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# Community in Early Childhood Education and Care

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<p>Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia päiväkodin ja yhteisön vuorovaikutusta. Tarkoituksena oli myös selvittää, miten se hyödyttää lapsia, sekä miten kahden päiväkodin ja niiden naapuristojen välille voitaisiin luoda yhteisö.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tutkimus suoritettiin kvalitatiivisin menetelmin kahdessa eri puolilla Helsinkiä sijaitsevassa päiväkodissa. Tutkimuksen osallistuneet ryhmät koostuivat näiden päiväkotien 14 lapsesta, 4 opettajasta, ja 2 johtajasta; lisäksi mukana oli 8 asukasta näistä kahdesta asuinalueesta. Tutkimuksen data kerättiin tarkkailemalla kyseisiä asuinalueita sekä lasten ja opettajien säännöllisesti käyttämiä ulkotiloja. Lisäksi tietoa kerättiin haastattelemalla lapsia, lähettämällä sähköinen kysely opettajille ja johtajille, tekemällä jatkohaastatteluja johtajien ja kahden opettajan kanssa, sekä lähettämällä sähköinen kysely näiden kahden asuinalueen asukkaille.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että molempien päiväkotien opettajat ja johtajat ovat kiinnostuneita luomaan yhteisön päiväkodin ja paikallisten asukkaiden välille. Tutkimuksen edetessä henkilökunnalta on tullut ideoita yhteisön toteuttamiseen. Myös päiväkodin lapset ovat osoittaneet kiinnostusta yhteisön muodostamiseen. Tutkimusta tehdessä kävi ilmi, että päiväkodit käyttävät jo ympäröivää aluetta oppimiseen ja jakavat tilaa paikallisten asukkaiden kanssa. Se tarjoaa hyvän lähtökohdan yhteisön kehittämiseen eteenpäin. Tutkimuksen myötä henkilökunta koki yhteisön kehittämisen tarjoavan positiivisia kokemuksia lapsille mm. kokemuspäivien laajentamisen ja yhteenkuuluvuuden tunteen luomisen kautta. Toisaalta asukkaista suurin osa suhtautui kielteisesti ajatukseen ja kokivat ajanpuutteen esteeksi yhteisön muodostamiseksi. Jotkut asukkaista olivat valmiita yhteistyöhön riippuen päiväkodin ehdottamista toiminnoista ja aikatauluista.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittavat, että tutkimukseen osallistuneiden sekä muiden päiväkotien tulee kunkin löytää juuri omiin tarpeisiinsa sopivia menetelmiä, tapoja ja tiloja, joiden avulla kehittää yhteisöllisyyttä lähiasukkaiden kanssa.</p>	
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<p>The purpose of this Bachelor's thesis was to explore the topic of community in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), and find out how it can be beneficial for children and how it would be possible to form a community between two ECEC centres and the people in their neighbourhoods.</p> <p>This study was carried out with the involvement of two ECEC centres located in different neighbourhoods of Helsinki, Finland, in a qualitative method. The groups which participated in this study comprised of 14 children, 4 teachers, and 2 managers from these ECEC centres; and 8 residents from these two neighbourhoods. Data for this study were collected by outside observations of these neighbourhoods and the outside spaces which the children and teachers use regularly, by conducting interviews with the children, by sending an online questionnaire for the teachers and managers, by conducting follow up interviews with the managers and two teachers, and by sending an online questionnaire for residents of these two neighbourhoods.</p> <p>The results showed that there is an interest and even some ideas from the teachers and managers of these ECEC centres to form a community with its local people, as well as an interest from the children. Furthermore, these ECEC centres use their neighbourhoods already as a learning environment and share spaces with some of the local people, which could be advantageous when pursuing this idea. Lastly, they acknowledged that this idea would present positive outcomes for the children, as it would broaden the children's mind and give them a sense of community. However, most of the residents would neither be interested in this idea nor would have time to get involved with the ECEC centres. On the other hand, some residents could get involved depending on the activities and the schedule proposed by the ECEC centres.</p> <p>This demonstrates that it will be up for these ECEC centres, and possibly other ECEC centres as well, to find suitable methods, activities and spaces which could help establish and develop a community with their local people.</p>	
Keywords	early childhood education, community, sense of community, learning environment

## Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Early Childhood Education and Care	2
2.1	Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland	2
2.1.1	Pedagogical Activities in Early Childhood Education and Care	3
2.2	Working Life Partners	6
3	Community	7
3.1	Sense of Community	8
3.2	Community in Early Childhood Education and Care	9
3.2.1	Learning Environment	12
4	Aim of Thesis and Research Questions	14
5	Research Methods	16
5.1	Preliminary Observations	17
5.2	Outside Observations with the Kindergartens	18
5.2.1	Kindergarten A	19
5.2.2	Kindergarten B	20
5.3	Interviews with the Children	21
5.4	Interview with Kindergarten Staff	22
5.4.1	Follow Up Interview with Kindergarten Staff	23
5.5	Questionnaire for Residents	24
6	Results	26
6.1	Outside Observations	26
6.1.1	Kindergarten A	26
6.1.2	Kindergarten B	28
6.2	Children	29
6.2.1	Kindergarten A	29
6.2.2	Kindergarten B	31
6.3	Kindergarten Staff	32
6.3.1	Kindergarten A	33
6.3.2	Kindergarten B	35
6.4	Local Residents	39
6.4.1	Neighbourhood A	39
6.4.2	Neighbourhood B	40

6.5	Summary of Results	42
7	Conclusions	44
8	Discussion	47
8.1	Ethical Discussion	50
8.2	Validity and Reliability	52
	References	54
Appendices		
	Appendix 1. Parental Consent Form	
	Appendix 2. Questionnaire for Children	
	Appendix 3. Questionnaire for Teachers	
	Appendix 4. Questionnaire for Managers	
	Appendix 5. Questionnaire for Residents	
	Appendix 6. Thesis Information Pamphlet	

## 1 Introduction

The topic of this final thesis is about community in early childhood education and care. The topic of community in early childhood education and care, or ECEC for its abbreviation, is one that can present a variety of cases and discussions, as different authors and/or researchers might address this topic in different scenarios or connect ECEC and community in multiple ways. Therefore, before explaining and delving into this topic, it would be imperative to define how the term 'community' will be addressed in this final thesis.

Community is often defined as the people who reside in a determinate area or by the fact that people have something in common between them, i.e. nationality, religion, common interests (Cambridge Dictionary). That might be a simplistic way of defining community, and some authors have precisely commented that defining the concept of community has been rather problematic (Mayo 2000, p. 36; Midgley 1986, p. 24; Popple 1995, p. 3; Rossi cited in Roos, Trigg & Hartman 2006). Moreover, the idea of community in terms of location has been romanticised to a certain degree with the image of a community as a tight unit of people with shared values and solidarity, a notion that has been based on something that critics say is not real. Additionally, the idea of communities with shared values has drawn criticism because it reinforces the concept of similarity and excludes diversity (Mayo 2000, p. 39).

Chavis & Lee (2015) also comment on the complexity of defining community, remarking that community is "both a feeling and a set of relationships between people", and not a location or some area individuals find themselves in. As Chavis & Lee (2015) further comments, "neighbourhoods, companies, schools, and places of faith are context and environments for these communities, but they are not communities themselves." Community itself, according to Chavis & Lee (2015), arises from the fact that the people living in a certain environment have shared experiences, a history, which forms trust, a relationship and a sense of belonging among them.

By engaging with each other and the world around us, and affecting each other through these shared experiences, a community is being formed (Davies 2014, p. 12), instead of simply relying on an inherent identity between people to form a community. However, is there any relevance or beneficial connection between this idea of 'community' and ECEC

in Finland? One of the important aspects of ECEC in Finland is to enable children to “grow, develop and learn in interaction with other people and the immediate environment” (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 23), as well as for them to become “ethically responsible members of society” (Hännikäinen 2003, p. 80). Therefore, the idea of community between ECEC centres, such as kindergartens, and the people around them could be appropriate and significant for children.

However, the question becomes: how would it be possible to form a community between ECEC centres and the individuals around them, and what could be some of the benefits for children? As it has been mentioned previously, community in ECEC has been presented in multiple ways, however the focus here will be exactly on exploring the possibility to form that relationship between ECEC centres and local people necessary for a community to develop between them. That means that the primary group of this study will be children, the secondary group will be the ECEC staff, and the tertiary group will be the individuals around these ECEC centres.

## **2 Early Childhood Education and Care**

In order to further explore and discuss the topic of community in ECEC, it is essential to first provide a context of ECEC in Finland with an overview of the history of ECEC in Finland and its National Core Curriculum. Perhaps more importantly, it is necessary to present some of the key aspects of learning and pedagogical activities within ECEC in Finland that are connected to the topic of this study. Lastly, it is vital to present some background information about the working life partners for this study. When discussing these topics, it is essential that the focus is maintained at children, as they are the primary group of this study and the ones that would benefit the most from this study.

### **2.1 Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland**

Finland has a rich history in the provision and implementation of ECEC services that dates to the 1920s (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2013). Significantly in 1973 the Act on Children’s Day Care came into effect in the country and stated that the organisation of day care for children under school age rested with local authorities (Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland 2000, p. 5), meaning the municipalities.

To this day municipalities oversee the provision of day care and pre-primary education, not forgetting basic education and upper secondary education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018; Määttä & Uusiautti 2013, p. 3). However, it is up to the parents to decide whether to enrol their child or children in municipal or private ECEC services, as parents have the primary responsibility in children's upbringing (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 8).

Furthermore, it is not compulsory for children to participate in ECEC in Finland below the age of 6 years-old. Children below 6-years old have, nonetheless, the right to participate for at least a minimum of 20 hours per week (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018) in ECEC centres. Additionally, since August of 2015, it became mandatory that children participate in pre-primary education, which can be organised in ECEC centres or in schools (European Commission 2018). Despite not being compulsory until the age of 6, the overall goal of ECEC in Finland "is to promote children's welfare in all aspects" (Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland 2000, p. 28).

Moreover, ECEC centres provide an additional support for parents in raising and educating their children, creating "equal preconditions for the holistic growth, development and learning of the children participating in early childhood education and care" (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 8). Essentially, ECEC in Finland has the mission to arrange and provide basic foundations necessary for children to grow and develop in society (Määttä & Uusiautti 2013, p. 6).

### 2.1.1 Pedagogical Activities in Early Childhood Education and Care

ECEC services in Finland are guided by the National Core Curriculum, which "specifies the key objectives and contents of early childhood education and care", and "the contents of the child's individual early childhood education and care plan." (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 9.) This means that ECEC services, whether they are provided by the municipality or by a private sector, prepare their own curricula based on the National Core Curriculum (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 9). Therefore, each ECEC centre will have its own curricula as it will focus and emphasize on different pedagogical approaches, the children's needs and any other special needs (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 10). Perhaps more importantly, the learning and

activities are focused on the child's strengths, skills and interests, in a collaborative manner with others, and without the notion that the adult, the educator, is the sole source or creator of knowledge (Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland 2000, p. 27).

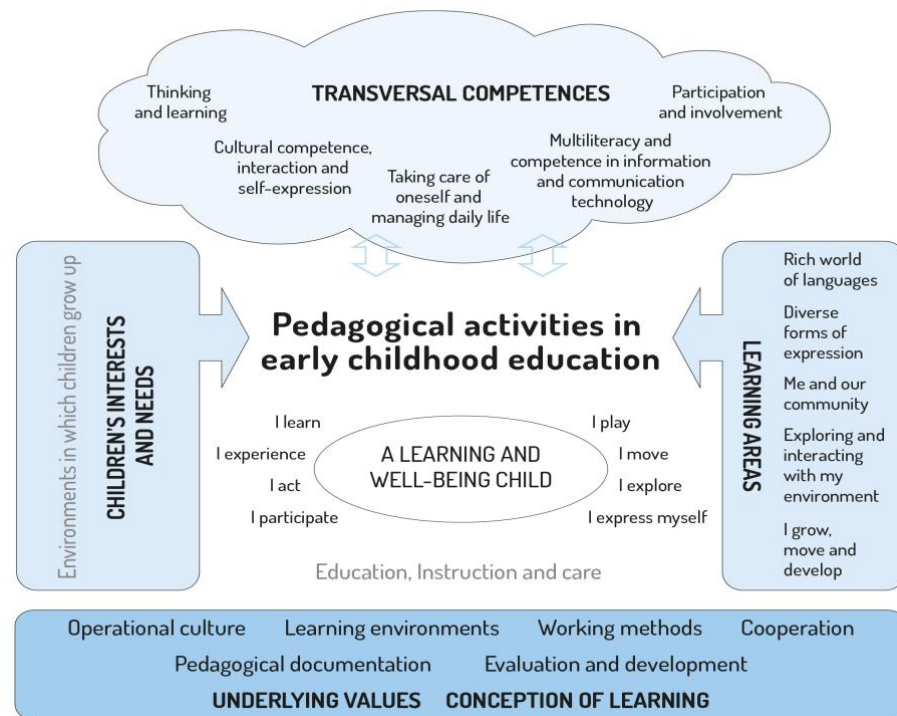


Figure 1. The framework for pedagogical activity in ECEC in Finland (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 40)

Within the framework for pedagogical activities described in the National Core Curriculum, as seen above in Figure 1, there are two essential aspects that promote children's learning and well-being in the ECEC context. One of them are the five interconnected transversal competences. These interconnected transversal competence compromise of thinking and learning; and cultural competence, interaction and self-expression; and taking care of oneself and managing daily life; and multi-literacy and competence in information and communication technology; and participation and involvement. Overall, the goal of these transversal competences is to promote "children's growth as individuals and as members of their community" (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 25). Moreover, each one of these

transversal competences have a specific meaning, and one that is very much connected to the idea of community is 'participation and involvement'.

According to the National Core Curriculum, 'participation and involvement' relates to the skills and the desire "in the individual to participate in the activities of the community and trust in their own possibilities of making a difference" (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 27). For that to occur, the ECEC personnel must safeguard and provide children with opportunities to be heard, respected and their actions acknowledged (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 28). Furthermore, one of the aims of ECEC in Finland is to guide children to act responsibly, to respect others and for them to become "members of the society" (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 18).

The other essential aspect within the framework for pedagogical activities in ECEC are the learning areas. The learning areas "describe the key objectives and contents of pedagogical activities" in ECEC. Meaning that these 'learning areas' steer the ECEC personnel with organizing and developing pedagogical activities, taking children's interests and needs in consideration. The 'learning areas' are organized in five principles and they entail of rich world of languages; and diverse forms of expression; and me and our community; and exploring and interacting with my environment; and I grow, move and develop. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 44.)

Each one of these 'learning areas' has its specific goal and focus, and within these 'learning areas' there are two areas that also are linked with the subject of this study. The first one is 'me and our community'. As children start to participate in ECEC centres, leaving their home environment to spend time in a new environment, their views and understandings of the surrounding world start to expand. Therefore, the main goal within 'me and our community' is precisely to "develop children's capabilities of understanding the diversity of the local community and practise acting in it". It relates to multiple ideas and skills such as 'ethical thinking' and 'the past, the present and the future of the local community'. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 48.)

The other 'learning area' connected to the topic of this study is 'exploring and interacting with my environment'. One of the goals within ECEC is to "provide children with a

capacity to observe, analyse and understand their surroundings”, and this refers not only to the ECEC centre itself, but the outside space as well (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 49). This leads to one of the goals within ‘exploring and interacting with my environment’, which is about ‘environmental education’. It consists of “three dimensions: learning in the environment, learning about the environment and acting for the environment”.

However, it is not just related to the natural environment itself, but also “built environments” in the surroundings of the ECEC centres. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 50.) It is about implementing an exploratory approach for children to participate in, as they “must have an opportunity to explore the world” when attending ECEC centres (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 42).

Above all, ECEC centres and its personnel must consider an array of components in terms of learning and activities that would be essential, and beneficial for children’s well-being and development.

## 2.2 Working Life Partners

For this final thesis, there are two working life partners. Both working life partners are private English-speaking kindergartens which are in different neighbourhoods of Helsinki. Perhaps more importantly, both kindergartens are situated inside and next to residential buildings. This means that both kindergartens have constantly direct or indirect contact with the people who either live in the same building where the kindergartens are situated, or those who live in the buildings next to them. Not forgetting that both kindergartens provide every day outside activities which can offer additional contacts and interactions with local people.

By having two partners located in different areas of Helsinki, and under similar circumstances, there is an opportunity to research and understand this topic in a wider manner. Essentially, this provides a wider look on participants’ views, the possibilities and difficulties to form that relationship between these kindergartens and the individuals around them. As requested by the working life partners, both kindergartens shall remain anonymous to maintain and protect the confidentiality of the children and staff. Therefore, when commenting on these two kindergartens in this study, they will be referred as

'Kindergarten A' and 'Kindergarten B'. Furthermore, the names of the neighbourhoods where the kindergartens are located will also remain anonymous, and they will be referred to as 'Neighbourhood A' and 'Neighbourhood B'.

It is important to note that neither of these kindergartens have participated previously in a study about the topic of community in ECEC. Nevertheless, both kindergartens have had some forms of experience and interaction with the people in their respective neighbourhoods. In both cases, the kindergartens go to local parks, sometimes going to parks outside of their own neighbourhood, they also visit the neighbourhood libraries, other local service places and local landmarks. These are among their most common outside activities for the children, especially going to parks. Since they are located inside residential buildings, they also have had their share of interactions with the inhabitants of those buildings. These interactions have been for the most part positive, although 'Kindergarten A' has gone through some negative interactions as well.

It is also important to note that, at the time of this study, there are 26 children in 'Kindergarten A', and 17 children in 'Kindergarten B'. In terms of time spent outside of the kindergarten, 'Kindergarten A' spends roughly about four hours and a half per day, whereas 'Kindergarten B' spends roughly about three hours per day. However, that figure changes depending on weather conditions, field trips and other activities designed to be done outside, which can extend or shorten their outside time. In both cases, the outside time is very important. Amongst some of the objectives of these kindergartens are for children to care for and to explore their environment; and to participate in activities to develop their social and team work skills.

### **3 Community**

The key concept in this study is community. More precisely, it is about the idea of forming a community between ECEC centres and the people near these centres. Therefore, it is essential to understand more about the idea of community, of how it can happen, and in what sort of context it could take place alongside the ECEC centre. Moreover, it is vital to discuss how community has been usually referred to and examined in ECEC literature, and what are some of the approaches within the concept of community in ECEC. Lastly, it is vital to discuss the concept of learning environment, as it can provide a real context for the idea of community in ECEC.

### 3.1 Sense of Community

The two central aspects for Chavis & Lee (2015) to define community were “a feeling and a set of relationships”. This idea is associated to what McMillan & Chavis (1986) were addressing when discussing sense of community. McMillan & Chavis (1986) proposed four criteria for a definition and theory of sense of community: membership; influence; reinforcement; and shared emotional connection. In McMillan & Chavis’ (1986) view, these elements must be linked and ‘working’ together to form a sense of community. Additionally, according to McMillan & Chavis (1986), to form strong communities, members need “positive ways to interact” with each other, they need to have that feeling of belonging and acceptance. It could be argued that one of the central factors not only forming a sense of community, but also getting people involved in participating in a collaborative manner, would be to develop positive relationships between participants (Stukas & Dunlap 2002).

However, McMillan & Chavis (1986) also do acknowledge the limitation, or boundary, factor that is inherent in membership within communities, as there are those who belong and those who do not. This is because people “have boundaries protecting their personal space” (McMillan & Chavis 1986), and this is an issue one must be aware of when trying to form a community and thus a sense of community between people. The other aspect that must be taken into consideration is people’s willingness and interest in participation to form a community. The capacity for people to get involved in community participation will vary greatly, from environment to environment, simply because some might not be interested, or might be unable to participate due to certain factors (Midgley 1986, p. 29).

Despite that, in McMillan’s & Chavis’ (1986) view, “a sense of community could develop, especially if appropriate technical assistance were provided to assist in organizing”. If assistance was to be provided, what else would be needed to develop a sense of community? McMillan & Chavis (1986) comment that members need “important events to share”, which can lead to building a shared history among themselves. Events, and shared projects within the community context, can nevertheless present some problems. On one hand, it can initiate the involvement and the relationship from all participants, but it can also determine or set, when that involvement or relationship ends as the project or activity reaches its goal (Midgley 1986, p.32).

There is, however, another crucial and current factor our society encounters every day, which McMillan & Chavis do not discuss when commenting about sense of community, and that is technology. The role technology plays in our social interaction and how that affects the development of relationships between people is a relevant factor when considering the idea of sense of community (Francis et al. 2012). From the industrialization period to development and advancement of media and technology, our societies have been affected by how individuals interact and form their communities (Farahani & Lozanovska 2014). Perhaps more than ever before, our ways of connecting, meeting and interacting with each other have changed (Yelland, Lee, O'Rourke & Harrison 2008, p. 8), as we interact and connect through different online platforms in a sphere not seem to have time and geographical limitations (Francis et al. 2012). This is certainly an important factor one must keep in mind when trying to form a relationship between people.

Nonetheless, perhaps more importantly, communities need to be rewarding for its members. If they can have a positive influence on its community and its people (Stukas & Dunlap 2002), if they can help or be helped for example, it becomes more rewarding for them (McMillan & Chavis 1986) to belong to a community. Moreover, this sense of achievement, of having done something concrete, i.e. helping others, can initiate or strengthen a sense of community within people (Midgley 1986, p.9), as they realize that they can contribute and have an influence.

This issue regarding influence also relates very closely to what had been commented about 'participation and involvement' in ECEC in Finland. Much like any member of a community, it is important for children to be heard, to be involved, and start trusting "in their own possibilities of making a difference" (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 27). These are basic democratic values, which are also important for children, and amongst some of the main values promoted within ECEC in Finland (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 22).

### 3.2 Community in Early Childhood Education and Care

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the literature on the topic of community in ECEC varies as different authors or researchers describe different examples of projects or methods on this topic, or how they view community in ECEC. One of the common cases

found in the literature about community in ECEC is about community residents' involvement, participation and assistance in the provision of education and care for children. There are multiple examples of different projects or programmes where the members of communities get engaged and involved to either provide or enhance education for those living in their community (Chiwela 2011, pp. 59-67; Hall 1986, pp. 79-81; Yáñez & Yanez 2001, pp. 43-73).

There are a variety of reasons for the community to be involved in this manner, however this often occurs due to a lack of financial resources from local government, but as a result it enables solidarity among members of the community (Yáñez & Yanez 2001, p. 56; Hall 1986, p. 82). At the core of these examples is the desire or goal for improvement in the local community, and this one of the leading reasons for those engaged in community involvement (Stukas & Dunlap 2002). Moreover, in cases like these, "ordinary people experience fulfilment which contributes to a heightened sense of community and a strengthening of community bonds" (Midgley 1986, p. 9).

Another example relates to McMillan & Chavis' (1986) four criteria of sense of community, but which happens inside kindergartens, amongst children, in many different countries. As children enter kindergartens, they start to learn how to belong and function in a group setting. In this environment, children start to learn, and understand, how to cooperate with each other, be willing to negotiate with each other and "to draw on one another's skills" (Kane 2016), leading them to trust each other and form relationships, in a community like manner. It is a process different for every group of children inside kindergartens, which the ECEC staff can influence and help children to develop (Koivula & Eerola-Pennanen 2017, p. 256), and something like what has been described before about the idea of forming a community. Although, this is more of an example in a micro-scale form and confined to an ECEC centre.

Another case of community's involvement in ECEC lies with the Reggio Emilia Approach of education. This approach has its roots in the small Italian city of Reggio Emilia, where communities came helping the local schools with money, food, skills and other resources right after the end of the second World War (Thornton & Brunton 2009, pp. 9-10). Community members, and parents, in Reggio Emilia started to become also involved as representatives in Early Childhood Councils of each early childhood education centre, and children become involved in projects for their communities (Thornton & Brunton 2009, p. 64). This background and history, of adults and children interacting together,

has created one of the cores of this approach and pedagogy, which has been characterized “as a ‘pedagogy of relationships’” (Nutkins, McDonald & Stephen 2013, p. 192), where children are “confident in building relationships” (Thornton & Brunton 2009, p. 15). Significantly, these are reciprocal relationships, where children and adults learn together, valuing each other’s’ views and opinions to construct knowledge (Nutkins et al. 2013, p. 193; Thornton & Brunton 2009, pp. 18-19).

Moreover, within the Reggio Emilia Approach, children are involved in substantial projects that take place in public spaces for all those in their communities (Thornton & Bunton 2009, p. 64). However, it is not just the Reggio Emilia Approach that highlights the importance of community involvement and building relationships. The Place-Based Education is also an approach that “considers the local community to be central to children’s education” (Mendoza & Katz 2013, p.166) as this approach aims to connect learning and communities “with the primary goals of increasing student engagement, boosting academic outcomes, impacting communities and promoting understanding of the world around” them (Getting Smart 2017).

Furthermore, these forms of reciprocal relationships, where there is mutual interaction and communication, can lead for those involved in becoming more participative, and perhaps more importantly, a citizen (Yamashita, Davies & Williams 2011, pp. 107-108). Children’s citizen role is an issue that many authors describe as vital, as children “must be acknowledged as citizens in the communities in which they live and learn” (Nutbrown & Clough 2006, p.149), as children are “active participants of their lives rather than passive recipients” (Lancaster & Kirby 2014, p. 97), who “have the right to express themselves, their opinions, and thoughts” (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 22).

This precise concept, of a collaborative learning, relates to a factor highlighted in the latest draft of the Helsinki ECEC Plan, Helsinki Vasu, which is to do with the importance of the ‘learning community’, where children and staff learn from each other. The draft of the Helsinki ECEC Plan notes that “participating and doing things together strengthens community” (Helsingin varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2019 luonnos), which is a concept that not only can happen inside kindergartens, between staff and children, but also between kindergartens and local people, like in the case of Reggio Emilia.

For children, this sense of becoming more participative, of trusting “in their own possibilities of making a difference” (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 27), and initiating a sense of what is to be citizen, can be very relevant for their development. Furthermore, participation activities for children, where there is community involvement for example, have shown to improve children’s communication and learning skills (Yamashita, Davies & Williams 2011, pp. 99-100). Moreover, according to Mendoza & Katz (2013, p.166), an active citizenship aspect within an educational approach, can provide basic understandings, knowledge and skills that can also “be applied to their interactions with the world beyond their communities”.

Despite the different approaches and cases of community in ECEC, there are two key factors that can be found in these different cases. The first one, perhaps the most obvious one, is that communities can have an influence on children’s lives and learning (Nutkins et al. 2013, pp. 123-124; Goldfield, Woolcock, Kantz, Tanton, Brinkman, O’Connor, Mathews & Giles-Corti 2014). The other one, which could be considered the most challenging one, is that “like any form of community, a community in an early childhood setting doesn’t just happen” (Naughton with Patrick Hughes 2003, p. 250), as this is something that needs to be constructed (Koivula & Eerola-Pennanen 2017, p. 250). The reason for this factor being possibly challenging is because it is necessary for ECEC centres to find approaches and arrange the time to engage with the local people. However, even a small-scale approach can be enough to start building a community (Touhill 2012).

Above all, what is clear is the importance of community in ECEC, for children and the staff in ECEC centres. We must remember that a child’s development does not only occur in one confined environment. There are multiple relationships and environments that can have an influence on children’s development, which is something that refers to Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system theory (Goldfield et al. 2014). The people and the surrounding environment in ECEC centres can have that influence, and this is something ECEC staff should be aware. Furthermore, ECEC educators can and should be able to provide diverse learning experiences for children, and the involvement of community is one example in broadening children’s learning (Donegal County Childcare Committee 2015).

### 3.2.1 Learning Environment

Learning environments, whether indoors or outdoors, play a vital role in helping to provide different educational experiences, opportunities and materials for children, and facilitating their development (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 34). Within the Reggio Emilia Approach, practitioners consider the environment, the indoor and outdoor space, to be the ‘third educator’ (Dowling 2014, p. 71; Robison 2010, p. 221) as it is essential for children to develop in rich and complex environments (Nutkins et al. 2013, p. 197) Utilizing the outdoor space as a learning environment has presented a great number of positive outcomes for children, i.e. increase in social and emotional development, cognitive development, all of which are relevant for their well-being (Cooper 2015). Furthermore, the outdoor space presents children with the possibility to interact with different people, who can have a meaningful role in children’s development and learning (Bruce 2005, p. 66).

If children are to become members of society (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 18), it would be vital to provide them with the opportunity where they can use their knowledge, act and interact with others outside of their ECEC groups, and not limit them with “simple environments and ideas” (Sisk-Hilton 2013, p.14). Elena Giacomini, a member of the pedagogical team in Reggio Emilia, comments precisely on this idea, noting that “education should occupy public spaces and not solely within the walls of the institution” (Giacomini cited in Thornton & Brunton 2009, p. 20). By placing part of their education in a real setting, with other individuals, children can have a direct and hands-on experience of learning which is essential for them (Bruce 2005, p. 59).

In the case of forming relationships, and a community, between ECEC centres and the people around them, the environment where this would most likely happen is the outdoor space. As public spaces, not only can offer an option of space for this relationship to happen and develop, but they can also be an important factor that can enhance a sense of community amongst those involved (Francis, Giles-Corti, Wood & Knuiman 2012).

Despite the positive aspects of the outside world becoming an important aspect of their learning, creating a learning environment outside for children is a complex and intricate endeavour (Bruce 2005, p. 58). To add more difficulty to this matter, it is necessary to look how ECEC centres, or schools as well, arrange their space. Are they completely sealed off from the surrounding environment or do they offer even a glimpse for community members to wonder what goes on in these ECEC centres (Almy 1975, p.

147)? Are these ECEC centres designed and/or arranged in a way that it does not allow any contact or interaction with people in the neighbourhood?

Using the outside space as a learning environment, and to form a community, can raise these sorts of questions, as ECEC staff and children's parents might have their own preconceived views of the neighbourhood and not know the people around these centres. This sort of issue is precisely connected to safety and security within the implementation of ECEC and how the environment is arranged (Robson 2010, p. 224). Creating a safe learning environment for children is a fundamental aspect in ECEC (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 18), which means that safety concerns are likely to present difficulties when trying to form a community between ECEC centres and people around them.

Nonetheless, it is important that children are provided with different and meaningful opportunities to connect and collaborate with a diverse group of people (Robson 2010, p. 222), i.e. other children and adults, in "real environments" (Katz 2010, p. 16). This means that in order to provide "versatile working methods" within that framework for pedagogical activities, ECEC centres need to provide "versatile learning environments" as well (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2016, p. 42).

#### **4 Aim of Thesis and Research Questions**

Each ECEC centre and its practitioners, whether in Finland or elsewhere, must decide on their curricula; how the development of children can happen or be enhanced in their centres, and through what sort of activities. As children in ECEC may spend between 20 to 40 hours on a weekly basis in these centres, the neighbourhood and its local people can present an influential element for children's learning and development. Based on the concepts, values and ideas discussed on this study thus far, the notion of forming a relationship, a community between ECEC centres and the people around them would be suitable, relevant and, more importantly, beneficial for children.

This leads precisely to the central question of this research: how would it be possible to form a community between ECEC centres and the local people around them? Moreover, what sort of potential benefits, in the view of these two ECEC centres, could come out for the children with this idea? Thus, the two working life partners, their respective

neighbourhoods and the local people, will provide the basis to find out the overall aim of this thesis and its research questions.

Above all, this will mean that it is essential to find out and understand the different perspectives and relevant opinions about this possible idea from the various participants, starting with the children. How do the children view the neighbourhood where their kindergarten is located? Do they prefer to spend their time outside in the neighbourhood or inside the kindergarten? Have they met or interacted with some of the local people? If they have, how these interactions have been? Would they be interested in doing activities and projects with the neighbourhood people?

It is also imperative to understand the perspective of the kindergarten staff, i.e. teachers and managers. How do they view the neighbourhood where they work? How do they use the outside space as a learning environment for the children? What sort of experiences the kindergartens have had with its local people? Do they have some ideas on how to form a community between them and the local people? More importantly, what could be some of the benefits that they see for the children by forming a community with their local people? Although the idea of community between ECEC centres and other people would be suitable and relevant for children, especially when considering the Finnish National Core Curriculum, what could be some of the difficulties in this process according to these kindergartens? Are there too many safety concerns or other issues that could prevent children interacting with people near these kindergartens?

One essential factor that must also be considered is the perspective of the local people about these kindergartens. How do the people in the neighbourhoods view these kindergartens? What sort of experiences they have had with these kindergartens? Are these people interested in forming a relationship with the kindergartens or do they even have time for this? As discussed before, some possible difficulties could even prevent this relationship to happen in the first place. Therefore, finding out these possible difficulties is also a significant aspect of this study, as it would be important to understand what sort of obstacles could lie ahead.

This leads to the working life partners of this study. As it has been mentioned, for both kindergartens the outside space is an important element for the children's development. It is a daily part of the children's lives in the kindergarten, not to mention to the staff as well. Both kindergartens have had so far, their share of experiences and interactions with

people in their neighbourhoods. However, these experiences and interactions have been seldom and brief, and there could be new approaches for both kindergartens to engage with the people in the neighbourhood that will come out as a result from this thesis. As it has been presented before, the ECEC centre can be a powerful tool and platform for children to engage with other individuals, to participate in collaborative activities, to form relationships while expanding their view and knowledge of the surrounding world. Therefore, these potential new approaches could bring interesting and valuable experiences for all involved, especially the children who would benefit the most from this idea.

## 5 Research Methods

Based on the aims of this study, the most suitable method of research for the topic of community in ECEC was a qualitative research. One of the reasons is that a qualitative research can provide a better understanding and information about a “specific social context or phenomenon”, as its research method can present different behaviours, views, beliefs and “relationship of individuals.” (Family Health International.) Furthermore, qualitative research method is more flexible than for example quantitative research method, which usually relies more on statistical numbers and close-ended questions from participants (Family Health International).

Another reason is that a qualitative research method commonly uses open-ended questions, allowing more of a discussion between the researcher and the participants, as participants can elaborate more in their answers (Family Health International), instead of relying too much on ‘yes’ or ‘no’ forms of answer. A major component of this research relied in interviewing, in different manners, the children and the staff in the kindergartens, and some of the individuals in the neighbourhoods. Thus, relying on a qualitative method of interview was appropriate to provide more understanding to the aims of the study.

Besides interviewing the necessary participants for this study, another important aspect of the research part was to make observations. This meant observing both the neighbourhoods where the working life partners are located, but also observing their outside activities with the children. More importantly, observing what sort of interactions the children might have with the people in these neighbourhoods when they are outside.

Therefore, these two sets of different contexts of observations involved two different methods: direct observation and participant observation.

When it came to observe the neighbourhoods without the presence of the working life partners, there were no interactions between researcher and anyone in both neighbourhoods, as the focus was to observe on the outside environment of the neighbourhood. Thus, it was a case of “direct observation”, of just observing how the neighbourhoods are without its local people being aware that there were observations taking place. On the other hand, when it came to the outside observations with the presence of the children and teachers, it became more about “participant observation”, as the children and staff were aware of the observations taking place, and the fact there was some degree of ‘participation’ involved in these observations. However, it is important to note that, in this case again, the emphasis was on the observation process itself and collecting the data. The participation was more about being part of the whole group than about influencing on the action of children and staff (Kawulich 2005.)

Lastly, the research part of the study was divided into five parts, which are described in detail below in their own category. The reason for that was because these five parts represent a different category of the data collection of the research process. This also meant that the data analysis was conducted accordingly to each category. Furthermore, in this manner the reader could follow and understand in a clearer way each single process taken, and the subsequent results, which are discussed in the next chapter. Each of these five parts of data collection were conducted separately, starting at the end of May and finalizing towards the middle of July.

## 5.1 Preliminary Observations

Before starting to conduct the outside observations of the working life partners, it was important to observe both neighbourhoods where ‘Kindergarten A’ and ‘Kindergarten B’ are located. The overall reason was to familiarize better with the outside environment of the kindergartens. It was important to see and visit some of the public spaces such as children’s playgrounds, parks and other spaces that the kindergartens, and people, in the neighbourhood are most likely to use, or that are simply available in these areas. Therefore, it was necessary to spend one full day in each neighbourhood observing the outside environment, taking down notes and pictures. There was not a space limitation in terms of where to make the observations, meaning that all the area in both

neighbourhoods were observed. However, the idea was to pay more attention to the environment closer to the kindergartens, rather than spots and places which are in the neighbourhood but over 20 minutes walking from both kindergartens. The other essential aspect was to focus on what is around these neighbourhoods without the company of the working life partners.

Furthermore, it was essential to examine the space that both kindergartens share with some of the local residents, as both kindergartens are situated in residential buildings. These observations and notes made during these visits would help as well to develop questions related about the neighbourhoods for the participants. Moreover, this would also provide already a better grasp to the answers that participants would eventually give about the neighbourhoods. Lastly, these observations would give an insight on how to reach out to residents of these neighbourhoods for them to participate in the questionnaire.

As it was mentioned, the other part of these preliminary observations consisted of taking pictures of the outside environment. The pictures taken were of different public spaces in the areas, the streets where the kindergartens are located and some known landmarks in both neighbourhoods. These pictures would be later be printed and used for the interviews with the children in the kindergartens, which are further discussed about the interview methods with the children.

## 5.2 Outside Observations with the Kindergartens

Prior to making the outside observations with the working life partners it was necessary to plan and organize the dates when these observations could happen. Not only that, it was important to meet the children of each kindergarten to inform that there would be an extra person coming in sometimes to spend a few hours during some days. That information was also given to parents by the staff of both kindergartens and an information pamphlet was printed and put in the kindergartens with details about the topic of this study and the researcher.

In both cases the observations would happen in the month of June, however there would be differences in dates and hours to be making these outside observations. Nevertheless, these observations would be done in similar manner. All the observations were written down on a notebook and transcribed to the computer. It was essential not

to disrupt the usual routine and manner how the children and staff act outside, the objective was to simply pay attention to the kindergartens in these outside contexts.

The goals were to observe what kind of interactions, if at all, between kindergartens and local people could happen in the outside environment; how the children, teachers and local people would act in these interactions; what are some of the outside environments in the neighbourhood that these kindergartens frequently use; for how long do the kindergartens spent their outside time; and how the outside environment could be used to form that relationship between kindergartens and local people.

There were however some small differences in the process of making these outside observations, all of which are detailed below separately by each working life partner.

### 5.2.1 Kindergarten A

For 'Kindergarten A' the outside observations could only take place for one week in June, from Monday to Friday. The week for these observations, and interviews with the children, were suggested by the kindergarten manager, as that particular week was the best suitable for them. In that week, there were no field trips happening, the kindergarten would then stick to their usual outside routine of going to two different parks in the neighbourhood during those days.

For the first three days of that week, the observations were made in the early afternoon, when the kindergarten usually goes out for the first time every day. The location was a park which takes about five minutes walking for the children and staff. These observations began from the point that the children started to walk outside of the kindergarten to the park and ended when the children went back to the kindergarten. These observations took little over two hours per day, the usual time 'Kindergarten A' spends outside during that part of the day. Although that in the first day, there were some additional observations made in the middle of the afternoon for less than one hour.

On the fourth day, the idea was to observe the kindergarten outside from the middle of the afternoon until the parents would pick the children up, again for little over two hours and in the same park. However, due to a heavy rain that took place that day, the kindergarten decided to stay inside for that time slot, instead of going out. This meant that, unfortunately, no observations were made that day.

On Friday, the last day of observations, the kindergarten would usually go to another park, which is about 10 minutes walking from the kindergarten. However, because two teachers had some previous engagements and could not go with the children outside, the kindergarten decided to go to the same park which had been previously observed with the kindergarten, and during the same time slot. Thus, the final outside observation with 'Kindergarten A' was done exactly in the same manner as the other days, and in the same space. This meant that there were only four days of outside observations with 'Kindergarten A'.

### 5.2.2 Kindergarten B

For 'Kindergarten B', the outside observations, and interview with the children, happened in different weeks during the month of June. The dates were selected in conjecture with the kindergarten teacher, always keeping in mind what suited best for the kindergarten. There were no field trips held during those dates, with most observations were done in the backyard of the building where the kindergarten is located. A spot which they spend a lot of their outside time on a weekly basis.

In total, there were seven days spent doing the outside observations with 'Kindergarten B'. From these seven days, two days were spent observing the kindergarten in two different parks. Both parks are located about fifteen minutes walking for the children and staff of the kindergarten. That meant that observations took place when the kindergarten was walking to the park, when they were in the park and when they walked back to the kindergarten. On both occasions, these observations took about two hours per day and they happened in the morning, when 'Kindergarten B' frequently spends time outside.

The other five days of outside observations happened in the backyard of the building where the kindergarten is located. In this backyard, there is a small playground for children to play, and it is also open for residents of nine buildings located around where the kindergarten is situated. More importantly, this is an outside environment which the children go daily, either in the morning and/or afternoon. From these five days observing this outside environment, two were done in the afternoon for little under two hours, and the other three days were spent in the morning for little under two hours as well.

### 5.3 Interviews with the Children

As it has been mentioned previously, the interviews with the children in 'Kindergarten A' and 'Kindergarten B' happened about the same days when the outside observations were made. However, before proceeding with the interviews there were certain vital aspects that needed to be taken care of. The first one was selecting the children from each kindergarten for the interviews. The initial idea was to interview between six and ten children from each kindergarten, as there would not be enough time to interview every child, as there were 26 children in 'Kindergarten A', and 17 children in 'Kindergarten B'. The other idea was for the children to be between the age of 4 and 6 years old, as they would be most likely to understand the questions and express themselves better than children below that age group. Based on that information, the manager and one teacher from 'Kindergarten A', and two teachers from 'Kindergarten B', suggested some possible children for the interviews.

The other aspect that needed to be taken care of was a parental consent form for the parents of the children who had been suggested to be interviewed. These parental consent forms (Appendix 1) included information on the topic of this study, any other relevant information about the interviews, and a consent for parents to sign in case they authorized their child to be interviewed. These consent forms were then handed to 'Kindergarten A' almost 2 weeks before the first day of observations and interviews, and to 'Kindergarten B' about 10 days before the first day of observations and interviews. In the end, there were 6 children interviewed from 'Kindergarten A', and 8 children interviewed from 'Kindergarten B'.

For both kindergartens' children, a similar questionnaire was made (Appendix 2) with 13 questions. The method of interview was for the most part open-ended questions, however there were some close-ended questions. Furthermore, the interviews were face to face and using an audio recording device to capture the answers. The audio files of the children's answers were later transcribed and highlights of their answers were also done.

The questions were designed to be simple but at the same time allowing the children to give informative answers to the questions, and there were no time limitations to do these interviews. Before each interview with the children, there was a quick and friendly talk about how the interview would work. They were told what purpose the interview was for,

and more importantly, a reassurance that the interview was not a test, that the children could be as open as they would wish to be and that they were not obligated to answer a question that they did not feel comfortable with. Additionally, there was visual aid used to help the children talk about the respective neighbourhoods of the kindergartens. There was a total of 12 pictures printed for each kindergarten, and these pictures had been taken during the preliminary observations. These pictures would be used only when referring to the questions about the neighbourhood of the kindergartens to help the children to answer these questions.

All the interviews, in both kindergartens, were conducted in the morning, and each participant was interviewed alone. The initial plan was to conduct the interviews in pairs, as the children might feel more comfortable with the presence of a peer than just being alone with the researcher. This idea was attempted in 'Kindergarten B' as a test, however it was noticed that the children got easily distracted by each other. Thus, it was decided to conduct the interviews with one child at time.

In 'Kindergarten A', the interviews were conducted in an area near the entrance of the kindergarten, which meant that there were a few occasions when other children and parents were in the same space. However, these minor occurrences did not distract the children in the interview process. In 'Kindergarten B', the interviews were conducted in a room without the presence of teachers or other children. All the interviews took between 6 to 10 minutes per child.

#### 5.4 Interview with Kindergarten Staff

The process of interviews with the staff of the kindergarten, teachers and managers, would be divided into two parts. The first part of this process consisted of an online questionnaire, where there was one questionnaire (Appendix 3) for teachers, and one questionnaire (Appendix 4) for managers. These questionnaires included questions about the neighbourhood of the kindergartens, the outside as a learning environment, previous experiences of interactions with the people in the neighbourhood, and other questions related to the topic of this study. The questionnaire for teachers had 18 questions, and the questionnaire for managers had 14 questions. The questionnaires were the same for both kindergartens, and most the questions were open-ended, although there were some close-ended questions as well.

The link for these online questionnaires were sent to the teachers and managers, and they were given a deadline to answer the questions. All the answers were kept confidential to the researcher and not shared to other members of staff, or to other kindergartens, or between participants. For 'Kindergarten A', the teachers and manager were given 11 days to answer the questions. For 'Kindergarten B', the teachers and manager were given 17 days to answer the questions. Based on the answers given, there would be follow up questions, which are described later. The reason why the staff in 'Kindergarten A' had less days to answer the questions, was because the follow up interviews would have to take place in the same week when outside observations and children's interviews were occurring.

There was a total of 6 participants in these questionnaires, two teachers and the manager from each kindergarten. However, it is important to comment that one of the participants from 'Kindergarten B' was a former teacher who had left that kindergarten one week before the research had started. Despite that, it was relevant to get this teacher's input as this teacher had been working in 'Kindergarten B' for quite some time and could provide significant answers to the questions presented.

#### 5.4.1 Follow Up Interview with Kindergarten Staff

The second part of this process consisted of follow up interviews based on the answers given by some of the participants. The follow up interviews therefore would be different for each participant, as it was based on the answers given from the online questionnaire. The aim was to get a more complete understanding to some of the cases and ideas brought up first through the online questionnaire. Moreover, it was a manner to expand on the conversation about the topic of this study.

Therefore, these follow up interviews were done face to face and an audio recorder device was used to capture the answers. This meant that the answers would be later transcribed. All in all, there were four participants from these follow up interviews: one teacher and the manager from each kindergarten. However, due to time restrictions the follow up interview with the manager of 'Kindergarten A' had to be done via email. The follow up interview with the teacher from 'Kindergarten A', as noted before, was done in the same week when outside observations and children's interviews were conducted there. Lastly, the follow up interviews in 'Kindergarten B' happened at the end of June.

## 5.5 Questionnaire for Residents

The last group of participants that needed to be interviewed for the research were the residents of 'Neighbourhood A' and 'Neighbourhood B'. Since the main goal of this study was to find out if it would be possible to form a relationship between kindergartens and the people in the neighbourhood, it was imperative to get the local people's point of view in this matter. Before figuring out how to contact the local people, it was necessary to set some boundaries, as it would be time consuming and difficult to get everyone in these neighbourhoods involved. Therefore, after the preliminary observation period in both neighbourhoods, the solution was to try to contact the people living in the same and in the buildings next to both kindergartens. The reason was because these people would likely to be more aware of the kindergartens and possibly have some previous experience of interactions with them. This also meant that the people working in these neighbourhoods, in restaurants or shops or libraries, would not be interviewed.

The next step was deciding how to interview the people in these two neighbourhoods. It would have been rather challenging and time consuming to be standing in front of these buildings and trying to interview people. Therefore, an online questionnaire, much like the one created for the teachers and managers of the kindergartens, was done. In this manner, participants could answer the questions in peace and without much rush as a face to face interview could pose. This questionnaire (Appendix 5) included 17 questions about the area in general and the possibility of forming a relationship with the kindergarten. The questionnaire for both neighbourhoods was the same, which had a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions, and there was also a version in Finnish of this questionnaire.

The next step was reaching out to the people in both neighbourhoods to participate in this online questionnaire. This was a difficult process as there were no clear and simple way to get people in both neighbourhoods involved. The neighbourhood association in 'Neighbourhood A' could not help, only offering some advice, and no online groups in social platforms like Facebook were found in that neighbourhood to promote this questionnaire. In 'Neighbourhood B' there was an online group in Facebook of the residents around the kindergarten, however that was a private group only for residents of the building.

This led to the idea of making an information pamphlet (Appendix 6) about the topic of this study and giving the necessary information for people who would like to participate in the questionnaire. Not only that, this questionnaire would be anonymous, meaning that participants would not need to disclose any personal information when answering the questions, unless they would want to. This pamphlet was also written in Finnish, and the idea was to print copies of these pamphlets in English and Finnish and put them inside and/or outside of the buildings of both neighbourhoods. Towards the end of June, these information pamphlets were put in 6 buildings in 'Neighbourhood A'. Out of these 6 buildings, in four of them the pamphlets were put inside of the buildings, and in the other two buildings they were put outside of the buildings. The reason was that not all the buildings were open when the pamphlets were put.

Also, in the end of June, the information pamphlets were put in 8 buildings of 'Neighbourhood B'. Only in one building, where the kindergarten is situated, the pamphlet was put inside. In the other buildings, the pamphlets had to be put outside as the doors were closed. In both cases, there were follow up visits to see if the pamphlets had been taken down after some time. Only in 'Neighbourhood B', in one building, the pamphlet had been taken down. Another copy was then put where it had been taken down. Almost all the pamphlets put in both neighbourhoods were in Finnish, however there were some pamphlets put also in English.

There was a set time frame for potential participants to reach out for the questionnaire, which was 3 weeks from the moment these pamphlets were put in the buildings. This deadline to participate was marked in the information pamphlet. However, in 'Neighbourhood B' one of the participants ended up helping towards the end of this time frame and posted the direct link to the questionnaire in the Facebook group that the residents of the 9 buildings around the kindergarten belong to. This meant residents in 'Neighbourhood B' were given an extra 5-day period to respond. In the end, there was only 1 participant from the questionnaire of 'Neighbourhood A'. Another resident from 'Neighbourhood A' sent an email about participating in the questionnaire, and despite been provided with the link to the questionnaire, this person did not participate answering the questions.

For 'Neighbourhood B' there were a total of 7 participants. From these participants, 4 participated because they had seen the information pamphlet, and 3 participated after the questionnaire link had been posted to the Facebook group of the residents. These 8

participants answered the questions in Finnish, and their answers were later translated to English.

## 6 Results

The results of the research process are divided into four categories: outside observations, children, kindergarten staff and local residents. Furthermore, there is also a summary of the results at the end of this chapter, to present for the reader an overall view of the common findings from both cases. Nonetheless, the results are presented in different sub-categories since there were two working life partners, and two distinct neighbourhoods of Helsinki, involved in the research process.

### 6.1 Outside Observations

In this section are the results from the outside observations made with the working life partners. This includes the observations not only from the outside environments they use, but also about the interactions with other people that occurred outside during the research period. Additionally, there are the results of the observations made of both neighbourhoods, about how the outside environment is in both areas, and what it offers to people in these neighbourhoods.

#### 6.1.1 Kindergarten A

There were four days doing the outside observations with 'Kindergarten A', as in one day the kindergarten stayed inside when the outside observations should have happened. Each outside observation took little over two hours per day. During these days, the kindergarten went to the same park, which is under a 5-minute walk from the kindergarten. This park is designed for children to use, all around the park there is a fence, and the city of Helsinki handles the maintenance of the park. Close to the park there are residential buildings, some shops and restaurants, a football field and other public spaces.

Inside the park there are sandboxes, swings, other children's play sets, a couple of benches and a table. It is a very big park, which the children seem to enjoy going to and

playing there. For the most part, during these observations, there were only the children and the teachers from 'Kindergarten A'. However, there were certain periods when another unit of the same kindergarten company was in that park. Additionally, there were two instances, in different days, when a parent with children were in that park at the same time as 'Kindergarten A'. Although they were not for a long period of time and did not have any interactions with the children or staff of 'Kindergarten A'. Therefore, there were no real interactions that occurred between 'Kindergarten A' and other people in this park.

When 'Kindergarten A' was walking towards to the park and back to the kindergarten, they did not interact with people in the neighbourhood. There were some occasions when there were people out when 'Kindergarten A' was walking, but these people never acknowledged the children and vice-versa.

This leads to an area that the kindergarten goes by every day, which is the inner yard and passage of the building where they are located. As it has been noted before, 'Kindergarten A' is located inside a residential building complex. Next to them and on top of them there are two residential buildings. To enter and exit both buildings, and the kindergarten, people go through by this passage. The inner yard of this building complex has a three, a space for residents to keep their bicycles, and containers for trash and recycling. It is not small; however, it is not that big in terms of size.

During the outside observations, there was only one instance when there was a resident going to the one of the buildings about the same time as the kindergarten. However, one of the teachers noticed that, stopped the line and waited for this resident to enter the passage area before continuing to walk with the children towards their building. It is also necessary to note, that there was no learning activity observed during the outside observations. The outside space and time during the four days was mainly used for children to play in the park.

In terms of the neighbourhood where 'Kindergarten A' belongs to, the outside environment overall offers a variety of options of leisure and activities for people to do outside. There are different parks, some designed exclusively for children, and some for people in general, historical landmarks, and different services operating in the area. There are also some schools and other kindergartens in this neighbourhood. It is also important to note, that there are a lot of residential buildings in this neighbourhood, especially close to the kindergarten. Although situated in an urban area of Helsinki,

nature is still a big part of the landscape in this neighbourhood, and its location provides easy access to other areas of Helsinki.

### 6.1.2 Kindergarten B

There were 7 days of outside observations conducted with 'Kindergarten B'. Out of these 7 days, two were done in the morning in two different parks in the neighbourhood. These parks, as noted before, are situated about 15 minutes walking from the kindergarten. Both parks are managed by the city of Helsinki, they are very big and other kindergartens and families with children use it. These parks have sandboxes, swings, slides and different play sets. When these observations took place, 'Kindergarten B' was out for about 2 hours. There were other children, and adults, in both parks when these observations were made, however there were no interactions between 'Kindergarten B' staff or children and others. Additionally, in both cases, when 'Kindergarten B' was walking towards these parks and back to the kindergarten, there were no interactions with local people. The children did not acknowledge other people walking in the streets and vice-versa.

Most the outside observations were made in the backyard of the building where the kindergarten is located. Much like the case of 'Kindergarten A', this kindergarten is also located inside a residential building, with other 8 buildings around them. This backyard is for the use of 9 residential buildings, and a housing company manages this backyard, and these 9 buildings. The backyard is rather small, narrow and it is semi-open. There is a gate, and then a fence around half of this backyard, but people can walk there through another spot. In this backyard, there is a small playground for children to play, which includes two small sandboxes, one slide and outside toys. There is a small flower spot which one of the residents takes care of, and a spot for residents to park their bicycles. Although the space in this backyard is somewhat limited, and without much options for children to play with, the children seem to like that area.

The outside observations made in this backyard happened three times in the morning, and two times in the afternoon. These observations took less than two hours. Even though this backyard can be used for other children living in these buildings, there were no other children besides the ones from the kindergarten during the observation days. However, there were residents of the three buildings that passed by a lot of times when the kindergarten was in this backyard. Despite that, there were no interactions, not even

short ones, between residents and 'Kindergarten B' staff or children. The residents did not even acknowledge the children and vice-versa. Residents of the buildings seemed to be leaving and entering their buildings in a hurry, and not really paying attention to the children. Whereas the children were more concerned about playing amongst themselves.

As much as was the case with 'Kindergarten A', it is relevant to point out that during the outside observations, there were no learning activities that took place. The outside time and space were mainly used for children to play.

The neighbourhood where 'Kindergarten B' is situated is very urban, with many residential buildings, historical landmarks, different shops and restaurants, other kindergartens and schools. Its outside environment provides people with different opportunities for activities and social life. Its location also provides easy access to other areas of Helsinki. There are different kinds of park in the neighbourhood as well, although children's parks are located about 15 minutes away from 'Kindergarten B'. Unlike where 'Kindergarten A' is located, there is not a lot of nature in this neighbourhood. Moreover, there is a big renovation and construction happening in some parts of this neighbourhood. This aspect has increased noise levels outside, something that was very noticeable during the morning observations made in the backyard when 'Kindergarten B' was outside.

## 6.2 Children

This section contains a summary of the answers given by the children in both kindergartens, separated by each kindergarten. This summary is regarding about what the children responded about their own neighbourhood, the neighbourhood of the kindergarten, the outside environment, the idea of meeting and doing activities with the people in the neighbourhood. It was important not only to highlight some of the common grounds found from the children, but also some answers that offered a different view to some topics brought up in the interview. In some cases, direct quotes are used to illustrate better the results found.

### 6.2.1 Kindergarten A

For 'Kindergarten A', as mentioned previously, 6 children participated in the interviews. Out from these participants, three live in the same neighbourhood where the kindergarten is located, one lives close by that neighbourhood and two live far away. All the children knew the word 'neighbour' and what it meant. Additionally, all of interviewees have at least one friend living in their own neighbourhood, either in the same street or even building. However, when asked if they knew the meaning of the word 'community', the children did not know how to answer. One child said that he had heard that word but could not explain what it means. An explanation was given to each child using the same concept of community used in this study, albeit in a simpler way of defining it.

Each child responded positively to the neighbourhood of 'Kindergarten A', saying that they like coming to that area, with some children describing the area as "nice" and "beautiful". Most of the children knew the outside environment of the neighbourhood based on the 12 pictures displayed to them, recognizing all but two pictures which were a landmark and a small park about 10 minutes walking from the kindergarten. Out of the 6 children, only 1 did not have a favourite spot or area in the neighbourhood. The rest mentioned various public spaces near the kindergarten, including the park that the children go to every Friday and the football field. Nevertheless, the children were satisfied with what the neighbourhood has to offer.

The children were split in regards about preferring to go outside or staying inside when they are in the kindergarten. One child prefers to go outside explaining "because when I'm outside I can do more things with my friends". However, another child prefers to stay inside because "you can't bring out" the favourite toys outside. For the majority, they prefer going outside in the summer season, with some saying because "it is beautiful and hot", and because "you don't need the rain coats". Only one child prefers going outside in the winter because "you can make snow man". In terms of doing more activities outside than they usually do, only two children would like to do more activities outside. Three children said that going outside twice a day was good enough already, and only one was not sure.

Lastly, most of the children said that it would be fun getting to know the local people in 'Neighbourhood A', including the people in their building or the one next to them. Only one child could not tell if this sort of idea would be nice. In regards about their experience meeting or talking to people who reside next to the kindergarten or other local residents, four said that they have met or talked with someone from the neighbourhood – although

two of these four said that it was a child that lives next to the kindergarten and attends the same kindergarten. One child was not sure about meeting or talking to anyone in the neighbourhood and one said has never met or talked with anyone there in the neighbourhood.

### 6.2.2 Kindergarten B

For 'Kindergarten B' there were 8 children participating in the interviews. From these 8 children, half of them live in the same neighbourhood as the kindergarten, two of them close to the neighbourhood, and two a bit further away from it. All the children knew the word 'neighbour' and its meaning, and most of them have a friend living either near them or in the same building. Much like the case of 'Kindergarten A', the children in 'Kindergarten B' did not know the meaning of the word community when asked about it. The same explanation about community was given to each participant.

All the 8 participants responded in a positive way about the neighbourhood of 'Kindergarten B' and are happy with what the area has to offer. The children like coming to this neighbourhood, and some of the children described the area as "nice" and "beautiful". Based on the pictures showed to the children, they were very familiar with the areas and spots. The children were able to recognize all but one picture of the area, which was a spot a little under 10 minutes walking from the kindergarten. All the children had between one and three favourite spots in 'Neighbourhood B', from the library to a football field to different parks that the children go on a weekly basis. The reason for some of these spots were to do with their own hobbies, interests and aesthetical reasons. For example, the library and one park were chosen because of the flowers outside.

Regarding the children's preference about going outside or staying inside when they are in the kindergarten, most of the participants, five to be exact, prefer going outside. The common reason of choosing outside was to do with playing with certain toys and playing in the sandbox. However, another one said that prefers going outside, but not in the winter season as the child commented that "don't like to dress up so much" when winter comes. Another one was split and said that likes both the same, and just one said that prefers staying inside. Nevertheless, the children were split about what season they rather go outside. Three of them said summer, three said winter and summer, one said in the winter, and one said in the autumn. The reasons were all related to things that one can do each season, so for example the reason for one child choosing the winter was

because “there is snow and you can play with the snow”, and one that choose summer said that the reason was “because I get ice cream”. Whereas the one child that choose autumn was “because I like to jump in the leaves”.

Lastly, the children were also split about the idea of going outside more than now for some activities. Half of them said that they would like to do more outside activities – although one of these four said that not during the winter; three said that they think is enough to go outside twice per day and one could not decide.

Finally, on the topic of the people in the neighbourhood and in the building of ‘Kindergarten B’. Half of participants said that it would be fun meeting local people, like the ones that live in the same building as the kindergarten. Three of them said that they did not know, and one said that it would not be nice meeting and getting to know the local people. This child did not give a reason why. Despite of that, most of them, six to be precise, said that they remember meeting or saying hello to someone from the same building as the kindergarten. Three of these children said that they have met a resident who has a dog and has let them pet the dog. Moreover, these six children remember seeing people coming in and out from their building when they have been in the backyard playing. Only two children could not remember meeting or talking to anyone, whether it was in the backyard or in the neighbourhood with the kindergarten group.

### 6.3 Kindergarten Staff

This section provides the results from the interview with the staff from both kindergartens. The questions for the teachers and the manager were slightly different, even though there were a few similar questions presented and the overall theme of the questionnaire was the same. Therefore, what is presented here is a summary of the answers given by the participants from each kindergarten. However, because there were some different questions and issues discussed, there is also a highlight on distinct issues. Moreover, there are some direct quotes used from the participants to reinforce an idea, topic or issue brought up from the questions. Lastly, it is perhaps important to note again that only one teacher and the manager from each kindergarten participated in the follow up interviews.

### 6.3.1 Kindergarten A

In terms of the neighbourhood of 'Kindergarten A', one teacher and the manager are very familiar with it. This teacher, as the manager, has been working in this kindergarten for some time already, and the teacher lives in that neighbourhood. On the other hand, one teacher was not that familiar with the neighbourhood. Nonetheless, the participants like a lot the neighbourhood as it "offers a variety of options to visit" as one teacher commented, and they do not think that the neighbourhood needs any improvement or change. However, one of the teachers brought up that the square in 'Neighbourhood A' needs an improvement and the city of Helsinki is organizing a competition for people in the neighbourhood, residents and/or business owners, to come up with ideas on how the square could be improved. Therefore, the teacher has thought about getting the children involved in this competition.

According to the participants, using the outside space as a learning environment is very important for 'Kindergarten A'. One teacher noted that during the summer is a lot easier to do outside activities, however throughout the year they are frequently outside. One of the teachers said that the children "get plenty of opportunities to explore the neighbourhood" and these experiences have been according to the participants very positive. One teacher commented that these types of experience have also enhanced "my own understanding of the importance of interacting with the community." In the participants' view, there are health, cognitive and social benefits using the outside space as a learning environment. By using the outside space as a learning environment, according to one of the teachers, children "familiarize themselves with the local community, they learn to talk to a variety of people about different subjects." Furthermore, the same teacher added the following comment:

*"The local people are very welcoming and are happy to have children visit them and learn about their work and how to participate within the community"*

According to the participants, the kindergarten has had topics and themes dealing with the neighbourhood and local community. This has led them to organize some projects with different people from the neighbourhood. These kinds of projects were a sort of 'Show & Tell', where different local people came to talk about their work, show what they do and do something with the children around that work. One case was of a flower shopkeeper coming to talk about flower arrangements, and then the children making

some flower arrangements for Mother's Day. The kindergarten used to organize also a 'Halloween bazaar', which took place once a year, from 1994 until 2009, and it was open not only to the kindergarten, but also to others in the neighbourhood. However, these forms of projects and events do not happen frequently, in the case of the 'Halloween bazaar', it has completely ended.

One of the teachers would be willing, nonetheless, to arrange and organize these sorts of get together with local people. According to this teacher, for example, there is an idea of inviting the police to come to the park next to the kindergarten to "show the police car and have a talk with the children", something that "can be easily done within a theme." The teacher commented the following in regards on how to do pursue this sort of idea:

*"It's just a matter of organizing and being willing to organize, and I think we should be willing. Implement as part of the work and do it."*

Moreover, in the manager's view, "nature related projects, knowing what is in the environment and its importance" could also be something for children to do in the context of the neighbourhood.

Another topic discussed were the interactions between the kindergarten and the people in the neighbourhood. The manager noted that since the kindergarten has been a part of the neighbourhood for the past 40 years, local residents are familiar with 'Kindergarten A'. The interactions between children and local people have been overall positive, whether it happens in field trips or in some other instances, for example in the park where they usually go. The park where all the outside observations have been done during the research has been an environment for different interactions. The teacher commented that sometimes, other families are there at the same time as the kindergarten, and the parents usually talk a lot to the teachers. Moreover, the box of toys in this park belongs to the kindergarten, but others can use those toys when the kindergarten is there, which usually happens. More recently, a local resident alerted the teachers about the fact that some people had been allowing dogs to go to this children's park and leaving the dogs' mess in the park. The manager also added that the kindergarten has helped people in the building and in the neighbourhood, a few times.

Nevertheless, the manager and one teacher did comment on a few instances when there have been minor issues which happened with a few residents of the building complex

where they are located. These minor issues happened around the building complex where the kindergarten is situated with the two residential buildings. The background for these minor issues were to do with one resident concerned about noise; a resident upset that children drew with chalk on the ground of the inner yard in front of the kindergarten; and a resident upset that a parent parked in front of the gate to the building. One of the teachers also commented that there is a resident “who does not care for children”, and has a few times been “verbally aggressive”. However, these small issues have occurred just a few times.

Despite minor issues that have happened with some residents, the participants view forming relationships with local people as a beneficial aspect for the children. According to one of the teachers, one benefit is that “it broadens their minds and the world around them.” Not forgetting that it would be beneficial for the kindergarten as a whole, as the manager noted by saying that with these sort of relationships “community bonds are strengthened, and we are seen as an asset to the community.” There are however some possible difficulties that the participants see, as the manager commented on this topic:

*“Some adults find children, especially in groups, challenging. We must also be aware of potential dangers. If a child becomes familiar and over comfortable with the wrong person, it could lead to problems, so we need to teach children a balance between being friendly and cautious.”*

Despite that, there has never been any safety concerns from the staff nor from the parents in any shape or form about the neighbourhood or about the residential building complex where the kindergarten is. Moreover, the kindergarten goes through safety policies and issues at the beginning of each term. Additionally, in terms of possible ways to connect to local people, or even to discuss common issues in the neighbourhood, the kindergarten does not belong to any neighbourhood association nor is it in any online platform, besides their own Facebook page.

### 6.3.2 Kindergarten B

The staff is quite familiar with the neighbourhood of the kindergarten, as one teacher has been living in the area for a few years, and the former teacher, who left just a month before the start of the research, lived in the neighbourhood. The staff likes the neighbourhood as it offers a variety of parks, children are exposed to different groups of people in this neighbourhood and offers easy access to other areas of Helsinki. However,

they did mention that there are certain problems and things that could be improved in the area.

Amongst some of these problems are to do with some of the local people's behaviour, as some might be under the influence of substances, leading to "inappropriate behaviour" from these people and witnessed by the children. Also, the fact that the streets in the neighbourhood are sometimes dirty with broken glasses or with needles on the ground. Despite that, according to the manager, the neighbourhood has "changed in a positive way over the last 4 to 5 years". According to the staff, there has not been any safety concerns brought up by the parents, nor from the children when they have been out. However, the aspect of the neighbourhood and the behaviour of some of its local people has raised some concerns from the teachers a few times, although never to a critical point.

According to the participants, the kindergarten frequently uses the outside as a learning environment. The kindergarten visits local parks on a weekly basis, they go to the local library and some of the shops in the neighbourhood, and they visit and observe local landmarks, thus helping to develop children's awareness of the local area according to the manager. On top of that, the kindergarten is situated in a residential building, which can allow "the kindergarten to have contact with the apartment residents on a regular basis", as noted by the former teacher. In fact, the teacher noted that the space that the children spend most frequently their outside time is the backyard playground area of their building, as they go there on a daily basis. Even though the teacher does not like the backyard, and thinks it should be renovated, "the children love it", as pointed out by the teacher.

Besides that, the kindergarten has also done some learning activities outside instead of doing it inside. Some of the examples given by the teacher were storytelling, games and the morning circle. In a few of these examples, it has only been the preschool group that has done these sorts of outside activities. Most of their experiences using the outside as a learning environment have been positive, and in the participants' view there are a lot of benefits for children. According to the teacher, "it breaks the routine and the kids love making a 'common/every day activity special", adding that with this change of routine "they focus better." The former teacher further commented on the benefits, noting that:

*“It provides endless opportunities for them to develop a sense of belonging in the neighbourhood, allows them to explore...and develop their own identity within the context of their community.”*

Nonetheless, there are some minor difficulties that can occur sometimes. The teacher noted that “the weather or the noise can be an impediment” when doing certain learning activities outside. Adding also that “maybe it’s easier inside because you have all the materials here”, although concluding that “if you plan it well in advance, it should be fine” to do any learning activity outside. Besides that, the former teacher did remark that a few times they had to change the planned location “due to inappropriate behaviour from those under the influence.”

According to the participants there has not been any sort of an activity, project or event with people in the neighbourhood. The kindergarten’s outside activities have consisted of only the children and staff. However, in 2018 the children did a Christmas card for the residents of the building where the kindergarten is, and they went delivering the cards through the mail slots. The kindergarten never got any sort of feedback from the residents about the Christmas cards; however, it is an idea which the teacher commented that the children might do again. Moreover, there is an idea, according to the teacher and the manager, for the kindergarten go to an elderly home in the neighbourhood, sing some Christmas songs and keep company for the elderly. The teacher commented that they will try it this year, with one of the goals that “children understand that it’s nice to make something for others.”

The kindergarten has been in that neighbourhood for little under 10 years, therefore the manager believes that at least the residents of the same building are aware of the kindergarten. This leads to the experiences they have had with the people in the neighbourhood, and especially in the building. The teacher mentioned that when the children are “playing in the backyard, some of the neighbours ask their children about their day”, or then they might just quickly greet the children and staff. Additionally, the teacher commented that lately, a few times, a mother and her son have been coming to play in the backyard at the same time as the kindergarten. Besides that, the other interactions with the people in the neighbourhood might happen in field trips in the neighbourhood. All in all, according to the participants, the interactions have been positive, with some children more comfortable talking to others than some. Additionally, the teacher mentioned that “these interactions are always safe” and that “we also ask them not to give personal information to strangers.”

All the participants see as a benefit for the children, and the kindergarten, to form relationships with the people in the neighbourhood. The teacher commented the following on the benefits for children:

*“I think that forming relationships with the people in the neighbourhood gives them a sense of community and gives them the opportunity to understand sense of community.”*

This comment echoes similar answers given by the manager and the former teacher. Nevertheless, there could be some difficulties or problems with the idea of forming relationships with the local people. In the manager’s view “sometimes interactions can be unwelcome”, so that staff needs “to be aware and thinking about the safety of the children.” One difficulty brought up by the manager is the fact that in the building of the kindergarten, there is a good number of residents moving and out, which could mean that some might not want to get involved if they are staying for a short while. For the teacher, one of the difficulties could be with the time and scheduling, as this idea could demand “plenty of preparation and agreeing times with the people is not something easy.”

However, there is another possible obstacle, which was mentioned by the teacher and the former teacher. Both said that cultural aspects might not make things easy, as the former teacher commented on this obstacle:

*“It may not be as easy to do in the context of the Finnish culture. I find that people are a little more private and keep to themselves. I suppose the kindergarten would have to find the right kind of people to collaborate with.”*

Currently, the kindergarten does not belong to any neighbourhood, local family association or in the residents’ Facebook group. The kindergarten has a Facebook page, but it is not active on any platform where it could engage with local people. The teacher and the manager think that it would be useful and beneficial for the kindergarten to participate in some sort of online platform, like the residents’ Facebook group. where they could engage with others. The manager thinks that could also bring more information about certain events happening in the area which they might not be aware of. According to the teacher, if they were to belong to that Facebook group, they “would know about any news about here, and maybe we could post there if we are doing any

special activities.” As the teacher further discussed, in that way there “could have a communication” between kindergarten and residents.

#### 6.4 Local Residents

Lastly, in here are the results from the questionnaire made for residents of both neighbourhoods. Participants responded the questions online in an anonymous manner, without the necessity to provide personal information, unless they choose to. As it was discussed, there were only 8 participants in total from both neighbourhoods, with one being from ‘Neighbourhood A’. Thus, for that neighbourhood the results are solely from that particular participant. For ‘Neighbourhood B’ there is a longer summary of the answers provided since there were 7 participants. Some direct quotes from the answers given by the participants are used to emphasize on some of their point of views and they are translated to English since all participants answered in Finnish.

##### 6.4.1 Neighbourhood A

The only participant of the online questionnaire from ‘Neighbourhood A’ has been living in this neighbourhood for little under 10 years, likes the area very much because it is peaceful, has a lot of services, different public spaces and because nature is a part of the area. In this participant’s view, there is nothing missing from the neighbourhood. The participant knows the neighbours in the building well, and according to the participant there is “a very communal atmosphere” in the building, as they “borrow things, help and offer help if needed” to each other. Furthermore, the participant comments that often the neighbours go outside and occasionally they come up with activities to do on their free time. However, the participant does not belong to any neighbourhood or residents’ association because the participant feels like that there would not be any time to participate in such things.

Regarding the kindergarten, the participant is aware of the kindergarten as it is in the same building complex, and they go through the same inner yard. The participant commented that “the children do not bother me, as I’m at work during the days, and don’t notice their actions.” More importantly, the participant said that would not be interested in engaging in some activities or events with ‘Kindergarten A’. The reason given was because the participant is “not in general child-friendly at all”, further commenting that “I

definitely wouldn't go out of my way to volunteer on my free time and lose my senses with a herd of children." Nevertheless, the participant noted that it is important to have some sort of a relationship with the kindergarten because the participant uses "the same facilities as them every day." Adding that it is "important to smile and greet the staff, the children and their parents every day, so that everyone would have a nice atmosphere."

#### 6.4.2 Neighbourhood B

Amongst the 7 participants, there were some that have been living in 'Neighbourhood B' for little over 1 year, some that have been living under 5 years and some that have been there for about 10 years. The participants like the area very much, with some saying that it is "wonderful", "I love it", and that the neighbourhood "is my home". Furthermore, the participants do not think there is something missing from the neighbourhood, although some commented that a few minor improvements or updates could be made in the area. Nevertheless, amongst the reasons why the participants like the neighbourhood were because there are a lot of services in the area, a lot of nice public parks and that everything is close by this neighbourhood. Overall, the participants use either on a weekly or a daily basis public spaces like parks, with some noting that they go more often to parks in the neighbourhood during the summer season. Additionally, all participants attend a variety of events organized in the neighbourhood, albeit some more than others.

Most of the participants only have a short interaction with the neighbours of the same building, which consists of greeting each other and/or occasionally engaging in small talk in the elevator, but not really knowing each other that well. One participant commented that "it is difficult to get to know people who live in a building". Another participant remarked that it is "unfortunate" not knowing the neighbours, but this was because there are a lot of people moving in and out from the building. Some of them have friends or relatives in the neighbourhood, and one is friendly with some of the shop keepers in the neighbourhood. Thus, for most, their social interactions with people in the neighbourhood are with these friends or relatives, and not with those living in the same building. Most the participants are active at least with each other through the residents' Facebook group, where they discuss common issues related to the 9 buildings. None of the participants belong to any sort of neighbourhood association, with the most common reason being a lack of time, and for some a lack of interest.

All the participants know 'Kindergarten B', and 6 out of these 7 participants commented that they live in the same building as the kindergarten. Five participants said that they usually greet the children and/or the staff when they see them, usually in the backyard when the children are playing, adding that these encounters have been positive and that the staff is friendly. One participant noted that the Christmas card done by the kindergarten was wonderful. Despite that, only two of the seven participants said that would be interested in doing some activity or event with the kindergarten. One participant gets along well with children, has experience in youth work and would be up for any kind of activity or event. However, for that to happen, the participant noted that it would "have to suit my own schedule". Lastly, this participant commented on the importance of forming a relationship with the kindergarten:

*"It is good to maintain a safe environment for the children to be in and play, and thus, to create a peace of mind for the staff. I hope that, on my part, I have helped in creating this kind of environment"*

Another one said that would be interested in some activity or event, however remarked that would likely not have time or energy to engage in such things. Nevertheless, this participant further commented that "if someone else comes up with some project" the participant could potentially get involved, but the participant would not initiate it. The other five participants had different comments and views in engaging somehow with the kindergarten. One was not sure if it was important or beneficial or interesting to form a relationship with the kindergarten and said that would not have time to engage in some activity or event with the kindergarten. However, the same participant commented that would only engage with the kindergarten in "making the flower bed in our yard."

The most common answer found from most participants was that they are not interested in engaging with the kindergarten in any activity or event, or to form some relationship with them. Additionally, for most of them it is enough just to greet the kindergarten staff and children, nothing else. Some of the reasons not to engage with the kindergarten in possible activities or events were because of lack of time, interest and other reasons. One participant remarked that "I'm not interested in spending time with children of strangers", while another commented that "children's events are not personally that interesting to me." Another participant said that "it would a bit strange if a married man, without children, would try to be in contact with unknown children from the kindergarten."

This same participant said as well that does not like children, and added the following comment when responding about the idea of forming a relationship with the kindergarten:

*“I would want all kindergartens away from the neighbourhood because children make noise and spread diseases.”*

## 6.5 Summary of Results

In terms of the outside space, both kindergartens are situated in very favourable locations as there are different places that the kindergartens use and/or visit either on a daily, weekly or monthly basis. This also means that there are different options of outside learning environments for children. Not only that, both kindergartens share a common space, an inner yard, with some residents of their respective neighbourhoods, since the kindergartens are in residential buildings. Moreover, both kindergartens are frequently outside, as ‘Kindergarten A’ spends an average of 4 hours outside per day, and ‘Kindergarten B’ spends an average of 3 hours outside per day. Lastly, during the time of the research process, there were not any sort of interactions that happened between any of the kindergartens and the local people of their neighbourhood.

The children were interviewed were aware of the word ‘neighbour’, and most of them had at least one friend or an acquaintance living in their neighbourhoods. However, not one child interviewed knew the meaning of the word ‘community’. Nonetheless, all the children interviewed were familiar with the neighbourhood of their respective kindergarten, and responded positively about how they view the neighbourhood of their kindergarten. The interviewed children were split about whether they would like to do more outside activities or not, as most felt that they spend enough time already outside. However, most of the children interviewed in ‘Kindergarten B’ prefer to go outside than stay inside when they are in the kindergarten. On the other hand, the children interviewed in ‘Kindergarten A’ were split about this preference. Lastly, most of the children in both kindergartens, responded positively to the idea of getting to know the people in the neighbourhood of their kindergarten. Furthermore, most of the children in both cases have previously met or briefly talked either to a resident of the same building complex as the kindergarten, or some local person in the neighbourhood.

The staff interviewed, in both cases, are very familiar with the neighbourhood of their kindergarten, and like the neighbourhood. One common reason for both kindergarten

liking their neighbourhood was because there are a variety of outside environments for the children and the kindergarten to go to. In terms of safety, according to the staff interviewed, parents in both kindergartens have never had any concerns about the neighbourhood. The staff in 'Kindergarten A', as well, has never had any safety concerns about their neighbourhood. However, the appearance of the neighbourhood and the behaviour of some of its local people has raised some minor concerns a few times from the staff in 'Kindergarten B'.

Both kindergartens use the neighbourhood frequently as a learning environment, as they see it as an important element for the children and have had positive experiences thus far. Moreover, according to the staff in both kindergartens, by using the outside space as a learning environment, there are cognitive, health and social benefits involved for the children. Both kindergartens currently do not belong to any online platform or neighbourhood association where they could engage and communicate with some of the local people. Nevertheless, both kindergartens have had their share of experiences of interaction with people in their neighbourhoods. 'Kindergarten A' has had different forms of interactions, i.e. events and activities, with some of the local people. On the other hand, 'Kindergarten B' has had, mainly, quick interactions with residents of the same building complex. Overall, these experiences for both kindergartens, have been positive. Although, 'Kindergarten A' has had a few minor negative interactions with a couple of residents of their building complex.

Above all, both kindergartens think it would be beneficial for the children, but also for the kindergarten as a whole, to form relationships with the local people. According to them, forming a community with local people could broaden children's mind, as they would interact with different people in different contexts; community bonds between kindergarten and local people could be strengthened, and the kindergarten could be seen as an asset to the community; and it would give children the opportunity to understand sense of community. According to some of the teachers interviewed, they do have some ideas on how to develop interactions with their local people. Furthermore, one teacher commented that it would be a case of simply organizing something in this context, and another one commented that it would come down to finding the right people to engage with.

However, they do see some possible difficulties in this process. Among these difficulties, there could be safety concerns about the people participating in activities or events with

the children; some adults might find it difficult engaging with a large group of children; there could be scheduling difficulties between kindergarten and local people; and this idea might not be easy to do in the context of Finnish culture, as people might be more reserved and not that open for this type of idea.

All the residents interviewed in both neighbourhoods are aware of the kindergarten in their building complex. For most the residents interviewed in both neighbourhoods, they would not be interested in forming a relationship with the kindergarten nor participating in any activity or event with them. The overall reason was a lack of interest and a lack of time. However, some residents in 'Neighbourhood B' would be willing to engage with the kindergarten depending on what kind of project and on the schedule. Despite the overall lack of interest, some of the residents interviewed did comment on the importance of at least maintaining a friendly atmosphere between them and the kindergartens.

## **7 Conclusions**

Based on what was found during the research process, it would be possible to form a community between the kindergartens and the local people, albeit with some caveat. The results found presented some possibilities and difficulties in forming relationships with the local people, which was something to be expected. Furthermore, this idea would be worth pursuing as it would present possible benefits for the children, which were noted by the staff of both kindergartens, but also found from previous studies about this topic.

In terms of possibilities, more importantly, it was clear from the responses given by both kindergartens that there is an interest, a desire and even a couple of ideas to form relationships with their respective local people. Additionally, both neighbourhoods offer a variety of location options where the kindergarten and local people could gather and start connecting. Furthermore, both kindergartens use the outside environment every day, and, significantly, both kindergartens are already in a beneficial position as they are located together with some of the local people of their neighbourhoods. Thus, providing an additional common ground with some people, and a possible starting point of getting to know better some of them.

Essentially, these possibilities would offer both kindergartens with a significant factor that was discussed in chapter 3 about community in ECEC, and learning environment. As it was mentioned in page 14, 'it is important that children are provided with different and

meaningful opportunities to connect and collaborate with a diverse group of people', in 'versatile learning environments'. Despite some previous experiences with some of the local people, both kindergartens have not had lately any continuous, seasonal or thematically activities, or events, that could be done with some of the local people. The key issue, perhaps, for both kindergartens would come down to finding the right people to connect and start forming that relationship, which is at the same time a possibility and a difficulty. This was a factor highlighted or underlined in some of the answers given by the participants of both kindergartens, especially by the former teacher from 'Kindergarten B', who said those precise words. Finding the right people would help to develop the formation of a relationship.

However, as it was displayed in the results, most of the residents interviewed in the research would not be interested in this idea. Most would rather keep a distance between themselves and the kindergartens, and commented that they are happy with their current 'relationship' with the kindergarten. Not forgetting that there were only 8 people that were willing to participate in the questionnaire about their local kindergarten. This lack of people's participation for the online questionnaire in both neighbourhoods can be interpreted as a sign of not wanting to do anything with the kindergartens. These sorts of issues are similar to what has been discussed in chapter 3 about sense of community. As it was commented in pages 8 and 9, there is a limitation factor when it comes to communities, as people naturally 'have boundaries protecting their personal space'. Moreover, Midgley (1986) did precisely mention that people's interest and willingness can affect the capacity of getting them involved in community participation. It is fair to conclude that the idea of getting people to participate and form a community with the kindergartens would not be an easy and quick process to achieve.

Nonetheless, this leads to what kind of approaches both kindergartens could make to connect and interact with their respective local people, despite a lack of overall interest from most of the participants of both neighbourhoods. Based on what was found, from observations and the interviews, one path for both kindergartens would be to use the common space that they have, and share, with the residents of their buildings. Those common spaces could be an environment for the kindergartens to develop projects, where residents could be involved in participating alongside the children and the staff if they would like to. It would be important that the residents would not feel obligated to participate, but they would be welcomed to participate in some project that could be

appreciated for both groups, i.e. arranging and maintaining a flower bed during different seasons.

Another possibility could be doing a project inside the buildings, for example a seasonal and/or holiday-based art decoration, where kindergarten and residents could collaborate on the design and then decorate. It is important to note that these sorts of ideas would need to have the approval of the building managers before getting started, and for the kindergartens to inform to the residents about these potential projects. However, there could be also projects and activities done outside in public spaces with others in the neighbourhood. As families with children in these neighbourhoods use similar spaces as the kindergartens, there could be connections made with them through certain projects and activities that could be useful and beneficial for both groups. Moreover, both neighbourhoods have spaces which, for example, are used for environment-related projects by local people, and both kindergartens could participate in alongside them. Therefore, utilizing the outside space in that manner could work as a catalyst to form relationships and, at the same time, serve its purpose as a learning environment for the kindergartens.

However, one vital aspect that would need to be in place for these possible ideas come into fruition, would be to have a line of communication between kindergarten and those with whom they would like to connect with. That could mean participating on online platforms and groups with residents of the building or with people in the neighbourhood, like the one that there is for example available for residents of the building complex where 'Kindergarten B' is situated in. These sorts of communication channels could be very useful as there could be conversations about the neighbourhood in general or even about the common space they share. Not only that, the kindergartens could use these sorts of communication channels to promote about possible activities or events that could have the participation of others. Through these communication channels, there could talks about possible rules, methods and goals between participants, so that those involved would be fully aware what to expect, when it would happen and how it would happen.

Overall, these might be small steps, however as Touhill (2012) had mentioned, even a small-scale approach can be enough to start building a community. The reality is that community is not something that just simply happens, it is something that needs to be developed and cultivated. As it has been noted throughout chapter 3, people need

positive ways to interact with each other and they need to have shared experiences to start forming relationships that can lead them to build a community.

More importantly, this idea of community between kindergartens and local people would present several benefits for children. Some of the comments from the teachers about the possible benefits are similar to what has been discussed about community in ECEC in this study previously. By interacting and doing new activities or participating in events with other people, in real settings and not just confined to the inside of the kindergarten, children's learning, communication and social skills for example could further develop; and they could start to understand sense of community. Moreover, this idea would fall under some of the aims which are described in the learning areas and transversal competences of the National Core Curriculum, such as 'participation and involvement', and 'me and our community'.

Above all, as remarked on page 12 of this study, and clear to what was found in the research, ECEC centres, much like the kindergartens of this study, will need to 'find approaches, and arrange the time with the local people' for this community to form. Thus, it will be up to them to find ways to get the local people involved and start forming that community with them, which could bring positive outcomes for the children, but also for the staff and the local people involved.

## **8 Discussion**

The idea in this section is to give the reader a closer insight on some of the important steps that occurred during the process of this study, especially regarding the research part, as it is necessary to discuss certain ethical aspects as well as validity and reliability of this study. As it had been remarked in the introduction, the topic of community and ECEC is one that can have a variety of approaches. This is because the idea of community and ECEC can be, and has been, discussed and studied already in multiple manners. Not to mention that the term 'community' can also have its different meanings and understandings. Thus, there could have been several ways when approaching and researching this study. However, from the beginning, the idea of researching and understanding this facet of community and ECEC appealed more.

It is a topic that has been addressed in literature previously, but rarely mentioned in Finland, and there was the appeal, to see from this angle. There were many examples of this topic found in literature and studies made in Latin American countries, and from Southern European countries. Therefore, there was an element of the unknown and curiosity that was driving this study as the main point of reference was based internationally and not nationally. Nevertheless, it was clear that this study would be only able to provide a very small angle from a situation observed in one city in Finland. Therefore, this topic is something that can be further analysed and studied, especially considering that this study was done with only two ECEC centres in an urban environment, with a set time frame. The results would be probably very different if the research would be done more extensively and with more participants, or in a rural city in Finland with just one ECEC centre, or even in other neighbourhoods of Helsinki with public kindergartens for example. The results would most likely differ based on the different contexts in which this sort of research is done, and it is possible that in different contexts, there would be more possibilities or willingness from local people in an idea like this.

This leads us to the research process itself. By having two kindergartens as partners, and their respective neighbourhoods, there were some benefits but also some difficulties. The benefits were that in this manner there would be more results and information gathered from the research process. Essentially, this would present a wider view on some of the questions raised in this study and there would be not a dependence on just partner. Having said that, it was clear that there would be twice as much work involved with two partners. It meant twice as much collecting, transcribing and analysing the data for the study. This also influenced the time frame of the study, as it was necessary to be present in two different locations in separate times, instead of spending the research time in just one location. Fortunately, the time arrangements with both partners were easy to achieve, although there was more time to do the field research in 'Kindergarten B' than in 'Kindergarten A'.

This situation is connected to another noticeable factor of the research process, which was the uneven number of observation days and participants. There were more days spent observing 'Kindergarten B' than 'Kindergarten A'; there were more children participating in the interviews in 'Kindergarten B' than 'Kindergarten A'; and there were more residents that participated in the questionnaire in 'Neighbourhood B' than in 'Neighbourhood A'. Despite the initial desire to have similar variants in each aspect of

the research process, these were factors that were not possible to have an influence over and were dependent on others.

These are the sort of factors that might happen and fortunately, for this case at least, they did not present a negative outcome, although one of these variants could have been better. This particular variant, of course, is the low participation number of local people in the questionnaire, especially from 'Neighbourhood A'. It was expected that not a lot of people would be participating in such a questionnaire, however it was never expected that only one person would participate in 'Neighbourhood A'. The low participation number overall, and not just from one neighbourhood, can be interpreted or assumed in a variety of ways. It could have been because people simply did not care for this topic, people assumed that this would have been time consuming, or that they never noticed the information pamphlets in both neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, this is something that will remain unanswered.

Above all, despite some minor predicaments, this study was able to find answers to the core questions about this topic and reach its aim. Perhaps more importantly, this study was able to present and emphasize on the significance that community can have in ECEC, especially its benefits for children. However, it is important, once again, to remark that the end results are not as simple or straightforward as one would hope. It is possible for there to be a community between ECEC centres and local people, but its formation, development and success will depend on a lot of factors as they have described in the conclusions.

One factor that was briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, was about the communication between the kindergartens and local people. It is fair to say that a great majority of people communicate and connect through social media or other forms of online groups. Not to mention that a lot of information, whether is about neighbourhood events, or even just conversations about what is happening in the neighbourhood between local people, takes place online in groups in platforms like Facebook. Therefore, it would be beneficial in this scenario for ECEC centres to be also participating in some of these online groups to communicate with others in their neighbourhoods, especially considering that when the research was conducted, both kindergartens were not active in any sort of online platform. This is something that would be extremely helpful in establishing, or at least starting, a connection between ECEC centres and some of the local people, and then exchanging ideas of what could be done as a group.

Another factor which is worth commenting is to do with people's perception. Based on the answers given by some of the residents, it was clear to see that some of them have a certain assumption on how they view this idea of forming a relationship with an ECEC centre or doing a project or activity with them. Some could view this idea as work, that they would have to oversee a group of children, when the reality is that they would be participants alongside the children and could also gain some benefits from this partnership. Thus, a line of communication could even provide the ground rules for those local residents participating, what they would be expected to do and a reassurance for them that they would not be in charge of taking care of the children.

Some of these factors were found in the research process, but there could be other ones that did not appear. It could be that with more time in the field doing the research, getting more people involved or doing in a different method, new outcomes would appear, and more ideas could be developed. Not to mention that this study could be also conducted solely looking at the potential benefits for children in a functional manner. This would mean finding an ECEC centre which has already some sort of activities that involve people in their neighbourhoods and purely observing the benefits that are occurring with the children.

Therefore, if there is a recommendation for others pursuing this sort of topic, it would be to further research and analyse this topic as there are advantages involved for children, ECEC centres and even the local people with the idea of this thesis.

## 8.1 Ethical Discussion

There were some ethical considerations about participation, confidentiality and anonymity when conducting this thesis. Firstly, there was the question whether to use or not the names of the kindergartens, as well as of their respective neighbourhoods. This subject was brought up with both working life partners separately. It was decided to not use the names of the kindergartens to keep the privacy and confidentiality of all the children, not only of those participating in the interviews, but all children in the kindergartens, and the staff members. This also meant that the names of the neighbourhoods would have to be anonymous. Therefore, there were certain details that had to be mentioned in general terms and not in a fully descriptive manner throughout

the study in order not to give away any indication as to where the kindergartens are located.

Another factor that had to be made clear before the research would even start, was to provide a general information for the children's guardians about who was the person coming to these kindergartens, when and why. They were also informed about the fact that any observations made during the research period would simply refer to the outside environment with the children, and that no pictures of the children would be taken. This information was printed and put in both kindergartens, with a direct contact to the researcher in case anyone had any doubts or concerns. The staff of both kindergartens also mentioned to the children's guardian about the presence of a 'new person' and the reason for it. However, it was also as important to inform the children about the fact there would be an 'extra adult' amongst the staff for some dates. Thus, the researcher had to introduce himself to the children of both kindergartens and let them know the reason for being there.

The parental consent form (Appendix 1) was made for those children who would participate in the interviews assuring guardians about the issue of confidentiality and anonymity, that their child's name would not be used and that the data collected would be only available for the researcher, for the purpose of this thesis and not to be made available elsewhere. Before the interviews with the children, it was important to once again tell them the reason for the interview, where their answers would be going to and if they had any questions. Additionally, they were informed that these interviews were not a test, that they could be as open as they would like, and that if they did not feel good about some question, they would not need to answer it.

Although the children's guardians agreed with the interviews, it was also vital to also have this short conversation with the children and see if there were any objections. All the children who were interviewed did not have any objections, had no questions about anything related to the interviews and willingly answered all the questions presented to them.

The other participants of the research, the staff of both kindergartens and the local people in their respective neighbourhood, were also informed that their names would not be made available and that the data collected would be only available for the researcher and used for this thesis, and not made available anywhere else. Moreover, all

participants were aware of the topic of this thesis, and they had the right also not to answer any question that they did not feel comfortable answering.

## 8.2 Validity and Reliability

As the research part of this study relied on the views, understandings and experiences of its different participants, as well as the researcher's observations, to reach its aim, it is also necessary to discuss the issue of validity and reliability. It is essential that researchers are aware of potential risks that can affect the validity and reliability of the findings, and these potential risks can come from the researcher himself, the participants, the situation being observed and studied, or the methods used for data collection and analysis (Brink 1993).

One must be aware of these above-mentioned risks, as there could be researcher bias, as the researcher is the sole instrument of collecting and analysing data, which could affect negatively the methods used during the research as well. Participant bias is also a potential concern, as the responses given by them might be distorted to present a more positive or negative light in their answers. Furthermore, participants being observed might act differently compared when alone without anyone observing them (Brink 1993.)

These risks were taken into consideration and there were precautions taken to specifically advert these potential risks for the validity and reliability of this study. One precaution was the use of different qualitative methods, which can provide a much stronger validity (Kawulich 2005), and in the case of this research, it included different methods of observations, online questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Additionally, notes were taken from the observations and analysed, much like the responses given from the participants. It was also important to describe in detail each step that happened during the research process, as detailed in chapter 5. Brink (1993) comments precisely on the importance of a "thick description" when it comes to qualitative research. As Brink (1993) notes, "validity and reliability can only be judged if a very detailed account of the context or setting within which the study took place and a thorough description of the procedures from the beginning to the end is given."

The detailed process given previously was done not only so that the reader would follow and understand better the research, but to also provide a transparency of the steps taken during the research and give the reader a very descriptive account of the context.

Moreover, the same transparency of the nature of this study and how the research was going to be conducted, and for what purpose, was provided for the participants.

Finally, even though this study was conducted by one person, which also meant with just one researcher, peer examination occurred during the whole process of this study. This meant that the process of this study was being checked by others, and not just by the researcher himself.

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## Parental Consent Form

Dear Parents / Guardians,

My name is Petri Seppänen da Costa and I am a 3<sup>rd</sup> year student of Bachelor of Social Services, specializing in Early Childhood Education at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. As a part of my final thesis, I need to interview some of the children and make some observations about the kindergarten between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of June of 2019.

### Purpose

My final thesis is about Community in Early Childhood Education and Care. The aim of the thesis is to find out if it is possible to form a community between kindergartens and the people around/near the kindergartens. The final thesis talks about concepts like community, sense of community, involvement and participation. The interviews with the children are to find out their views and understandings of the outside environment (the neighbourhood) of the kindergarten, the people in this area and other relevant ideas related to the final thesis. The final thesis will be published in late autumn of 2019 and made available for the kindergarten.

### Final Thesis Interviews Description

The interviews and observations will happen in the month of June of 2019 inside the kindergarten, with the supervision of the staff. I will be coming a couple of times per week in June to the interview the children and to make my observations. All the interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed for the final thesis.

If there is a necessity to do more interviews with the children, the staff will be notified, further arrangements will be made, and parents will be informed.

### Confidentiality

Children's names and other identifiers will not be used in the final thesis to protect children's privacy and personal information. Furthermore, any observations made during my visits to the kindergarten will strictly be related to the topic of my final thesis, and the name of the kindergarten or its location will not be mentioned in the final thesis. I kindly ask you to sign a Child Interview Consent Form if you allow your child to be interviewed for this final thesis.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, [Name] the parent or legal guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ [Child's name] grant my permission to interview my child for the final thesis of Petri Seppänen da Costa.

The use of the interview will be limited strictly for the final thesis. The audio file of the interviews will be transcribed for the final thesis, and the audio file of the interview will not be available anywhere. The audio file will be only available for Petri Seppänen da Costa during the writing of the final thesis, and it will be deleted once the final thesis is published.

Parent/Guardian's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Questionnaire for Children

1. Do you live far away or near by the kindergarten (are you walking, coming with a car/bus etc)?
2. Do you like the area where you live? (What do you like about the area where you live?)
3. Do you know the people in the area where you live (neighbours - do you know that word)? Do you have any friends living in the same street or building?
4. What do you think about this area/neighbourhood where we are?  
(Is it nice, scary, beautiful, boring, or ugly?)
5. Do you like coming to this area/neighbourhood of Helsinki?
6. Do you have any favourite places in this neighbourhood?  
(Like a park, a shop, or something else?)
7. What do you think is missing from this area: forest, bigger parks, etc, or are you happy with what there is here?
8. Do you like to go outside in this area/neighbourhood with your kindergarten group or do you like better to be inside learning and doing activities?
9. Do you prefer to go outside during the summer, winter, spring, autumn? Why is that?
10. Do you wish you could do more activities and learning things outside of the kindergarten in this neighbourhood? Why is that?
11. Do you have opportunities, or have you ever talked and meet other people in this building or in this neighbourhood?
12. Do you think it would be fun to get to know the people around this neighbourhood?
13. Do you know the word community? Do you know what it means?

## Questionnaire for Teachers

1. How well are you familiar with this neighbourhood?
2. How do you like this area/neighbourhood where the kindergarten is located?
3. If you could, what would you change or improve in this area? And why would you change or improve that?
4. Is there any space/spot in the neighbourhood which the kindergarten, or your group of children, prefers to use or visit? What is the reason behind this?
5. Do you think the children have enough opportunities to explore and interact with the outside world of the kindergarten?
6. Do you use the neighbourhood of the kindergarten as a learning environment for the children?
7. If yes how often do you use it, and how exactly do you use the neighbourhood as a learning environment?
8. If not, why don't you use the outside space as a learning environment?
  
9. What kind of experiences you as a professional have had using the outside space as a learning environment for the children?
10. What are in your opinion the benefits and the difficulties of using the outside space of the kindergarten as a learning environment for the children?
11. Have you ever engaged or talked with the local people (residents/workers) during work? If so, how was that experience?
12. How do the children usually engage or interact with the people (residents/workers) in this neighbourhood?
13. From your point of view, how these interactions between the children and the people in the neighbourhood have been?
14. Are there, or has there even been, any activities, projects or events where children can engage, interact and collaborate with others/those who are not in the kindergarten?
  
15. Have you ever discussed with the children the concept/notion of neighbourhood and/or community?
16. Do you think it would be beneficial to form relationships with the people from the neighbourhood here? Why would it be or wouldn't be beneficial for the children and the kindergarten?

17. How would you try to form relationships with the local people or try a collaboration with them?
18. What kind of possible difficulties do you see in forming a relationship or collaborating with the people from the neighbourhood?

## Questionnaire for Managers

1. For how long has this kindergarten been open?
2. How well are you familiar with the neighbourhood/area of the kindergarten?
3. How do you like the area/neighbourhood where the kindergarten is located?
4. If you could, what would you change or improve in the neighbourhood/area of the kindergarten? Why you change or improve that?
5. Do you think the people (residents/workers) from this neighbourhood are familiar with the kindergarten?
6. What sort of interactions, if any, have you had with people in the neighbourhood of the kindergarten?
  
7. How do you take into consideration the neighbourhood/local area and its people to the curriculum of the kindergarten?
8. What sort of activities or projects do you think are important for children to do in the context of the neighbourhood of the kindergarten?
9. How, if at all, important is for the kindergarten to use the neighbourhood as a learning environment?
  
10. Have you ever considered arranging an event that could involve the kindergarten and the different people from the neighbourhood (residents, local workers)?
11. If you have arranged, how was that experience?
12. If not, do you think that would be something relevant and beneficial for children and the kindergarten?
13. Do you think it would be beneficial to form relationships with the people from the neighbourhood here? Why and what kind of possible benefits do you see happening for the children and the kindergarten?
14. What kind of possible difficulties do you see in forming a relationship or collaborating with the people from the neighbourhood?

## Questionnaire for Residents

1. How long have you lived in this neighbourhood?
2. What do you think about this neighbourhood?
3. What public spaces (parks, etc) do you use in this neighbourhood? How often do you use/go to these places?
4. Is there something missing in this neighbourhood or something that you think needs to be improved? If yes, what exactly and why it needs to be improved?
5. How well do you know your neighbours (those who live in the same building or close by where you live, or the people who work here)?
6. Do you socialize or do activities with your neighbors? If yes, could you tell what kind of activities you do together in the neighbourhood?
7. If you don't socialize or do activities with your neighbours, is there any particular reason for that?
  
8. Do you belong to any neighbourhood/residents' association? If yes, what association and what kind of things that association does?
9. If you don't belong to any neighbourhood/residents' association, would you like to participate in one?
10. Do you participate in any sort of events organized in the neighbourhood where you live? If yes, what sort of events?
  
11. Are you familiar with the **xxxxxxxxxxxx** in your neighbourhood?
12. Have you ever had any direct contact or interaction with that kindergarten or the children that go there? If yes, how was that experience?
13. If you haven't had any contact or interaction with the kindergarten and/or the children, what is the reason for that (not interested, not enough time, etc)?
14. Would you be interested in participating in some form of an activity or event together with the kindergarten in the neighbourhood?
15. If yes, what sort of activity or event do you think it would be interesting to participate alongside the kindergarten?
16. If not, could you tell what the reason is?
17. From your point of view, do you think it would be interesting, important and/or beneficial to create a relationship with that kindergarten? Why is that?

## Information Pamphlet

Hi,

My name is Petri Seppänen da Costa. I'm a Bachelor of Social Services in Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. I'm currently writing my final thesis, and my topic is community and early childhood education. I'm interviewing some of the staff and children of **XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX**, and I would like to know if you could help me as well?

I would like to interview people who live close to the kindergarten, to ask a few questions about the area of **XXXXXXXXXX** and also about the kindergarten. The interview will be anonymous, your name won't be used in my final thesis. This interview will be in the format of an online survey which I would send for those who are interested in participating in the interview.

If you'd like to participate in this interview, please send an email to:

**XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX**

After I've received your email, saying that you are interested in participating in the interview, I will send to your email a link with the questions of this online survey.

If you are interested in participating, please send an email to me by **XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX**.

Thank you very much and have a great summer,

Petri Seppänen da Costa