. Also, according to the collected data, there were challenges connected to communication and interactions between the parents and the early childhood education professionals.</p> <p>This study raised some interesting topics, but to generalize the results, further studies with larger samples need to be conducted.</p>	
Keywords	early childhood education, kindergarten teacher, Bachelor of Social Services, co-operation with families, participation, empowerment, dialogue

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<p>Tämä opinnäytetyö on tapaustutkimus lastentarhanopettajien näkemyksistä perheiden kanssa tehtävästä työstä porvoalaisessa päiväkodissa. Suomalaisessa varhaiskasvatuksessa on tapahtunut lukuisia muutoksia, mikä tekee tästä aiheesta ajankohtaisen. Nämä muutokset sisältävät uudet varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet, jotka määrittelevät päiväkodeissa tehtävää työtä sekä uuden varhaiskasvatuslain, joka muuttaa varhaiskasvatuksessa käytettäviä ammattinimikkeitä ja pyrkii lisäämään korkeakoulutettuja työntekijöitä varhaiskasvatuksessa.</p> <p>Tässä kvalitatiivisessa tutkimuksessa kerään tietoa puolistrukturoidulla haastattelulla, jossa haastateltiin yhteensä neljää lastentarhanopettajaa. Kerätyt tiedot analysoitiin sisällönanalyysillä. Kerätyt tiedot analysoitiin osallisuuden, voimaantumisen sekä dialogisuuden teoreettisten viitekehysten kautta. Tällä tutkimuksella oli kolme tavoitetta. Yksi tavoite oli selvittää perheiden kanssa tehtävää työtä: mitä se sisältää, minkälaisia haasteita siinä on sekä kuinka sitä toteutetaan. Toinen tavoite oli selvittää koulutuksen vaikutusta havainnoista perheiden kanssa tehtävästä työstä. Kolmas tavoite oli selvittää suunnitteluajan käyttöä, mihin sitä käytetään ja kuinka se on järjestetty.</p> <p>Tästä tutkimuksesta saadut tulokset noudattavat vastaavista tutkimuksista saatuja tuloksia. Kaikki haastateltavat näkivät perheiden kanssa tehtävän työn tärkeänä sekä korostivat moniammatillisen tiimityön tärkeyttä. Sosionomitaustaiset haastateltavat kokivat, että he olivat saaneet opinnoistaan enemmän työkaluja perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön kuin kasvatustieteen kandidaatin tutkinnon suorittaneet. Lisäksi tämä tutkimus osoitti, että vaikka päiväkodeilla on tahtoa lisätä vanhempien osallisuutta toiminnassaan, työntekijät eivät koe hankalien asioiden puheeksi ottamista helpoksi. Puheeksi ottaminen koettiin hankalaksi etenkin haastavasti käyttäytyvien vanhempien kanssa. Materiaalista nousi esiin, että vanhempien ja varhaiskasvattajien välisessä kanssakäymisessä sekä kommunikaatiossa on haasteita.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset nostivat esille ajankohtaisia näkökulmia varhaiskasvatuksen parissa työskenteleville. Yleistävämpien johtopäätösten tekemiseen tarvitaan jatkotutkimuksia suuremmalla otannalla.</p>	
Avainsanat	Varhaiskasvatus, lastentarhanopettaja, perheiden kanssa tehtävä työ, sosionomi, osallisuus, voimaantuminen, dialogisuus

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1 Introduction

This bachelor's thesis is a case study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions of co-operation done with parents. This qualitative case study researches kindergarten teachers in Porvoo from two different educational backgrounds. The aim was to find out their thoughts about the work with families, what it includes, what are the challenges and does the educational background affect their thoughts. These aims are inspected through the theoretical framework of dialogue, participation and empowerment.

This topic was chosen because of the current changes in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In 2016 the new national core curriculum for ECEC was written and it has been effective since 1.7.2017. In this core curriculum the co-operation done with families is seen as an important part of the work done in kindergartens. The Finnish ministry of education and culture renewed the law for Finnish early childhood education in 2018. The new early childhood education law replaced the old one as of 1st of September 2018. At the center of these changes has been the position of Bachelors of Social Services working as kindergarten teachers. It has been said that the strengths for Bachelors of Social Services working as kindergarten teacher is that they have more knowledge of co-operation done with families and other instances than Bachelors of Early Childhood Education. (Karila, K. & al., 2017, pp. 80-84, Talentia, 2018.) The new law changed the qualifications needed to work as a kindergarten teacher and also the titles used in the field. The future graduates of Bachelors of Social Services can no longer work as kindergarten teachers, but will have a new title and work description for work done in kindergartens. (Varhaiskasvatuslaki, 2018.)

This case study examined the co-operation with parents through the theoretical framework of empowerment, dialogue and participation; what does it include, what kind of challenges there are and does the kindergarten teacher's educational background affect their perceptions of these. The co-operation with parents begins with the orientation discussion when a child is accepted to the kindergarten. After this it continues as the daily discussion about the child, the events organized in the kindergarten and the annual updates of the child's individual early childhood education plan. Most of the challenges in the co-operation with parents are connected to the interaction and communication between the early childhood education professionals and the parents. The results were that the educational background does not affect the perceptions of the work with families

and that the only part where the interviewees saw a difference was the tools that their education has given them for the co-operation with parent. The interviewees with and education from the social services field saw that they had gotten tools for the co-operation with parents whereas the interviewees with an education from educational field felt that their education did not give much tools for it.

This bachelor's thesis has eight chapter. The first chapter includes the introduction to this study. The second chapter includes a description of the Finnish early childhood education system, how it was originally formed, how it has changed throughout the years and what kind of professionals are working in the field. In the third chapter there is information about the co-operation with parents, what does it mean and how does the early childhood education curriculum define it. The fourth chapter includes the definitions of the theoretical frameworks used in the study; it defines dialogue, empowerment and participation and explains how these are relevant for early childhood education. The fifth chapter is about the methodology used in the study and how the study was conducted. The sixth chapter describes the study results through the theoretical framework and answers the study questions. The seventh chapter includes a discussion about the study; what was discovered and how is the theoretical framework connected to the results gained. The eight chapter concludes this bachelor's thesis and suggests further study topics that rose from the study.

2 Early Childhood Education in Finland

Early childhood education has been an important part of Finnish history and the pedagogical viewpoint came to it almost from the beginning. It has developed from a social service into an educational service, available to all children under the age of 6. Originally in 1917 early childhood education functioned under the school board. In 1924 it was transferred under the social ministry, where it stayed until the year 2013, when it was transferred to the ministry of education and culture. (Alila, K. & al., 2014, pp. 8-14, Varhaiskasvatustaki, 2018.)

Uno Cygnaeus was the creator of Finnish school system, but also an important part of the history of Finnish kindergartens. He thought that teaching women was an important step to ensure children's wellbeing. This was a similar idea that Friedrich Fröbel had and while Cygnaeus visited German in the late 19th century and got to know Frobel's ideology

better, he became convinced that Fröbel's pedagogical views were the best way to bring up small children. (Salminen, H. & Salminen, J., 1986, pp. 8, 90-93.)

In 1863 the first kindergarten based on Fröbel's pedagogy opened in Jyväskylä, Finland, to the same place, where they trained folk school teachers. After Uno Cygnaeus death in the 1890s first kindergartens were closed. However, Hanna Rothman and Elisabeth Alander had opened their first kindergarten functioning under Fröbel's pedagogical ideas in 1888 to Helsinki. They were called folk kindergartens and meant for poor parents' children, who needed a place while their parents were working. Rothman also provided teaching for childminders. Later they also started to train folk kindergarten educators, which was the preceding of Finnish kindergarten teacher education. (Salminen, H. & Salminen, J., 1986, pp. 90-109, Välimäki A.-L., 1999, pp. 81-106.) There have been two different educational degrees for obtaining kindergarten teacher's qualification until the year 2018. For more information see chapter 2.2.

Early childhood education in Finland combines education, care and instruction with pedagogical emphasis. These three elements combined create a holistic entity where pedagogy is present in all situations. (Finnish national agency for education, 2017, p. 24, Ahonen, L., 2017, pp. 27-28)

2.1 Current Attendance and Staff Ratio in Early Childhood Education in Finland

In 2016 there were 68% of the children aged from 1 to 6 taking part in early childhood education (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2017). This number is lower than in other Nordic countries and the reasons for it are unclear. One reason might be that often mothers remain at home with their children for several years after child's birth. This seems to be the case especially for mothers with low income or low educational background. (Karila, K., Kosonen, T. & Järvenkallas, S., 2017, pp. 29-32.)

From the year 1996 all children in Finland under the age of 7 have had a right to attend early childhood education. However, in 2016 the law for early childhood education changed that children are no longer entitled to fulltime daycare if one of their parents is at home, but instead they can only attend 20 hours a week in kindergarten. (Varhaiskasvatuslaki, 1973/36 § 11a, Karila, K., Kosonen, T. & Järvenkallas, S., 2017, p. 17).

The decree on children's day care defines the group sizes for kindergartens. In one group there can be a number of children that corresponds to three adults. This means that in a group with children under the age of 3, where there can be up to four children per one adult, leading the maximum group size to be 12 children. In a group with children over the age of four there can be up to 8 children per adult, leading to a maximum group size being 24 children. The ratio for children over the age of 3 was increased in 2016. Before it was one adult per 7 children over the age of 3. (Asetus lasten päivähoidosta, 1973/239, §6.)

2.2 Early Childhood Education and Care Professionals

In 2018 the Finnish ministry of education and culture drafted new legislation for the early year's education, as the old law was from 1973. In the new Early Childhood Education and Care Act, there are three different kind of professionals working in early childhood education. Bachelor of Social Services Students entering school after 2018 will not be called teachers of early childhood education, since their education is not focused solely on early childhood education. The Bachelor of Social Services will be called an Early Childhood Education's Bachelor of Social Services [varhaiskasvatuksen sosionomi], whereas the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education would have the title of Early Childhood Education Teachers [varhaiskasvatuksen opettaja]. The main argument for this change was that the Bachelor of Social Services are not seen to have enough pedagogical skills to be working as teachers, and their education is more focused in working with families and working in co-operation with different governmental agencies, such as child protection services and social services. (Karila, K. & al., 2017, pp. 80-84.)

Currently people working as kindergarten teacher come from several different educational backgrounds. Until the year 1973 kindergarten teachers graduated from post-secondary education, after this it was also possible to study in universities. In 1995 kindergarten teacher education was completely transferred to universities and to universities of applied sciences. Even before 1995 there were two different degrees to work as a kindergarten teacher. The other one was a social pedagogue degree and the other kindergarten teacher degree, but they were both post-secondary level educations and not university-level degrees. (Alila, K. & al. 2014, pp. 17-18.)

It is estimated that 43% of the kindergarten teachers working in early childhood education in Finland have an education from the social field, referring either the old post-secondary

level degree or the current education from university of applied sciences and 57% have a degree from educational field, referring to Bachelor of Early Childhood Education or such (Karila, K. & al., 2017, p. 94).

High quality early childhood education is connected to the teachers' higher educational level, and currently most of the staff working in early childhood education are practical nurses (Manning, M., Garvis, S., Fleming, C. & Wong, T. W. G. 2015, pp. 44-46). Currently the requirements for the staff working in early childhood education are that one third must have a higher education such as a kindergarten teacher, and two thirds are practical nurses, with a vocational education (Asetus lasten päivähoidosta, 1973, Laki sosiaalihuollon ammatillisen henkilöstön kelpoisuusvaatimuksista, 2005). Since the new national curriculum for early childhood education and care emphasizes the importance of pedagogical approaches in early childhood education, this current division is no longer seen sufficient (Finnish national agency for education, 2017, Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2018, pp. 45-48). The new Early Childhood Education and Care Act is changing the old requirements that by 2030 kindergarten's must have two thirds of their staff to be post-secondary level graduates, where at least one should have a degree from the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (Varhaiskasvatustilaki, 2018, 74§). To fulfil this upcoming higher demand for kindergarten teachers, the Ministry of education and culture has decided to increase the number of students taken in to universities to study early childhood education. The idea is that in the end there would be thousand more kindergarten teachers graduated from university. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2017.)

Eini Saukkonen (2017) has done her master's thesis about the kindergarten teachers from different educational backgrounds working in multidisciplinary work communities. In her thesis she interviewed six kindergarten teachers from different educational backgrounds to find out about their views of the work done in kindergartens as a teacher. What she found out was that the three kindergarten teachers from social and healthcare education emphasized the importance of co-operation done with families in supporting the child's growth more than the kindergarten teachers graduated from educational fields, who saw the main point of ECHE to be education and pedagogy in addition to the co-operation done with families. Also, one of the teachers with an educational education said that she would have wanted from her education tools for the co-operation done with parents, since it differs a lot from the work done with small children. (Saukkonen, E., 2017.)

Most of the interviewees felt that there were tensions between different educational backgrounds. Some of them even said, that it was a “taboo” to speak about your education in kindergartens. Despite of this, all the interviewees felt, that it is important that kindergartens have multidisciplinary work community. They also felt, that it would be important that everyone could bring out their special tools, which they have gained through their education. (Saukkonen, E., 2017.)

2.3 Kindergarten Teacher’s Work Description

Kindergarten teachers working in the municipal sector belong under the general collective agreement for municipal personnel. In 2018 they increased the time to do work outside of child group up to 13%, which comes to approximately 1 hour per day. In the agreement it says that this time should be used for “planning of educational and developmental work, evaluation and development and drafting children’s personal ECHE plans”. There should also be enough time for parents’ meetings and multi-professional co-operation. (Kunnallinen virka- ja työehtosopimus 2018-2019, 2018.)

The city of Porvoo lists the in their kindergarten teacher’s work description the kindergarten teacher’s work tasks to be the following:

1. Oversees pedagogy in a child group
2. Oversees child group’s care, education and instruction
3. Oversees child group’s activities, planning and evaluation together with her team according to the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care and the national curriculum for preschool education
4. Oversees co-operation done with parents/guardians and participates in co-operation with other staff
5. Oversees multi-professional co-operation (in her own group)
6. Oversees early childhood education and preschool education’s documentation (in her own group)
7. Oversees the upkeep and development of her own work competences
8. Deployment of the tools that the employer gives

(Porvoon kaupunki, 2016.)

3 Co-operation with Parents

Since the national core curriculum for early childhood education in 2003 there has been a mention of parent-teacher partnership [kasvatuskumppanuus]. The idea of this partnership is to bring together child’s parents and early childhood professionals to make

sure that the child gets best possible support in growth, learning and development. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet, 2003.)

In the end of 2016 the Finnish national agency for education (2017) released the renewed national core curriculum for early childhood education and care. In the renewed version they do not talk about parent-teacher partnership anymore, but simply call it co-operation with families [vanhempien kanssa tehtävä yhteistyö]. In this study there will be both terms present, depending on the term used in the original source literature. Even though the name was changed in the curriculum, the term parent-teacher partnership is still being used. Liisa Ahonen (2017) states that building relationship with parents is the responsibility of the early childhood education professionals. The quality of this relationship is also important, because it is connected to the child's wellbeing. The relationship should be built on equality so that the parent's thoughts are also heard. The renewed curriculum also brings even more importance to the families' thoughts and opinions, encouraging kindergartens to involve children's parents or guardians more in the life of kindergartens. This involvement should not only be seen in the mandatory discussions done by annual bases and in the passing discussions in the corridors when parents are bringing their children to the kindergarten or picking them up, but also in actively engaging parents to participate in the planning of kindergarten's activities and inviting them to visit kindergarten for different kind of events. (Ahonen, L., 2017, pp. 123-128, Finnish national agency for education, 2017.)

The new national core curriculum for early childhood education and care highlights the importance of co-operation with children's guardians. This is seen as an important part, so that child could have a healthy and safe growth, development and learning. The early childhood education personnel should be actively discussing with the parents about all sort of things from the daily life in ECEC to the values, goals and responsibilities related to ECEC. The guardians should also be invited to participate in the planning of kindergartens' activities. (Finnish national agency for education, 2017.)

The national early childhood education and care curriculum states that there are three levels for the curriculum; national, local, and a child's individual curriculum. (Finnish national agency for education, 2017, pp. 8-13.)

The local ECEC curriculum should be done in co-operation with local education, social welfare and health care officials (Finnish national agency for education, 2017). This is

because Finnish early childhood education is one of the places for pre-emptive child welfare to take place. The purpose of this pre-emptive service is to improve children's wellbeing and development, and to support the child's guardians parenting. The early childhood professionals are obliged to make a child welfare notification if they are concerned about the child's wellbeing. (Child welfare act, 2007.)

Knowing about the values and thoughts of the parents is important so that the same values are present at home and at the kindergarten. Before a child comes to the kindergarten for the first time, an orientation discussion is held, where the aim is to have an open discussion with the parents and it is vital for information about the child's life. The orientation discussion is also important since it is the first encounter that the parents have with the kindergarten and the meeting shapes the parents' thoughts and attitudes towards early childhood education. On a daily bases it is also important to talk about positive things, so that the parents feel that the kindergarten is not only burdening. This is the case especially with children with special needs or who are more challenging. There should be time for discussions in a calm environment with the parents, so that their thoughts can truly be heard. (Ahonen, L., 2017, pp. .)

The guardians are also invited to the kindergarten when the draft of the child's individual early childhood education and care plan is made. This discussion is important, so that the kindergarten can know more about the child's home conditions, such as home language, culture and religion, and about the guardians' thoughts about the child's development. Also, the possible concerns of the child's development are considered when drafting the individual plan. (Finnish national agency for education, 2017, pp. 10-23.)

Anna Laine (2006) researched early childhood education's parent-teacher partnership in her master's thesis. She defined the partnership to be built on trust, equality and appreciation between early childhood education professionals and parents, and it includes sharing everyday life of a child. Parents' values, wishes and thoughts were considered when the professionals planned their work. When drafting the individual early childhood education plan and discussing with the parents, the kindergarten teachers felt like they got important knowledge and insight of the family's and the child's life. The kindergarten teachers felt that they had enough knowledge and tools to work in a partnership, except for when they needed to discuss problems or worries with the parents, where some of the teachers felt like they needed more education. (Laine, A.,

2006.) This issue rose from this study as well, for further information about the study results see chapters six and seven.

4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study in this Bachelor's Thesis is formed with the concept of dialogue, empowerment and participation. These concepts are the core elements when working with families.

4.1 Dialogue

Bohm (2010) defines dialogue to be a “stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us”. According to Bohm dialogue is an open forum, where people should be able to look past their thoughts and assumptions and focus on hearing what people have to say. For this to happen, people need to be aware of their own thoughts, feelings and assumptions. Dialogue is a way to find a solution to an issue by being open minded. (Bohm, D., 2010, pp. 6-33.)

Bohm (2010) sees that a true dialogue can only happen, if everyone present agrees to see past their assumptions and listen. Bohm's dialogue aims at changing the process of how people think, so that people would not defend automatically their own opinions and assumptions. People should not try to defend their own ideas in a dialogue, because by defending them people do not look past them. In a true dialogue people share their opinions, listen to others' opinions and try to see them all in a larger scale. Dialogue is not about winning or changing one's opinions, but rather it is about thinking together. (Bohm, D., 2010, pp. 6-33.)

Seikkula's and Arnkil's (2014) view of dialogue is different from Bohm's (2010). Seikkula and Arnkil explain about a dialogical process to be used in early interventions. They mention this model to be useful for people working with children and their parents who have problems. Often professionals are hesitant to bring up worries when talking to a child's parents. This is because they are afraid of how the parents would react. The idea is to talk before being too worried, because the earlier the problems are tackled, the chances of a positive outcome are higher. When worries arise workers should rather listen than talk. This means that instead of blaming the parents or offering the parents an advice on what to do, the professionals tell the parents that they are worried about

the child and have tried to help him/her. Next the professionals ask the parents that what they think that should be done next. By asking the parents help the professional also invites them to a dialogue. The professionals need to be interested in what the parents have to say and listen to them. (Seikkula, J. & Arnkil, T. E., 2014, pp. 25-38.)

Kaskela and Kekkonen (2006) define the core elements guiding parent-teacher partnership to be hearing, respect, trust and dialogue. They define hearing as being present while listening and being truly interested what the other person has to say, while being also honest and empathic. Respect is accepting otherness in people and appreciating it. Trust is being built on hearing and respect and needs time to develop. It is being built not only how the workers treat the child, but also how they treat the parents. Dialogue is the main element in hearing, which is defined by respect. They see the dialogue to be important in early childhood education, especially in the parent-teacher partnership. They define dialogue to be a skill to think, talk and act together. The core concepts of dialogue are respect and listening. The dialogue between a parent and a kindergarten teacher is created around the shared interest of a child's upbringing. (Kaskela, M. & Kekkonen, M., 2006, pp. 38-40.)

In this study dialogue is understood as a concept to interact with the parents. Dialogue is a way to talk with the parents without offending them, a key to hearing the parents worries and a way to build a functioning co-operation with parents and kindergarten professionals (Kaskela, M. & Kekkonen, M., 2006, pp. 38-40).

4.2 Empowerment

Empowerment has many definitions, depending on the context it is being used at and on the people, who are using it. Empowerment can be used as a term to explain how oppressed people or groups get their voices heard and get the possibility to affect their own lives, or it can mean one person's actions to make a difference in his or her life. (Adams, R., 2008, pp. 15-18; Luttrell, C. et al, 2009.) Page and Czuba (1999) wrote a literature review to find a definition for empowerment. They concluded that there is no easy way to define it. They decided to define empowerment to be a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives". (Page, N. & Czuba, C., 1999.)

Empowerment is connected to power and participation. The connection with empowerment and power is that power must change and expand for empowerment to be possible. (Page, N., & Czuba, C., 1999.) Rowlands (1997) categorizes power to have four different forms; “power over”, “power to”, “power with” and “power from within”. “Power over” means that people are given the possibility that they did not have before to affect decision-making process. “Power to” refers to a capability of people having the power to organize new activities for things to change. “Power with” means the power that comes when a group of people succeed together. “Power from” within is a person’s own individual feeling of strength and awareness, that helps the person to achieve his or her full potential. (Rowlands, J., 1997, pp.12-14, 122.)

Vuoremaa (2015) defined parental empowerment as a parent’s own estimation on how well the parent feel like their everyday life is managed with the child. She discovered that a poor parental empowerment is connected to problems in childhood and that in some cases the parent’s poor empowerment might follow the child’s adulthood. Parents who did not think that they are involved in their child’s services did often not feel empowered. Parents mostly evaluated that they are strongly empowered when it comes to their own child’s services. The parents whose child was in kindergarten felt more empowered than the parents whose child was at home. Vuoremaa thought that this could be because of parent-teacher partnership. (Vuoremaa, M., 2015.)

Halme, Vuorisalmi and Perälä made a study in 2014 about professionals’ thoughts on support, empowerment and co-operation in children’s and families’ services. They collected answers from professionals working in kindergarten, schools, maternity clinic and child health clinics. They discovered that professionals thought that it was more difficult to discuss with the parents about concerns about the parents themselves than on a concern about a child. The difficulty to discuss concerns about the parent could be about substance abuse, domestic violence or the threat of a sexual violence. The professionals often thought that it was not their place to discuss about parents’ troubles or that they did not know how to talk about it. Almost half of the parents do have problems or questions about parenting and they usually talk about these issues in maternity clinic or child health clinics. In kindergartens, even though the professionals see the parents daily, the problems concerning the parent were not usually discussed. The conclusion was, that there should be more pre-emptive and promotional services. The professionals should have methods on how to operate in different situations, so that it would be easier to act. (Halme, N., Vuorisalmi, M. & Perälä, M.-L., 2014.)

In this study empowerment means that the parents' and children's thoughts are listened and taken in to consideration in kindergarten when planning their child's care and the kindergarten's practices. The co-operation done with parents is a way to enhance participation and empowerment. The goal is for parents to reach the power from within and gain the confidence in their own skills as parents, that they also know what is best for their child.

4.3 Participation

According to Adams participation means that people are actively affecting the community and the services around them by giving their opinion on the community and on the services that they are using and that by doing so can affect how the community and the services are run. Participation also enhances empowerment, because it allows people to affect the way things are done around them and this gives people power. (Adams, R., 2008, pp. 28-47.)

One study made by the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare sees participation to be a tool on how to promote good life. They divided participation into three aspects; participation to individual's own life, participation to service, communal processes and other processes around individual and local participation, in which individual has meaningful relationships with others and can affect how resources are divided. These three aspects are intertwined and can occur separately or simultaneously. (Isola, A.-M. & al., 2017, pp. 6, 23-26.) In early childhood education all these aspects can be present if the parents are being listened, their wishes and opinions are taken into consideration and the professionals treat the parents with respect.

In 2011 a study was published about professionals' and parents' thoughts on participation in the capital areas kindergartens. The parents took the initiative to talk with the professionals quite often. Usually the parents wanted to talk about their child's wellbeing or about the planning of activities. Difficulties from the professionals' side in this co-operation were seen to be for example hurry, for both parents and professionals and the parents' unawareness of what is early childhood education, which in some cases lead to uninterested attitude towards kindergarten. Sometimes the parents' ideas for improvements in the early childhood education were too complex and thus could not be implemented in a larger group of children. Some challenges that the professionals found were also that the parents did not talk same language with the professionals, cultural

differences or that there was not enough time to meet face-to-face. Some parents and professionals felt that the parents needed to be active in order to have a chance to influence kindergarten's activities and professionals. Both parents and professionals felt that there was a need for better communication. If the parents have a better idea of what happens in the kindergarten, their ideas about the improvements were often more realizable. In some cases, the professionals were too used to their old routines and this was an obstacle for the parents' participation. (Venninen, T. & al., 2011.)

5 Methodology

This chapter defines the study questions and then describes how this case study was conducted. After these there are the ethical considerations connected to the study.

5.1 Study Questions

The purpose of this study was to find out what does co-operation done with families include and how do kindergarten teachers see it. The following questions were formulated to answer these research questions.

1. Does educational background affect the perceptions of workers for the co-operation done with parents?
2. What does co-operation done with families include? How is it actualized? What kind of challenges there are in co-operation done with families?
3. How is the planning time for the early childhood education teachers organized and to what it can be used for?

5.2 Study Method

Qualitative methods are used to study real life feelings and thoughts (Hirsjärvi, S., Remes., P. & Sajavaara, P., 2009, pp. 160-161). As the purpose of this study was to find out about kindergarten teachers' perceptions about the co-operation done with families, a qualitative approach was chosen. A qualitative research often has a small sampling, so that the collected data can be analyzed thoroughly (Eskola, J. & Suoranta, J., 2001, p. 18).

An interview is a good research method when wanting to get thorough information, as in an interview it is possible to ask for details and to get clarification the given answers. Challenges for interview as a research method are that it demands a lot of planning. One challenge for interviews is that people tend to give socially acceptable answers in them, because people want to give good impression of themselves. (Hirsjärvi, S., Remes., P. & Sajavaara, P., 2009, pp. 204-207.)

A semi-structured interview usually has some premade questions surrounding a topic. The idea is that the premade questions raise more questions for the interviewer to ask and deepen the conversation. (Alston & Bowels, 2013, pp. 142-143.) As in interviewer it is important to stay professional, to show interest towards the interviewees and to be trustful. These aspects create good atmosphere for the interview, which enables a good communication between the interviewer and the interviewees. (Hirsjärvi, S. & Hurme, H., 2000, pp. 96-98.)

To find out about the kindergarten teachers' opinions about the importance of co-operation with the families, a semi-structured interview was conducted in a kindergarten in Porvoo. The interviews were held in June 2018. In total there were four kindergarten teachers interviewed in two different interview sessions. In one session there were present two teachers and the interviewer. These small group interviews were arranged, because it was easier for the kindergarten teachers to arrange time for the interviews this way. The research questions were used as a baseline for the interviews. As a background information, information was collected about the interviewees' educational background and how long they have been working in early childhood education.

The interviews were recorded, and in total the two interviews lasted one hour and 45 minutes. To make the data analysis easier, the interviews were transcribed and in total there were 21 pages by using font size 11 from the two interviews held. After transcribing the interviews, the collected data was then divided into an excel file to make it easier to analyze it. From the excel file it was easier to see each individuals' responses and see reoccurring answers. After this the data was analyzed by deductive content analyze, in which the collected data was reorganized into a new excel sheet according to the selected theoretical framework (Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A., 2013, pp. 95-100, 113-118).

All the teachers interviewed were female and coming from a different educational background (see Table 1).

Educational background	Years of teaching done in ECHE	Teaching at this kindergarten
Bachelor of social services + practical nurse	5 years of teaching in ECHE, in total 20 years of work in early childhood education	3 years
Bachelor of Arts (early childhood education)	18 years of teaching in ECHE	18 years
University education for early childhood education from abroad	3 years of teaching in ECHE.	One year
Social pedagogue	23 years of teaching in ECHE	6 years

Table 1. Background of the interviewees

5.3 Ethical Considerations

This study follows Arene's the ethical recommendations for thesis work (Arene, n.d.). A research permit was needed from the city of Porvoo for conducting a study in their kindergartens. The permit was granted by the Porvoo's early childhood education leader before the interviews were held.

As the interviews were conducted in Finnish and this study is written in English, it is important to notice that some of the meanings might change in the translation made by the author of the study. No personal information was collected, and all interviewees will stay anonymous and cannot be identified from their answers. The interviews were strictly confidential, and the only one who had access to those materials was the author of this study. The collected material was stored in Metropolia's cloud drive and it was destroyed when this thesis was published. All the previous information was explained to the interviewees and in the research permit application. Because the sample of this study was small, and this study was presented at the kindergarten where the interviews were held, to obtain the anonymity of the interviewees the quotations from the interviewees hold not information of who said them.

It should be taken in to consideration that the teachers who participated in this study were voluntary. Because of this, it can be that the participants were already interested in this topic and people who are not interested, did not volunteer.

Also, it is to be noticed that as a Bachelor of Social Services student I may be impartial in my comparison of the two different higher educational backgrounds employed in the early childhood education field.

6 Study Results

The research results were analyzed based on the theoretical framework and the research questions. The answers were divided into aspects that are challenges for dialogue, participation and empowerment and to things that enhance it. These challenges are also the challenges present in the work done with families. Many answers can belong into several if not all the theoretical concepts. In some cases one answer can be listed in all of the concepts if it belongs to them all equally, but in other cases the most suiting one is selected.

All the interviewees saw the co-operation done with families as an important part of their work. They described the team work and multi-professional collaboration to be important part in their work. In general kindergartens in Porvoo have in one team two kindergarten teachers and one practical nurse. The team is important according to the interviewees, because it offers support and the possibility to talk and reflect about work.

Simplified discourse	Subclass	Class
Orientation conversation creates base for the relationship	Enhances dialogue	Dialogue
Building a trustful relationship		
Sensitivity towards parents		
Lack of a common language	Challenges for dialogue	
Parents challenging behavior		
How to talk about things		
Lack of resources		
Parent and professionals have different views of what is best for the child	Enhances participation	
Orientation conversations are important		
Listening to parents		
Talking with parents daily, even shortly		
Kindergarten's activities for the whole family		
Giving parents chances to network with other parents		
Kindergartens are participating parents more		
Parent and professionals have different views of what is best for the child		Challenges for participation
Difficulty to get feedback		
Lack of a common language		
Parents challenging behavior		
Giving parents ideas what to do with a child	Enhances empowerment	Empowerment
Time to talk with the parents		
More low threshold services available		
Parents have the courage to ask and receive help		
Helping families also helps the child		
Lack of a common language	Challenges for empowerment	
How to talk about things		

Table 2. Analysis of answers

6.1 Dialogue

Aspects that enhance dialogue according to the data collected are the importance of creating a trustful relationship, the orientation discussion and sensitivity towards parents. Trust is important element for dialogue and for the teacher-parent relationship (Kaskela, M. & Kekkonen, M., 2006, pp. 38-40). An orientation discussion is a discussion which is held before a child comes to kindergarten and it is an important part of the co-operation done with parents according to the interviewees. It is the first time the parents encounter professionals working in a kindergarten and it creates the base for the future relationship with the kindergarten. Even though the interviewees did not mention dialogue, dialogue

is important in the orientation discussion, because it is important to hear the parents' wishes and thoughts about their child without judging them (Kaskela, M. & Kekkonen, M., 2006, pp. 38-40).

Challenges for a dialogue to happen are the lack of a common language, as this makes the communication in some cases impossible without an interpreter. Parents challenging behavior towards early childhood education professionals can make having any kind of relationship or conversation with the parent and ECHE professionals impossible. In these cases, it was the kindergarten's policy to have at least two professionals present in the discussion, so that in case of difficult behavior no one is left alone with a threatening parent. One important aspect for dialogue to happen is time to have the dialogue (Bohm, D., 1996, pp.17-18). According to the interviewees the lack of resources can affect the possibilities for the kindergarten's professionals to have time for uninterrupted meetings and talks with the parents. If parents and the professionals have different ideas of what is best for the child it can affect the dialogue, as dialogue should be an open forum, where people try to look past their own assumptions (Bohm, D., 1996, pp. 6-33). In these cases, the child's best interest can be in the way of truly being able to understand the other person's aspect. Also, the professionals' insecurity of how to talk about difficult issues or worries about the child with the parents is a challenge for the dialogue to happen, because trust and honesty are important for dialogue (Kaskela, M. & Kekkonen, M., 2006, pp. 38-40).

6.2 Participation

The orientation discussion is important, not only for the dialogue, but also for the parents' participation. Not only does the orientation discussion create the base for the future relationship, but it also creates the base for the co-operation done with the kindergarten. In orientation discussion and in general in early childhood education it is important to hear the parents' thoughts, worries and wishes. This happens best when talking with the parents daily, even if it is done shortly when bringing the child to kindergarten or picking the child up. Participation with kindergarten is also enhanced when kindergarten is hosting events and organizing activities for the whole family. The events can be for one group or the whole kindergarten. The interviewees saw that the kindergarten's activities and events have increased in the past years. The kindergartens also give the parents opportunities to network with other parents by hosting these events, but also by organizing

parents' meetings, where parents are invited to talk with the kindergartens' professionals and to meet other parents.

The challenges that rose from the collected data that are connected to participation are problems with communication. Parents and professionals can have different ideas of what is best for the child and sometimes it can be difficult to find a common ground in this. Sometimes parents are behaving aggressively towards professionals and this is also a challenge for participation as in these cases the parent's presence is not necessarily safe for the kindergarten. Lack of a common language can also make communication with the parents difficult and on its own challenge participation. The interviewees felt that getting feedback from parents was difficult. When asked what could be done differently, parents often replied that everything was good as it is. This does not help participation, because according to the interviewees, parents did not often see the need to involve themselves in kindergartens planning, even though it is wanted from the kindergarten's side.

6.3 Empowerment

The interviewees told that the kindergarten is offering the parents opportunities to spend time with the child in the kindergarten and the professionals are offering ideas on what can be done together with the child. Parental empowerment is that the parents have a feeling, that they are in control of their own lives and capable of dealing with issues arising in it (Vuorenmaa, M., 2015). These activities that the kindergarten is offering are aiming to increase the parents own capacities of being a parent according to the interviewees. Parents sometimes talk about problems connected to their child and life with the kindergarten professionals. When giving the parents time to talk and possibly answers to their worries enhances the parental participation (Vuorenmaa, M., 2015). The interviewees have understood that helping the parents also helps the child. According to the interviewees there are low threshold services available in Porvoo area for families with children and the parents have the courage to ask help and to receive it. The interviewees also see that it is part of their work to guide parents to the services around them.

" Child's illbeing is not necessarily only because of the child, there can be something in the family. If we give some support to the family, it can affect the child's wellbeing positively"

One challenge for empowerment is lack of common language with the parents. It can be on its own unempowering to be in a country where one does not understand the language spoken. Empowerment is the feeling that a person has when one feels being capable of managing their everyday life (Adams, R., 2008, pp. 15-18; Luttrell, C. et al, 2009). The interviewees told that they are not always sure how and when bring up difficult issues connected to the child or the parents. If the kindergarten professionals see that a family has issues, but does not know how to talk about them, it can affect the empowerment. If the child or the parents are not feeling well, it affects the whole family. In these situations, the parents can feel helpless, and it can affect parental empowerment. (Vuorenmaa, M., 2015.)

6.4 Answers to Study Questions

The educational background did not show based on the interviewees' answers for most of the aspects inspected. All the interviewees thought that co-operation done with families is important. The only thing where the educational background affected was the teachers' confidence in the beginning of their career when working with families. The interviewees coming from social education felt more confident in talking with the parents and felt that they have the tools needed for it. The interviewees from educational background said that their education did not offer much tools for interacting with the parents.

"I would have wished more tools (from my education) on how to co-operate with families. I can see it now that I have the experience that I feel that I can work in co-operation with families, that it is a natural part of this work."

The research question on the planning time did not get clear answers from the interviewees, as at the time of the interviews the planning time was still being implemented into practice and the city of Porvoo did not have instructions of it yet. As the instructions now have been in place since August 2018 the current perceptions would be interesting to study further.

According to the data collected, most of the challenges in the work are connected to building up the co-operation with parents or the professionals not being sure when and how to deal with the parents when problems arise. Also, according to the interviewees, the kindergarten's resources brought challenges to the co-operation with parents. The

interviewees felt that in some cases it was difficult to arrange time to talk with the parents in private, as when one of the staff members is away from the group, it brings challenges to the rest of the staff on the supervision of the children.

“Parents are required to behave decently and sometimes we have had to remind the parents that we are in a kindergarten and that they need to behave properly.”

” That if I know that it would be important to speak with a family this afternoon, if there are worries about this and that, we must consider who is with the children at the moment and when can I detach myself and we must plan with the team that I need to discuss with this family...”

7 Discussion

The aim of this case study was to research the kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the co-operation done with families. These perceptions were inspected through the theoretical frameworks of empowerment, dialogue and participation, which were present in the collected data and supported by the data analysis. The interviewees saw the co-operation with families as an important element in their work and highlighted the importance of multi-professional teamwork. As I only interviewed four teachers for this study, the results cannot be generalized. However, the interviews shed light on the individual perception on the current state of collaboration, and it would be interesting to find out if the results would stay the same with a larger data sample.

One of the challenges that rose from the collected material were the difficulties connected to communication and interaction between the parents and the professionals. The reasons for these issues can be the lack of common language, insecurity in how to talk about difficult issues, parents and professionals having different views of what is best for the child, and/or difficulty to get feedback from the parents. In some cases, there have been parents, whose behavior has been challenging, which has led to precautions from the kindergartens side to ensure everyone's safety. These challenges have been detected in earlier studies, but they do not have clear answers on how to deal with them. Further studies are needed to give clear answers on how to solve these issues.

The problems of not knowing how to talk about sensitive issues are not new. In a study conducted by Halme, Vuorinsalmi & Perälä (2014) they discovered that the professional

working in several different services for families and children have issues when talking to the parents, especially when problems connected to the parents. In kindergarten, even though they see the parents daily, the issues were spoken the least (Halme, N., Vuorisalmi, M. & Perälä, M.-L., 2014). In my opinion, kindergartens could be the place to detect problems early. But it seems to me, because employees have even in this study communicated their uncertainty of how to bring up difficult issues, the problems are not necessarily dealt with as early as possible.

Seikkula & Arnkil have developed a dialogical process to be used in early interventions. This method helps the professionals to talk about children's challenges to their parents. The idea is to tell the parents that the professionals are worried and give the parents the opportunity to talk about their own thoughts about this issue and how they see that it could be solved. This way the parents are offered the possibility to tell their opinion rather than the professionals giving the parents direct advice on what to do. By doing so, the professionals are inviting the parents to a dialogue. (Seikkula, J. & Arnkil, T. E., 2014, pp. 25-38.) The interviewees told that it is sometimes a challenge to find the resources, meaning time and privacy, to talk with the parents. This lack of resources would also affect the use of this dialogical process, as the interviewees told that they cannot talk about sensitive issues with the parents when there are other people around them.

The amount of activities and events for families has increased in the past years in this kindergarten. The interviewees state that there are several events in each of their groups during a year, but also the kindergarten hosts event for all the parents. These events and activities improve the participation of parents in the kindergarten's life. This change is following the instructions given in the new curriculum of early childhood education. The new curriculum states that parents should have the possibility to affect the planning and developing of the activities. Parents' networking and collaboration in different events improves the sense of communality and gives support to the work done in kindergartens. That is why organizing these events is useful for everybody. (Ahonen, L., 2017, pp. 123-128, Finnish national agency for education, 2017, pp. 35-36.)

The interviewees told that they see the multi-professional work community as a strength, and similar answers have been gained in another study conducted in this area (Saukkonen, E., 2017). The multi-professional work community gives the kindergarten teachers support on the work they are doing and chances to talk about their work.

8 Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to find out about kindergarten teachers' perceptions of co-operation with families. What was discovered is that the kindergarten teachers see the co-operation with families as an important part of their work. As the data sample was small, the results cannot be generalized.

For further studies I find that it would be useful to pay attention to the planning time of early education teachers. At the time of the interviews the city's official instructions about how to use this time, had not come. Time has passed and based on my later work experience in the same kindergarten, I have observed that now the planning time is being used actively. It would be interesting to study now what the planning time is being used for and how have the perceptions of the kindergarten teachers as per the planning time has changed.

Another aspect that could be studied further is what do the Bachelor of Education graduates think about the tools their education has given them on how to interact with the parents. Does their education offer enough support for the co-operation done with parents or is it something that they could study more? Based on the analysis of this study, I think that it would be beneficial for also the kindergartens to know if people from different educational backgrounds need more support in different aspects at the beginning of their careers.

It has been a long road, but also taught me a lot. I got confidence for my own skills when doing research and interviewing people. If I would have known at the beginning of this process what I do now know, I would have done a lot of things differently in this study. I did not have a clear picture of the thesis process before the starting it and afterwards I see that for example formulating the study and interview questions could have been done differently. If the theoretical framework would have been present in the interview questions, the analysis would have been easier to make as the questions would have supported the theoretical framework.

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Interview questions

1. Mikä on koulutustaustasi? Kuinka kauan olet ollut alalla? Kuinka kauan olet työskennellyt kyseisessä yksikössä?
2. Kuinka päiväkodissasi/ryhmässäsi toteutetaan perheiden kanssa tehtävää työtä?
 - a. Mitä perheiden kanssa tehtävä työ pitää sisällään?
 - b. Kuinka tuette vanhempia kasvatuksessa ja jaksamisessa?
 - c. Puhutteko lapsen asioista tasapuolisesti äidin ja isän kanssa perheissä, joissa molemmat vanhemmat ovat tekemisissä päiväkodin kanssa?
 - d. Auttaako kahden opettajan ryhmässä toimiminen perheiden kanssa tehtävää työtä?
 - e. Minkälaisia haasteita perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön sisältyy?
3. Minkälaisia taitoja perheiden kanssa tehtävä työ vaatii?
 - a. Minkälaisia välineitä koet saaneesi koulutuksestasi perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön?
 - b. Minkälaisesta lisäkoulutuksesta perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön olisit kiinnostunut? Oletko osallistunut jo sellaiseen?
4. Miten perheiden kanssa tehtävä työ on otettu huomioon ryhmän vuosisuunnitelmaa tehtäessä?
 - a. Tuetaanko perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön?
5. Kuinka paljon aikaa viikossa keskimäärin käytetään perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön? Käytetäänkö uutta 13% lapsiryhmän ulkopuolista työaikaa perheiden kanssa tehtävään työhön? Mihin sitä voi käyttää?

Information letter for the interviewees

***** päiväkodin
Lastentarhanopettajat
00000 Porvoo

Haastateltavien informointi ***** päiväkodissa

Teen opinnäytetyötä lastentarhanopettajien näkemyksistä perheiden kanssa tehtävästä yhteistyöstä. Osana tätä opinnäytetyötä haastattelen päiväkodissanne lastentarhanopettajia.

Haastattelut nauhoitetaan suostumuksellanne. Nauhoitukset siirretään Metropolian pilvipalveluun, johon ainoastaan minulla on pääsy. Kaikki sanomanne tulee pysymään anonyymina, eikä teitä voida yhdistää valmiissa työssä

Tarkoitukseni on kerätä aineisto Porvoon kaupungin lastentarhaopettajilta kvalitatiivisin menetelmin puolistrukturoidulla haastattelulla yllä olevia kysymyksiä hyödyntäen.

Vastaan mielelläni kysymyksiinne. Opinnäytetyön valmistuttua tulen mielelläni kertomaan tuloksista ja saatte opinnäytetyön käyttöönnne. Työtäni ohjaavat lehtorit Sylvia Hakari ja Mervi Nyman.

Jenina Vepsäläinen, 14.6.2018 Porvoo