



"Do you know a CODA?"

Supporting Children of Deaf Adults in Their Childhood
and in Early Childhood Education.

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Katarina Dence, Julia Enroth
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The objective of this thesis was to explore what it means to be a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA) and explore the Early Childhood Education (ECE) perspective to CODAs in Finland. The development task was to create a children's book that portrays the everyday experiences of a CODA in a relatable and authentic way.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is grounded in literature exploring CODAs, Deaf culture, bilingualism, and Early Childhood Education. To gather relevant insights, we conducted two questionnaires – one for CODAs and another for ECE professionals – discovering CODAs experiences, challenges, and the support educators can provide. The book seeks to help CODA children feel seen and understood while offering educators and caregivers meaningful guidance on how to support them effectively.

The key findings indicate that CODAs often navigate complex cultural and linguistic identities, balancing between the Deaf and hearing worlds. Many CODAs experience a sense of responsibility as interpreters for their parents from a young age and may struggle with belonging fully to either the Deaf or hearing community. Our research also revealed that there is little to no representation of CODAs in Finnish children's literature, reinforcing the need for more specific literature.

Based on these findings, our children's book was developed to address this gap, ensuring that CODAs can also see their experiences reflected in literature. Additionally, providing an opportunity for educators and non-CODA children to learn about diverse family dynamics. Our conclusion emphasizes the importance of increasing awareness of CODA experiences in ECE and the need for more inclusive educational resources. We recommend that future research and development projects continue to explore ways to integrate Deaf communities and CODAs representation into educational materials to foster greater inclusivity and understanding.

Keywords: Supporting a CODA, Early Childhood Education, Deaf Families, Bilingualism, Children's Book

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1 The Introduction

Are you familiar with the term CODA? If not, keep reading—you'll soon find out! If you already know, this thesis is designed with you in mind, offering insights that may deepen your understanding. We certainly gained new perspectives throughout our journey. Regardless of your familiarity with the topic, we're glad you're here.

When we were developing our idea for this thesis, we originally thought to have multilingual and multicultural children as our main topic. However, we challenged us to come up with a more specific and unusual approach for the topic of multilingualism within Early Childhood Education. After some brainstorming, we came across the topic of **Children of Deaf Adults**, also known by the name **CODA**. The term CODA (Child of Deaf Adult) and the CODA-community is part of the deaf community. Even though there are more CODAs than deaf people, CODAs are easily overlooked, because they blend in with the overall population having normal hearing.

In addition, this topic is personally relatable, since Julia herself experiences life as a CODA within her own family. This is one of the reasons why we wanted to explore this subject for ourselves and find out more.

This topic will be reflected in the product of our thesis, a children's book that portrays the experiences of a CODA throughout their daily lives. The goal of the book is that a CODA could feel seen in their unique experience. While also providing parents and Early Childhood Educators with a better understanding of how to support a CODA in their position. The book could easily be used in other spaces with children, helping them to broaden their perspective of how diverse our world really is.

Instead of choosing to create a more common product of a developmental thesis, such as a leaflet, we wanted to challenge ourselves with creating a book for children, that would hopefully have a more direct impact on children. To make the topic more approachable, it is important to us to present a down to earth and easily relatable insight into the possible experiences of a CODA.

We noticed that CODAs and deaf families are barely, if at all represented in children's literature, especially here in Finland. After identifying a real gap in the market, we felt passionate about bringing a change to this for the future.

We will first introduce you to the background of our thesis, where we will introduce the concept of a developmental thesis, elaborate on our goals and working life-partner. Secondly, we will look into related theory and literature about CODAs, terminology related to

deaf culture and the perspective of Early Childhood Education linked to our topic. Thirdly, we will share our implementation process. Starting with gathering insight and background information from CODAs and ECE-professionals for the book, we plan to do this with two questionnaires. And then we will share our writing and creation process of the book for children. Before the final conclusion and discussion, we will also go through a personal evaluation and go over feedback we got for our prototype of the children's book and thesis.

2 Background of the Thesis

In this chapter we will elaborate on the background of our thesis. We will start with explaining what a developmental thesis is according to literature, followed by our concrete goals and evaluation. Lastly, we will introduce our working life partner CODA-yhdistys ry.

2.1 Developmental Thesis

A developmental thesis focuses on responding to the current needs of development in working life by identifying certain challenges in working life and developing practical solutions (Vilkkä & Airaksinen 2003, 10-17; Opinnäytetyön ohjaus, no date). As literature and a strong knowledge base is essential in developmental work, research methods are not implemented (Kostamo, Airaksinen, Vilkkä 2022, page 12).

A developmental process progresses in various steps like ideation, action-plan and implementation. Considering ethics as well as continuous reflection and critical thinking are vital for professional developmental projects. (Kostamo, Airaksinen, Vilkkä 2022, page 10.) A developmental thesis encompasses an implementation, which may involve executing an activity or designing a product (Vilkkä & Airaksinen 2003, 9). In addition to a report, common products from a development-based thesis in the social field could be, for example, a leaflet, a workshop guide, or another tool that supports client work.

Working with a working life partner is very common and strongly suggested when writing a developmental thesis. It offers an opportunity for practical application and feedback from the field. A student is responsible for initiating communication and developing a plan with the working life-partner. Developing something with others has a greater impact than developing something on your own. (Kostamo, Airaksinen, Vilkkä 2022, page 10, 30). As a benefit it creates a bridge for the student to connect with working life and supports the transition after studies are completed.

The thesis process aims to strengthen and demonstrate a student's skill in critical thinking, seeking reliable information and the implementation of it, as well as innovativeness, communication and independent work skills (Opinnäytetyön ohjaus, no date). The thesis must reflect a student's independent work and follow criteria of ethical research (Arene ry 2018). A developmental thesis can be classified as research, or development project (Opinnäytetyön ohjaus, no date).

We chose to conduct a Development Based Thesis, since we believe that developing a practical product or a tool will have the greater impact on our subject for our thesis. We want to create something innovative, like a children's book, challenging ourselves to think from new perspectives, finding creative solutions and creating a tool to support the target group, and the people around them.

Naturally before implementation comes exploration and familiarization of the topic and related literature. For the thesis and the children's book, we will gather background information, perspectives, and experiences from CODA-adults, as well as from individuals who work with CODA's, deaf children or their families. We will create two questionnaires to gather information about these experiences. With the feedback and insight of "experts' by experience", we will pick the most relevant aspects and integrate them into the story for the children's book.

Since our thesis also aims to meet the criteria of Early Childhood Education, we will focus primarily on the experiences and needs of children under the age of seven. However, since childhood also reflects into adolescence and adulthood (Daines, Hansen, Novilla and Crandall 2021), we want to work with a holistic viewpoint, looking into, as well as mentioning some examples of the impact from a CODA's childhood going into adulthood.

2.2 Concrete Goals and Measurement Through Feedback

We will ask for feedback in both oral and in a written format, both during the process and before the presentation of the final thesis. We will ask for feedback on the thesis from our working-life partners, our professional and private networks.

We hope to have a meaningful impact on the readers, the CODA community, as well as the deaf community. This we plan to achieve by asking for oral or short written feedback for our draft for the book. The target group from which we plan to ask for feedback is our working-life partner and professionals in the ECE-field. We aim to have feedback on the book from CODAs themselves, and if possible, within our time frame, from deaf and hearing children and adults. This we plan to do by utilizing the networks we have professionally and privately.

Our evaluation objectives, in relation to the evaluation criteria for the thesis, are to aim as high as possible according to our current life-situation and resources. We will be satisfied when we have finished the thesis and addressed all feedback to our best ability.

We are deeply committed to ensuring our children's book is thoughtfully crafted with the highest quality, bringing both joy and fresh perspectives to its readers. Our goal is to have a finished prototype of the children's book, having it digitally or possibly even printed. Our goal and focus within this thesis process is not to publish the book for sales or mass-printing, but we do, however, plan to inform ourselves of the process of publishing a physical or digital book. We won't deny or refuse the possible opportunity of bringing this book to market, if one should occur.

2.3 CODA-yhdistys ry, Our Working Life Partner

We were very fortunate to have come across the CODA-yhdistys ry and have them agree to be our working life partners for this thesis. We agreed that the role of our working-life partner is primarily to give feedback during the process of developing our prototype. Additionally, they assist us in distributing the questionnaires in their social network to reach more CODAs and gain more answers. The CODA-association will also give feedback on the thesis report. Our role is to communicate regularly and clearly about our progress as well as being responsible for arranging our meetings. (Koskinen, Ruuska and Suni 2018, page 117-138.)

The CODA-association focuses on serving as a support-network for hearing children of deaf parents at all stages of life. The CODA-association homepage writes¹, that the CODA-association was founded in 1996 and has well over 100 members, even though there are several thousands of CODAs living in Finland, and hundreds of thousands or even millions of CODAs living worldwide. Thirteen years after being founded, the association became a member of the Finnish Association of the Deaf in 2009. The CODA Association operates with the help of its board and members. The board consists of 4-7 board members serving for one year at a time. (CODA-yhdistys ry, hallitus, 2024)

They share the history of organizing activities and events in various forms across Finland, for both adults and children. They organize an annual weekend meeting for adult members, during that same weekend they have a yearly general meeting that takes place. In addition, there are various other meetings, excursions, and evening gatherings. The association communicates about events through social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram under the name @codafinland (CODA-yhdistys ry, 2022).

Every year the Finnish Association of the Deaf (Kuurojen Liitto ry) cooperates with the CODA-association and organizes a course with signing instructors, to strengthen a CODAs identity and meet other families from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They also organize other activities and summer courses for children and young people across Finland (CODA-yhdistys ry, yhdistys, 2022).

It is very valuable for the children to learn that there are other children and other families who have deaf parents, or other family members, and families using sign-language at home (CODA-yhdistys ry, yhdistys, 2022).

The association describes¹ the course as “bilingual, so there is also signing throughout. The goal of using the language is to expand the children's sign language vocabulary, encourage them to use the language more, and to help them understand what it means to be bilingual.” (CODA-yhdistys ry, 2022)

¹ This quote has been translated by ChatGBT

3 Early Childhood Education and Bilingual Experiences: CODAs Perspective

In this section we explain the theoretical background of our thesis, the reason behind our choice of topic, and the link to early childhood education. We will start by introducing the general background and elaborating more on who CODAs are. After that we will explain key concepts along with terminology related to being a CODA and deaf culture. Following that, we will familiarize ourselves with Early Childhood Education (ECE) here in Finland and the different strategies early childhood educators use to help hearing children with deaf parents.

While there are numerous studies on children's language development and bilingual families, as well as an increasing body of research on deaf children, deaf adults, and sign language, the perspective of CODAs stays largely underrepresented in systematic studies. Existing research tends to focus only on general experiences of CODAs, without providing deeper insights or practical applications. To address this gap, we have aimed to gather a diverse range of sources to build a strong theoretical foundation for this topic.

3.1 General Background

More than 90% of deaf adults' children have normal hearing (Allsop & Kyle 1997; Dutta 2023). These children often experience communication, social, and cultural challenges because of the unique difference between the deaf and hearing worlds.

The development of language and social skills is central for any child. According to Cormier (2017) some professionals worry that CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) might struggle with spoken language, but there is little evidence to support this. For a child to learn spoken language, they need to be introduced to it and exposed to it regularly.

Cormier (2017) suggests that according to Singleton & Tittle about 5-10 hours of spoken language exposure per week is needed for typical development. If a CODA does not get enough exposure to spoken language and shows delays, it doesn't mean they are behind in language development overall. Sign language is often their first language, and they may be fully competent in it. The delay might only apply to their second language, which in this case would be the spoken language, where they might need extra support. In addition, increasing exposure through playgroups, preschool, family interactions, babysitters, or other CODAs can be helpful. CODAs may face challenges when they act as interpreters for their deaf parents. Some deaf parents, aware of this issue, may choose not to teach their child sign language to avoid burdening them.

3.2 Who is a CODA?

To set a foundation to our topic we will now elaborate on who CODAs are. The acronym CODA meaning Child of Deaf Adult was coined in 1983 by Millie Brother. As a CODA herself, knowing that almost 90% of the children born to deaf parents are hearing, she founded the organization CODA International, to support CODAs. (CODA International, no date.)

Alternatively, the term KODA, comes from Kid of Deaf Adult and can be used to specifically refer to a CODA under the age of 18. In our thesis we focus on children who are CODAs, however the term CODA includes all ages, from young children to elderly people, who have grown up with deaf parents or carers.

A CODA as the name implies is raised by parents or caretakers, of which at least the other is deaf. The child typically grows up in a bilingual and bicultural environment, using e.g. Finnish sign-language and Finnish as their mother tongues (CODA-yhdistys ry, Coda, no date; Kanto, Huttunen, Laakso 2012).

CODAs form their own minority within the deaf community, as they are part of both the deaf- and hearing communities, which are distinct in their way of communicating. The children grow up in linguistically, culturally and socially different communities. CODAs grow up heavily relying on visual communication but are often perceived as part of the hearing community, because they don't own deafness as a physical trait like their parents do. (CODA-yhdistys ry, Coda, no date; Dutta 2023). Similarly, looking from the other side Dutta (2023) expresses that *“despite having a functional hearing system, they [CODAs] experience the ambiguity of being “culturally deaf.”*

The nature of sign language results to CODAs often using more hand movements when communicating. They may be quicker to rely on physical touch, like a tap on the arm to get someone's attention. Growing up with visual communication might impact the capacity to process purely auditive information and make it more challenging. Likewise, eye contact and being able to see the discussion partner properly has an increased importance, since talking with a deaf person in sign language relies on visual means. (CODA-yhdistys ry, Coda, no date; Kanto et.al. 2012)

As language is the way we communicate information or express thoughts and feelings, it is central to human socialization, as well as a foundational building block of a functioning society. A common language naturally connects people and creates inclusivity, but without a common language, disbalances such as inequality, isolation, or marginalization form easily. (Paananen, Lindeman, Lindholm, Luodonpää-Manni 2023.)

The first language one learns growing up is their **native language** or **mother tongue**. It is typically the language which a child's parents use to communicate with their child. One's

native language is their strongest and preferred language, the language in which they think and express themselves best. (Kecskes & Papp 2001; Nishanthi 2020.) A mother tongue has often emotional and personal connotations, at the same time it is a complex term, and its meaning is not as black and white (Slavkov, Melo-Pfeifer, Kerschhofer-Puhalo 2021).

Building a strong linguistic foundation in one's native language, including signed language, is crucial for all future learning (Votruba-Drzal & Dearing 2017, pages 194-196). Learning one's native language and receiving education in one's native language strengthens the results. At the same time successful learning in a foreign language also reinforces the development of one's native language (Kecskes & Papp 2001). On the other hand, when a child is immersed in an educational environment that uses a second or third language, the child might also experience loss in their first language skills. This can have a negative impact on a child's social-emotional skills and even their thinking and reasoning skills. (Votruba-Drzal & Dearing 2017 page 194-196.)

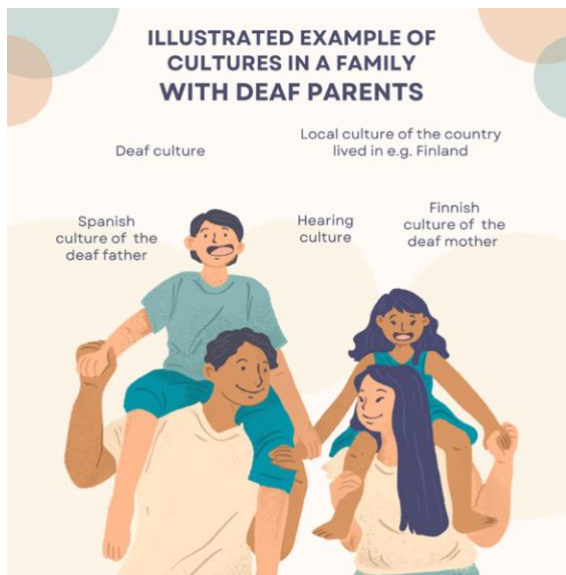
Shin (2013, pages 214-218) describes that **bilingual** children can acquire two languages simultaneously from birth or learn the second one successfully later in their childhood. She explains that a **home language** is used when referring to the language a linguistic minority uses in their home and a **foreign language** is foreign to its learner, typically different to the language used in their own country.

The language experience within a family can differ between firstborns and their younger siblings. Oftentimes the oldest child in a bilingual or multilingual family develops a stronger language proficiency, because they spend more uninterrupted time with their parents in their first years. Immigrant parents are also more likely to rely on the oldest child to do tasks like interpreting. Older siblings are more likely to discourage younger siblings from using the mother tongue by criticizing mistakes or interpreting within or for the family. (Shin 2013, page 205.)

Furthermore, a CODA may grow up in a home with even more than two cultures or languages, for example if the parent(s) are immigrants to the country they live in. This can complicate the language development of a child even more, adding a third or fourth language to their linguistic environment. The linguistic development of a child can vary and depends on their individual environment (Kanto et.al. 2012).

Below we inserted a picture created with Canva, aiming to clarify the complexity of cultures within a family with deaf parents and multinational backgrounds.

Figure 1: Illustration of cultures in a family with deaf parents (Enroth 2024, made with Canva).



In this example the children experience deaf culture, through their deaf parents. Deaf culture which is influenced by the communication styles of sign language (Cripps, no date). The children might meet other deaf people through their parents, such as their friends in private gatherings, or for example in national, or even international events organized by and for deaf people. The children might also be affected by a parent's experiences as a deaf person in a society.

Secondly, the children experience the culture of hearing people and local spoken language in their environment. Closely connected hearing people could be relatives, friends and teachers in daycare, school, or hobbies. In their daily lives encountering the world of hearing people happens anywhere they go, the grocery store, public transport, doctors' office, movie theaters, not to forget the world of internet and the media outlets.

Lastly, the parents of our example family come from different national backgrounds, in this case Spanish and Finnish. Depending on the degree the parents choose to embrace their national cultures, the children will then be exposed to Spanish and Finnish cultures and language. National culture heritage everything from food, art, and traditions to norms, values and beliefs. The children might also pick up both Spanish and Finnish sign languages, depending on which languages the parents choose to sign to their children and to each other.

In their unique position, CODAs have individual and common experiences. They might easily take on the role of an interpreter, even though the parents actively seek to avoid putting that burden on them. Especially firstborns have a higher risk of falling into taking on a parenting role and feel increased responsibility for their parents and siblings. Advocacy for deaf people can be instinctive to CODAs, due to their understanding of challenges deaf people face and being able to communicate them to hearing people (Deaf Websites, no date).

A CODAs experience also varies generationally and is heavily influenced by a society's approach to deaf people. This brief insight to deaf history in Finland highlights how different CODAs experiences can be, simply in the matter of a generation.

Before Carl Oscar Malm established the first school for deaf in 1846, the deaf in Finland were strongly excluded in society and thought less of. Deaf people rarely knew how to read or

write and barely knew any language. Most deaf people are the only deaf member in their whole family, therefore hearing parents do often not have any previous knowledge of deafness or sign-language. Giving deaf people the opportunity to get education in their own language significantly improved their lives and position in society. Malm strongly emphasized the idea that deaf people could learn and do anything like hearing people, if they have the opportunity to learn it in sign language. (Paananen et al. 2023. Pages 56-72.)

Adversely the idea that sign language is slowing deaf people down and that deaf people should only be taught in spoken language, became popular in Europe towards the end of 1800s. The use of sign language was banned and the time of oralism lasted nearly a decade. Around the 1970s it was understood that deaf children do learn better when sign language is used. At this time families with deaf children were encouraged and provided to learn sign language, these “family projects” strongly enhanced the learning and education of deaf children. As technology advanced in the early 2000s CI-implants became more popular and available for families with deaf children. This advancement had also its downside, while the hearing aid was thought to be sufficient, learning sign language was not seen as important anymore. This is, however, problematic, since the hearing aid cannot fully restore one's hearing and the question of language, identity and culture remains unacknowledged. (Paananen et al. 2023. Pages 56-72.)

With all these examples, it is evident that there are multiple factors impacting and forming a CODAs experiences, culture, language and identity.

3.3 Terminology Related to Deaf Culture

Here we briefly explain the most relevant key terms to familiarize the reader with the general background of CODAs, their families and deaf culture.

Deafness is medically defined by the degree of profound hearing loss. Causes of hearing loss and deafness are rarely genetic factors. Instead, causes more often are e.g. infections or sicknesses during pregnancy, lack of oxygen at time of birth, chronic ear infections, infections and chronic diseases, smoking, exposure to loud sounds, trauma or nutritional deficiencies. Different degrees of hearing loss affect 5% of the world's population or 430 million people (WHO 2024).

The World Federation of the Deaf (no date) writes that the status of the deaf remains weak, with an estimated 80% of the world's deaf people not having access to any form of education, as most deaf people live in developing countries. We want to emphasize that our thesis focuses on CODAs and deaf families in Finland, including generally more developed countries. A CODA in a developing country may face different challenges and feel increased responsibility for their deaf parents, as deaf people have less rights and poorer access to services (Kuurojen Liitto 2019).

Hard of Hearing is medically defined by the degree of mild to severe hearing loss. They often communicate with spoken language, however with varying challenges in auditive comprehension (WHO 2024). A person born with hearing loss may be more likely to identify themselves as part of sign language speakers in the deaf community.

Hearing aids for the outer ear and **cochlear implants (CI)** which require surgery, are electronic devices that can reduce hearing loss, but don't restore it. Hearing aids can improve one's ability to hear and understand speech, as well as recognize and orientate sounds (WHO 2024; Cleveland Clinic 2023). The impact can vary individually.

Lip-reading, even though it does not improve hearing, can support comprehension in communication for people with hearing loss and deaf people. The ability to lip read is very individual and can vary in different circumstances. Factors such as clarity of pronunciation, facial expressions, familiarity with the person, and contextual setting like lights, background noise and visual distance, can impact the effectiveness of lip reading. Lip reading is a nuanced and complex skill requiring high levels of concentration and practice. Therefore, reading lips can quickly become tiring. Luckily there are increasing numbers of technological tools, like Speech-to-Text apps, that can support communication. (The Speech and Language Center 2023)

Sign language is a visual language, where signs made by hands correspond to words in spoken languages. In addition to expression through hand movements, facial expressions, mouth and body movements, there are also grammatical elements in sign language. Contrary to common idea of a universal sign-language, every country has their own sign language, which reflects the local spoken language. Sign language has also dialects, every day and ceremonial styles and slang. (Kuurojen Liitto 2019).

The finger alphabet is used in sign language, for example when introducing one's name or spelling a word with no corresponding sign. In sign language and deaf culture, a person is given or chooses a sign for their name based on a typical characteristic of the person.



Figure 2: Sormiaakkoset (Kuuloliitto 2017)

Supportive signing (Tukiviittomat) is a means of communication that aims to facilitate listening by producing individual signs based on sign-language (Kuurojen Liitto 2019). This method is becoming more popular with special needs children in Early Childhood Education. However, this is different to sign-language used by deaf people, which consists of signed sentences.

Users of sign language (Viittomakielinen) describes a person who identifies with the sign language community and uses sign language in their everyday life. Sign language speakers form a linguistic and cultural group (Kuurojen Liitto 2019). This community includes e.g. deaf people, people hard of hearing, Children of deaf adults (CODA), hearing parents or siblings of a deaf person.

Deaf people see themselves primarily as a linguistic and cultural minority, as sign language speakers (Kuurojen Liitto 2019), even though legally and medically they are primarily referred as people with disabilities. Often wrongly assumed, deaf people are not mute, however without hearing your own voice modulating your voice to pronounce words correctly, becomes much more challenging and usually requires speech training (National Association of the Deaf 2025).

Kuurojen Liitto (Viittomakieliset, no date) states that in Finland there are currently about 5 500 native speakers of Finnish sign language, of whom about 3 000 are deaf. This number has significantly decreased since 2011, when there were 6000-9000 users of Finnish sign-language, of which 4000-5000 being deaf (Oikeusministeriö 2011).

Deaf Community refers to a group of individuals connected by shared experiences of hearing loss or deafness. This group extends beyond those with hearing impairments to include their family members and Sign Language users and interpreters. It is a community built around common methods of communication, such as Sign Language, and shared challenges. Members support one another by exchanging personal experiences and fostering strong values, helping each other navigate the unique difficulties they may encounter in daily life. (Kuurojen Liitto 2019).

For many deaf people and users of sign language the deaf community is like a second home. Compared to everyday life where they face language barriers frequently causing them to feel left out easily, deaf communities offer a place where they can be understood and communicate freely, without having to rely on interpretation. This allows opportunities to strengthen their self-worth, social skills, and taking on leadership (Kuurojen Liitto 2019; Cripps, no date).

Deaf Culture refers to the unique culture within the deaf community, which differs from the culture of hearing people. Deaf culture is not tied to a local or national heritage, but their experiences and expressions of being deaf, which often unites them beyond borders. (Cripps, no date) Deaf Culture is rich in artistic expression, such as signed poetry, theatre and literature just to mention a few. There are also a lot of sports events, matches and championships, there are even Deaflympics, which are organized every four years (Kuurojen Liitto 2019; Cripps, no date).

Characteristics for deaf culture are interlinked to the nature of communication which is used in sign language (Cripps, no date). Not only are the words signed with hands, but the tone is expressed with the size and rhythm of signs, as well as enhanced facial expressions and body language, especially focusing on the head, shoulders and arms. Deaf people may greet each other with hugs more than hearing people (CODA-yhdistys ry, Coda, no date; Cripps, no date).

Interpretation services (Tulkkauspalvelut) are secured by the Finnish law for people who use Finnish - or Finnish Swedish sign language due to a disability. It is also possible to arrange the interpretation service remotely. The interpretation service is free of charge, being funded by the Finnish State. (Suomen Perustuslaki 11.6.1999/731; Viittomakielilaki 3.2.3/10.4.2015/359; Laki vammaisten henkilöiden tulkkauspalvelusta 19.2.2010/133). The interpretation services can be used for any kind of appointment, event, hobby, including travels, work and education (Kuurojen Liitto, Tietoa tulkkauskesästä, no date). There are public and private providers of interpretation services. Kuurojen Liitto (2024) has also composed a list of service providers which are available also in emergency situations.

3.4 The Early Childhood Education Perspective

In this section, we will explain what early childhood education means and how it is implemented here in Finland. We will also go through some of the main goals of ECE that support our thesis, along with exploring how language is learned and how literature can support a child's development.

In Finland ², early childhood education refers to a structured and goal-oriented system that integrates care, teaching, and upbringing, with a strong focus on pedagogy. It is a vital part of the Finnish education system and plays a key role in a child's development from infancy to the start of primary school ages 0-6. Its purpose extends beyond learning, by fostering children's growth and development, promotes equality, and helps prevent social exclusion. Early childhood education also supports parents by enabling them to work or study while ensuring their children receive quality care and education. The skills and knowledge gained during this stage empower children to actively participate in society and lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning. (Opetushallitus 2025.)

In Finland there are ten main goals of the early childhood education law, of which our thesis focuses on three of these goals. According to Early Childhood Education Law chapter 1, 3§ part 6 (Varhaiskasvatustaki 13.7.2018/540), ECE will “provide all children with equal opportunities for early childhood education, promote equality and gender equity, and equip them with the ability to understand and respect cultural heritage as well as diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and philosophical backgrounds.”

Part 8 (Varhaiskasvatustaki 13.7.2018/540) “ECE will develop children's cooperation and interaction skills, support their ability to work within peer groups, and guide them toward ethically responsible and sustainable actions, respect for others, and active participation in society.” Part 10 (Varhaiskasvatustaki 13.7.2018/540) “ECE will work in collaboration with the child, their parents, or other guardians to support the child's balanced development and overall well-being while also assisting parents or guardians in their role as caregivers.” We believe our thesis and book touches on all three of these qualifying factors to some degree. Giving the general public and educators an even greater insight on how to better support children of deaf adults and their families.

Early childhood education for signing children has been implemented using temporary solutions in Daycares around Finland. This has recently changed as the city of Helsinki has decided to focus on sign language in early childhood education at Daycare *Taneli* as of August

² In this chapter ChatGPT has been used to help translate text from the Finnish law and other sources.

2024. Focusing on sign language in early childhood education in daycare will strengthen the children's participation, equality, and language development. This way children have the opportunity to use sign language with children their own age and receive the support they need. Priority for these bilingual daycare groups will be given to children with hearing impairments and, where possible, other children who use sign language at home. This includes hearing children of deaf parents (CODAs), siblings of deaf children (SODAs), and others who may not have hearing impairments but use sign language as their mother tongue. (Keski-Levijoki 2023.)

This is an extremely significant improvement for the deaf community here in Finland. Even though primarily deaf children will be attending the daycare, this still gives CODAs an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of sign language. It gives their parents a unique opportunity to expose their child to a community with similar strengths and struggles.

The National Core Curriculum of Early Childhood Education (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet) states that an inclusive early childhood education promotes participation, equality, and fairness. Highlighting that everyone's ideas and opinions are valued. Through participation and active involvement in ECE, children learn about community, rights, and responsibilities. Feeling heard and included helps them grow.

Children and parents are encouraged to join in planning and evaluating activities. With every staff member playing a key role in creating an inclusive environment. In ECE everyone in that community is treated equally, no matter their background. Equity doesn't mean treating everyone the same but recognizing individual needs and providing tailored support which promotes equality. Staff discuss and challenge stereotypes about gender, language, ethnicity, or disabilities, ensuring that all children feel accepted and free to make their own choices. Positive interactions support children's self-confidence and identity development. (Opetushallitus 2022)

When talking about children's language development, the language development of CODAs has slightly different way than most children. Pihlaja and Viitala (2018, pages 207-211) refer in their book to Schaeffer's theory about children's language development. A child grows into their linguistic community by acquiring the skills needed for interaction and communication. Language comes in many forms of expression: it can be spoken, written, visual, or, in the context of CODAs, signed. Early interaction with a caregiver lays the foundation for language learning. Human relationships create the context in which a child's psychological and cognitive functions develop.

Pihlaja and Viitala (2018) also to Bouchard and his research team, supporting and developing linguistic skills can be divided into child-centered activities, interaction-guiding activities, and language modeling. This can be done by both the parents and ECE educators. Child-

centered activities involve shared attention and engagement with adults, where the child's own interests serve as the starting point. Early language development is supported by interactions that aim to create an intensive relationship with the child, respond to the child's initiatives, actively maintain and direct the child's attention to surrounding objects, events, and phenomena, and name points of interest.

In addition, ECE values cultural diversity and sees it as a strength. Children have the right to their own language, culture, and beliefs. Staff embrace the community's cultural and linguistic variety, using it as a learning opportunity. They encourage open conversations about different ways of thinking and working together. Language is central to children's learning, identity, and connection to society. The staff in ECE act as language role models, encouraging children to use language in diverse ways. Multilingualism is celebrated, and children are given time and opportunities to practice their language skills in different settings. (Opetushallitus 2022.)

The utilization of children's literature in Early Childhood Education is strongly encouraged. Reading out loud can be part of instructed pedagogical program, or simply an everyday activity, which opens a door to adventure and knowledge. Common activities, such as reading out loud in a group can strengthen a child's understanding of self. (Heikkilä-Haltonen 2018.)

Children's literature has developed into the huge industry as we know it today, since the early 1600s. The genre has changed and expanded over the centuries aligning or challenging the beliefs and culture shaping the eras of their time (Nuba, Levity Sheiman and Searson 1999.) Nuba et.al. (1999) refer to influential early childhood development and education philosophers such as Maria Montessori, Friedrich Froebel, Johan Pestalozzi, who emphasised the crucial impact of reading with children and to children as part of their language development and academic advancement.

Benefits of reading shouldn't be underestimated. It exposes a child to richer language, grammar and vocabulary (Kümmerling-Meibauer, Meibauer, Nachtigäller, Rohlfing 2015; Nuba, et al. 1999). In addition, the social interaction and experience of reading a book also supports bonding between the child and the reader (Nuba et al. 1999).

Quoting Nuba et al. (1999) *"A good book provides a child the opportunity to relate to a situation, express what they think and feel, open a new window to the world in which they live."*

Storytelling as a tool for communication supports pedagogical approaches. It provides children with opportunities and a safe and creative way to reflect on different issues and topics in their young life and understanding the world around them. Stories can also create a feeling of comfort and safety, e.g. when a child finds something they can relate to. Messages behind

stories gently introduce and support children to interpret the world as they grow and broaden their perspective. (Heikkilä-Halttunen 2018; Johnson 2024; Kümmerling-Meibauer et al. 2015; Nuba, et al. 1999; Ylönen & Luumi 2002.)

Children often take information literally; they might process and comprehend the embedded message in the story later. At the same time children naturally learn to distinguish fiction from real life, because of the nature of stories and how different language is used to tell the narrative and describe the characters. Illustration aids children to follow and understand the story better. This also means that visuality and language, strengthen a child's development, as well as emotional and cognitive skills. (Kümmerling-Meibauer et al. 2015; Nuba, et al. 1999; Ylönen & Luumi 2002.)

Picture books are a popular form of books in children's literature. A suggested definition describes picture books as objects which contain information and communicate ideas by means of printed text. Typically, they tell the story through the combination of text and pictures. In comparison picture books with no text at all are usually referred to as "early-concept books". Children in preschool and primary school are typically the primary target audience of picture books. (Kümmerling-Meibauer et al. 2015.) Other popular styles in children's literature include nursery rhymes, informational books and novels (Johnson 2024).

In conclusion, there is limited information available on CODAs language development. However, existing language development materials, such as those focused on bilingual children's language development, can be adapted and applied in parallel. To help raise awareness of CODAs in early childhood education, we recognized the need for accessible and engaging materials—particularly books and discussions about sign language and its users, including deaf individuals, CODAs, and SODAs (Sibling of Deaf Adult). This is where the developmental aspect of our thesis comes into play. As a part of our developmental thesis, we wrote and illustrated a children's book that highlights the everyday experiences of CODAs. The book aims to provide an authentic representation of what it's like to grow up in both the hearing and deaf communities. Through relatable storytelling and colourful illustrations, we bring to life the challenges, joys, and unique aspects of a CODAs identity.

Our goal is to create a resource that fosters understanding and inclusion, especially in early childhood education settings. By introducing young readers to diverse family dynamics and communication styles, we hope to encourage empathy and curiosity about sign language and the CODA experience. This book serves as both an educational tool and a way to spark meaningful discussions among children, parents, and educators.

4 The Implementation Process

In this section, we will explain our implementation process. We'll start with the ethical considerations, the method of prototyping followed by a brief elaboration of the two questionnaires and then going into the key findings of background information from them. Lastly, we will go through and describe the process of writing the book for children, as well as the options for publication.

4.1 Ethical Considerations

Following general ethical principles of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK), it was important for us to respect the dignity and autonomy of the participants of our developmental thesis (TENK 2019). We considered conducting the developmental thesis and the book for children in a way which does not harm or cause significant risks to the participants or community (TENK 2019), in our case CODAs, deaf families and deaf communities. This was one of the most critical and nuanced tasks as we developed the characters for our book, since we wanted to make sure to have realistic and positive representation of CODAs and deaf families through our fictional characters.

As our questionnaire (Appendix 2) for CODAs includes personal and sensitive questions, we made sure to remind the respondents that the questionnaire is fully anonymous and confidential to ensure privacy of the participants (TENK 2019). We emphasized the freedom to answer and the right to skip any question according to their preference and comfort. Therefore, we had decided not to have any mandatory questions for the questionnaires (Appendix 1; Appendix 2) we created (TENK 2019). Both questionnaires and all the answers will be eradicated when the final thesis is submitted.

We included only the most relevant background questions, such as asking who in a CODAs family is deaf and which languages they speak, to get some idea of some general profile of culture and languages of CODAs in Finland, however we are aware that the questionnaire is small scale and reached only a small group of people in the CODA community. We left out more typical background questions such as questions of age or gender. Especially as we are dealing with a small community, we wanted to minimize and prevent feasible identification of respondents in our thesis as much as possible.

In both questionnaires (Appendix 1; Appendix 2) We ensured and clarified that some of the answers could be used as inspiration for developing the book for children. By answering the questions, the respondent consented to the possible use of their response (TENK 2019).

Since we were developing a book for children and aiming to grow to understand a child's point of view as a CODA. From that we came across the question, *would grown up CODAs answering our questions, be inaccurate to represent a child's point of view?* Although a deaf parent is always free to forward or fill in the questionnaire with their hearing child, children might not be able to deliver the qualitative responses that we are looking for.

As childhood reflects into adolescence and adulthood (Daines, et al. 2021), adults are able to reflect and recognize the things they needed, received or lacked as a child. Utilizing experience as material for a developmental thesis, it is important to minimize the harm to the target group. It is important to remember that personal experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and intuition can change and gain new forms with new perspectives of knowledge and experience. As experiences can have multilayered implications, it is also not wrong to doubt personal experiences. (Kostamo, Airaksinen, & Vilkkä 2022, pages 53-57).

Johnson (2024) mentions how books from the 1960s tackled issues like divorce, death, abuse, and homelessness, though they were initially excluded from school reading lists as some adults sought to shield children from such topics. Ironically, this may have made them more appealing to young readers. Controversial subjects like religion, sexuality, and racism remain difficult for many educators and parents to address. While critics praised these books and children found them valuable, many adults remained hesitant about their place in children's literature.

Alternatively, Fox (no date) shares some examples of subjects that don't belong in children's books intended for young children. He strongly suggests not to include topics that are difficult to approach in an age-appropriate way. Such subjects are e.g. weapons, substance-abuse, sexually explicit content, insensitive stereotypes, horror or death. In the case of the topic for our book, none of these subjects are relevant, but this was still a valuable insight and helped us to form an informed approach.

The developmental phases of children also influence the ethics of writing a children's book. We considered which topics and subjects are suitable for children. As we learned how to approach the topic we had in mind, we gained clarity on how to create the book intended that the child, a CODA, would be able to relate to the characters and see themselves in the characters.

According to Grenby and Reynolds (2011) academic critics of children's literature are usually adults, not children, which makes it challenging to truly understand how young readers interpret books, the world, and themselves. How can we know what interests them or what they want?

Psychology and psychoanalysis help answer these questions. They offer insights into why authors write for children and how emotions, fears, and desires appear in stories. The discussion explores different psychological approaches to studying children's literature and how they can help us better understand both the books and their young readers. In the early 20th century, Jean Piaget conducted experiments to understand how children at different ages think and process information. His work laid the foundation for developmental psychology, which studies how people's thinking changes as they grow.

Piaget identified four stages of cognitive development:

- **Sensori-motor stage (0-2 years):** Learning through senses and movement.
- **Pre-operational stage (2-7 years):** Developing language and imagination but struggling with logic.
- **Concrete operational stage (7-11 years):** Beginning to think logically about concrete situations.
- **Formal operational stage (11+ years):** Thinking abstractly and solving complex problems.

Each stage builds on the previous one, shaping how children understand the world. Piaget believed this progression could serve as a general roadmap for cognitive development. (Grenby & Reynolds 2011.)

4.2 Prototyping as Our Method

“[Prototypes] slow us down to speed us up. By taking the time to prototype our ideas, we avoid costly mistakes such as becoming too complex too early and sticking with a weak idea for too long.” (Tim Brown 2019)

Prototyping is a process commonly used in design and development to visualize and test concepts before finalizing them. It provided us with an opportunity to experiment with different formats, structures, and content delivery methods. By creating early-stage models of our book, we were able to assess its readability, layout, and overall effectiveness in communicating our message.

According to Hallgrímsson (2019) prototyping is a key problem-solving activity. It's a way to take us much of the guesswork out of the final product. We learn different things from making a prototype. Subjects and characters only become meaningful when we engage with them, allowing us to understand their qualities in more detail. This process helps develop intuition, which is essential for conceptualizing ideas. Even experienced product designers create models by hand, especially in the early stages of a project, using prototyping as a way

to explore ideas. These early prototypes act as a dialogue between the designer and the characters, guiding decisions on what works and what doesn't.

Gengnagel, Nagy and Stark (2015) describe that prototypes serve as practical tools for generating, testing, and communicating ideas, inspiring innovation, identifying challenges, and refining solutions across disciplines. The transdisciplinary research process fostered critical self-reflection, encouraging new perspectives and collaborative methods through project meetings and workshops. This transformative approach led to innovative discussion formats, enabling participants to challenge traditional viewpoints and explore new directions.

According to Valentine (2013) prototypes are more than just models; they are hypotheses—educated guesses about future performance, user reactions, production, and market potential. As "congealed culture," they serve as exploratory tools that help explain and predict observable phenomena, guiding research and development. She also states that prototypes function as playgrounds for innovation, offering a space where rules are relaxed to explore new possibilities through creativity, collaboration, and experimentation. Like play, prototypes embrace unpredictability, allowing for unexpected discoveries that drive innovation beyond established norms.

Using the advice from Ursell's (2013) book "Illustrating a Children's Book", we started with our idea writing it out as a storyboard. Bouncing off one another building up the characters using multiple small drawings to help get a visual image of what we were coming up with. Developing ideas and experiment freely with color, certain features, how we wanted our character to be portrayed. This is what we aimed to do with our first drawings of the characters (Figure 4; Figure 5).

From there, using inspiration from Zaki Warfel (2009) we explored the characters' world: their surroundings and the events that might shape their journey. Our drawings quickly answered these questions, gradually forming a visual collection that helped shape the story. It was much like noticing someone on the street and imagining their life based on small details—their clothing, shopping bags, pet, or posture. For the narrative, we drew inspiration from were elements of both our lives growing up, which provided a structured plot and resolution. We adapted it by updating the setting, renaming characters, and adjusting key elements to bring a fresh perspective. Some parts of the original storyline were reimaged, allowing for a unique and engaging interpretation.

Below you can see three Fotos of drafts from the prototyping process of our book. In the first picture (Figure 3), you can see the very first draft of the storyboard, with brainstorming ideas of various scenes for the book. Here we tried to find what type of situations would best bring out CODAs experiences and what kind of conversations could be included.

In the second picture (Figure 4) we created the first drafts of the illustration style, testing out different animals, characteristics and color theme.

In the third picture (Figure 5.) we created a draft of the opening scene and played with page layout.

Figure 3: Brainstorming ideas for storyline - Enroth

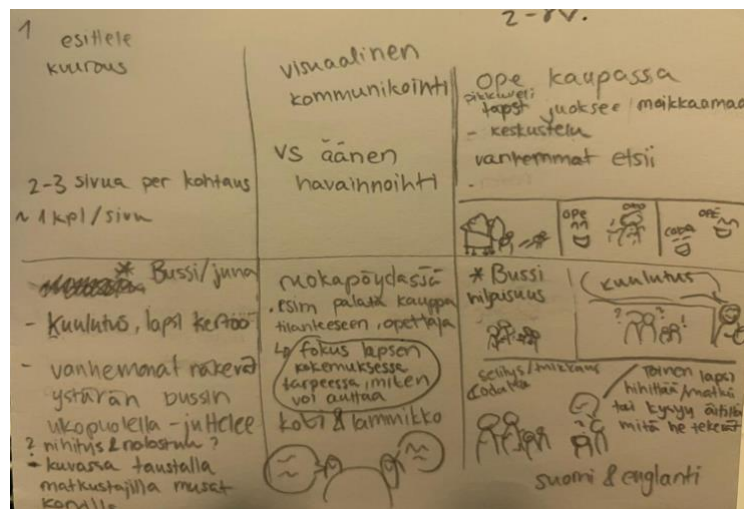
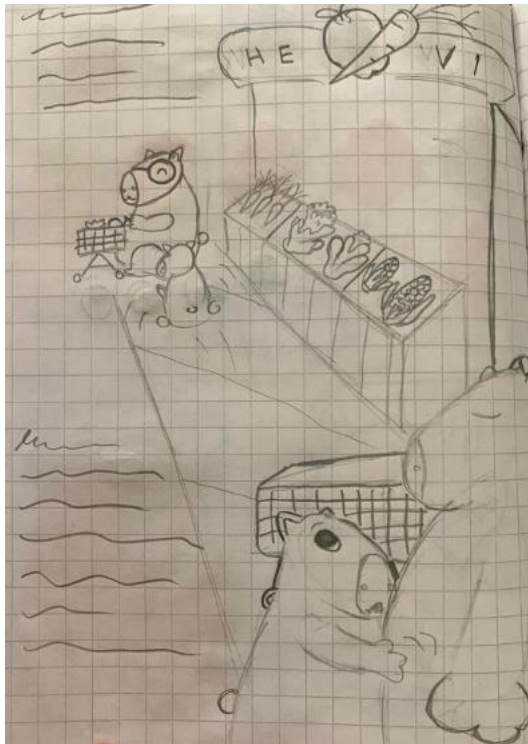


Figure 4: First brainstorming ideas for characters in the book - Dence



Figure 5: Brainstorming of Illustrations - Dence



Through these examples, we explored various types of prototypes, including low-fidelity sketches, to see how they could help shape our book's structure. We also examined how prototyping is used in different fields, such as product design and education, to gain insights into best practices. This process helped us identify potential challenges early on and make informed decisions about design, language, and accessibility. By studying prototyping before implementation, we ensured that our book development was guided by an iterative and user-centered approach, ultimately leading to a more polished and impactful final version.

4.3 Highlights from the Background Review

We created two questionnaires on Google Forms to ask low-threshold questions about personal experiences as a CODA (Appendix 2: Hei CODA!), and for early childhood educators (Appendix 1: Tunnetko CODA:n?), asking if and what type of experiences they have had working with deaf families.

We originally thought of conducting interviews, but for the sake of focus and time, we chose to collect background information with the questionnaires (Appendix 1.; Appendix 2) to have

a wider reach for answers and map out the needs. The questionnaires ended up aligning better with the focus on development instead of extensive research.

This background information from the questionnaires will not be analyzed in this developmental thesis. Instead, we will provide a short summary with relevant highlights of the answers we acquired.

From the “Do you know a CODA?” (Appendix 1) questionnaire for ECE-workers we received only one answer from an ECE worker who is a CODA themselves. This person shared that they would generally approach a CODA and their parents the same way as other families. They would want to learn what language is primarily spoken at home, so that the child’s (bilingual) language learning and vocabulary, for example in expressing emotion, can be supported if needed. In a meeting with the parents, this person would still choose to have an interpreter present, even though they themselves speak sign-language. This would keep the other ECE professionals present on the same page as the parents and further focus on their role as Early Childhood Educators instead of signing or translating for their client.

Additionally, we received a couple of answers from personal contacts in the field via email and through conversation. We didn’t receive as many answers as we would have hoped for, due to a lack of knowledge about CODAs. A lot of the information received was from a hypothetical standpoint as ECE workers and not from actual experience working with CODAs or their families. This was to be expected with the CODA community being so small and easily overlooked.

However, Dence did have a conversation with an ECE special needs teacher while at work, where she briefly discussed the teacher’s interaction with a CODA and their parents who were both deaf. The teacher recalled her interaction with the family, stating that the CODA was very intelligent and didn’t have any challenges when it comes to their social skills. They did, however, support the child with their development of speech, giving them some speech therapy. This issue was resolved within that ECE year. In addition, the teacher learned how to use supportive sign fluently and is very grateful to this family for enhancing that ability. (Special Needs Teacher 2025. Private conversation)

According to Annanulli (Pers. com. 2024), a special need specialist in the ECE field, children from this type of background would be treated similarly to children with a bilingual or multilingual background. Emphasizing the importance and focus on the child’s level of the Finnish language, but also investigating the family’s perspective on their proficiency in sign language, how sign language is enriched within the family, whether the child has hearing playmates or other hearing family members they are in regular contact with, etc. Assessing the child’s level of Finnish in the same way as with other children. Naturally, the situation is also influenced by how long and how regularly the child attends early childhood education.

Overall, approaching it from the perspective that languages are wealth and that this does not automatically imply issues in any area of development.

In ECE, Annanulli (Pers. com. 2024) states she would incorporate sign language into the child group just like any other language. For example, organizing reading sessions in a child's mother tongue (e.g., a parent comes to read a book in their native language, and then the same book is read in Finnish).

This approach could work well with sign language too. In daily activities, using supportive sign (*tukiviittomat*), is common with the children, and the group could learn more of those together. *Kielinuppu* (2025) songs are a great tool for learning vocabulary, sentence structure, word inflection, supportive sign, rhythm, word and sentence pacing, duration, and length of language. This is where most children get their first introduction using supportive sign. Of course, supportive signing is different from sign language, but it provides an easy way to get familiar with signing, normalizing it for the group and the child themselves.

Another way to support children with their language learning is through music. Songs by *Kielinuppu* also provide this as they support the language development of all children in early childhood education. They are especially beneficial for children from immigrant backgrounds, multilingual children, including CODAs, and those with language development challenges. Many early childhood educators, Finnish as a Second Language (S2) teachers, special education teachers, and speech therapists have adopted *Kielinuppu* songs as a tool in their work.

The questionnaire "Hei CODA!" (Appendix 2), was crafted to ask CODAs about their experiences. Our working life partner helped distribute the questionnaire to CODAs by sharing it within their social network. The questionnaire was answered by 28 CODAs in Finland. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, 1) background information 2) memories from childhood and 3) experiences.

To shortly summarize answers, from the 1) background information. The question about mother tongues, most of the repliers answered Finnish and Finnish sign language were their mother tongues, for some it was only one of them and some mentioned a third or fourth languages. 21/28 of CODAs replied that both of their parents are deaf, five replied, only having one deaf parent and two replied informing us that they are the only hearing in their family. Around two thirds of CODAs replied on having other CODAs as friends along with having deaf friends.

CODA experiences are diverse and shaped by individual family backgrounds. The following sections will present key findings on childhood memories and personal experiences. We want

to emphasize that these insights are subjective. Each CODA's journey is unique, influenced by various factors, and not all shared characteristics or experiences apply universally.

Children of Deaf Adults ³ navigate two cultures, combining strengths from deaf and hearing people. The questionees shared that **growing up with deaf parents** they have acquired skills like bilingual and visual communication, social skills, tendency to look for eye contact and being actively present in conversations. Many CODAs shared that they experience having enhanced visual observation skills and heightened ability to read body language. Also being able to adapt culturally, meaning being able to switch from one culture and language to another.

The majority expressed that growing up with deaf parents leads to appreciating and understanding diversity and enriched empathy. Many mentioned the importance and impact of deaf community in their lives. Events, camps, and gatherings within the Deaf and CODA communities, have created cherished memories, often filled with laughter and humor.

CODAs shared that **sign language** offers them versatility in communication: facilitating communication across barriers, e.g., from distance, in loud places or through glass, and serving as a private "secret language". They shared that knowing sign language has connected them to other people (CODAs, hearing and deaf people), create and strengthen relationships. It can also provide practical benefits, for example in workplaces and childcare. Some mentioned that teaching sign language or sharing about the deaf community has been an empowering experience.

Likewise, **strengths acquired by hearing people** or being of hearing were, access to music and freedom to communicate in spoken language. Some also mentioned the ability to enjoy and navigate by sounds, as well as appreciating silence, knowing what noise can be.

Many CODAs expressed that **experiencing and growing up in both deaf and hearing cultures** they now feel enriched, joyful and prideful in their dual and bilingual identity. At the same time many shared sometimes struggling with feeling fully part of either culture or feel that they are not recognized as bilingual. Some shared that they positively experience being a bonding bridge between these communities, understanding both perspectives and having the best of each.

Some challenges CODAs shared included interpreting and feeling responsible in helping their parents. For some this has also caused CODAs to become independent early or even lack

³ In the following paragraphs ChatGPT has been used to help summarize our notes about key findings from parts 2) and 3) of the questionnaire.

reliance on their parents. For some the lack of vocabulary caused difficulty to express feelings and share meaningful moments with their parents. Some shared that societal misunderstandings of deaf people or related bullying made them feel ashamed as a child. Also, communication barriers lead to worry for their parent's well-being, or even their safety in an emergency.

The language barrier between their deaf parents and CODAs hearing friends, teachers, partners etc. made some feel sad, because they were not able to communicate directly with each other. Some also miss(ed) the ability to call your parent on the phone, nowadays it with technological advancement and video-calls are however making it possible. It was also mentioned that the reality of one's parent not hearing their child's voice has emotional significance.

CODAs shared that they wish hearing people understood that deaf people live full, vibrant lives and possess enhanced problem-solving skills and creativity, topped off with strong resilience and unique humour. Some also expressed that just because CODAs are born to deaf parents shouldn't be solely responsible for educating others about Deaf culture. CODAs recognize that hearing people are not inherently prejudiced against Deafness, they simply might be unsure how to approach communication, they hope that hearing and deaf people could have more courage to approach one another, and for hearing people curiosity to learn some signs.

4.4 The Book for Children

As we have stated earlier, our aim is to write and illustrate a children's book, that portrays an insight into the daily life of a CODA. Through this book, we aim to help CODAs feel recognized and validated in their common experiences. Additionally, the book will serve as a valuable resource for parents and early childhood educators, offering some insights into how to support CODAs and address their needs. It can also be used in a broader setting with children, fostering understanding and appreciation for the diversity in our world.

In the following subsections we will share the journey and process of creating a book for children. Starting with the first steps towards the book, followed by the outline of the children's book, developing characters, the writing and creation process, and lastly discussing options for publication.

4.4.1 Steps of the Prototyping Process

Before starting to work on the children's book, we conducted some preliminary studying to identify development needs and understand the process of writing a book for children. We found a good source from an experienced editor and writer John Fox. He has been sharing advice on what to do, and not to do when writing a book, along with giving helpful advice to writers on BookFox since 2006.

Fox (no date) gives advice on how not to make mistakes that can and should be avoided, how to include or exclude parents in a children's book, how to add humor or build an interesting character, as well as 12 steps on writing a book for children.

For our prototyping process we completed different stages, each having their own objectives and outcomes. On the right column of the table (Table 1.) Below you can see the four steps described by Miro (no date), which are part of a typical process of developing a prototype. On the left column we described what actions we took for each step. An organic process does however not proceed in a fully linear way, as the 4-step process guide outlines (Miro, no date). In a process different steps can happen simultaneously, and sometimes it is necessary to return to a previous step to reflect and redo a part, or even a whole idea.

Steps of the Prototyping Process

Process Steps and Their Description	What We Did in This Process Step
<p>Concept Development: Brainstorming ideas, creating simple drafts to explore different concepts. With the goal of identifying a direction for the product. (Miro, no date)</p>	<p>We brainstormed ideas, read through children’s books for inspiration, created physical and digital drafts of characters, the storyline, illustration and outlines.</p> <p>We decided to create a picture book for ages 4 and up. Choosing also to work with a certain animal for all the characters.</p>
<p>The Background Review: (Theory & Questionnaires)</p>	<p>Alongside brainstorming and concept development, we read into the existing literature and created two questionnaires to gather background information about CODAs. Aiming to have a deeper and more well-rounded understanding of their experiences, so that we could represent them as accurately as possible.</p>
<p>Ethical Considerations:</p>	<p>Simultaneously developing our concept, we reflected on ethical considerations related to writing a book for children and creating a questionnaire to gather background information. Based on these ethical considerations, we chose either to implement or not implement the ideas we had.</p>
<p>Design and Development: After having decided on a concept, it’s all about refining, adding detail and interactive elements, testing functionality and refining the text again. (Miro, no date)</p>	<p>We wrote the first draft of the book, with some preliminary feedback from our friends, which helped us finish the first prototype. We then sent it off to our working life partner to receive some additional feedback and kept adjusting accordingly.</p> <p>For example: character names, wording, scenes that were still unclear or accidentally gave off the wrong message</p>

<p>User Testing: Collecting feedback from actual users. Interactive prototypes play a key role in allowing to observe user interactions with the product and pinpoint areas that need improvement. (Miro, No Date)</p>	<p>After modifying according to the feedback we received, we asked for additional feedback from our working life partner. We also aimed to let the book be test read with our target audience, CODAs and children, for some consumer feedback.</p>
<p>Iteration and Refinement: Prior to finalizing the product, adjustments based on feedback should be made. This stage might consist of multiple revisions, rounds of testing and refinement. (Miro, no date)</p>	<p>Based on the final feedback we received from friends, family and working life partner, we adjusted and finished the final prototype of the book. This meaning that the book will not yet be published with a publisher.</p>

Table 1: Steps of the Prototyping Process (Table created by us. Source used: Miro, no date)

As shown in the table (Table 1.) The development of the book prototype generally followed a structured process with several key stages. These steps also overlap with general steps in a developmental process (Kostamo, Airaksinen & Vilkkka 2022, page 18). We began with the planning phase, concept development and a background review to establish a solid foundation. Ethical considerations were evaluated before moving into the design and creation phase and were continuously reflected on during the process. User testing provided valuable feedback, leading to multiple revisions and refinements to improve the final product. Developing our book with the constant feedback from our working life partner along with their support in distributing the questionnaire to CODAs, helped us to achieve a higher quality of our prototype.

4.4.2 The Outline of the Children's Book

Below we have laid out the final outline of the book (Table 2.). This outline has been modified over the course of creating the book. The changes are based on personal reflection during the process, feedback or findings in literature, and insight from the questionnaires.

Table 2: Outline of the book

Keywords:	CODA (Child of Deaf Adult), Sign-Language, Deafness, Multilingual, Empathy, Shame, Confidence
Topic:	A day of a CODA child. Language and communication, feeling of belonging.
Message:	Quoting from our book: “Being different isn’t something you need to hide from. It is both a richness and a strength. And you don’t need to choose just one side, you are and can be part of both.”
Goals:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Help CODAs feel recognized and validated in their common experiences. 2. Serve as a resource for parents and early childhood educators, offering some insights into how to support CODAs and address their needs. 3. It can also be used in a broader setting with children, fostering understanding and appreciation for the diversity in our world.
Family dynamic:	Hearing siblings, 6 years old girl Nova and 4 years old boy Enzo, deaf Mum and Dad, Uncle Otto - Dad’s hearing brother
Other characters:	Daycare teacher Sarah The bus driver, a boy and his grandmother on the bus
Setting:	3 scenes: At the grocery store, in the bus, at home
Language of the book:	Finnish and English
Story line:	Julia and Katarina
Story Writing:	Julia
Illustration:	Katarina
Atmosphere of the book:	warm, cozy, colorful, humorous, approachable, easy to follow
Focus group:	Children 4 years and over, CODAs, families with deaf members, family households, ECE/ daycares. Other possibilities, for example the library, children’s hospitals, reception homes etc.

4.4.3 Character Development

We debated and discussed the best way to portray the characters in our book, should it be humans, or could it be animals for example? After long debate and going back and forth between the two ideas, we have finally settled upon portraying our characters as animals. Taking inspiration from the portrayals of the characters in the hit Australian children's show "Bluey" (British Broadcasting Corporation 1996), an anthropomorphic blue puppy who is energetic, imaginative and curious. Exploring the world and different emotions and challenges with her family and friends. Bluey is a great example of a character that is relatable to people all over the world. Since the main character is a blue dog, having a non-natural color like blue keeps the character neutral and untouched by human issues such as age bias, racial discrimination, sexism or gender inequality or other issues like this. Making the character approachable. This is something we would like our characters to be like, making the focus of the book about being a CODA.

We decided to use only one type of animal character in the story, as it neutralizes any other comparisons and brings into focus the challenges presented by the language barriers between CODAs and their deaf families. This also avoids inadvertently creating a negative stigma or bad image by choosing a particular species to represent deaf families.

We took inspiration of Capybaras, a South American animal, the largest rodent in the world, which thrives in water as well as on land, eating grass and aquatic plants and living mostly in packs. Capybaras need to be on the lookout for predators and communicate through different vocalizations. It is social, calm and friendly towards other animals and even allows birds and monkeys, among others, to perch on its back (Animalia, no date).

For the illustration, we first had the idea that the CODA's parents' ears could be floppy or folded to signify deafness to children in a visual way. Although, in reality you can't tell from the outside whether a person is or isn't deaf. However, we decided to not implement this idea after all, since it could bring too much attention to "broken ears" and this was not the way we want to represent deaf people.

For the first draft of the book, we used the names Coda and Little Caba, referring to Capybaras, to simply have more clarity of the story's characters. We debated a long time if we were going to keep the names or have different names for them. We received various feedback about the names, some loved them, some got confused about the similarity of Coda and Caba, and some including our working life partner, preferred if the names were changed.

A strong reason to keep the name Coda would have been to clarify who the protagonist is, and it helps to familiarize the reader having never come across the term CODA. On the other hand, as our book is aimed mainly at CODAs there is the question of if it's too on the nose, or whether it would be a good, neutral and unifying name for CODAs. So that a child can focus on relating to the CODAs experiences and not get distracted by the name. It seems wisest in any case to change the little brother's name Caba to be something else, since it was confusing to many when we got feedback on the characters. Additionally, it would give more personality to the little brother's character having a more distinctive name compared to his sister. User testing provided valuable feedback, leading to multiple revisions and refinements to improve the final product.

Even having already gotten somewhat attached to the characters nicknames, we ended up deciding on different names that would not plainly describe the character's most obvious traits. After researching different names and the meanings behind them, we decided on the names Nova and Enzo for our main characters. Nova or formally Coda, was chosen due to the name meaning "New" or "Optimism". We thought that would fit her personality better being the firstborn child in the book. Enzo or formally Caba, was chosen due to the quirky meaning of the name. The name Enzo means "ruler of the house", which we found to describe the second born. Their funny and energetic personality perfectly.

Additionally giving the name Otto for the dad's brother in the book, all of the characters that have actual names, have the letter "O" which ties all the characters in with each other and within the family that we follow throughout our story. We also aimed to choose names that would work well in different languages, hoping that it would be more approachable for multilingual audiences.

4.4.4. The Writing and Creation Process

To start the writing process, we brainstormed ideas and browsed through children's books for inspiration. We looked at different styles children's books had, whether they would be books we could find at home, in the library or in a bookstore. We came across an interesting children's picture dictionary "Voihan vammaisen" by Saraste and Könkkölä (2017), which explains different vocabulary related to all kinds of disabilities. Even though it was clear that we would like to create a storybook, not a nonfiction book, it gave us some ideas how we could present topics or explain vocabulary relating to CODAs, sign-language and deafness.

This step helped us to clarify our vision of the book type, the target audience, the key message and how to deliver it. We agreed upon a picture book for children above the age of four. This age group allows us to have short chapters on each page, while the illustration is an

equally important part of telling the story and making it more interactive. A well-written story is also captivating and interesting to read out loud.

As per the recommendations from the article “Lastenkirjan Kirjoittaminen” (Kirjoittajakoulu no date) they emphasize clear, simple, and easy to understand language while still being rich and engaging enough to capture a child's attention. This helps children to understand complex emotions, situations, and concepts they encounter in their own lives.

With the bigger picture and goal in mind we discussed possible options for the timescale of the story. Whether the story would cover the course of one day, or several days, or even not to have a specific context of time. To keep the story simple and clear, we decided to focus the story on events happening over the course of one day, giving an insight to CODAs experiences in everyday life.

We explored ideas for different scenes of the book from multiple angles, coming up with how best to represent some of the most common challenges and feelings of a CODA. We made sure to read through the literature we found and all the answers from our questionnaires; to have the most accurate elements in our story as possible. It was important to us to have meaningful roles for the deaf parents in the story as well, since they are the reason why a CODA is a Child of Deaf Adults.

We also tested out how to best find a way to integrate ECE into the story. We decided⁴ that the most suitable approach was to include the teacher in the storyline without depicting a scene set in the daycare, as that would have shifted the focus in a different direction. Our goal was to highlight the family and their everyday life. Through the teacher's character, we aimed to emphasize the importance of engaging with this family with the same warmth and respect as any other. We wanted the interaction between the teacher and the family to feel as natural as possible, without drawing special attention to the parents' deafness. Aligning with the values of the Finnish Core Curriculum of Early Childhood Education.

With these reflections we decided to have three scenes in the story arc:

1. **At the grocery store.** The family meets one of Enzo's new daycare teachers, who surprisingly knows how to sign.

⁴ In this paragraph ChatGPT has been used to help smooth out the text and make it more fluent.

2. **In the bus.** Nova translates the bus driver's announcement. A curious boy looks at the signing family. Nova feels ashamed, thinking the boy was making fun of them. However, the boy approaches Nova, and she ends up teaching him a couple of signs.

3. **At home.** Nova has a conversation with Mum about her feelings of shame and being different. Mum encourages her. Later Uncle Otto, the hearing brother of Novas dad, shares his favorite part of knowing how to sign when he was a child and now as an adult.

After writing a rough first draft we asked our family and friends for some first impressions. We went through the text and edited unclear sentences, adding more details for better transitions, color and smoothness to the story.

It was natural to us to use both English and Finnish to write the story. Even though writing and checking everything twice in different languages was challenging at times due to getting the wording mixed up at some points, we again used our family members to check our work again and again until our text felt smooth and easy to read and understand.

When choosing the title for the book we explored some tips and tricks of what to keep in mind when thinking of children's literature. A good title is crucial in all writing, since it needs to catch attention and communicate the key message of the book to a potential reader and buyer. Walton Hamilton (2010) emphasises the positive impact of a catchy title that it easy to remember. Too complicated or long titles can disengage interest quickly. Using linguistic and rhetorical tools such as alliteration, unusual combinations, or possessives to trigger curiosity for the book (Walton Hamilton 2010; Nuba, et al. 1999). We found using the phrase "(Coda's) secret superpower" would describe the key message of the book. However, it took some pondering and multiple changes as the names of our characters changed before we could settle on the final title:

The secret superpower of Nova and Enzo.

4.4.5. Options for Delivering the Book to the Public

As books are meant to be shared and read by others, we informed ourselves of the practical implementation of publishing a physical children's book.

In Finland roughly 80% of books are published through publishing companies 10% through self-publishing and the rest through organizations, associations or other businesses.

As for the **current trends in children's books**, the Finish Children's Book Institute (Lastenkirjainstituutti 2024) shares yearly statistics of most sold books their genres and

themes. In 2023,⁵ children's and young adult literature focused on the challenges of modern childhood and youth, including insecurity, bullying, and the influence of social media, with family and friends providing crucial support. Picture books for younger readers emphasize emotional regulation. Other key themes included history, time travel, diversity, folklore, and environmental issues, particularly animal rights and biodiversity. With this statistical insight, we feel confident that our book could be appealing to the current market.

We found different options for publishers or publishing services and found some information about costs. We found a couple options of publishing styles, the traditional way to publish via a publisher, self-publishing or direct publishing through a platform.

The process of **publishing through a publisher** is very detailed. It is estimated that only a small percentage of all manuscripts sent are accepted by publishers and lead to a contract (Kirjoittajakoulu, Kirjan julkaiseminen, no date), since a book's profitability is a crucial part of their business. The publisher usually has a lot of influence on decisions and holds most if not all the rights to the book, depending on the type of contract. The author's royalty rate is often a small portion of the price a customer pays for the product, and an author's fee is usually around 21-26%. One of the more significant strengths of publishing a book through a publisher is that the book will reach more people, as a professional marketing team will advertise the book. The publisher will also fund the final editing, design, printing, pricing, marketing, distribution and take care of the author's royalties. (Kirjoittajakoulu, Kirjan julkaiseminen, no date)

Self-publishing or self-funded print gives freedom and full ownership of your book but requires more funds and responsibility to take care of all the needed steps. The price for a self-published book can vary from a couple hundred to a couple thousand euros. Factors like book folding, number of prints, cover- and paper style and decorative additions have an impact on the price range. (Kirjoittajakoulu, Kirjan julkaiseminen, no date) In addition when publishing independently in Finland, one must apply for the ISBN-number, before publishing the book. The online application can be found on the website of the Finnish ISBN-center. (Kansalliskirjasto 2024)

Digital books, whether in text or audiobooks, have also gained a lot of popularity and offer their own possibilities for publishing. Since Digital products don't have material costs, they are considered the most affordable options to publish. Although for an audiobook there might be a need to pay for a reader.

⁵ ChatGPT was used to translate and summarize this paragraph.

Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP) is one of these platforms and allows anyone to publish and sell a book in their online store. Publishing itself is free, but from every sale Amazon charges the cost of sale, which can include e.g. printing costs, and a sales commission for selling the book (AuthorImprints 2024). Amazon prints books on demand, according to the orders, it is also possible to have a combination with selling digital books or only selling either a digital or printed version (Kirjoittajakoulu, Kirjan julkaiseminen, no date).

This makes it very simple to self-publish without worrying about contracts, printing, having storage for printed copies and so on. One of the biggest challenges with direct publishing is the huge supply and competition of books sold online, and the marketing responsibility lies completely on oneself. Amazon KDP does also not have content or quality control; therefore, buyer reviews hold immense influence on determining a book's sales. Amazon is currently one of the world's largest online bookstores and distributors. (Kirjoittajakoulu, Kirjan julkaiseminen, no date)

When considering our book's worth in compared to other similar publications, the Self-Publishing School (Lee Kidder 2024) suggests including the following factors in the evaluation. Regarding the genre and the content of the book, what do other children's picture books cost generally? How unique is our content or topic, is there a lot of competition? What is the format of the book, hardback, paperback or e-book? What is the word or page count of the book? What quality does the book have altogether? For example, is there specific or new information to the reader, how has it been edited and formatted? What type of print is chosen, black and white, color resolution and so on. Also, the popularity of the authors can influence, if the price can be raised higher, since more popular authors have more loyal buyers than an author publishing their first book.

We tested what would be the estimated royalty on Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing with their Calculator (Figure 3.). However, it turns out that to publish a hardcover requires a minimum page count of 75 whereas a paperback requires minimum of 24 pages. For the sake of having an example we tried out the calculator by changing the page count to 24, even though our book has a page count of 14, including the back cover and cover page. Below you can see a screenshot of the printing costs and royalty calculation for a 24-page paperback with premium color interior and a list price of 14,46€. The Printing cost would be 3.63€ and the royalty rate of 60% would result in 5.05€ estimated royalty per book sold.

Figure 6: Example of Printing Costs and Royalty Calculator KDP (5.2.2025)

Marketplace ⓘ	List Price ⓘ	Royalty Rate	Minimum List Price ⓘ	Printing Cost ⓘ	Estimated Royalty ⓘ
Amazon.com	\$15.00	60%	\$7.00	\$4.20	\$4.80
Amazon.co.uk	£12.02	60%	£5.42	£3.25	£3.96
Amazon.de	€14.46	60%	€6.05	€3.63	€5.05

There are also publishers like Bookea (no date), which provide a platform to publish more independently through their platform in return for a service fee or order and offer the possibility to have the book available in Finnish bookstores. Their platform has a more contemporary and low threshold approach to professional publishing.

Since our book deals with a very specific topic, it could be likely that a publisher would not be interested in publishing our book. Especially since our target audience is so narrow for the book to be financially profitable. We will be working on getting this book published after the Thesis process is over. As we are not aiming to become writers or publish more books at this time, a form of self-publishing or working to publish with our working life-partner, CODA-yhdistys ry, would be an attractive option for us. However, we could send in the manuscript to publishers and see if any publisher would be interested in publishing our book.

5 Feedback and Evaluation

During our thesis process we regularly collected feedback from various people, helping us to evaluate and gain perspective to the quality of our thesis and book. In this chapter we will describe how we collected feedback and what kind of feedback we received. We start from sharing feedback from our working life-partner, followed by feedback we got from our private and professional network. Lastly, we share our personal evaluation of this process and the results. We will also reflect on our writing journey, going over the most important and interesting things we learned personally during our thesis process.

5.1 The Feedback We Received

Most of the feedback we received through email communication with our working life-partner CODA-yhdistys ry. We kept our working life partner informed about our process by sending at least one update per month along with requesting feedback. This way we were able to receive comments about our ideas, suggestions and progress, making sure that the direction we were heading in was aligned with the CODA association and focused on our goal.

After creating the first draft of the prototype of the book, we requested feedback from our working life partner. The feedback we received was very good and constructive. Commenting that experiences of a CODA are represented well in the story, e.g. interpretation, shame or embarrassment. They also liked the simplicity of the story arc taking place in one day. Having ordinary everyday events like grocery shopping and travelling on the bus. The representatives of the association can see the book empowering CODA-children and others.

They highlighted some specific wordings, for example changing phrases like “talk” in sign language” to more natural expressions like “using” or “communicating” in sign language. They also highlighted the importance of making it clearer earlier on that the character Uncle Otto is of hearing. They also supported the idea of changing the names for the characters in the book, instead of using the originals: Coda and Little Caba.

Importantly they noted a good ethical consideration on the last page, which we ended up changing according to their feedback. It was the last line the little brother, Enzo, said “ It’s fun to trick dad by unplugging the vacuum cleaner, because he can’t hear”. The original idea of tricking dad came from a handful of answers in the questionnaire, where some shared that as a child it was fun to unplug the vacuum cleaner while one of the parents was cleaning, due to not being able to hear the difference. Therefore, we first concluded that since this was a common fun memory for some of our participants, it could be fun to include it in the story to lighten up the ending after having an emotionally heavier discussion between Nova and her Mum. Additionally, this would not have been the best example for children, since it could unintentionally encourage teasing or bullying people for their deafness, rather than as something fun and lighthearted. From the feedback we changed the ending to be something else fun and cheerful.

One of our original aims was to raise more awareness of CODAs, but after attending a guidance meeting it became clear that this was too vague and that we should concentrate our focus on something more measurable. This comment helped us later on achieve a more concrete goal of having a finished product which is the prototype of the book. The process to print or publish a book often takes a much longer time than would be expected. This goal would not have been realistic within the time frame of our thesis process.

The feedback we received from ECE was quite minimal due to their busy schedules, but we did manage to get feedback from ECE professionals, special needs teachers, at two different daycares, one in Helsinki and the other in Vantaa. With professionals from both daycares having an extremely positive reaction to the subject matter of our book. Stating that if we get our book to be physically published, they see no reason for it not to become a favorite among children.

In addition, we also received some feedback from CODAs, deaf people, and other people in our private and professional network. This feedback was mainly related to the children's book, its structure and content. We also had support with proof-reading and correcting the language of the book.

Since the writing and editing process took longer than expected, the illustration-work also began later than planned. This meant test readers had to rely solely on the story, as the hand-drawn illustrations were still incomplete, preventing them from experiencing the book as originally intended. The timing prevented us from requesting feedback for the book from (CODA) children themselves, even though receiving feedback from the primary target group would be significant for the final version of the book. We did manage to attain a couple test readings with children, which gave us some insight into the general target group. To keep it simple we requested feedback orally or in short informal written form.

The feedback⁶ questions were simple and concise: Did the reader enjoy the story? Was it easy and engaging to follow? Did they have any additional feedback or suggestions? We also asked whether a CODA could relate to the story and feel encouraged or empowered by it. From an adult's perspective, we inquired whether the book was enjoyable to read with a child and if any parts felt dull or overly sentimental.

As the prototype evolved, we received feedback that the story was very good, easy to follow—simple yet engaging and logical. CODAs found it relatable, and test readers felt it was well-suited for children aged 4 and up, making it enjoyable to read with a child. One reader even suggested it could be expanded into a book series. Development suggestions related primarily to the language and structure of the text, as well as confusion about the similarity of the former names Coda and Caba while questions their meanings.

According to the feedback from all parties, we are pleased to learn that our book prototype successfully portrays the experiences of a CODA in daily life, allowing them to feel seen and recognized. At the same time, it can provide parents and Early Childhood Educators with a deeper understanding of how to support CODAs in their experiences. Additionally, it can be easily used in various settings with children, helping them develop a broader perspective on the diversity of our world. Considering these factors, the book has a meaningful and positive impact on readers, the CODA community, and the Deaf community.

⁶ In the following paragraphs ChatGPT has been used to help smooth out the text and make it more fluent.

5.2 Our Professional and Personal Evaluation

For our own evaluation of the implementation process and results, we will begin with how we accomplished our objectives and how we experienced the overall process. The evaluation is based on individual and shared self-reflection.

We are satisfied that we achieved our goal, aiming as high as possible according to our abilities and resources. Challenging seasons in our personal lives and being under the weather were slowing down the process and impacting our efficiency during certain months. Dividing up the tasks and breaking them into smaller steps helped us plan and achieve them. This had a great impact on us and helped us stick to our schedule.

It was a good decision for us to move the due date for the thesis from November to February. This gave us just the right amount of time we needed and was beneficial for the process of developing the book. This is why we are satisfied that we were able to achieve our goal of a finished prototype, thoughtfully crafted and delivered in high quality. Giving us the option for the book to be published in the future, bringing both joy and fresh perspectives to its readers.

Working on this thesis as a pair was an insightful and very positive experience. For us,⁷ clear and regular communication was key to creating a supportive environment and maintaining a motivated approach. Expressing the current states of well-being and our schedules helped us to be on the same page, as well as building trust and accountability. As mentioned earlier, regular feedback from others kept us focused and helped us identify areas for development that we had previously overlooked.

Shared working styles and a common vision helped us avoid preventable clashes. In cases of misunderstandings, lack of clarity, or differing preferences, we were able to listen to one another, discuss the issues, and reach a mutual conclusion. As an example, in the beginning of writing the book we had many personal preferences of how the characters should be and it took some time for us to form a clear unified vision of the storyline. The writing process was a continuous back and forth between us and the feedback, which also made forming a clear vision challenging at times. At no point were we in complete disagreement with each other over the course of writing the book. This was thanks to our steady and reliable communication between one another.

Our complementary strengths allowed us to maintain a balanced and well-rounded

⁷ In the following paragraphs ChatGPT has been used to help smooth out the text and make it more fluent.

perspective, leading to better results. For example, while one of us excels at structuring larger sections, the other has a keen eye for detail and the skills to refine the language.

Having grown up with at least two or three languages—and with one of us personally experiencing life as a CODA—we still gained deeper insight and fresh perspectives on this topic. For instance, while the experience of a CODA with one Deaf parent differs significantly from that of someone with two Deaf parents, many aspects of their experiences remain shared.

There are also shared experiences between CODAs and bilingual or multicultural children with hearing parents. Both groups may be affected by their parents' language barriers or challenges in adapting to a new culture. Additionally, they may face communication difficulties due to a lack of a strong common language or vocabulary. Growing up navigating multiple cultures, CODAs and multilingual children often experience identity struggles and grapple with their sense of belonging within their cultural communities.

Professionally, we feel that we have gained valuable new insights into Deaf culture and what it means to be a CODA, expanding our understanding beyond what we knew before. Engaging with different perspectives has deepened our appreciation of the unique experiences CODAs navigate in their daily lives. It has been especially interesting to hear firsthand accounts from CODAs in Finland, as their stories have provided a richer and more nuanced understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and identity-related aspects of growing up with Deaf parents. These insights have broadened our perspective and challenged us to think more critically about inclusivity and representation.

It was also incredibly valuable to take a deeper look into how language, diverse cultural influences, supportive sign, and other teaching methods are integrated into early childhood education. This exploration has given us a greater understanding of how these elements work together to create an inclusive and effective learning environment for children. We were able to learn how different languages and cultures are represented in educational practices, how supportive signing enhances communication and learning for children with varying needs, and how a mix of strategies are used to support children's development in a more holistic way.

Writing a book was both an interesting and educational experience. It challenged us to reflect on theory and literature and find ways to translate those concepts into a children's book. This required a great deal of creativity, as we had to encapsule complex ideas into a simple, engaging, and understandable format for young readers. Our goal was to make the book approachable, meaningful, educational, and entertaining all at once.

The process involved many steps, demanding both attention to detail and a clear vision for the final product as a whole. We truly enjoyed bringing our story to life, especially since it

was centered on a topic we are interested in. Having the artistic freedom to shape our book made the experience even more rewarding, and watching the story take form was incredibly motivating. Through continuous refinement we learned that making changes is not a sign of failure—rather, refusing to let go of a bad idea is.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

Finally, after completing our thesis we feel proud and happy with all we have learned and accomplished.

Having introduced the reader to our topic⁸ and elaborated on the concept of our developmental thesis and working life partner, we established a strong foundation to build upon. We explored the theoretical aspects of CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults) and key terminology, linking them to the perspective of Early Childhood Education.

By using two questionnaires, we gained valuable insight into the experiences of CODAs as well as perspectives from professionals in the ECE field. The theoretical framework and background review provided essential support during the implementation process, giving us confidence in the quality of both our thesis and the children's book we created. After completing our final prototype, we shared the feedback we received and reflected on our experiences throughout this journey.

Our thesis came with its own set of challenges. One of the more difficult aspects was focusing and expanding on certain topics, particularly when it came to gathering firsthand experiences from CODAs both globally and here in Finland. Finding relevant sources and insights required extensive research, and at times, the available information seemed to be limited.

While there are many resources about the deaf as well as plenty of developmental needs to support the community, we had chosen to focus on CODAs. Although hearing children of deaf parents do not face the same physical challenges as their parents, their unique experiences and struggles deserve recognition and support as well. With this said the experiences of CODAs are deeply connected to the deaf community and cannot be viewed in isolation.

Though CODAs and bilingual children share certain experiences, there are significant differences that give CODAs a unique, often underappreciated perspective. Deaf people are frequently perceived primarily as having a disability rather than being part of a linguistic minority.

A deaf person cannot simply learn to hear, whereas a hearing person has the privilege of learning sign language. Deaf individuals can be fluent in multiple signed and written languages, yet they often face language barriers similar to those encountered by immigrants. However, a key difference is that in developed countries with advanced healthcare, the number of deaf individuals is gradually decreasing, while the immigrant population continues

⁸ In the following chapter ChatGPT has been used to help smooth out the text and make it more fluent.

to rise. As a result, without intentional efforts to promote and preserve sign language, its use may become increasingly limited, while foreign language communities naturally expand, fostering more widespread peer support. However, at the same time along with immigrants and refugees there are more international deaf people migrating to Finland.

Another challenge was navigating the complexities of Early Childhood Education and determining how best to connect it to our topic. It took considerable effort and critical thinking to identify which aspects were most relevant and what details should be included or omitted to maintain a clear and focused discussion.

Fortunately, we had enough time to refine our work, allowing us to thoroughly research, organize our ideas, and strengthen our arguments. The ability to gather information and sources over an extended period significantly enriched our thesis, enabling us to explore the subject matter in greater depth and present a well-rounded perspective.

Despite the challenges we encountered—such as gathering firsthand accounts from CODAs and making connections to Early Childhood Education—we were able to improve our work overtime, deepening our understanding of the subject. Through thorough research and reflection, we have gained valuable insights into Deaf culture, multilingualism, and the unique identity of CODAs. This process has reinforced the importance of representation, inclusivity, and cultural awareness in Early Childhood Education.

Ultimately, our thesis has not only contributed to our academic and professional growth but has also given us the opportunity to create something impactful. We hope that our children's book will help CODAs feel seen and understood while also raising awareness about their experiences among educators, families, and children.

For further development and inclusion of the deaf community and CODAs, we recommend raising more awareness in ECE. Continued and emphasized implementation of using supportive signs and vocabulary learning support CODAs and bilingual children in language learning, speech, communication and self-expression.

Future development ideas include further investment in children's literature, allowing a wider range of important topics to be explored through simple yet meaningful stories. Books can serve as powerful pedagogical tools, helping children engage with complex subjects in an accessible way. However, it is equally important to create stories that encourage children to think critically, reflect, and draw their own conclusions, rather than simply presenting them with lessons. At the same time, storytelling should remain enjoyable, fostering a love for reading while subtly imparting valuable insights. Striking this balance between education and entertainment ensures that children's literature remains both impactful and engaging.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Tunnetko CODA:n? Questionnaire for Early Childhood Educators

Appendix 2: “Hei CODA!” Questionnaire for CODAs

Appendix 1: “Tunnetko CODA:n?” Questionnaire for Early Childhood Educators



Tunnetko CODA:n?

CODA: Child of Deaf Adult/Kuuron vanhemman kuuleva lapsi.

Tämän lyhyen kyselyn avulla kartoitamme varhaiskasvatuksen tietämystä kuurojen perheiden kanssa toimimisesta, keskittyen kuurojen vanhempien kuuleviin lapsiin. Opinnäytetyön tuloksena laadimme kirjaa lapsille, CODA-lapsen näkökulmasta. Keräämme vastauksien pohjalta myös ideoita kirjan tarinaan. Vastauksia käsitellään anonyymisti ja luottamuksellisesti.

Oletko työssäsi kohdannut kuuron lapsen?

- kyllä
- en
- olen kohdannut kuuron henkilön työni ulkopuolella

Oletko työssäsi kohdannut kuulevan lapsen, jolla on kuuro vanhempi?

- kyllä
- en
- olen kohdannut kuuron henkilön työni ulkopuolella

Jos tapaisit työssäsi CODA-lapsen ja kuurot vanhemmat, miten kuvittelisit lähestyväsi perhettä?

Meine Antwort

Miten olet tai kuvittelisit kommunikoivasi kuuron vanhemman kanssa?

Meine Antwort

Koetko tai kokisitko kuuron kanssa kommunikoinnin vaikeammaksi kuin kuulevan, mutta erikielisen (ei yhteistä kieltä) vanhemman kanssa? Millä tavalla?

Meine Antwort

Oletko koskaan opetellut..

- Tukiviittomia
- Suomen viittomakieltä
- Muun kielen viittomakieltä
- En ole, mutta haluaisin opetella tukiviittomia
- En ole, mutta haluaisin opetella (suomen) viittomakieltä
- Sonstiges: _____

Onko lähipiirissäsi CODA-henkilöitä?

- kyllä
- ei
- kyllä, olen itsekin CODA

Onko lähipiirissäsi kuuroja henkilöitä?

- kyllä
- ei
- kyllä, olen itsekin kuuro

Oletko huomannut CODA-lapsessa muihin lapsiin verrattuna poikkeavaa käytöstä tai ominaispiirteitä?

Meine Antwort

Mitä haasteita kuvittelisit CODA lapsella olevan, joita voitaisi varhaiskasvatuksessa tukea?

Meine Antwort

Mitä olisit aina halunnut kysyä kuuroilta henkilöltä?

Meine Antwort

Muuta kommentoitavaa?

Meine Antwort



Appendix 2: "Hei CODA!" Questionnaire for CODAs



Hei CODA!

CODA: Child of Deaf Adult/Kuuron vanhemman kuuleva lapsi.

Tämän lyhyen kyselyn avulla kartoitamme kokemuksia CODA-lapsuudesta opinnäytetyötämme varten. Opinnäytetyön tuloksena laadimme kirjaa lapsille, CODA-lapsen näkökulmasta. Keräämme vastauksien pohjalta myös ideoita kirjan tarinaan. Voit halutessasi jättää kysymyksiä vastaamatta, jos koet ne liian henkilökohtaiseksi. Vastauksia käsitellään anonyymisti ja luottamuksellisesti.

With this short questionnaire we collect data for our Bachelor Thesis about the experiences of childhood as a CODA. As an end product to our thesis we are creating a book for children from a CODA-child's perspective. We collect ideas for the story of the book based on the answers. You can leave questions unanswered, if they are too personal to share. The answers will be dealt with anonymously and confidentially.

1/3 Taustakysymyksiä / Background information

Voit vastata itsesi puolesta CODA:na, tai kuulevan lapsesi kanssa. /
You can answer for yourself as a CODA, or with your hearing child.

Ketkä perheessäsi ovat kuuroja? / Who in your family are deaf?

- Molemmat vanhemmat/ both parents
- Toinen vanhemmista/ one of my parents
- Sisarukseni/ my sibling(s)
- Olen perheeni ainoa kuuleva / I am the only hearing one in our family
- Sonstiges: _____

Mitkä kielet ovat äidinkieliäsi? / Which languages are your mother tongue?

Meine Antwort _____

Onko sinulla CODA-ystäviä? / Do you have CODA-friends?

kyllä / yes

ei / no

Onko sinulla kuuroja ystäviä? / Do you have deaf friends?

kyllä / yes

ei / no

2/3 Muistoja lapsuudesta / Memories from childhood

Muistathan, että vastauksia voidaan käyttää inspiraationa kirjan juoneen! :)
Please remember that shared responses can be used as inspiration for the storyline of the book! :)

Mikä on mielestäsi paras "kuurojen supervoima"?
What do you think is the best "deaf superpower"?

Meine Antwort _____

Mikä on mielestäsi paras "kuulevien supervoima"?
What do you think is the best "hearing superpower"?

Meine Antwort _____

Minkälaisissa tilanteissa viittomakielestä ollut hyötyä?
In which situations has sign-language been useful?

Meine Antwort _____

3/3 Kokemuksia / Experiences

HUOM! Voit vastata niin moneen kysymykseen kuin haluat! /
NOTE! You can answer to as many questions as you like!

Mitä ominaispiirteitä CODA:lla on? / What characteristics does a CODA have?

Meine Antwort

Mitä ominaispiirteitä kuuroilla on? / What characteristics do deaf people have?

Meine Antwort

Miten kuvailisit CODA:n asemaa kuulevien ja kuurojen kulttuurin välillä? /
How would you describe the position of a CODA between the hearing and deaf
cultures?

Meine Antwort

Mikä oli / on sinulle haastavaa tai surullista koska vanhempasi ovat kuuroja? /

What was / is challenging or sad to you because your parents are deaf?

Meine Antwort

Aikuisena, mitä kertoisit itsellesi lapsena? /

As an adult, what would you tell to yourself as a child?

Meine Antwort

Mitä toivoisit kuulevien tietävän kuuroista tai CODA:na olemisesta? /

What do you wish hearing people would know about deaf people or about being a CODA?

Meine Antwort

Mitä toivoisit kuurojen tietävän kuulevista tai CODA:na olemisesta? /

What do you wish deaf people would know about hearing people or about being a CODA?

Meine Antwort

Muuta kommentoitavaa? /Other Comments?

Meine Antwort

