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How to support a child's cultural identity?

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Miten tuetaan lapsen kulttuuri-identiteettiä?

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Pääkaupunkiseudun päivähoito on monikulttuurisempi kuin koskaan aiemmin. Tämän opinnäytetyö on laadullinen tutkimus, jonka tarkoitus oli tutkia, miten vanhemmat ja päivähoiton työntekijät tukevat lapsen kulttuuri-identiteettiä. Tarkoituksena oli tutkia myös, miten yhteistyötä päivähoiton ja vanhempien välillä voidaan kehittää identiteettien tukemiseksi. Opinnäytetyön yhteistyötaho oli päiväkotiympäristö pääkaupunkiseudulla.

Aineiston keruussa käytettiin laadullisia haastatteluita vanhemmille ja päivähoiton työntekijöille. Kirjallisuuskatsauksessa pohdittiin kulttuurin yhteyttä identiteettiin ja kieleen. Myös varhaiskasvatussuunnitelmaan sekä yhteistyöhön vanhempien ja päivähoiton välillä tutustuttiin. Kirjallisuuskatsauksessa tuotiin esiin työntekijöiden vastuita, sekä annettiin käytännön vinkkejä monikulttuurisuutta tukevan päiväkotiympäristön luomiseksi.

Tulokset kertoivat, että vanhemmat halusivat antaa lapsilleen mahdollisuuden tehdä omia valintoja kulttuurin suhteen. Vaikutteiden ja tiedon tarjoaminen sekä mahdollisuus keskusteluun olivat keskiössä. Työntekijät ymmärsivät vastuunsa roolimalleina ja halusivat opettaa lapsille avoimuutta ja ymmärrystä kulttuureita kohtaan. Yhteistyön kehittämiseksi vastaajaryhmät toivoivat, että perheet voisivat esitellä kulttuureitaan päiväkodissa. Työntekijät toivoivat vanhempien tukevan lasten kulttuuri-identiteettiä korostamalla avoimuutta ja ymmärrystä. Päätelmänä oli, että lasten kulttuuri-identiteettiä tuettiin korostamalla kulttuuritietoisuutta ja ymmärrystä, unohtamatta kykyä kriittiseen reflektointiin.

Jatkotutkimusehdotuksiin lukeutui toiminnallinen opinnäytetyö, jolla luodaan päivähoitolle monikulttuurisuutta tukevia aktiviteetteja. Ehdotuksiin lukeutui myös yhteiskunnan monimuotoisuuden tutkiminen etenkin varhaiskasvatuksen näkökulmasta.

Asiasanat: kulttuuri-identiteetti, monikulttuurinen päivähoito, identiteetin tukeminen, hyväksyminen, tietoisuus, yhteistyö vanhempien kanssa

Rita Bahne

How to support a child's cultural identity?

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Daycares in the greater Helsinki region are more multicultural than ever. The aim of this thesis was to find out how parents and daycare employees support a child's cultural identity, and how to develop educational partnership to further support cultural identities of children. This thesis was commissioned by a daycare centre in the greater Helsinki region.

This thesis used qualitative interviews with both parents and daycare employees to gather data. The literary review discussed the relation between culture, identity and language. The guidelines on multiculturalism in Finnish daycare and educational partnership were also reviewed. Employee responsibilities were discussed with practical tips on how to create an environment that supports multiculturalism in the daycare environment.

The results indicated that, in terms of cultural identities, parents wanted to let their child decide themselves by giving them cultural influences and a possibility discuss and reflect cultural issues. Daycare employees acknowledged their influence on the children and wished to teach them general awareness and acceptance towards different cultures. In terms of developing educational partnership, both parents and employees wished for families to introduce their cultures at the daycare. Employees wished for parents to support children's cultural identities by promoting acceptance and awareness. The findings indicated that supporting cultural identities was characterized by teaching children a culture of acceptance with a skill for critical reflection.

Suggestions for further research included a functional research for creating regular cultural activities at the daycare to support multiculturalism. The diversification of our society especially in terms of early childhood education was also included in the suggestions.

Keywords: cultural identity, multicultural daycare, supporting identity, acceptance, awareness, educational partnership

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1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to find out how parents and daycare employees support a child's cultural identity. The topic is relevant, because there is a growing number of children with different cultural backgrounds: out of all families in Finland, 9.1% have at least one parent that does not have Finnish as their native language(s). 5.3% of families have both parents speaking a foreign language as their native language. (Väestöliitto 2017.) According to a population forecast, in 2030 one in five citizens will have some other native language than Finnish, Swedish or Sami (City of Helsinki 2017). Multiculturalism is an integral part of early childhood education in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Over 70 languages are spoken in the field today. (Jauhola, Bisi, Järvi & Rusama, 2007, 7.)

This thesis is commissioned by a daycare centre in the greater Helsinki region. This thesis can be used as a foundation for daycare employees to develop the early childhood education in educational partnership with the parents of multicultural children. The purpose of this thesis is to find out how parents and employees support children's cultural identities and with that increase educational partnership between parents and daycare employees in supporting a child's cultural identity. It offers valuable information to both parents and early childhood educators about how children are supported, and what could be done in the future to further develop educational partnership. For a child to receive the best possible early childhood education, parents and daycare employees need to work in cooperation in supporting the overall development of children. Due to the diversity of the greater Helsinki region, daycare employees need to be culturally aware and considerate.

2 Research method

This thesis uses a qualitative research approach. The aim is to find out how to support a child's cultural identity. The research questions of my thesis are:

1. How do parents support their child's cultural identity?
2. How do daycare employees support the cultural identities of children?
3. How to develop educational partnership to further support children's cultural identities?

The literary review of this thesis is the theory basis for my research. This thesis uses a qualitative research method, with the perspectives of the participants being the starting point (Ritchie, Lewis, Mc Naughton Nicholls & Ormston 2013, 3.) A common trait for qualitative research is that the research aims at describing and understanding life and phenomena, using people as instruments for information. Qualitative research is interested in revealing information that is otherwise difficult to measure (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara,

2004, 152-153.) Ritchie et al. (2013, 4) describe qualitative research as an aim to interpret and understand the reality and experiences of the research participants. Open and reflective approaches are often used for qualitative research. In humanistic fields, the researchers use logical argumentation and aim at an objective perspective by leaning on the evidence and material they have gathered, rather than their own subjective opinions or values (Alasuutari, 2001, 32). Qualitative methods are not chosen due to the lack of resources to carry out a quantitative research. In a qualitative method, a large sampling or statistic argumentation is not necessary or possible. (Alasuutari, 2011, 39.) In qualitative research, the researcher needs to use intuition. The researcher needs to know what to look for. (Kananen, 2014, 115.)

Chapter 3 will present the literary review of this thesis that is the theoretical basis of this research. After this, the analysis of gathered data will be presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents results by answering the research questions of this thesis. Chapter 6 discusses the validity, reliability and ethics of this thesis. Suggestions for further research and over all conclusions of this thesis process will be discussed in chapter 6. References and attachments are found at the end of this thesis.

3 Literary review

The following chapters will present the literary review of this thesis. The literary review will first introduce the relation between culture, identity and language. The guidelines of multiculturalism in early childhood education, the importance of educational partnership and employee responsibilities will then be presented. The last subchapter presents practical tips on how to create a daycare environment that supports multiculturalism.

When speaking of language, this thesis refers to multilingualism. A conscious choice was made to use this term in stead of bilingualism, which only refers to a situation where two languages are present. While there is a difference whether a child is learning two or more languages, it does not make a significant impact on this research. For clarification purposes, the term multilingualism is used when referred to a situation with more than one language present. This choice is supported by Roos (2007, 146), who states, that a third culture is often formed within families of several cultures. It is formed when parents decide how they want to incorporate cultures into the upbringing of their children. The aspects include language and communication, family relations, housework and chores, celebrations, upbringing of children, religion and taking care of intimate relationships. From this point of view, the term multilingual is used when speaking of families with more than one language present. One could also argue, that all families could be called multicultural, because an intimate relationship and raising children with your partner will always create a family culture of your own. In this thesis, the term 'multicultural' is used for families with more than one culture.

3.1 Culture, identity and language

Culture has two essential forms: we learn it and we share it. Culture defines the behaviour of people belonging to a society. Children learn culture through socialization: they learn language, values, skills and knowledge that helps them function in the society they are living in. Values differ from norms in that they are more abstract and general. Values are ideas shared by people about what is good, bad, right and wrong. (Williams, 1986, 26-27.)

Identity generally refers to individuals' personal experiences about themselves and about belonging to a society or a culture. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 48). Cultural identity is a part of an individual's social identity. Identity is constantly changing (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 61; Halme & Vataja, 2011, 11-12). Individuals with complex cultural and national identities may feel like they do not belong anywhere - identity may begin to alter so that ethnic and national dimensions of identity become ambiguous and blurred. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 81-83.) Self and identity form in interaction with other people. Positive feedback reinforces an individual's sense of self to be good and valuable. If the formation of identity is vague, it can create social, emotional and motivational deficiencies (Campbell, 1990, 547 in Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 112).

Cultural identity may refer to a certain national or cultural ethnic group. Children usually define themselves by means of gender, family, and their daycare group. Children can also define themselves by culture, religion or language. In a daycare setting, it is important for children to feel that their cultural heritage is appreciated and accepted by others. It is important for parents to have a positive outlook on their own language and cultural background. Children's identities grow stronger as they learn to understand and accept their culture and heritage. Children see themselves through the eyes of peers and daycare employees. Through positive enforcement, children learn to see themselves as important and valuable members of society. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 11-12.)

The research evidence states that children as young as three years of age are aware that people come from a different cultural background. Children learn to identify differences in race and ethnicity by the age of 2-3 through skin colour and social interaction in the present environment. By the age of 4-5, children may refuse to play with other children of different race. (Robinson & Diaz 2005 in Halme & Vataja, 2011, 44.) For this reason, it is extremely important to incorporate multicultural upbringing into early childhood education. The issue is not in the differences between the children themselves but on how we deal with them. Children should be given the opportunity to discuss differences together with adults. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 44.)

Daycare is one of the first institutions that affect personality development with the aim of supporting a child's sense of identity and autonomy (Korat, 2001, 225). Cultural educational

pedagogists believe that education is about children adapting to a culture to meet their own needs, as well as understand the culture in which they live in. Cornerstones of cultural pedagogy are awareness, interaction and reflection. (Korat, 2001, 230.) The purpose of multicultural early childhood education is to help children achieve high self-consciousness and offer cultural, ethnic and linguistic experiences. Emphasis is on decreasing and abolishing racism, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 43.) Early childhood education should teach children how to critically analyze the culture they belong to (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 63). Central to the success of children and development of a healthy self-esteem are the high expectations and positive attitudes given by the teachers to all children equally. Valuing the native language(s) is the core in supporting a positive identity formation (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 229- 231.)

The purpose of family is to help children settle in the environment around them. In this socialization process, individuals learn the culture of their society and become functional members of it. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 117-118.) It is important for parents to allow children to express their cultural identity. A child's identity forms constantly and in a multicultural setting it may sometimes turn towards one language or culture more than the other (Hassinen, 2005, 66-67). Roos (2007, 146) states, that a third culture is often formed within families of several cultures. A third culture forms, when parents decide how they want to incorporate cultures into the upbringing of their children. The aspects include language and communication, family relations, housework and chores, celebrations, upbringing of children, religion and taking care of intimate relationships.

Language is one of the most important aspects of culture. Even though multilingualism is a global norm, there was not much talk about multilingualism in Finland few decades ago. (Rakkolainen-Sossa 2017; Halme & Vataja, 2011, 13). Many are worried that if a child is learning several languages, they will not learn any language adequately. (Rakkolainen-Sossa 2017; SOCCA 2007.) In the beginning of the 1900's people believed that multilingualism was detrimental to the development of a child's cognitive skills. (Hassinen, 2005, 48). Further research in the 1960's concluded that a bilingual child succeeded better in linguistic and non-linguistic tasks in comparison with their peers. Although it was accepted that children can adopt several languages without is disrupting their cognitive development, (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 13), prejudice towards learning several languages during early childhood still exists among parents and professionals (Hassinen, 2005, 50).

Learning is interaction between a child and the environment (Halme & Vataja, 2000, 23). A child is most adaptable towards new languages between ages 2-6. Linguistic and cultural diversity and enrichments are highly useful at this age, since the inner world and imagination of a child are rapidly developing at the same time. (Hassinen, 2005, 138-139.) Languages are open to change and they are constantly evolving. Children that use two or more languages are

more sensitive to these changes. Active communication and interaction are necessary for someone to master a language. A linguistically rich home and a daycare that value different languages are an excellent platform for learning languages. Adults play a vital role in supporting a child's linguistic development. The essential part of learning a language is the experience of succeeding. Adults should portray the message that every language is important and valuable. (Rakkolainen-Sossa 2017; Hassinen, 2005, 55.) Daycare employees should also be respectful and curious towards a child's language and culture. Children should find it acceptable to speak in all the languages they know. (SOCCA 2007.)

Parents should be encouraged to support the child's native language(s) at home (Hassinen, 2005, 143-146; Jauhola et al. 2007, 14). The best results are reached by means of one language - one person - process, in which the child learns to associate one language with one person. Best results are reached when there is use for all the languages learned and the environment accepts and supports it. (Hassinen, 2005, 55.) The one language-one person - process works when there are two languages spoken at home. Bringing up a child with several languages requires active participation and dedication from the parents as well as cooperation with daycare (Halme & Vataja 2000, 14-15).

School-aged children have said, that they think multilingualism is a good thing, since it helps them learn new languages. What drives learning or adapting a new language is play, openness and bravery towards trying to learn. A small child is usually better at adapting new languages since they are naturally curious and open towards it. (Hassinen, 2005, 39.) The positive factors of having more than one native language include being accepting towards people from different backgrounds as well as having a broad view of the world. (Hassinen, 2005, 50.)

3.2 Multiculturalism in early childhood education

Cross-cultural skills in early childhood education depend highly on how much multilingual or multicultural families live in a certain area. Sometimes up to 70% of the children in a daycare centre have multicultural parents. When speaking of multiculturalism in Finland, the focus is often on immigrants. This is the case even when we have always had diverse families in our society. (Pernaa, 2014.) Multicultural education belongs to both majority and minority groups (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 227).

The National Core Curriculum guides early childhood education in Finland. The core values of the National Core Curriculum are equality and diversity: children have the right to develop their skills and make choices despite gender, origin, cultural background or other factors. Employees in early childhood education create an accepting and respectful atmosphere by greeting all families with acceptance and respect. This allows children to have a safe and accepting daycare environment that allows the best possible growth and development. Children should feel that their family is worthy despite their background. The basis for

learning in early childhood education is in the former experiences, interests and skills of the children. It is important that learning is relevant to the child's capabilities, experience realm and cultural background. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 19-20.)

Early childhood education interacts and changes with cultural values, habits and norms. One purpose of upbringing is to pass on cultural inheritance and important values and traditions to generations to come. Children are encouraged to form their own experiences and be critical towards existing traditions and habits. Cultural acceptance and respect requires individuals to understand their own cultural background and values. One important purpose of early childhood education is to support children's cultural knowledge, acceptance and interaction skills, with employees acting as role models. Their example teaches children to be open towards other people, languages and cultures. Employees support children in the formation of their cultural identities. The experiences in early childhood education strengthen children's capability to absorb, use and change culture. Important moments to work towards this in early childhood education are times of play, eating and festivities. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 21-23.)

Early childhood education is culturally changing and a diverse part of our society. Diversity of culture is a strength. The Finnish society acknowledges that a person's right to language, culture, religion and beliefs is our basic right. This requires personnel to have knowledge about other cultures, different views of life, as well as acceptance and will to see things from multiple perspectives. Knowing how to step into someone else's shoes is vital. Cultural sustainability can be endorsed by engaging in constructive conversation and looking for new ways to do things. Accepting and bringing forth different languages and cultures in early childhood education supports a child's learning and development in interaction and cooperation skills, formation of cultural identity and belonging in society. Making multilingualism visible in early childhood education supports a child's development in a culturally diverse world. Personnel should be aware that they are role models for children and that they should mind their own use of language and words. Personnel should support children in their use of languages. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 30.)

One of the purposes of early childhood education is to strengthen a child's linguistic abilities and the formation of a linguistic identity. Interacting and working together with others as well as self-expression are strengthened in early childhood education. It is noted in early childhood education, that children can adopt several languages simultaneously. It is also acknowledged that children come from culturally and linguistically diverse families and homes. Cultural diversity is enriched together with the parents. Culture is an essential part of a child's identity. In early childhood education, children are offered various ways influences of art and culture. Experiences with art and culture help support children's ability to adopt,

use and produce culture. Simultaneously children learn to understand the importance, significance and value of art and cultural heritage. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 40-42.)

Life stance education is given in early childhood education. It focuses on the religions and stances that are present in the daycare group. Different life stances have an equal status in the group and children become familiar with all of them. The aim is to increase mutual respect and understanding towards different life stances as well as support a child's identity in terms of culture and life stance. Children become familiar with different stances and traditions. Natural ways of getting to know different life stances are annual celebrations, happenings as well as daily routines, such as dressing up and eating. Children are given the opportunity to wonder and marvel at life questions that may arise in daycare. Educational partnership is essential in learning and adopting life stance. Employees work together with parents respectfully as they come together to support a child's cultural know-how, interaction, expression, thinking and learning abilities. Getting to know the nearby-society's history, present and future is an excellent way to entice children's curiosity and interest towards building a stable and diverse future. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 43-44.)

Supporting the cultural identity, self-esteem and linguistic abilities are important parts of early childhood education. Early childhood education supports social integration into Finnish society. Parents learn the essentials of Finnish early childhood education in terms of objectives, contents and methods. Discussion about a child's linguistic and cultural environment is an important part of educational partnership. Children may have a chance to learn and practice their own native language(s) in the daycare environment. The primary responsibility of preserving a child's native language(s) remains with the parents. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 48-50.)

3.3 Educational partnership

A child's identity is forming and changing constantly (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 11-12; Hassinen, 2005, 66-67; Paavola & Talib, 2010, 61), as is the family unit of the child (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 71). The cultural opinion on how children should be raised, varies according to culture (Helve, 2008, 291; Halme & Vataja, 2011, 71-73). Cross-cultural encounters and communication are a vivid part of today's early childhood education in Finland, especially in the Helsinki metropolitan area. For this reason, daycare employees should pay genuine interest in the aims and needs of a family and look for new ways of increasing equality and participation of the family. The aim is to work from a family centered focus, finding ways to support the family's decision-making skills and independence. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 71-73.)

A child is typically growing in two sets of environments: home and daycare. Educational partnership is the cooperation between parents and daycare employees with the aim to create a safe childhood. It is a constant dialogue guided by mutual trust and respect. (Kaskela & Kekkonen, 2006, 5; Karila, 2006, 97, 99). Essential dimensions of educational partnership are the definitions of upbringing and the values behind them, providing a child good upbringing and childhood, as well as parenting and the responsibilities of families. When differences in opinions arise between parents and daycare employees, the reason is often based on different values and experiences. (Karila, 2006, 95.) The way we transfer culture is changing. Children are influenced by a diverse set of cultural orientations. Globalisation and information technology allows children to be in touch with the world and the people in new ways. Researchers and parents alike may find it hard to keep up. (Lahikainen, Punamäki & Tamminen, 2008, 306-308).

The society around a family often dictates the level of social integration the family feels. How the family's culture and language is seen by the society plays a vital role in terms of a child's cultural development. The main responsibility of a child's upbringing is with the parents. (Halme & Vataja 2000, 15; Hassinen, 2005, 143-146.) Home is the most important factor influencing the development of a child. Daycare offers a different type of support by introducing them to social interaction with other adults and children. The daycare environment should be accepting and respectful towards children from different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds. Every child should have an equal opportunity to grow and develop in a safe and accepting daycare environment. Daycare often satisfies a child's natural need for social interaction, feeling of belonging and safety. It also provides a platform for adapting languages, cultures and attitudes. Daycare offers children a variety of cognitive challenges through play and adaptation. (Hassinen, 2005, 143-146.)

Multiculturalism should be heard and seen in the daycare centre. A child's multicultural upbringing and development of cultural identity should be supported in concrete actions. Parents and daycare employees should discuss life stance education in a child's early childhood education plan. Common values can be found through life stance education. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 49-51.) Religious upbringing should respect the beliefs of the parents (Varhaiskasvatuslaki 2 a §). Daycare employees should be aware of which cultures are present in a child's life - it is important to know what traditions and beliefs are within cultures. Asking questions and getting to know a family's cultural heritage shows the family that they are appreciated and accepted. It also strengthens cross-cultural understanding of the daycare staff. The staff should also tell multicultural children and their families about Finnish traditions and beliefs. The aim is to teach children to accept people from different cultures and backgrounds at an early stage. Daycare centre staff can ask parents to come speak about their language and culture. They can also be asked to join in on planning certain festivities

and activities. Celebrations, traditions and themes from different cultures enrich cultural understanding and acceptance (Jauhola et al. 2007, 14-15).

3.4 Employee responsibilities

Employees in early childhood education should work in accordance with the values and ethics of social work. These are presented by Talentia (2018), which guides professionals in the field of social work, social welfare and early childhood education. Decisions made in the field of social services should be based on ethics and human rights. The purpose of social services in general is essentially to do good, help people, supporting change and decrease suffering. On a professional level, ethics is the ability to reflect and criticize one's behaviour and decision-making. (Talentia, 2017, 3-8.)

Decisions made in early childhood education are rooted values and societal structures. When our society becomes diverse, early childhood education needs to make changes as well. Understanding and being comfortable with one's own culture is a basis for encountering other cultures. Early childhood educators need to understand that Finland is multicultural and diverse, and that even within a major culture there are always subcultures within. Culturally competent early childhood educators encounter families with an open mind. Flexibility and openness are required. Having knowledge on the general cultural and religious aspects of a culture is a polite starting point. Early childhood educators should make initiative to get to know the family and their culture. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 98-100.)

Daycare employees act as role models for children. Receiving positive enforcement of one's culture from teachers is highly beneficial for children in learning to respect and value other people and cultures (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 75). Early childhood educators need to critically reflect upon their own values and practices (Murrey & Urban, 2012, in Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016, 92; Chen, Nimmo & Fraser 2009, in Jokikokko & Karikoski 2016, 102). How the daycare employees regards a child's language and identity are a vital part of a child's development. The acceptance and interest towards a child's cultural background should be a part of daily daycare routines, so that the child grows a stable self-image and cultural identity. (Hassinen, 2005, 143-146.) A teacher needs to identify and seek to change evident structures that maintain inequality. Information about how the socioeconomic environment, language and culture affects a child's behavior and learning. A teacher should have enough information about each child's home language, culture, and environment. Teachers should aim to support a child's individual strengths by treating children as individuals. Using many ways of teaching ensures that each child has an equal opportunity to learn. A teacher should have willingness and ability to listen to children and take account of their ideas, experiences and emotions when planning and executing activities. Minimizing prejudice and creating a safe, accepting environment is a major part in a teacher's work. Intercultural communication skills help solve every day situations. Teachers should reflect their own values and beliefs and assimilate them

with universal values. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 102-103.) Teachers' own cultural frameworks strongly determine what they consider right and wrong (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 77).

Heini Paavola, researcher and lecturer from University of Helsinki states, that kindergarten teachers aim to negotiate with families to find out what is good upbringing and teaching, meanwhile finding a pedagogical platform for the child. A sense of community is vital in the daily routines of the daycare centre. There should be a common understanding of what multiculturalism means in that daycare centre. Paavola continues to state, that working with multicultural children often enriches professionalism. Early childhood educators are pedagogical experts of childhood and they know that their job is to make sure every child receives the support and guidance in their development and growth. (Perna, 2014.)

3.5 Creating a multicultural daycare environment

Employees are responsible for creating an environment that celebrates multiculturalism and social integration. Play and games are ideal opportunities for a child to learn words and meanings, as well as communicate with other children and adults through both verbal and non-verbal means (Halme & Vataja, 2000, 27; SOCCA 2007). Ways to teach a child a foreign language are storytelling, children's books, and games. Drawing is an excellent way for cross-cultural communication, because no words are needed, and it is not tied to a certain time or place. Variety in physical exercise is a vital part of learning. Linguistic development and motor skills development are closely linked together. Exercise can help to support the child's cognitive development by enhancing a positive body image and self-esteem and social bonding with peers. Auditive and visual aids can be added into exercise to further support learning. (Halme & Vataja, 28-33).

It is important that toys are suitable for all children - for example, dolls have different skin colors and types of clothing. Daycare employees and children can practice words from each child's language. This makes children feel that their language and culture are welcome and appreciated. The amount and form of different stations and corners can be variable and changed according to children's interests and wishes. Play areas offer children multiple ways of learning language, social norms and routines. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 91-94.) Story games are great ways to teach grammar, phonetics and word recognition. Nursery rhymes are an excellent way to practice language and repetition. Although language is in a great role in daycare, there should also be daily activities that do not require linguistic abilities. Through different forms of art, children can express themselves non-verbally. Daycare employees can get to know the child better by observing their expression of art. (SOCCA 2007.)

Construction games are good for learning language through shapes, sizes, colours and measurements. Construction games can help increase mathematical skills. Handicrafts offer an opportunity to express emotions and thoughts, since a common language is not required.

Immigrant children may be drawn towards handicrafts because it gives them a break from trying to cope in a foreign language. Daycare employees have an opportunity to get to know the child by observing how children work. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 91-94.)

A daycare group can have a mascot or toy that visits the family of each child. A notebook will go along with the mascot. Parents and children write stories, add pictures to elaborate on what the family did during the weekend or holiday. Once the mascot and the notebook are back, the whole group can get to know another family and their culture. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 46-47.) During roleplay, children interact and practice social skills. It offers an opportunity for the development of cognitive skills, such as decision-making and causality. In roleplay, even shy children may suddenly feel confident in using languages that they do not yet fully master. Playing home is an excellent way for daycare employees to learn what happens in the homes of children and what the cultural heritage of the family is like. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 91-94.)

A book corner is a calm area where kids can come to spend some peaceful time with books. A game corner or a shelf is compiled of age suitable games that the daycare employees choose. Changing games regularly is important when keeping up with the interests of children. A regular time slot for playing games every week is excellent in supporting linguistic development. A science corner can concentrate on the interests of the children and seasonal matters, such as leaves in the fall, seeds in the spring, snow during winter. A music corner can have instruments from around the world. Children can make their own instruments using every day materials. Bringing music to the daycare is an excellent way for children to have a sense of belonging. Children can teach other rhymes and songs with the help of adults. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 91-94.)

Pictures of families can be put up on walls as an exhibition in the daycare. Daycare employees can interview children to ask what they like to do and what their dreams are. Parents can come and teach cultural games, songs and plays from their own culture to the rest of the daycare group. Children can pinpoint where they are from on a map of the world. A suitcase full of games, songs, instruments, stories, books, post cards and little objects from different countries can be a great way to incorporate multiculturalism into daily activities. Traditional celebrations bring together parents and daycare employees in creating cultural celebrations such as the Japanese Sakura (festival of cherry tree), Chinese New Year and Iranian New Year Noqruz. Workshops, arts, dance, drama, music and food can be enriching elements of the event. Celebrations often give children a sense of pride and belonging. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 46-47.)

4 Analysis

This thesis is a qualitative research that uses interviews as means to gather data. This thesis uses a method of thematic analysis to analyse the gathered data. Thematic analysis is a method of qualitative research analysis that aims to highlight central themes. Repetitive themes that come up in the research material are categorized and analysed. (Teemoittelu. 2016)

This thesis research was commissioned by a daycare in the Helsinki region. A conscious choice was made to interview multicultural families to gain deeper understanding of multiculturalism in the specific daycare. It was important to find out how multicultural parents support children's cultural identities. The data was gathered through qualitative interviews during January 2018. The interview questions are found at the end of this thesis, in Attachment 1 and Attachment 2. Separate interview questions for daycare employees and parents were sent to the interviewees prior to the interview. The interviews were conducted in English. The interview questions were printed out, and brought to the interview situation. The interviews were held in the daycare premises in privacy or in a quiet location near-by. Face-to-face interviews were recorded with a recording device for transcribing purposes. The interviews were transcribed shortly after the interview. The examples given in the analysis are exact citations that have not been modified. Once the interview data was analyzed, recording and transcription materials were disposed of. Some interviews were conducted in written form. These documents were permanently deleted after using the data for analysis.

The interview questions for the parents aimed at finding out how parents support the cultural identities of their children in practical ways. The questions also aimed to find out what type of cultural atmospheres do the children live in at home. Parents were asked what they wished for the future in terms of supporting their child's cultural identity at home and at daycare. In total, five parents were interviewed. Out of these, three interviews were conducted face-to-face and two interviews were conducted in written form. In addition to this, six employees were interviewed. Out of these, three were conducted face-to-face and three interviews were conducted in written form.

Interview questions for the employees aimed at finding out how daycare employees support the cultural identities of children in practical ways and what kind of a cultural atmosphere is present at the daycare. Emphasis was on the responsibilities of the employees in maintaining their intercultural competences in order to be supportive role models for the children. Employees were also asked, what they wished for the future in terms of supporting children's cultural identities at home and at daycare.

In qualitative research, the analysis is not the final stage of a qualitative research. It should be a constant process throughout the research. Analysis throughout the research process

guides the researcher. Data should be gathered until there is enough material for the researcher to answer the research questions. (Kananen, 2014, 18.) In qualitative research, repetition of research results is a sign that the saturation point has been reached. Reaching the saturation point shows that the material has been sufficient. (Kananen, 2014, 159.) The saturation point was reached during the last interviews of both parents and employees.

The process of analysis started with the very first interviews. There were significant similarities in the themes respondents talked about, even if the set of interview questions were slightly different for both groups. It was evident, that both parents and daycare employees wanted to highlight awareness and openness as essential elements in supporting a child's cultural identity. Awareness of one's own culture and other cultures, as well as openness to learn and welcome other cultures were strongly supported. Language as a carrying force of culture identified. Language was a significant factor in supporting identities and cultures. When asked about being role models, daycare employees expressed openness, kindness and respect towards all cultures, so that children would learn this from them. They acknowledged that they have a strong influence on children. Some respondents also admitted that being a role model made them cautious. Respondents realized that their biases and prejudices needed to be reflected upon, in order to maintain positive intercultural competences.

Both parents and employees thought it important to give child enough exposure, experiences and time to discuss cultural aspects and differences. By doing this, both parents and employees wanted to allow children to make their own decisions without trying to decide for them. When parents spoke about the future of their child's cultural upbringing at the daycare centre, most respondents wished to get to know other families and their cultures better. Some respondents admitted to not knowing much about the other children and their families. Parents saw it as a great opportunity for families to get to know one another while supporting cultural identities and creating discussion through awareness. Daycare employees wished that families would keep on supporting and celebrating their own cultures and languages at home, so that the identities of children would remain diverse.

Responses are coded in the following manner:

Employer and sequence number - E1, E2, E3, E3, E4, E5, E6.

Parent and sequence number - P1, P2, P3, P4, P5.

In the following chapters, the analysis will be presented under three themes. The first theme is called 'Parents' and it concentrates on how parents support the cultural identities of children. The second theme is called 'Employees' and it concentrates on how employees support the cultural identities of children. The third theme is called 'Educational partnership'

and it concentrates on how to develop educational partnership between parents and daycare employees.

4.1 Theme 1: Parents

Below is a graph presenting the items in theme 1. Part 1 consists of practical elements of culture. Three topics were chosen from the interview material: language, religion and values, and gender roles. Parents highlighted the forementioned elements as important parts of their child's identities. They also generated most vivid responses. Part 1 is comprised of the responses generated by question PQ2. Part 1 discusses cultural elements on a practical level. In part 2, the cultural atmosphere of home is described, as well as supporting a child's identity on an abstract level. In part 2, parents describe how they see culture in their family and how they incorporate culture into their family lives. It discusses cultural elements on an abstract level. Part 2 is comprised of the responses generated by questions PQ1 and PQ3.

THEME 1: PARENTS How do parents support the cultural identities of children?
Part 1: Practical elements of culture (PQ2) - language, values and religion, gender roles
Part 2: Cultural atmosphere (PQ1, PQ3) - cultural atmosphere at home

4.1.1 Practical elements of culture

Language

Parents saw language as an essential part of their child's identity and that it shaped the cultural atmosphere of the child.

Language is very important, because language shapes identity, very much, if anything, the cultural atmosphere of the child. (P2)

Respondents acknowledged how language shapes the way we think. Respondents saw that their child might need help in learning multiple languages.

Naturally language influences upbringing, as different languages encourage different thought patterns. Learning multiple languages will also mean that the kid will need help with learning them properly. (P4)

Parents also expressed how inadequate language skills affected how children express themselves. Some parents described, that the lack of language skills could affect how the child behaved and affect how their child was seen by others.

Our daughter is very bright and smart and funny, but with her it's difficult to express herself because of the language. She feels that she can't show who she really is. That's why she's doing silly things to get attention. (P3)

Language had a significant effect on communication within the family, but also to friends and relatives outside of Finland. As much as language was seen as an element that shapes culture, it also contributed to the emotional ties between friends and relatives.

He was brought up speaking three languages. The Finnish helps him communicate with his relatives, family and friends and helps him in the Finnish society. (The other) languages can help in communicating with my family and the rest of the world. (P5)

Some parents had set goals to the linguistic capabilities of their child in terms of planning to have multiple languages taught to the child. Multilingualism and multiculturalism were viewed as positive things.

I want her to speak Russian and at least two other languages, which ones, it doesn't matter. The only important thing to me is that she is multicultural. (P1)

Some parents shared their own experiences from their childhood and expressed how speaking a certain language can also make you vulnerable to bullying in some environments. This parent wanted their child to experience a safe childhood in which language did not expose their child to bullying or discrimination.

I hope that my daughter will not have to deal with all of this stuff that I had to deal with. That made me afraid when she was small and she didn't speak Estonian. I thought, what will happen to her? (P3)

Values and religion

Parents were asked about the cultural atmosphere of home and how it affects their child's upbringing. Some parents stated that they are trying to avoid culture as such and that values they taught did not arise from cultures per se. Values and religion were brought up in several interviews.

We both value openness and honesty. As parents we share the belief that the child should be able to pick up religion on his own. And that we should teach children to value all beliefs, even those that they do not personally believe in. It is somewhat difficult, but will encourage peace and acceptance. (P4)

Some parents described that their family is in the process of creating traditions for the family.

Since we are somewhat young family, it feels like we are still on the process of creating new traditions that we all would value. Values are mostly passed down and partly picked up from the community and his own generation. (P4)

Parents described that they wanted to let their children choose what they believe in. Parents saw that they can support their child's cultural identity by giving advice, information and offering support in their decision.

We don't have any beliefs ourselves. And find that our child should choose what he wants to believe in and that we just have to stand behind him in whatever he chooses. We could only give advice and more info. Hoping he makes the right decision. (P5)

One parent described that baptizing her child brought her a sense of protection. Allowing the child to grow in an open atmosphere where the child is not forced to wear religious symbols or attend religious gatherings is essential in supporting children's right to their own cultural identity. While this parent supported her child's multicultural upbringing in concrete ways, she also allowed her to decide for herself.

She is baptized. When she was small, you know, like hormones of a new mother and everything, you want to make sure that she is secured from every position. So, why not have the religion too? She was wearing a cross at some point, but then I thought she wanted to wear a unicorn, so I gave her the unicorn. (P1)

Giving options and teaching equality was a significant factor for some parents. Being a citizen of this planet and part of a bigger picture was more important than raising a child according to certain religious doctrines.

We don't teach our child to be religious, but I still want her to view the world with an open mind so that everyone is equal. We are all part of one big...something. I sometimes say that I'm a citizen of this planet. Maybe the other parent is more cultural and I think that's good that the child can then later choose how to do it. (P3)

One parent had deep thoughts on culture and the values society gives us. It was evident, that the respondent felt it was up to the parents to teach children values. The respondent thought that the values society gave were not in line with the upbringing this family wanted their children to receive.

If you let society guide you, you would just eat at McDonald's and watch MTV. If you don't teach a child values you won't get any from society. You will get materialistic, superficial values. I would personally blame a lot of society's problems on that. (P2)

Gender roles

All responses indicated that gender typical behavior or preferences were not important but rather parents tried to steer away from them. Colours were indications of gender typical preferences. Some parents thought their child had strong gender typical preferences even though they tried steer away from them.

No matter how many times I tell my child that pink is not my favorite color and that not all girls like pink and there are boys that like pink and you can also like black and blue and everything else, she has a strong preference for pink crowns and dancing. What she prefers is very gender typical. (P1)

Some parents seemed frustrated with how society affects gender roles.

Why can't girls wear hockey skates? Society pushes those values what girls and boys should wear. These things don't really evolve. There's progression and then regression. (P2)

While all parents said that they wanted their child to grow up without gender typical expectations, the influence of society was highlighted on several occasions.

I feel there is underlying expectations in the society that boys and girls will behave differently. (P4)

Many parents said that they try to raise their child according to their personal interests by allowing their children to choose whichever colours they wanted to wear.

If he likes pink, that's fine - it is up to him. (P4)

Parents saw steering away from gender typical preferences as teaching equality. Equality would allow children to make decisions about their future profession according to their interests, not by the expectations of society.

We teach our child that everyone is equal. I would like her to choose a profession or make choices other than what society expects. (P3)

One parent admitted to feeling responsible for gender specific household chores, but tried to make conscious choices to teach the child otherwise. The parent believed that these feelings

of responsibility came from the parent's own cultural heritage or upbringing. This parent made conscious efforts to teach children that families come in all shapes and sizes. The parent also indicated wanting to break free from the gender stereotypes that partly came from her own cultural heritage.

Our idea is that families come in different shapes. Everything with roles and basically who does what around the house - this is still in flux because that is also a part of the Soviet upbringing. Even if I want my career I still feel responsible for a number of things that are typically considered feminine. (P1)

4.1.2 Cultural atmosphere

Parents were asked to describe their child's cultural identity and how they support it. What was evident in most responses was that parents wanted to let their child make their own decisions by giving them cultural influences and possibility for discussion. Most parents had difficulties describing their child's cultural identity.

I feel he doesn't have that specific cultural identity. It will most likely be a shared culture, partly coming between home and school. As we as family haven't been that keen on traditions, it is harder to estimate its influence in the upbringing of our child. (P4)

Some respondents stated that they are trying to raise their child with as little culture as possible. This would mean that parents wish to give their children the opportunity to form their own cultural identities by filtering and rationalizing.

I try to raise children with as little as possible culture. Culture can be something that you either absorb through tradition or through the environment, but at the same time you can still filter it, rationalize it.

One employee response is included in the responses of the parents, since the respondent had children and could relate to the viewpoint of the parents. The respondent spoke about having balance - supporting the identities of children without dominating them.

Now that I have my own children, it's also important to pass on the cultural competences to them. Also, to understand that their culture isn't the same as mine. Being aware of culture and supporting a child's own identity, but not dominating it either. Somehow guide the children in the way that they are able to hold on to their own culture and own identity. (E1)

Parents wanted to give their children a variety of influences without enforcing one over the other. Parents want to allow their children to have an adjustable way of thinking that is

flexible and that can form opinions of their own. One parent made a relevant comment about culture being a changing entity that changes over time, and how children must learn to evolve with it. This comment encapsulates the essence of culture and supporting cultural identities - cultural identities require flexibility and ability to evolve if we wish to remain culturally aware.

There is overall question of what the culture actually is. A group sharing their ideals? It is not only that there is a national culture, there are many different cultures within it as well. They are also kind of living beings, in that they form and change over time, not staying fully constant. As such, the child must learn to evolve within the culture as well. (P4)

4.1.3 Summary

Parents saw language as an important element of a child's identity. Linguistic capabilities affected the way children express themselves. Parents said they try to raise their children according to what interest them. Parents made conscious decisions to steer away from gender roles given by the society. In stead, they wanted to let their child make decisions according to their interests. In terms of cultural identities, parents wanted to let their child decide themselves by giving them cultural influences and a possibility discuss and reflect cultural issues. Most parents had difficulties describing their child's cultural identity.

4.2 Theme 2: Employees

Below is a graph presenting the items in theme 2. Part 1 consists of practical elements of culture. Part 1 discusses activities and daily routines of the daycare centre. Three topics were chosen from the interview material: language, religion and values, and gender roles. Part 1 is comprised of the generated responses to question EQ1 and EQ4. Part 1 discussed practical elements of culture, and how they support cultural identities of children.

In part 2, the culture of acceptance of the daycare centre is discussed. Part 2 discusses employees as role models, and how employees maintain their intercultural competences. Awareness and openness are key elements throughout part 2. Part 2 is comprised of the generated responses to questions EQ2 and EQ3. Part 2 discusses cultural elements on an abstract level.

<p>THEME 2: EMPLOYEES</p> <p>How do employees support the cultural identities of children?</p>
<p>Part 1: Daily routines (EQ1, EQ4)</p> <p>- daily routines: language, values and religion, gender roles</p>
<p>Part 2: Intercultural competences (EQ2, EQ3)</p> <p>- promoting a culture of acceptance by being a role model and maintaining intercultural competences</p>

4.2.1 Daily routines

Language

Employees stated that language was a key element of culture in daily routines. Choices of words by the employees reflected their own cultural identity. This described how language carries cultural connotations.

We are rubbing off our cultural identity on the children subconsciously, we don't maybe even realize it. We have our own identities and we do things in a certain way because of how we were brought up or raised. I think it's happening daily even in the slang we use. (E3)

Employees shared how children dealt with multiple languages at the daycare centre. Supporting linguistic development was a part of daily routines. This suggests that employees supported linguistic development of the children during planned activities as well as during daily events, such as eating.

The children are often sharing words, mixing the languages and discussing. At group and mealtimes, we will ask children to share words related to what we are eating or learning about. (E6)

We do the alphabet every week. They learn a different letter and word. Also, opposites, repeating, rhymes, saying words correctly. Even correcting their grammar errors. (E2)

The daycare environment was adapted so that languages and nationalities were incorporated into daily activities. Supporting cultural identities through language was both educational and interesting for the children.

The preschool group has a very diverse group of children and to acknowledge different languages we have a map display with how to say good morning in each of their mother tongues. (E5)

Gender roles

Employees emphasized the same culture of acceptance as the parents did when it came to gender roles. Employees described that the daycare did not enforce gender roles on the children. They described that they do not have expectations of children according to gender stereotypes.

Our kindergarten promotes equality in everything we do and stereotypical roles are something we work to break down and create children who see gender as an identity but not a label or a restrictive categorising tool. If children are discussing roles or expectations of genders we encourage this discussion and also engage to help children to consider other opinions. (E5)

Employees also described that the children learn through stories and discussion that families come in all shapes and sizes. This enforces the culture of acceptance that was mentioned earlier. A culture of acceptance promotes healthy self-esteem development of children and supports a stable development of their identities.

The children know through stories and discussions that no family is the same, nor is there an accepted formula for how a family should look or whom it should contain. (E6)

Accepting children as individuals with personal preferences was something the daycare centre wanted to promote. Discussing biological differences between genders with the children was important. Employees did not enforce gender roles on children. Children were free to make their own choices according to their interests.

We teach to children that gender doesn't define what you can be or do. Everyone has a choice of their own and nothing is tying you to a certain role or task. It is important to discuss the differences between boys and girls but at the same time keeping it open to the fact that the world is open for you to do and be what you want. (E4)

Values and religion

Daycare plays an important role in supporting cultural identities and acknowledging values and religion as part of diverse upbringing. One respondent described that religion was hardly discussed before, whereas now with the new National Core Curriculum (2016), religion is something to talk about in daycare as well. Employees thought it was important to highlight similarities rather than differences when discussing beliefs and life stances with the children.

We were kind of avoiding religion and kept saying that it is something for just home, so that for us has been quite a change going from not talking about religion to talking about religion. We are going through this transition at the moment about how much we talk about religion. It's not such a black and white thing when we talk about religion, we must also be careful that even within the same religion there are different kinds of understandings. I think there are some fundamental points there throughout all religions and all cultures - that we are nice to other, that we are honest, that we think about others in a group or society. (E1)

Employees described how children engage in discussions of religion and beliefs. They describe children having arguments especially during Christmas time about whether someone believes in God or Jesus. One employee wanted to teach children, that everyone has a right to believe in what they want, and that different beliefs should not be a factor that ends friendship.

We don't talk about religion that much at the kindergarten, that is something that is done at home. Some parents have told that they fall under this religion or that we are open-minded, but the kids discuss it among themselves. I've told (the children) that there are people who believe there are people who do not believe and it doesn't mean it's something that breaks up your friendship. (E3)

Letting the children engage in discussion about values and beliefs teaches children to be accepting towards people with different beliefs.

I don't know if we really talk about religion. I hear the kids talk about it - "Is there a God?" Letting them engage in that kind of conversation or if they ask a question then obviously respond. (E2)

Several employees highlighted the importance of discussing religion and beliefs especially when children bring it up themselves.

If children show an interest in religion or wish to discuss beliefs and values we welcome the discussions. In accordance with child led development of their learning. We would only intervene with this if there was a parent request to not expose their child to other religions. (E5)

It was also noted, that showing genuine interest in the beliefs and experiences of children was important in supporting the cultural identities through religion and values. By doing this, employees allow children to feel important and valuable despite of what they believe in. This promotes healthy development of cultural identities.

I think it is important to openly ask questions of all the children about their experiences and beliefs, and to make comparisons, ask their opinions, and show genuine interest and amazement. (E6)

4.2.2 Intercultural competences

Employees were asked how they maintain their intercultural competences. Employees wanted to support children by teaching them acceptance and openness towards other cultures. Self-education was a way to maintain intercultural competences.

I maintain my intercultural competences by educating myself about other cultures and keeping an open mind. (E4)

Many employees referred to their own personal life and experiences and admitted that they shape their perceptions and maintain their intercultural competences.

In my personal life I have friends from everywhere so just being exposed to that helps you maintain your competence. You're able to understand that people have different cultural backgrounds. That makes you more open-minded. The people around me help me grow in that area and be willing to open to change. Not everything needs to be done in one certain way. (E2)

Having a multicultural background or living environment seemed to be a big part in maintaining intercultural competences. One employee showed advanced self-reflection in describing to overcome perceptions that had formed in times of childhood.

I grew up in a multicultural environment. I would like to think that I'm pretty open to other cultures. I think all of us have some preconceptions of people depending on how we grew up. I grew up in Israel in my first two years and there is this Arab and Israeli - Muslim and Jew thing. As you get older you realize that it was there - even as a kid you absorb that. As you get to know people and their stories you realize that they have those same fears. The best way for me is to get to know people and interact with people. (E3)

Living abroad affected the intercultural competences of some employees. While employees agreed, that awareness and openness were key in teaching children a culture of acceptance, holding on to your identity and cultural heritage seemed important as well.

I've been living abroad for over 10 years now. You can feel the pull on this idea of cultural identities and of your own. It's when you've been abroad for some years it starts with for example language. Maintaining my personal intercultural competences - sometimes you need to make a bit of an effort to

make sure not to lose it, not to blend in to the rest of the society of the dominant culture and remember who I am. It's important to keep the identity. It comes down to even the way you dress and forms of interaction. (E1)

While life experiences were important in shaping how employees saw themselves, they also mentioned self-reflection as an important factor that maintained intercultural skills.

Teachers need to be aware of the different cultures that are out there, using the parents as resources, also reading up a little bit for ourselves about these different cultural things, also doing self-reflection and awareness on our own cultures and our own habits of how we interact with others. (E1)

Getting to know parents was a vital part of maintaining intercultural competences. Maintaining intercultural skills through interaction with the parents is an example of educational partnership and supporting children's cultural identities in cooperation with the families. Having a better understanding of the needs and requirements of families was essential in maintaining intercultural competences, but also developing a stronger educational partnership. Reading, traveling, following world news and politics were also ways to maintain intercultural competences.

I familiarize myself with the cultures of the children in our facilities and learn about their cultures, so I have a better understanding of their needs and family requirements. I have worked in 6 different countries and have learned a lot about adapting to a new environment and culture. These skills I apply to my work and my experiences from my work and travels support cultural awareness. I am also very aware of world news and politics and as much as this is a personal interest, it is entirely applicable to my working environment too. (E5)

One employee saw the interview itself as a reflective tool for maintaining intercultural competences. Questionnaires and interviews can initiate thought processes that would otherwise remain unconscious.

This interview itself is a good reflective tool. Perhaps all daycare staff should take part! (E6)

Employees as role models

Teaching culture of acceptance by being a role model was emphasized by all employees. Employees acknowledged that they have a significant influence on the children and that

children are influenced even by the slightest of cues. Some employees suggested that being a role model was something that also made them cautious in the way they speak or behave.

Being a role model to young children is in some ways scary and amazing at the same time. I hope I can teach children acceptance towards differences and that you should always have an open mind when faced with something new and different than what they are used to. Every moment is a moment to learn and the best way to learn is through other people and their experiences. (E4)

Makes you think twice what you do or say. (E2)

Some respondents felt confident in being a role model and wanted to extend their example to the parents of the children. This supports the idea of educational partnership and working together to support the cultural identities of children together with the parents. Self-reflection was described as an essential part of working as a kindergarten teacher.

I feel confident as a role model who treats all children as individuals and with respect. I try to model positive interactions and behaviour that will hopefully encourage the children to do the same. As well as a role model to the children, I also hope that I am a role model to their families, encouraging them to embrace the culture into which they are integrating, which will in turn provide more positive role models for the children. As a teacher, reflection is a huge part of my working life, and I try to also extend it into my everyday life. (E6)

Employees acknowledged that their own biases could affect how they are around children. They saw this as something to reflect on in order to remain open and aware.

I want to be that role model that gives that confidence to enjoy the experience different cultures rather than stigmatize or to be afraid. Being ok with your own culture is important, allows you to be open and respectful. If you are not ok with your own culture, you may feel the need to be resilient. Being aware of (our biases) basically and once we are aware of it we can then do something with it. (E1)

A culture of acceptance and awareness was described by most employees. One respondent saw promoting openness and acceptance important factors in being a role model, because it could shelter children from developing extremist views.

We are a huge influence in the children's lives, in that this can affect their lives into the future basically. It's a new culture of acceptance. If it's not really given the right kind of light in the beginning I do believe that later on it

can have a knock-off effect that you get this kind of extremism possibly. And I think we teach this openness and acceptance from the beginning, so it's really important. (E1)

4.2.3 Summary

Language is key element of culture in daily routines of daycare. Linguistic development was supported in both planned activities and arbitrary moments. Employees acknowledged their influence on the children. Many employees referred to their personal life and experiences in shaping their intercultural competences. Getting to know parents was also regarded as a vital part of maintaining intercultural competences. Having a better understanding of the needs and requirements of families was essential in maintaining intercultural competences, but also developing a stronger educational partnership. Gender roles were not enforced on the children. Being accepted as individuals with personal preferences is something the daycare centre wanted to promote from an early stage. Several employees highlighted the importance of discussing religion and beliefs especially when children brought it up themselves. Showing genuine interest in the beliefs and experiences of children was important in supporting the cultural identities through religion and values. A general culture of acceptance and awareness was described by most employees.

4.3 Theme 3: Educational partnership

Below is a graph presenting the items in theme 3. Theme 3 consists of the responses generated from EQ5 and PQ4. Both employees and parents were asked what they wished for in the future in terms of supporting cultural identities of children at home and at the daycare. Part 1 includes the responses from employees and part 2 includes the responses from parents.

THEME 3: EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP
How to develop educational partnership to support cultural identities?
Part 1: What do employees wish for in the future (EQ5) - support cultures at home by discussing culture and giving children cultural influences - introduce home cultures at the daycare
Part 2: What do parents wish for in the future future (PQ4) - getting to know other families and their cultures by introducing home cultures at the daycare

4.3.1 From employees to parents - hopes for the future

Employees were asked at the end of the interview what sort of wishes for the future regarding supporting cultural identities. Most employees wished for parents to support their

own cultures at home while promoting acceptance and awareness of other cultures. Giving children a possibility to choose their own ways of doing things was also of vital importance according to the employees.

Parents need to be open in supporting acceptance of other cultures but not losing hold of their own culture at the same time. Support the cultures at home and to also discuss it and to actively celebrate different cultures. We also have to give the children a choice - they can choose their own ways of doing it and I suppose it's also important at home to discuss other cultures. (E1)

At home focus and their own culture so that they get that from home. (E2)

Some employees highlighted the importance of discussing values, beliefs and religion at home. Employees saw this as something that would teach children to be tolerant and accepting of others.

Home learning about religion is the parental responsibility and we hope that parents will promote their religion and culture in a positive light. Informing children and giving them experiences so they can understand and explain their belief, values and religion. It is always refreshing when parents are open to children learning and understanding other religions so they become rounded in accepting difference and tolerance of those different choices. (E5)

Employees also wished for educational partnership between parents and employees to keep on developing. Some employees wished for parents to have a role in participating in the daily activities by introducing their culture to the rest of the group.

I hope that in the future we can continue to keep an open discussion between us and the families about their different cultures and traditions. Teaching children at home about different customs and possibly even having parents come over to the daycare to talk about their own experiences. (E4)

The findings indicated that employees are committed into giving children and families alike the freedom to enjoy cultures and make independent decisions.

I wish that children would not be forced into accepting a whole culture that is of little relevance or meaning to them, just because it is within the belief of the parents or other family members. I hope that the children in my home will be free to discuss their experiences of daycare with their parents, and that their parents will listen, and seek out similar experiences to enjoy with their

children. I wish that parents would embrace the culture around them in order to share and enjoy it with their children. (E6)

Employees wished for children to learn to accept people from different cultures and backgrounds at an early stage.

That children grow in tolerance and learning. That they understand cultural differences and accept that different choices are ok and that they have the right to believe and follow their own cultural values in an environment which may be very different to home of from their country of origin. (E5)

Employees wished that the daycare would continue to deal with cultural issues in terms of discussions, stories and festivities. This suggests that employees are dedicated about supporting the formation of cultural identities.

In the daycare I hope we can engage the children more with talk about their own and different cultures with for example stories and festivities. (E4)

Employees wanted daycare to be an environment where children feel comfortable sharing experiences and being themselves. Understanding and accepting differences in feelings and beliefs was seen as an integral part of cultural upbringing.

In the daycare, my only wish is that the children feel safe enough to express themselves, and to ask questions of themselves and others whilst maintaining respect for each other. And also, to understand that everyone has and is entitled to different feelings, beliefs and priorities. (E6)

Employees also wished for educational partnership between parents and employees to keep on developing. Some employees wished for parents to have a role in participating in the daily activities by introducing their culture to the rest of the group. Employees saw it as an important part of educational partnership that parents would introduce their nationalities and cultures at the daycare. This would promote self-esteem of children as well as educate them in understanding different cultural orientations.

It would be nice to have an activity where we talked about introducing countries. To start getting exposed to different cultures younger, it makes you more open minded, helping to support and having their mind open. There is not only one way to do things in life, that people do things differently in life. (E2)

4.3.2 From parents to employees - hopes for the future

Parents were asked what sort of wishes they had for the future of the daycare regarding supporting children's cultural identities. Most parents expressed willingness to get to know other families and their cultures. Continuing to create cultural awareness and promote shared values were also important.

I don't know any other cultures that are represented, who are the other children at the kindergarten? I think it would be all so cool for (my child) to learn other children and for me, because I am curious. (P1)

Parents wished for daycare to support cultural acceptance by highlighting similarities of different cultures. This would promote positive formation of identities of children as well as promote culture of acceptance.

Support the multiculturalism by sharing how different cultures value similar things. For example, the value of life is high in most cultures. I feel the shared values should be stressed more than the differences, even if the latter parts should be brought out just the same. (P4)

In regard of creating a safe environment and having universal values, one parent expressed expectations for the teachers at the daycare centre.

Teachers need to have some values. They don't have to be religious necessarily. Perhaps utilitarian, in which you believe that the most important thing is the good of the individual and the good of the society together combined. (P2)

Parents also wished for other families to introduce themselves at the daycare - a similar hope was stated by employees. This suggests that both employees and parents would find this enriching for the children and families, whilst promoting educational partnership.

I would hope for families to introduce their culture. Finnish children would repeat themselves most of the time, but for those other children it would be interesting and important. (P3)

One respondent also spoke of hopes for the future of education generally. The respondent expressed dissatisfaction in how individual needs were met in the current educational system. The respondent said that while there is no education style that fits every child, personalized education would bring forth the best results. The respondent highlights the importance of acknowledging several types of skills and abilities. The respondent believes that this is overlooked by the current educational system. This respondent emphasizes imagination and

using different sets of skills in creating societies of the future. While this comment was directed at the education system generally, elements of imagination could be used in daycare to cater for children with different talents and abilities.

People have the wrong conception of multiculturalism in a sense that it's the only culture that exists now. It's also what has existed before and in a way what could exist - imagination is a part of that. Kids could explore what should the future be like how technology could help us - could we live in the ecological society? Instead of having mass education in which they are just trying to teach kids whatever is good for the average person, maybe the Finnish educational system should be more individualistic. Because people differ - it's a world of difference for someone who is mathematically gifted but autistic, or someone who is socially gifted with language, but maybe not analytical. Then there's imaginative people. The evidence in education in many things suggest that there is no one size that fits all. Each child has to be taken somewhat individually. It's very difficult to do that and it's not very cost-effective, but you get the best results undoubtedly. (P2)

While catering for individual needs of children and families is important, one employee made a relevant comment about the reality of daycare operations:

How far do we go in catering for individual needs in the kindergarten? (E1)

4.3.3 Summary

Most employees wished for parents to support their own cultures at home while promoting acceptance and awareness of other cultures. Giving children the possibility to choose their own ways of doing things was also of vital importance according to the employees. The importance of discussing values, beliefs and religion at home were mentioned. Employees wished for educational partnership between parents and employees to keep on developing. Some employees wished for parents to have a role in participating in the daily activities by introducing their culture to the rest of the group. Employees also wished that the daycare would continue to deal with cultural issues in terms of discussions, stories and festivities. Employees also wanted daycare to be an environment where children feel comfortable sharing experiences and being themselves. Employees saw it as an important part of educational partnership that parents would introduce their nationalities and cultures at the daycare centre. This would promote self-esteem of children as well as educate them in understanding different cultural orientations. Most parents expressed willingness to get to know other families and their cultures by introducing themselves at the daycare. Parents wished for daycare to support cultural acceptance by highlighting similarities of different cultures.

5 Results

The aim of this thesis was to find out how to support a child's cultural identity. The research questions were:

1. How do parents support their child's cultural identity?
2. How do daycare employees support the cultural identities of children?
3. How to develop educational partnership to support children's cultural identities?

Answers to the research questions are presented in the following chapter.

5.1 How do parents support the cultural identities of children?

The influence of family on the formation of a child's identity is indisputable. Self and identity form in interaction with other people (Campbell, 1990, 547 in Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 112; Williams, 1986, 26-27). The purpose of family is to help a child settle in the environment and help the child in the process of socialization - learning the culture of the society and becoming a functional member of it. Language, values, skills and knowledge that help children function in the society are mostly learned from home. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 117-118).

The findings indicated that parents were not worried about the effects of multilingualism. This is in line with research that concludes that multilingualism is not detrimental to the cognitive development of a child (Rakkolainen-Sossa 2017; Hassinen, 2005, 48; Halme & Vataja, 2011, 13). The findings indicated that parents saw language as an essential, if not the most important part of cultural identity. Parents acknowledged that a child's linguistic abilities could affect communication and self-expression. Parents thought language shaped thought patterns, the way a child views the world, and also how the child was seen by others. The findings indicate that parents support the cultural identity of their child through language by offering them an environment that sees multilingualism as a positive thing. The findings indicated that parents wanted their children to be multilingual.

Successful multilingualism can be achieved with the strong cooperation between the parents and the daycare employees (Halme & Vataja 2000, 14-15). As we discovered in chapter 2, school-aged children think multilingualism is a good thing, since it helps them learn new languages. A small child is usually better at adapting new languages since they are naturally curious and open towards it. (Hassinen, 2005, 39.) If there were two languages spoken to the child, parents could benefit from adopting a one language - one person - process, in which the child learns to associate one language with one person (Hassinen, 2005, 55). Parents could further support their child's linguistic development by making sure that used languages

are useful and that they are given an adequate amount of attention, time and dedication in an environment that supports learning (Hassinen, 2005, 55).

The topic of religion and values generated intrinsic responses from parents. Religion and values can affect identity extensively (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 90-91) and they can be seen an essential part of cultural identity. The findings indicated that parents did not want their child to grow up according to strict values or religion. Rather than raising their child according to a religious doctrine or life stance, parents described the desire of letting their child choose what they believe in. While religious beliefs of every family are respected in Finnish daycare centres (Jauhola et al. 2007, 14-15), parents were unanimous in wanting to let their child make their own decisions when it came to religion. Openness, honesty and equality were values that parents wanted to teach their children. One parent wanted to highlight the importance of teaching universal values at home, since society does not provide them. The way parents support their child's cultural identity in terms of religion and values is by giving them information, teaching openness and equality and by allowing them to make their own decisions.

Even though gender is biologically given, gender identity is dynamic and changing. Gender identity refers to interpretations that culturally categorize us as male or female. Gender in cultural sense is a social construct. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 92-93). Cultural backgrounds affect what kind of beliefs, practices and emotions go along with being female or male (Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson & Loftus, 2003, 92; Hofstede Insights 2017). The findings indicated that all parents wanted to steer away from supporting gender typical behaviour or preferences, such as colours, interest in sport or choice of profession. Many parents said that they try to raise their child according to their personal interests. Parents wished for their children to choose a profession according to interests, not the expectations of society. Findings indicated that parents thought society had a strong influence in gender roles. Both research and findings supported the idea, that it is beneficial to teach equality to children. Supporting their child's personal interests rather than enforcing gender typical preferences was how parents support their child's cultural identity.

Most parents had trouble describing their child's identities. Some respondents stated that they are trying to raise their child with as little culture as possible. This suggests that parents feel that a child's identity may lose flexibility and ability for critical thinking if the cultural atmosphere is too dominant. These could be the reasons why parents struggled in describing their child's identities. A child's identity forms constantly and it may sometimes turn towards one language or culture more than the other (Hassinen, 2005, 66-67). This could be another reason why parents thought it was difficult to describe their child's cultural identity. As Roos (2007, 146) explains, a third culture is often created within the family of multiple cultural influences. A third culture is formed when parents decide how they want to incorporate

cultures into the upbringing of their children. The aspects include language and communication, family relations, housework and chores, celebrations, upbringing of children, religion and taking care of intimate relationships. From this point of view, all bilingual and bicultural families can be called multicultural, because an intimate relationship and raising children with your partner will always create a family culture of your own. This could be a third reason to why parents struggled to describe their child's identity - every family has their own culture that is unlike any other.

5.2 How do employees support the cultural identities of children?

Interaction and cooperation skills support the formation of cultural identity, and belonging in society. Making multilingualism visible in early childhood education supports a child's development in a culturally diverse world. (Halme & Vataja 2000, 14-15, 23, 27, 28-32; SOCCA 2007.) The findings indicated that the linguistic development of children was supported by employees in accordance with the National Core Curriculum (2016, 21-23; 30) - employees support children in their use of languages. The findings indicated that multilingualism presented itself in the daycare environment in both planned activities and arbitrary moments. This is in-line with several research findings: multilingualism is achievable with the cooperation between parents and daycare employees, and by providing an environment that supports linguistic development. Play, games, books and storytelling are essential elements in supporting linguistic development. (Halme & Vataja 2000, 14-15, 23, 27, 28-32; SOCCA 2007.) Group activities included pinpointing nationalities on a World map and greeting each other in several languages. Supporting cultural identities through language was educational and interesting for the children. Findings indicated that employees gave their time and effort to supporting linguistic development.

Early childhood education interacts and changes with cultural values, habits and norms. One goal of upbringing is to pass on cultural inheritance and important values and traditions to generations to come. Children are encouraged to form their own experiences and be critical towards existing traditions and habits. Cultural acceptance and respect requires individuals to understand their own cultural background and values. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 21-23.) Religion, values and norms shape identity extensively. In Finland, religion has typically been a private matter. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 90-91.)

Research states that central to the success of children and development of a healthy self-esteem are the high expectations and positive attitudes given by the teachers to all children equally. Possibilities should be equal for all children despite their background (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 229 & 235). The findings indicate that employees are willing to discuss values and religion with children without enforcing one doctrine over another. Employees let children discuss cultural elements freely, unless the family has requested otherwise. This is in-line with Finnish legislation: religious upbringing should respect the beliefs of the parents

(Varhaiskasvatuslaki 2 a §). The findings indicate that employees promote a culture of awareness and acceptance despite the cultural background of the child and the family. By doing this, employees support cultural identities of children. In the case of this daycare, parents and employees seem to share the same views on how to teach religion and values to children.

The findings indicate that parents and employees want religion and values to be openly discussed. Rather than looking at differences, both employees and parents agreed, that focusing on the values that bring us together should be emphasized to the children. This is supported by research that states, that having knowledge on the general cultural and religious aspects of a culture is a polite starting point. Getting to know a family and their culture should be the responsibility of daycare employees (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 98-100.) This allows issues of religion and values to be discussed in an accepting atmosphere, where knowledge and opinions are shared. Employees wanted to teach children, that you can be friends with one another even if you believe in different things. By letting children make their own decisions on religion, employees support the cultural identities of children.

The findings indicate that showing genuine interest in the beliefs and experiences of children was important in supporting the cultural identities through religion and values. This is in line with Halme & Vataja (2011, 102-103) who state that a teacher should have willingness and ability to listen to children and take account of their ideas, experiences and emotions when planning and executing activities. An opportunity for children to marvel at life questions needs to be given. (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 43-44.) In doing this, employees allow children to feel important and valuable despite of what they believe in. This promotes healthy development of cultural identities. Several employees highlighted the importance of discussing religion and beliefs especially when children brought it up themselves.

As we found out in the previous chapter, gender is an important part of identity. Gender in cultural sense is a social construct. (Talib & Lipponen, 2008, 92-93). Cultural backgrounds affect what kind of beliefs, practices and emotions go along with being female or male (Smith, Nolen-Hoeksema, Fredrickson & Loftus, 2003, 92; Hofstede Insights 2017. In the daycare environment, accepting children as individuals with personal preferences was something all employees wanted to promote. Employees described that the daycare did not enforce gender roles on the children and they did not expect gender typical behaviour or choices from the children. Employees described that the children learn through stories and discussion that families come in all shapes and sizes. Findings also indicated that employees and parents both found promoting a healthy self-esteem of children through equality of genders was essential. By letting children act according to their personal interests, employees support their cultural identities.

Daycare employees act as role models for children. Employees support children's cultural identities by promoting acceptance, giving positive reinforcement and self-reflecting. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 97-98; National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 30.) Employees wish to promote a culture of acceptance by being a positive role model and maintaining intercultural competences. Findings indicated that employees wanted to portray a role model that was accepting and positive towards other cultures. This is in line with the National Core Curriculum that emphasizes the importance of teaching children to be open towards other people, languages and cultures (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 21-23). Findings indicated that being a role model was something that also made some employees cautious. Self-reflection that included acknowledging one's biases and working on them was a vital part of maintaining intercultural competences by some employees. This is in-line with research that calls for employees to critically reflect their own values and practices (Murrey & Urban, 2012 in Jokikokko & Karikoski, 2016, 92).

Working with multicultural children enriches professionalism (Perna 2014). Intercultural competences are essential when employees support children's cultural identities. Many employees referred to their personal life and experiences and admitted that they shape their intercultural competences. According to the findings, multiculturalism at the daycare was seen as a positive thing. Employees described their interest in cultural issues and mentioned several ways of keeping up their personal intercultural competences - reading about cultures, traveling, following world news and politics. According to the findings, some employees thought that getting to know parents was a vital part of maintaining intercultural competences. Having a better understanding of the needs and requirements of families was essential in maintaining intercultural competences, but also developing stronger educational partnership. This finding is supported by Halme & Vataja (2011, 98-100), who state that culturally competent early childhood educators encounter families with an open mind. Having knowledge on the general cultural and religious aspects of a culture is a polite starting point. Early childhood educators should make initiative to get to know the family and their culture. A teacher should have enough information about each child's home language, culture, and environment. Each child should be treated as an individual and teachers should aim to support a child's individual strengths. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 102-103.)

5.3 How to develop educational partnership to support children's cultural identities?

Educational partnership is the cooperation between parents and daycare employees with the aim to create a safe childhood. It is a constant dialogue guided by mutual trust and respect. (Kaskela & Kekkonen, 2006, 5; Karila, 2006, 97, 99). The aim is of multicultural upbringing is to teach children to accept people from different cultures and backgrounds in an early stage (Jauhola et al. 2007, 15). The findings indicated that both parents and employees wish for the

children to be tolerant and accepting of other cultures. This strengthens educational partnership since both parents and employees have similar hopes for the future.

Educational partnership strengthens the integration of the family as well as supports the development of a child's cultural identity. When differences in opinion arise, the reasons are commonly found in differences in values and experiences (Karila, 2006, 95, 97, 99). The findings indicated that employees wished for educational partnership between parents and employees to keep developing. Findings indicated that employees wish to have open discussions about culture and traditions to better support identities of both children and families. Being aware of which cultures are present in a child's life by asking questions and getting to know a family's cultural heritage shows the family that they are appreciated and accepted (Jauhola et al. 2007, 15). Respect and trust are key elements in building a solid foundation for a successful educational partnership (Karila, 2006, 97,99).

A safe environment is beneficial for educational partnership, as understanding and accepting differences in feelings and beliefs is an integral part of cultural upbringing. When children feel safe in the daycare, parents are likely to feel the same. This offers the possibility for families and daycare employees to engage in meaningful discussions about raising a child together. This is supported by the findings as well as the National Core Curriculum - employees need to create an accepting and respectful atmosphere by greeting everyone with acceptance and respect (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 19-20).

Related to creating a safe environment is the finding, that by both parents and employees wished to offer children the possibility to make their own decisions. A safe environment allows children to express themselves freely. This supports the formation of a healthy self-esteem - children feel that they are accepted as individuals.

The findings also indicated that parents wished for daycare to support cultural acceptance by highlighting similarities of different cultures, rather than differences. It was emphasized by both parents and employees, that it is important to teach children that people can be get along and be friends with one another despite background and beliefs. This would promote positive formation of identities of children as well as promote culture of acceptance. The agreement in which employees and parents wish to support the children's identities suggests a solid foundation for further developing educational partnership.

A child's multicultural upbringing and development of cultural identity should be supported in concrete actions. Daycare employees can ask parents to come speak about their language and culture. They can be asked to join the planning of festivities and activities. Different celebrations, traditions and themes from different cultures enriches and supports cultural understanding and acceptance. (Jauhola et al. 2007, 14-15.) This is supported by the findings

that indicated, that parents expressed willingness to get to know other families and their cultures by introducing themselves at the daycare. The findings also indicated similar results from employees - they wished for parents to have a role in participating in the daily activities by introducing their culture to the rest of the group. Employees saw it as an important part of educational partnership that parents would introduce their nationalities and cultures at the daycare. This suggests that both employees and parents would find this enriching for the children and families, whilst promoting educational partnership.

Raising a child together requires active participation and dedication from both parents and employees. To develop educational partnership, daycare employees and parents should agree on the objectives of the child's development. (Halme & Vataja 2000, 15.) The findings and research support that further developing educational partnership benefits the formation of a child's cultural identity. The idea of introducing family cultures at the daycare centre would benefit the parents, children and employees alike.

Continuing to expose children to a variety of cultural influences should be done at home and at the daycare. Educational partnership can be developed by exposing children to cultural influences at home and at the daycare centre. Employees wished for parents to support their own cultures at home by discussing culture with children and through a variation of cultural influences - traveling, experiencing foods and taking part in cultural events. The findings indicated that employees wanted the daycare to continue to expose children to culture through discussions, stories and festivities. This suggests that both parents and employees are dedicated about supporting the formation of cultural identities.

6 Discussion

The research questions sought to find out how parents and employees support the cultural identities of children and how developing educational partnership can further facilitate this. What was evident in the findings of Theme 1 was that parents wanted to let children make their own decisions by giving them a variety of cultural influences, possibility discuss and reflect upon cultural issues. Whether it was religion, beliefs, preferences in activities and professions, promoting a culture of acceptance was emphasized. We learned in chapter 2 that the purpose of multicultural upbringing is to help children achieve high self-consciousness and offer cultural, ethnic and linguistic experiences. Emphasis should also be on decreasing and abolishing racism, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes. (Halme & Vataja, 2011, 43.) The findings suggested that teaching a culture of acceptance to the children in several dimensions of culture could be a way to decrease racism, discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes.

Giving children enough influences and offering support in their decisions was an important part of supporting their child's cultural identities. In terms of supporting cultural identities this means that parents believe in giving children the possibility to be exposed to varied

cultural influences and letting children decide for themselves. It suggests that parents wish to allow individual preferences to shape their child's cultural identities. In terms of supporting cultural identities of children, parents wish to create an atmosphere of openness and acceptance.

Theme 2 presented that employees acknowledged how setting an open and accepting example was a vital part of supporting the formation of the identities of children. This is supported by the National Core Curriculum that states, that identities of the families in daycare should be supported so, that every child can feel that their family is worthy (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education 2016, 19-20). Findings indicated that parents wish to encounter children and families with openness and acceptance. This is in line with research: receiving positive enforcement of one's culture from teachers is highly beneficial for children in learning to respect and value other people and cultures (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 75).

Being a positive role model would suggest that employees wish to create a safe environment for all children and families. The findings indicated that intercultural competences were essential in minimizing prejudice and being able to treat all children and families equally. In line with research is the finding that teachers should reflect on their own values and beliefs in order to teach culture of acceptance (Paavola & Talib, 2010, 63; Halme & Vataja, 2011, 102-103.) Employees wished to treat children as individuals and support their identities in emphasizing acceptance and openness without forgetting critical thinking and self-reflection. In line with theme 1, employees support children's identities by teaching a culture of acceptance and critical thinking.

What can be abstracted from theme 3, is that employees and parents had similar hopes for the future. The findings indicated that both parents and employees wish for the children to be tolerant and accepting of other cultures. Both parents and employees wished to offer children the possibility to make their own decisions. A safe environment allows children to express themselves freely. This supports the formation of a healthy self-esteem in that children feel that they are accepted as individuals. Parents expressed willingness to get to know other families and their cultures by introducing themselves at the daycare. The findings also indicated similar results from employees - they wished for parents to have a role in participating in the daily activities by introducing their culture to the rest of the group. Employees saw it as an important part of educational partnership that parents would introduce their nationalities and cultures at the daycare. This suggests that both employees and parents would find this enriching for the children and families, whilst promoting educational partnership.

The findings indicated that parents wished for daycare to support cultural acceptance by highlighting similarities of different cultures, rather than differences. It was emphasized by both parents and employees, that it is important to teach children that people can get along and be friends with one another despite background and beliefs. The agreement in which employees and parents wish to support the children's identities suggests a solid foundation for further developing educational partnership. Parents and employees have similar hopes for developing educational partnership in order to further support children's cultural identities.

The research questions were answered in this thesis. The interview questions were successful in gathering data from the parents. The responses were categorized and presented in three themes: parents, employees and educational partnership. Conscious choices were made throughout the process to look for the essential themes that arose in the responses from both parents and employees. Some themes were brought up on several occasions, but were not included in the analysis of the data.

6.1 Validity, reliability and ethics

The cornerstones of research are validity and reliability. Some qualitative researchers have argued that validity is not applicable in qualitative research. Stenbacka (2001) states that the concept of reliability is misleading in qualitative research (in Golafshani 2003, 601.) Many qualitative researchers have replaced validity with words such as quality, rigor and trustworthiness to describe the validity of their research. (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001 in Golafshani 2003, 602).

Validity and reliability can be examined by discussing the typical features of a qualitative research. The basis for qualitative research is trying to define reality in a comprehensive manner. It includes the acknowledgement that reality is diverse. Qualitative research aims to reveal realities rather than confirm claims that are already accepted. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 152.) This thesis aims to find out how parents and employees support cultural identities of children, and how educational partnership can develop it further. This research aims at finding out the realities from each participant without generalizations. People should be used as instruments to gather data in qualitative research. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 155.)

The basis of a qualitative research is not to test out a theory or hypothesis, but to examine gathered data in precision and in depth. The researcher does not decide, what is important. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 155.) This was in line with the research process of this thesis. The interview questions included several cultural dimensions, but only three dimensions were chosen for the analysis. This was a conscious choice made after analysing the data - these chosen dimensions were more significant compared to the other dimensions. This allowed for the voice of the participants to be heard (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 155). The research questions

are open, so that parents and daycare employees could speak about their experiences in an open manner.

A sample of participants were interviewed. Multicultural families and employees who work in a multicultural environment were chosen as the sample group. A random sample is not recommended in qualitative research (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 155). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. Two researchers will never have the exact same analysis in qualitative research. (Kananen, 2014, 160.) It has to be noted, that the results and findings of this thesis are unique and they describe the phenomena of supporting children's cultural identities from the point of view of the chosen sample group. All cases represent an individual, unique setting (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 155). The findings describe the reality of the respondents and thus the results can not be generalized.

An important aspect of discussing validity and reliability of research is being honest about the process of the research (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 217-218). The deficiencies of this research can be used to evaluate the validity and reliability of this thesis. The first deficiency was working alone. With a partner or a group, analysis could be more precise. Errors in logic could be pointed out by a partner or a group. Another deficiency was having a broad topic. It was evident at the end of the research process that the topic could have been narrower. The third deficiency of this thesis process is the use of a single method of research in stead of triangulation. Triangulation means using multiple sources to gather data and test validity. Triangulation is often used in qualitative research to ensure that data and results are comprehensive and well-developed. While a single method can explain the phenomenon of interest, multiple methods can elaborate it and provide a deeper understanding of it. (RWJF 2008). This thesis only used a single method because interviews were the only appropriate way to gather data on the topic. Other methods such as observations would have required more resources.

The validity and reliability of this thesis can be evaluated by the sources used for the literary review. Using up-to-date sources would be ideal, but in some cases, research findings may be relevant for decades. Many sources used in this thesis were cited in contemporary publications - several authors in the field were content in using sources that were aged. This notice supported the use of these sources in this thesis. The study of culture, identity and language are constantly developing, but the primary source of information may still be relevant despite year of publication.

Honesty is one of the guiding values of any research. Plagiarism is not accepted in any form. Findings and results should not be generalized without critique. The format of reporting should not be misleading or ambiguous. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 27-28.) Honesty, trustworthiness and respect for participants have been guiding this thesis process from its initial stages in

September 2017. It was acknowledged early in the process, that ethical questions will arise throughout the process and that they have to be dealt with in accordance with valuing and honoring human value. Valuing and honoring human value is the most important ethical question around the group of interviewees (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 27). When research data is gathered from people, several ethical questions arise. An important ethical question is how the participants are approached. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 26.) In this research, participants were contacted by an employee in the daycare. This ensured the privacy of participants concerning their contact details. If the participants expressed their willingness to participate, first hand contact between the researcher and the participants was established. Anonymity of the participants and the daycare was a priority throughout the process. The research proceeded in a manner that made sure that the participants remained anonymous and that their voices were heard.

A question that arises from the research is the risk it imposes on the participants. Participants must be given the opportunity to refuse and back out from the research at any point. They must be informed how the research will proceed, how the gathered data will be used and stored. They must be informed how the data will be analysed and used in the final publication. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2004, 26-27.) In this research, participants were given relevant information about the research process and their anonymity in the interview question papers. The question papers were given to them prior to the interview and in the interview situation itself. The following was included in the question paper for both parents and employees:

All interviewees will remain anonymous. Children, families, employees and the kindergarten will remain anonymous throughout the thesis process. The interview material will be analysed and discussed in the final thesis. The interview data (notes, recording materials etc) will be disposed after it has been analysed. The kindergarten will be referred to as a kindergarten in the greater Helsinki region without further identification to ensure the anonymity of the kindergarten, children, families and employees. Anonymity remains the highest priority throughout the process. In the thesis, nationalities and religions may be mentioned. This will be done in terms of clarifying discussion or comparison of results.

6.2 Suggestions for future research

The topic of cultural identities and multicultural daycare have been widely researched in recent years. Several other authors have conducted their thesis, dissertation or other research on the topic of multiculturalism in daycare. Heini Paavola has researched the field of multiculturalism in several publications. The topic of this thesis is in-line with previous research. It does however take the point of view of researching parents and employees of a

specific daycare. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a tool for employees and parents alike to develop educational partnership to further support cultural identities of children.

The aim of this thesis was to research how cultural identities were supported by parents and daycare employees, and how developing educational partnership would further support children's identities. Practical suggestions for further research within early childhood education include a functional research into creating regular cultural activities at the daycare to support multiculturalism and cultural identities. These activities could include coming up with a monthly theme in which the daycare and families work together to get to know a certain culture, language, tradition etc. Themes can be certain countries or states, or a language, or a religion or a life stance. The themes can be suggestions from both children, adults and employees. While it would make multiculturalism concrete in daycare, it also supports educational partnership and involvement of parents and children.

According to an interview with Heini Paavola, researcher and lecturer from University of Helsinki states, instead of talking about multiculturalism, we should talk about diversity. By doing this, we consider other aspects in addition to just religion, language and ethnicity. Socioeconomic factors of a family have a significant effect, whether we speak of an immigrant family or not. The concept of multiculturalism should include gender and sexual orientation too. Paavola continues, that background factors of a family come forward when parents and daycare employees come together to discuss a child's individual early childhood education plan. (Pernaa, 2014.) One suggestion for the future would be to research how diversity is understood in early childhood education and how do children, parents or employees relate to diversification of our society in general. This topic offers multiple possibilities according to the interests of the researcher or the commissioner.

Throughout this thesis process it has been evident, that the the topic of multiculturalism is extremely broad. While it has been an interesting adventure, the topic could have been narrower. Several cultural elements were discussed by both employees and parents, but were not included in this thesis. Conscious choices were made to include the topics of language, religion and values, and gender roles. A suggestion for further research would be to concentrate on a single cultural dimension and its effects on children. These dimensions could include music and dance, social hierarchy, time orientation, power distance, individualism and collectivism, and food.

6.3 Conclusions

Both parents and daycare employees can use this thesis to understand how children's cultural identities are supported. This thesis provides important knowledge to both parties about how children's identities are supported at home and at the daycare centre. This thesis provides insight into how educational partnership can be developed in order to further support

children's cultural identities. This thesis provides both parents and daycare employees the opportunity to gain awareness and knowledge about multicultural upbringing and its effects on children's identities. This thesis is a dialogue between parents and employees in the mutual quest for providing the best possible platform for their child's development. Practical examples are given in this thesis on how parents and employees support children's cultural identities. Both parties can learn from each other by introducing themselves into the chapters of this thesis. Readers will hopefully gain insight on educational partnership and its importance in raising a child at home and in the daycare environment.

Culture is everywhere, whether we consciously steer away from it or take it in wholeheartedly. Culture is changing rapidly by means of globalization and technology (Lahikainen, Punamäki & Tamminen, 2008, 306-308). While the findings indicated that cultural upbringing was based on personal values and interests rather than a specific culture per se, culture is a significant part of our identities. It can be concluded from the results that supporting cultural identities is characterized by teaching children a culture of acceptance with a skill for critical reflection. An important question arose from the findings:

How far do we go in catering for individual needs in the kindergarten?

This question poses a rather important issue in the world of today and tomorrow. As physical, mental and social borders are fading, who accommodates their culture and to what extent?

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Attachments

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Attachment 1: Interview questions for parents

PQ1. How would you describe the cultural atmosphere in which your child is growing up?

PQ2. Do the following dimensions influence the upbringing of your child? How?

- a. language
- b. eating habits, food
- c. traditions, festivals
- d. values, beliefs, religion
- e. music, art
- f. hierarchy
- g. gender roles, masculinity and femininity
- h. individualism vs. collectivism, social connections (in Finland and abroad)
- i. other

PQ3. How would you describe the cultural identity of your child? Do you support your child's own cultural identity? How?

PQ4. What do you wish for in the future regarding the support of your child's cultural identity?

- a. at home
- b. in daycare

PQ5. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time! All interviewees will remain anonymous. Children, families, employees and the kindergarten will remain anonymous throughout the thesis process. The interview material will be analysed and discussed in the final thesis. The interview data (notes, recording materials etc) will be disposed after it has been analysed. The kindergarten will be referred to as a kindergarten in the greater Helsinki region without further identification to ensure the anonymity of the kindergarten, children, families and employees. Anonymity remains the highest priority throughout the process.

In the thesis, nationalities and religions may be mentioned. This will be done in terms of clarifying discussion or comparison of results.

Attachment 2: Interview questions for employees

The new “vasu” (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care) states that one important purpose of early childhood education is to support childrens’ cultural knowledge, acceptance and interaction skills.

EQ1. Employees should support children in the formation of their cultural identities. Is this visible in your work? How?

EQ2. Employees are role models for children in accepting and respecting people from different cultural backgrounds. How does this make you feel? What kind of a role model would you want to be?

EQ3. How do you maintain your personal intercultural competences?

EQ4. Do you arrange any activities in your kindergarten that support the cultural dimensions/identities of the children? What kind of activities? Eg.

- a. language
- b. eating habits, food
- c. traditions, festivals
- d. values, beliefs, religion
- e. music, art
- f. gender roles, masculinity and femininity
- g. individualism vs. collectivism
- h. other

EQ5. Educational partnership is an important part of raising a child together with the parents. What do you wish for in the future in terms of supporting the cultural identities of children?

- a. at home
- b. in daycare

EQ6. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you for your time! All interviewees will remain anonymous. Children, families, employees and the kindergarten will remain anonymous throughout the thesis process. The interview material will be analysed and discussed in the final thesis. The interview data (notes, recording materials etc) will be disposed after it has been analysed. The kindergarten will be referred to as a kindergarten in the greater Helsinki region without further identification to ensure the anonymity of the kindergarten, children, families and employees. Anonymity remains the highest priority throughout the process.

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