



FEEDBACK FROM METROPOLIA GRADUATES

Studying in an English Degree Program as an Immigrant
and their Road to Working Life

Degree Program in
Social Services
Bachelor of Social Services
Final Project
Autumn 2010

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| Degree Programme in | | Degree | |
| Social Services | | Bachelor of Social Services | |
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| Title | | | |
| Feedback from Metropolia Graduates: Studying in an English Degree Program as an Immigrant and their Road to Working Life | | | |
| Type of Work | Date | Pages | |
| Final Project | Autumn 2010 | 44 + 3 appendices | |
| <p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>The purpose of this study was to conduct an evaluation study based on the feedback from former students with immigrant background of the English Degree Program in Social Services (DPSS) with the help of interviews. The idea of the evaluation was to harness what elements in the curriculum of the degree program had been useful during the studies and for later working life. The evaluation study was divided into three parts including their feedback on the study curriculum, studying in a multicultural environment and experiences on the process towards working life.</p> <p>A qualitative approach was used in carrying out the study. Semi structured interviews were used in collecting data. The study was focused on the individuals experiences and personal opinions in order for it to be able to provide a detailed feedback for the working life partner. Former students of the English degree program with immigrant background were contacted and six interviews were used for this study including two teacher interviews.</p> <p>The findings showed that the curriculum and the multicultural study environment generally played a supportive role for the former students of the DPSS. Work placements were regarded as the most beneficial element of the curriculum regarding employment opportunities in Finland.</p> <p>In conclusion, the results indicate that although there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction regarding the English language skills used in teaching, students were generally satisfied. The students were mainly motivated about getting a bachelor's certificate since they knew that the degree program will provide them one.</p> | | | |
| Keywords | | | |
| Metropolia, Degree Program in Social Services, immigrants, former students | | | |

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|--|--|---|-----------------|
| Koulutusohjelma | | Suuntautumisvaihtoehto | |
| Sosiaalialan Koulutusohjelma | | Sosionomi AMK/Bachelor of Social Services | |
| Tekijä/Tekijät | | | |
| Yasmin König, Ekho Osazee | | | |
| Työn nimi | | | |
| Palaute entisiltä Metropolian Opiskelijoilta: Opiskelu Sosionomin Koulutusohjelmassa Maahanmuuttajana ja Matka Työelämään. | | | |
| Työn laji | | Aika | Sivumäärä |
| Opinnäytetyö | | Syksy 2010 | 44 + 3 liitettä |
| TIIVISTELMÄ | | | |
| <p>Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tehdä arviointitutkimus perustuen palautteeseen, joka saatiin entisiltä maahanmuuttajataustaisilta sosionomin koulutusohjelman opiskelijoilta haastatteluiden avulla. Arvioinnin ajatuksena oli valjastaa ne sosionomin koulutusohjelman opetussuunnitelman elementit, jotka olivat olleet hyödyllisiä opiskelun aikana ja myöhemmin työelämässä. Arviointitutkimus oli jaettu kolmeen osaan, jotka sisälsivät heidän palautteensa opetussuunnitelmasta, opiskelun monikulttuurisessa ympäristössä ja kokemukset prosessista kohti työelämää.</p> <p>Kvalitatiivista lähestymistapaa käytettiin tutkimuksen toteuttamisessa. Tieto kerättiin käyttämällä puolistrukturoituja haastatteluja. Tutkimus keskittyi yksilöiden kokemuksiin ja henkilökohtaisiin mielipiteisiin, jotta voitaisiin antaa yksityiskohtainen palaute työelämän yhteistyökumppanille, tässä tapauksessa Helsingin Metropolian Ammattikorkeakoulu. Sosionomin koulutusohjelman entisiin maahanmuuttajataustaisiin opiskelijoihin otettiin yhteyttä ja kuutta haastattelua käytettiin tähän tutkimukseen, mukaanlukien kaksi opettajien haastattelua.</p> <p>Palautteiden tulokset osoittivat, että opetussuunnitelmalla sekä monikulttuurisella opiskeluympäristöllä yleisesti oli kannustava rooli entisille sosionomin koulutusohjelman opiskelijoille. Useimmat heistä näkivät monikulttuurisen opiskeluympäristön voiman lähteenä opiskelun aikana, mutta myös työelämän aikana. Työharjoitteluiden katsottiin olleen kaikkein hyödyllisin opetussuunnitelman elementti, kun ajateltiin työllistymismahdollisuuksia Suomessa.</p> <p>Johtopäätökset osoittavat, että vaikka esiintyi tyytymättömyyttä englannin kielen taitoja kohti opetuksessa, opiskelijat olivat yleisesti ottaen tyytyväisiä. Opiskelijat olivat pääosin motivoituneita saamaan ammattikorkeakoulututkinnon todistuksen, sillä tiesivät koulutusohjelman tarjoavan sen heille. Vaikka entiset opiskelijat olivatkin tyytyväisiä englanninkielisen koulutusohjelman lopputulokseen, he löysivät kuitenkin joitakin asioita joita olisi voitu heidän mielestään parantaa.</p> | | | |
| Avainsanat | | | |
| Metropolia, sosionomin koulutusohjelma, maahanmuuttajat, entiset opiskelijat | | | |

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Finnish higher education is based on a high standard. Currently, there are 27 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland (Centre for International Mobility CIMO 2010). The implementation and introduction of Universities of Applied Sciences has been a major reform in the Finnish higher education system in the 1990s. These institutions that were set up on temporary bases soon became permanent institutions representing practically all educational fields. Different methods have been explored in order to further develop or improve these higher institutions. Researches, evaluations, studies and projects have been common tools used in this process. Improving the quality of international degree programs has also been essential. (OECD publishing 2003: 51-52.)

These studies and evaluations have focused on smaller context as well as larger context. Amongst these have been both successful and not so successful reports and evaluations. Nevertheless, the aims have always been to learn from them in order to further develop the Finnish higher institutions. Education and training providers are urged to evaluate their own activities and participate in external evaluations. This according to the Ministry of Education is a method used to collect data in support of education policy decisions and as a background for information and performance based training. One of the first evaluations done on higher education in Finland started in the beginning of the 1980s. (Välilä 2001: 42.) This decision was politically made aiming at more efficient public funding of research. In a nutshell, this evaluation proved to be successful only in the sense of showing how evaluations are not to be made. Since this, more evaluations have been either initiated or made by the Ministry of Education, the academy of Finland, individual Universities and other institutions. (Välilä 2001: 39-41.) Examples of current studies that have been made on higher institutions in Finland are explained in this final project.

As other higher education institutions in Finland, Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences shows interest in evaluation of their activities offered in the international Degree Program in Social Services. According to Metropolia's webpage the Degree Program in Social Services in English started on August 1996 and prepares students to work in the Finnish society and abroad. Graduates from the Program become Bachelors of Social Services, which entitles one to work with clients of all age groups

in the social pedagogical field. (Metropolia 2010.) In order to get the needed information for the evaluation, feedback of graduates is necessitated. A review of the graduate student's opinions on studying in the Degree Program in Social Services as well as the process in getting a work place in Finnish labor market is evaluated in this final project.

The idea of writing the final project on feedback from graduate students came during a workshop session on May 2009 with Mai Salmenkangas (Head of the Degree Program in Social Services). Few examples on topics for the final project were brought up since the idea was to get the students start thinking of their final project topics. The current topic was mentioned in a larger context. The idea was that some students could do a final project on the views of former degree program students on employment and studying in the English degree program. After a discussion with Mai Salmenkangas it became transparent that the focus for this study was on the curriculum of the Degree Program in Social Services from the perspective of students with immigrant background and the process in getting employed in form of a feedback to the school. This study was carried out in collaboration with Metropolia which in this case is the working life partner of this final project. A research permit from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences was requested. After granted, it gave permission to access certain data and information from the school's database system.

2. GENERAL SITUATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN FINLAND

The Finnish migration service defines an immigrant as a person who moves from a certain country to another. The term immigrant is a general concept used in denoting all migrants with various reasons for moving. (Finnish Immigration Service.) The term migration refers to the movement of people from one region or country of residence to another for the purpose of resettlement (Giddens 2006: 528).

2.1 Number of Immigrants

The number of foreign born population in Finland has enormously increased since the 1990s. The number of foreigners living in Finland without Finnish citizenship between 1990 and 2005 increased from 26,300 to 112,850. (European Immigration 2007: 103.) According to the Statistics Finland, the Finnish population was 5 351 427 by the end of 2009 (Statistics Finland 2010). The statistics of the Finnish Immigration Service on citizenship show that on 31st of December 2009 the number of foreign citizens living in Finland was in total 155 660. This number includes 153 253 people from 175 different nationalities, 694 stateless persons and 1713 persons with unknown citizenship. (Finnish Immigration Service.) The population of immigrants in Finland is about 2.7 percent and comprises not only of Africa, Asian, southern American and the Former Soviet Union but also from European countries and North America. The Finnish immigration service also shows that the highest number of immigrants living in Finland includes people from the Russian Federation with 28 214 persons and from Estonia with 25 416 persons. The third and fourth biggest group of immigrants in Finland comes from Sweden with 8568 persons and Somalia with 5549 persons. (Finnish Immigration Service.)

Gropas (2007: 99-100) explains that there was an estimate of about 7,500 foreigners living in Finland by the year 1955. A major improvement has been seen since the first Finnish Aliens act was enforced in 1983. This Aliens act had helped in strengthen the protection of foreigners and granted foreigners the permission to appeal before the courts. Since the enforcement of the Aliens Act, there has been more development in the Finnish immigration situation such as the adoption of a new Aliens act which came into force in 1991, and the equality act which came into force in February 2004. The equality act prohibits discrimination based on age, ethnicity, disability, sexual

orientation or other personal characteristics. (Gropas2007: 100-101.) Ethnicity here means cultural differences that make one group differ from another for example through language, religion or history of ancestry (Giddens 2006: 527).

2.2 Immigrants and Employment

As of 2006, Finland was enjoying a wide range of economic boom and improved employment. This could be seen with an increase in the gross production with over 5% in comparing to 2005 (Ministry of Labour 2010). During the year 2006, employment went up in all sectors except agriculture and forestry. As described earlier, the Finnish educational level is high and the standard of education is good. Those people with a higher level of education amounted for the highest of those with jobs in Finland. The percentage of employment rates with native Finns with low education was about 47.4% while that of foreign born were 42.4%. (OECD Fact book 2009.)

Below on table 1 are percentages of employment rates of foreign born and native born population by educational attainment.

| Low education (native finns) | Intermediate education (native finns) | High education (native finns) | Low education (non-native) | Intermediate education (non-native) | High education (non-native) |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 47,4 | 73,6 | 85,6 | 42,4 | 65,8 | 72.9 |

Source: OECD Fact book 2009: Economic, Environmental and Social Statistics

The table above represents to an extent the percentage of employed skilled and unskilled foreign born workers living in Finland. When compared with the native born workers, there is to an extent a visible difference between the two groups. The main focus of this paragraph is the difference between employment amongst skilled and unskilled foreign born workers in Finland. As shown in the table above, there was as at 2006 a 30% difference between skilled and unskilled foreign born workers in Finland. Higher education in this case means those with a University or a University of Applied Sciences degree or higher qualifications. The term University of Applied Sciences is used in this study and is the same as Polytechnic.

3. EDUCATION

The term education, according to the Cambridge advanced learners dictionary, means the process of teaching or learning in a school (Cambridge advanced learners dictionary 2008). Emil Durkheim explains education as a way of learning and understanding the common values of a society (Giddens 2006: 686). Chandra and Sharma (2004: 1) defined education as the process of developing a person's power and his inner abilities. Education as described in Sociology of education is an umbrella concept which covers all knowledge that is grasped through reading of magazines and newspapers, watching of television and use of other means of information transfer. This means that knowledge can be achieved through different ways of acquisition. The method by which certain knowledge is acquired determines under which category of education it is to be placed. (Chandra and Sharma 2004:5-9.)

Some of the categories are: general education, specific education, conscious education and unconscious education. General education means the knowledge one acquires from birth till death. This is the list amount of knowledge an individual needs in order to carry out his or her daily activities. Specific education is a kind of education an individual acquires in order to become a specialist in a particular field of study. Conscious education involves the kind of education where the objective of the education is fully known. The Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences are usually designed in this manner. Conscious education is usually designed to meet a certain standard. Unconscious education on the other hand is the education achieved through lifetime experiences from an individual's surrounding environments. (Chandra and Sharma 2004: 5-9.)

3.1 Finland and the EU System

The Bologna process is the main forum for higher education in the EU. The Bologna process is named after the declaration signed in June 1999 in Bologna Italy by 29 European countries ministers in charge of higher education in their various countries. The aim of the process is to create a European higher education area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more corresponding and compatible throughout Europe. The Copenhagen process launched in 2002 by the EU is designed to improve the quality of vocational education and to entice mobility amongst

vocational students and graduates. The Copenhagen process is a part of the Lisbon strategy which generally aimed at making Europe one of the most knowledge based and most academically dynamic in the World. (Bologna Process.)

Finnish higher educational institutions have been encouraged by the international strategy for higher education institutions 2009-2015 to increase their international cooperation in order to create a strong and competitive international higher education and research community in Finland. Indeed, Finland has been successful in this meaning that the overall Finnish education and science policy are in accordance with the EU strategies. Finland has also been very progressive in the process of adopting European models and tools such as the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning (EQF), and the Bologna Process described above. (Finnish National Board of Education 2010.)

3.2 Finnish Education System

According to The Finnish National Board of Education, every resident in Finland has the right to education. Education is free of charge for pupils of primary and secondary schools and for most other education such as postgraduate's education. (Finnish National Board of Education 2010.)

The history of the Finnish education dates back to the 13th century. During this period, education was governed by the church under the influence of Sweden. The first ABC book written in Finnish was introduced as well as the first Finnish University in the 16th century during the Lutheran Reformation. Turku Academy was established in 1640. In the 19th century, vocational education began to build up due to the increase in industrialization. After the independence in 1917, Finland continued its battle to ensure that education is reached to all citizens and the level of education has since been increasing. (Välilmaa 2001: 13-16.) Välilmaa explained in Finnish Higher Education in Transition that the Royal University of Åbo, known today as the University of Turku, gave way to the birth of higher education in Finland. The University of Turku was established in Finland in order to train civil servants for the King of Sweden and clergymen to serve the Lutheran church. Finland was at that time under the Kingdom of Sweden. (Välilmaa 2001: 13-16.) During the 1870s, a technical education was introduced which by the 1908, the institute had developed into a college

of technology and was finally the Helsinki University of Technology by the 1960s. Most institutions in Finland became Universities during the 1960s and 70s, for example the College of Social Sciences became the University of Tampere. (Välilä 2001:27.)

Today the Finnish Educational System strives to maintain its standard in Europe and environment. The background of the success according to the Finnish Board of Education has been equal opportunities for every one regardless of sex, age, race, economic situation and linguistic. Comprehensiveness of education means that schools do not choose pupils, but pupils go to schools in their districts, competent teachers, system based on empowerment, cooperation, assessment and evaluation. Also included is encouragement and student oriented active conception of learning. The Finnish educational system is divided into pre-primary education, basic education, upper secondary education/ vocational education and higher education otherwise called Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. (Finnish Board of Education 2010.)

Pre- primary education refers to the initial stage of education structured to introduce children to schooling environment. The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) describes this stage as a bridge between home and a school based atmosphere. Primary Education or otherwise called the Basic Education is designed to give students some basic education in reading, writing, mathematics and basic understanding of other subjects. A child's Primary Education starts usually when he or she turns seven years of age. The purpose of this education is to provide the individual with basic skills needed in everyday life. (Finnish Board of Education 2010.)

The Upper Secondary Education is a continuation of the basic education. The individual in this category is usually between the age of sixteen and nineteen years. This level of education usually last for three years with a Final Matriculation Exam. Upon successful passing of the Matriculation Exams, the individual then has the opportunity to apply for a study place at a Higher Educational Institution of his or her choice. The Vocational Upper Secondary School lasts for three years. Students in this group are usually between aged 16-25 years. There is no limited age group in the apprenticeship system, the minimum age is 15 and there is no maximum age. (Finnish Board of Education 2010.)

The Universities focus more on theoretical basis and research based education, the University of Applied Sciences offer work-related education in response to labor

market needs. Finland has a total of twenty Universities and twenty-seven Universities of Applied Sciences. Universities are mostly run by the state and funded mostly by the government (70%). Universities of Applied Sciences are run by local authorities or by private foundations and are co-financed by both the local authorities and private organizations. (Ministry of Education.)

3.3 Universities of Applied Sciences

After the review of the Finnish education in the early 1980s, it was recommended that Universities of Applied Sciences should be established alongside Universities. During the late 1980s, the Finnish Ministry of Education had done another evaluation because the current educational structure was not matching with the increasing demand in the Finnish labor market and international environment. The Ministry of Education proposed the establishment of these institutions and a closer cooperation with Upper Secondary School. The proposal of the Polytechnic reform by the Ministry of Education came as a surprise to politicians and Universities. The Government then proposed for an experimental phase. The experimental phase began in 1991, with the establishment of twenty-two temporary Universities of Applied Sciences and a number of research projects so as to monitor the experimental phase. The aim of this experiment was to achieve experience in order to be able to run a permanent system in the future. (Polytechnic Education in Finland, OECD 2003.)

3.3.1 Aims of Polytechnic Reform

According to the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) publishing the following were the main goals of the Polytechnic reform amongst others: to raise the standard of education provided, to increase the attractiveness of Vocation Education, to improve international comparability and respond to new demands of vocational skills. (Polytechnic Education in Finland, OECD 2003.)

3.3.2 Funding

University of Applied Sciences in Finland offers free education, meaning that they do not charge tuition fees. Most of their financing for degree programs come from public funding. They also get external money from Research and Development work and

continuous education which accounts for about twenty two percents of their total budgets. In 1996, a first set of Polytechnics were granted the right to permanent operations. All Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland have been made permanent since 2000. (Forest et al 2006: 526.)

3.3.3 Statistics

Universities of Applied Sciences have proven to be an important sector in the Finnish educational system. This could be seen for example from the number of new study places been created. There were a total of 5610 study places at the Department of Technology and Communication in the year 1998. By the year 2001, there had been an increase of 42% meaning 2345 more study places (Polytechnic Education in Finland, OECD, 2003).

The target group was the former students who were, as at the time of writing this report, graduates from the Degree Program in Social Services and working in a fulltime or part time job. A rough figure of the progress of University of Applied Sciences and the progress of the graduates is necessary in order to get a transparent picture of the background, stability and importance of Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland.

According to Statistics Finland, the transition of Polytechnic and University graduate students into working life had been successful. Over 86% of those who graduated in 2005 were employed before the end of the year. In 2006 and 2007, there were over 88% of new graduate students who became employed as at the end of the years (2006 and 2007 had almost the same figure of employed recent graduates). At the end of 2008 there had been over 89% of Polytechnic graduates employed, 70.4% of lower University degree graduates employed, 96.1% of those who graduated with higher Polytechnic degree and 88.8% of higher University degree program graduates employed. All of these had graduated within the year 2008. (Statistics Finland 2010.) It should be noted that there was more successful transition into working life for graduates with higher educational qualifications, meaning Polytechnics and Universities, than for graduates with Upper Secondary Vocational Qualifications.

3.3.4 Number of Students

A total of 135,033 students attended Polytechnic education in the autumn of 2009. There were about 2500 more students than the previous year (2008). The number of new students also increased by three percent making up a total of 38, 200. The fields of Technology, Welfare and Health, Transport and Physical Exercise had the highest number of students. Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and Turku University of Applied Sciences were the biggest Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. (Statistics Finland 2010.)

3.4 Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences is a higher education institute and forms the biggest University of Applied Sciences in Finland. Metropolia exists under its current name since 1st of August 2008, after the former Helsinki Polytechnic Stadia and EVTEK University of Applied Sciences joined together. Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences offers four fields of study which consist of technology, communication and transport, business and administration, culture, and health care and social services. The different Degrees that can be studied in Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences include Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees, Bachelor's Degrees Adult Education and Degree Programmes in English. Altogether, 41 Bachelor's Degree Programs and 13 Master's Degree Programs carried out in Finnish language, and also 8 Bachelor's Degree Programs and 2 Master's Degree Programs carried out in English language are available at Metropolia. In addition, other studies such as open studies, continuing studies or evaluation studies belong to Metropolia's education offer. (Metropolia 2010.)

Due to the school's strong collaboration with working life partners, the students benefit of better possibilities in finding a job after graduation. In addition, the labor market profits of this network when employing good skilled professionals who can meet the requirements of the Metropolitan area. (Metropolia 2010.) Metropolitan area: The term Helsinki Metropolitan Area in this study means Helsinki and the three cities surrounding it which are Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen (Helsinki Region statistics 2008).

Metropolia offers ten Degree Programs conducted in English language and one of the Universities principles is education of high international level. International activities for students are organized and offer a range of possibilities. Metropolia has good connections with international partner universities. This includes visits of foreign lecturers, exchange students and the opportunity for Metropolia students to go on exchange or complete their second or third practical training in a foreign country. Annually, Metropolia educates more than 300 international degree students from more than 50 different nations. (Metropolia 2010.)

3.5 English Degree Program in Social Services

The information on the Degree Program in Social Services (later referred to as DPSS in this study) is based on interviews with senior lecturer Mervi Nyman and the former Coordinator of the DPSS Irmeli Norokorpi and based on the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences webpage.

The current Degree Program in Social Services offered by Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences started on 1.8.1996 as the Degree Program in Social Welfare. The program included a diploma program known then as British Higher National Diploma in care practice. The aim of the earlier degree program was to train students for social pedagogical work in English around the Helsinki Metropolitan Area as well as to promote international competence. The program was especially meant for students with immigrant background who did not know enough Finnish but had good English language skills, Finnish students who wanted to study in English either because they have lived or studied abroad and also for those Finnish students who were interested in studying in English for one reason or the other. The program included both theoretical (110 credits) and practical studies (30 credits). Students also had the possibility to get a British Higher National Diploma HND in care practice which was 60 study weeks. Academic year was divided into two sessions. First section started on April while the second section started on January. There were two similar programs at the same time. The students that started on April had same curriculum with those that studied in Finnish Language. Those who started on January had the HND on their program which was then 60 study weeks. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

The current Degree Program started as the only DPSS in English around 2001. Later in 2005, the curriculum was changed that only the current Degree Program in Social Services was left, meaning that the HND was dropped out of the curriculum. One of the current aims of the DPSS is to educate people to work in the international environment here in Helsinki Metropolitan Area and also to give skills and knowledge to work in international context. More also, for the people with immigrant background living in the Helsinki area who are not able to study in Finnish yet but are ready to study in English although English is not their mother tongue. It was thought that the teaching will be given in English and at the same time the students will learn some Finnish, in order for them to be able to work in Finland after graduation. The reason for having multicultural student groups at Metropolia in DPSS in English is to educate immigrants living in Helsinki. In multicultural learning environment students learn multicultural skills giving them the ability to work with people from different ethnic backgrounds. The aim is that students learn during their studies to appreciate different cultures. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

The DPSS comprises of a multicultural group of students from over 15 different countries (Metropolia 2010). In order to prepare those foreign students more for functioning and working in the Finnish society, Metropolias teachers have changed the way of teaching which means that at present more Finnish terms and learning material is used in the lessons. Teachers are trying to have more mixed groups of students from both Finnish and English programs. Languages used during these lessons are English and Finnish. Students are also encouraged by teachers to take elective courses in Finnish or having their work placement in a Finnish speaking environment. Finnish language courses are offered but only little. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

There had been several changes in the curriculum and structure of the Degree Program in Social Services since 2005. This includes the introduction of a Finnish language test in the entrance exams. This is to attract students who have some basic knowledge in Finnish language. One of the idea behind this is, according to interview with the former coordinator of the DPSS, because the first practical work placement is in the second term during the first study year, it is reasonable for the students to be able to speak some Finnish during this work placement. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

According to the printed version of the Stadia University of Applied Sciences curriculum 2004, the work of a graduate from the Degree Program in Social Services comprises of pedagogical supervision, meaning that he or she can work with various client group in the field of social pedagogy, project and development in community and institution services, organisations as well as businesses. A bachelor of social services can work in the coordination and managerial work with the elderly and people with special needs, prevention of substance abuse, promotion of mental health, in multicultural work, day care services, and child protection as well as in home help services. (Stadia opinto-opas 2004: 270.)

The curriculum includes professional and optional studies, work placements and a final project. Social pedagogy is the framework of the curriculum of the DPSS. This focuses on the empowerment of individual/citizen's activeness, self help and social influence. The aim of this approach is to promote inclusion and social pluralism and the prevention of exclusion. As stated in the 2010 curriculum, "this kind of work requires multi-disciplinary education, co-operation skills and an ability to examine and develop oneself as well as one's field". (Metropolia opinto-opas 2010.) Learning methods include group work, project planning, and participation in international activities at different stages of studies. Instructions are mainly in English, with a basic knowledge in the Finnish language required.

3.5.1 Structure of DPSS

The work placement that the school offers to its students aims at combining theoretical knowledge and working methods together. It consists of three periods. 5 weeks of work placement during the first year. This is followed by an 8 week period of work placement during the second year and 17 weeks during the third year. Work placements are offered in different working environments and students have the possibility to choose from these options. Students from the DPSS have the opportunity to go abroad on exchange programs, seminars and workshop during their study. Teachers are also provided with the opportunity to visit other institutions abroad. According to the former Coordinator of the DPSS, the main aim of the exchange program is to share experiences and teachers could get ideas from other countries. (Metropolia 2010.)

“Henkilökohtainen opintosuunnitelma” (HOPS) is a personal study plan designed by the student. The main idea of HOPS is to allow students to become self directive. Students get the opportunity to make their own personal plans on how they wish to further their studies and graduate on time. The idea is that students get empowered. This study plan is checked and updated by the student and tutor as the study continues. It also creates a clear time schedule for the student. The study plan helps the tutor teacher to follow and understand the student’s academic plan during his or her studies. (Metropolia 2010.)

Small group meetings are designed to offer professional growth and development for students. In small group meetings, students have the opportunity to share experiences about theoretical studies, work practice and exchange programs. Main aim of the meetings is that it should act as peer group support for its members. The small group meetings last throughout the study period. (Teacher Interviews 2010)

The Degree Program offers other activities for its teachers and students such as international day, apple/winter party, a yearly Hildesheim visit for the first year students’ and more. The apple/ winter party is organised two times a year by students but coordinated by teachers and coordinator of the DPSS. One idea of this party is to introduce the new students to the older students. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

The teaching methods used in DPSS are different and depend on the teacher. Methods that are very often used are group work, contact teaching and discussions. Also Drama is used occasionally. The importance of group work is that students will learn teamwork skills which are needed in working life. Group work also offers possibilities to practice how to work with different personalities and how to solve conflicts. A small number of the students with immigrant background have gone abroad after graduation and continued their studies to get the Masters Degree. To find a work place in Finland it is beneficial to know the Finnish language. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

At the beginning of DPSS the requirement for the entrance exam was a psychological test, English language test and group discussion. Around 2005/6 a Finnish language test was added to the entrance exam. The group discussion includes 5 applicants with the presence of 2 teachers at a time. Also Individual interviews became a new part of psychological tests. The new entrance exam requirements starting from 2008 until now

consist of a written exam for which the students have to read a book or material on the internet. English and Finnish language tests are still in use but there are no longer psychological tests. (Teacher Interviews 2010.)

3.5.2 The DPSS Curriculum

An important tool of empowerment in education is the curriculum. The curriculum is viewed in this final project as an important tool of empowerment bearing in mind that a well-constructed curriculum may contain the needed contents to empower and emancipate both the graduated and ongoing students. Language courses offered by the school for example could improve the student's sense of confidence and also his chances of employment. (Metropolia opinto-opas 2010.)

The Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary (2008) defines curriculum as the group of subjects studied in a school. The term curriculum has been defined by several scholars in many different ways nevertheless; Marsh (2004) defined the concept as a combination of those subjects that are most useful for living in a contemporary society. Another definition of the concept by Marsh (2004) states that it "is the totality of experiences presented to students so that they can attain general skills and knowledge at a variety of learning sites" (Marsh 2004: 5). This definition of the term tries to explore the importance of work placements and study/ field visits which are also an essential part of the curriculum. The DPSS for example offers a number of field visits during some of its courses such as case management or social participation and marginalization. Squires (2009) referring to his definition as the standard based one, defines curriculum as the "district written plan incorporating aspects of time use, content and process aligned to standards and assessments that establishes a focus for instruction, staff development... so students achievement improves." (Squires 2009: 143). These definitions explain the importance of various contents put together to create a curriculum.

The area of competences at the Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Science's Degree Program in Social Services has been organized according to the model of social pedagogical activity by the Danish social pedagogue Bent Madsen. The growth and maturity of a student into a bachelor of social services requires a process which involves the acquisition of different areas of competences. This process includes the absorption

of scientific, expressive, productive, and communicative skills on both practical and theoretical levels. (Metropolia 2010.)

The learning process which makes up the curriculum of the DPSS includes growth in social pedagogical thinking, cooperation with professional life, ethical professional practices, work placements as well as the investigative development of the social services. These are further broken down into sub categories representing different areas of competences. Students get the opportunity to have elective studies of a maximum of 10 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) during their study period and a final project and maturity test towards the final end of the studies. (Metropolia 2010.)

The DPSS's curriculum includes an introductory course in the Finnish language designed to offer support both in oral and written aspects in work and leisure for students with immigrant background. A course in Swedish language is also offered to Finnish speaking students at the beginning of the studies. Professional English and web based communication studies are offered to all students.

The first work placement is arranged for the student during their first year of study alongside a first aid course, this gives the opportunity for students to be able to apply the social pedagogical skills they have learnt and are also able to reflect on their own learning. This is followed by a series of multi-disciplinary subjects of social pedagogy, environment of social pedagogical work, applied studies of social pedagogy. Courses in empowerment comprising of 37 European Credit Transfer Systems are offered in the DPSS, examples include dialogue, multiculturalism and equality, a second work placement where students get the opportunity to apply means of empowerment to various working environments. A series of courses relating to working in the social field such as management and development of work in the social field, innovation project and third work placement are also offered. (Metropolia 2010.)

3.6 Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is viewed here from the prospective of empowerment. In this context, multicultural education could be seen as a tool designed to create equal educational opportunities for students and to also ensure that they gain greater self-

understanding of themselves and the world around them (Bank and Bank 1995; cited in Banks 2002).

Meanwhile empowerment has also been defined from the prospective of education in Irwin (1996) as process through which students learn to understand the knowledge existing outside their very own vicinity and experiences in order to increase their understanding of themselves, the world... (Irwin 1996: 3). Multicultural education strives to broaden both the views and perceptions of the culturally oriented students as well as the students from the mainstream culture in becoming culturally competent. This in turn will help in the acquisition of cultural knowledge. Pitkänen explained in Häkkinen 1998 that one of the most useful resources and perhaps sources of empowerment in schools is the opportunity to gain access to the kind of knowledge that is culturally accurate and has a value (Häkkinen 1998: 43). Banks explains that people who are educated about their society and the world in general but only from their cultural and ethnic point of view are denied essential parts of life experiences and are therefore condensed (Banks 2002: 1). A successful multicultural education as described by Banks is one which is able to provide students with the amount of knowledge and skills needed to function within their own society, the mainstream society and across other societies (Banks 2002: 1).

In order to fully grasp the importance of multicultural education, one needs to see it from the perspective of empowerment. This concept has been described in Sleeter (1991) as an imperative dimension to empowerment while empowerment has been described as a fundamental goal of multicultural education (Sleeter 1991: 9). Geneva Guy explains in his article in Häkkinen (1998) the benefits of understanding the relationship between general education and multicultural education. Guy further explains that students from diverse ethnic background with a different learning style may require a variety in teaching techniques in order to master the same academic skill at a similar level of proficiency. In a classroom filled with a student group of multicultural and multi-ethnic backgrounds, having lectures in the most easily understandable manners for all, usually proves to be the most proficient. In order to achieve this, Guy explained in his article the different pedagogical approaches that have been used over the years in order to effectively induce multicultural education into schools. (Häkkinen 1998: 9-20.)

One of the main approaches was transformative curriculum or the social reconstruction and transformation. This approach has proven to be more reaching and effective than the other approaches because it does not rely on improving the programs and process that already exists but rather challenges the route and foundations of these already existing educational enterprise. This approach aims for the creation of a new system. (Häkkinen 1998: 9-20.) A transformative curriculum is designed to empower students, help develop their skills and values needed to become critics who can make effective decisions in the society. “A reflective decision making and personal and civic action must be the primary goals of a transformative and empowering curriculum.” (Sleeter 1991: 31.)

3.7 Previous Studies

An example of earlier study made related to this topic is a survey conducted by the Student union of the University of Helsinki in conjunction with the University of Helsinki. The target of the survey was to know the factors affecting foreign degree students' decision to stay in or leave Finland after graduation. (Ally 2002: 5.) In order to get justifiable results, the survey had used a questionnaire to get the opinions of students concerning the topic. Examples of the questions ranged from the students' background information; how long they have been in Finland and what kind of family ties do they have in Finland. Employment, subsistence, future plans and language skills, e.g. role of language, are discussed as well. (Ally 2002: 25-33.)

At the end of the study, some key issues were revised as they had exclusively been repeated throughout the study. First was the role of Finnish language skills. The study disclosed the importance of understanding and been able to speak Finnish as one of the key ways to having a successful and positive experience in Finland. The study suggested that a number of foreign students are aware of the need to improve their Finnish language skills and also a number of students feel that the language training provided for them by the University does not prepare them orally enough for communication in Finnish. The second key issue revised in the study was the problems and difficulties of finding a job as a foreigner in Finland. The study further explained that even when the foreign students do find jobs, the jobs may be totally unrelated to their profession or field of study due to lack of qualification and language skills. This means that foreign students do not only face unemployment but also underemployment

making them one of the most disadvantaged of those on the job market. Third key issue that came up from the study was the need to focus on the integration of foreign students. According to the study, only half of the respondents from the survey felt well integrated. A major problem that foreign degree student face is the fact that they are often uninformed or miss informed about the issues relating to academics in the University and also practical matters in Finland in general. (Ally 2002: 109-115.)

Metropolia carried out a study in 2004 by a lecturer of the DPSS Tuula Hyppönen and Leena Liukko about the Degree Program in Social Services. The aim of the survey was to get information and understanding of the students studying in the DPSS based on their perception on their employment and the preparedness that the education had provided for working life. The survey was focused on the process and employment of the graduates as well as the students who had delayed their studies and the reasons for the delay or termination of their studies. Questions for the survey were sent to 152 persons who had studied at the school between the years 1996-2000. This included 83 Finnish speaking graduates, 7 English speaking graduates, 45 Finnish speaking non graduates and 17 English speaking none-graduates. 65 people responded to the survey. Students who had graduated from the Degree Program in English and were working as at the time of the survey is the most beneficial for this final project. A summary of the result of the survey showed that; amongst the graduates from the DPSS who answered in the survey and regarding the question on how long it took the former students to get their first jobs, 70 percent (33 graduates) got employed immediately after graduation, 9 percent (4 graduates) got a job after a month of graduation and 4 of the graduates were yet to get employment as at the time of the survey. (Hyppönen 2004: 2-10.)

Respondents showed in the survey that they would have wanted to have English speaking lecturers. The English skills received after the program were not diverse and professionally detailed enough. One problem was also the bad atmosphere in the class lectures. Contents of the DPSS were also commented, for example students were satisfied on courses relating to management but would have wanted more of them. Students also wanted more functional methods and how they could be carried out in practice. (Hyppönen 2004: 25.)

It is interesting to note that between 1996 and the time of doing the survey, 14 students with immigrant background had studied in the DPSS of which 7 of them responded to

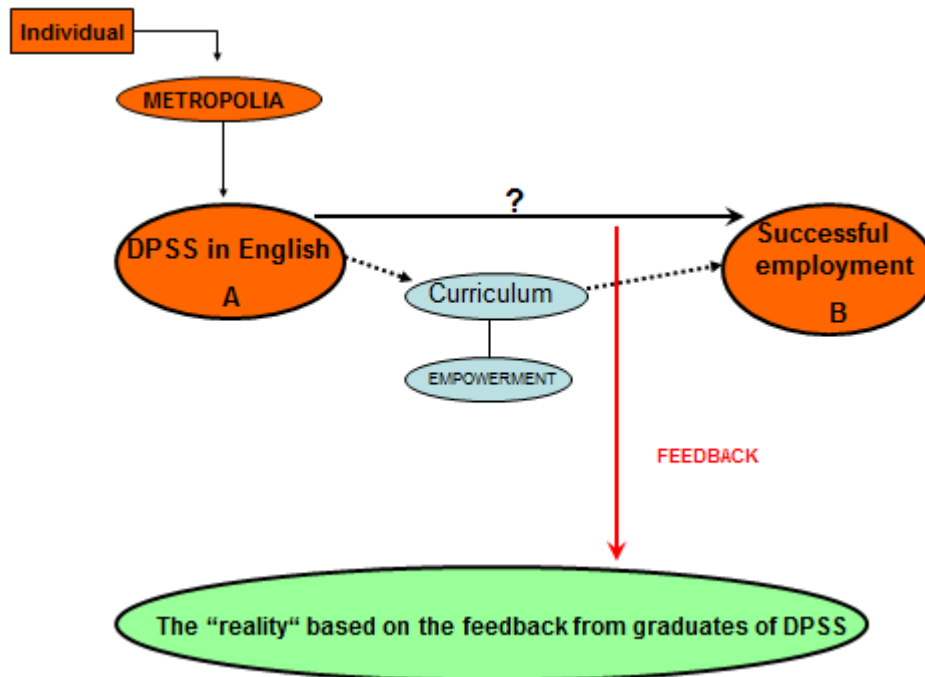
the survey. Students with immigrant background would have wanted more Finnish language courses, especially in relation to practical situations. Some of them also saw the process of getting employment as difficult. Respondents with immigrant background felt that it was hard for them to get a job as a bachelor of social service because of their language skills and that they might end up doing a nurse or an assistant job which they are over educated for. (Hyppönen 2004: 23-25.)

4. FRAMEWORK

The aim of the Final project was to do an evaluation study based on the feedback of former students of DPSS in English with the help of interviews. The idea of the evaluation was to harness what elements in the curriculum of the degree program had been useful for the former students during their studies as well as during the process of getting employment. The study was divided into three parts including the students' feedback on the study curriculum, experiences on the road to working life and studying in a multicultural study environment. Muus (1997) explains that multiculturalism here refers to the development of immigrant populations into ethnic communities. They remain distinguishable from the majority population with regards to language, culture, social behavior and autonomous associations over a long period and usually several generations. (Muus 1997: 40.)

The outcome of this study was also of interest to the authors studying in the same degree program. This gave an insight of the benefits gained and difficulties experienced by immigrants during their studies and during the process of getting a professional career. Future students could also benefit from the result since feedback from the former students was given to the Degree Program of Social Services.

4.1 Mind Map



The mind map shows how the collected data matched the theories and vice versa. This is a simplistic version of the route followed in order to get the answers to the research question. As seen, the map describes the process that was focused on from admission of the individual into Metroplia University of Applied Sciences better still the DPSS to the graduation of the student and then into the working life. Therefore, the orange rectangle represents the individual with an immigrant background been admitted into Metroplia University of Applied Sciences and starting the Degree Program in Social Services in English. The orange bubble A represents the DPSS and orange bubble B represents successful employment. The black arrow represents both the study time in DPSS and the process in getting employment. The black arrow is denoted with a question mark since this is the area the study focuses on. The source to find this out was the interviews of graduate students of the degree program since they know the reality.

The concept of empowerment through means such as multicultural education will be the main focus as well as a look at the curriculum of the DPSS. The bubble of the curriculum is placed between DPSS and employment and connected with a broken arrow because the authors wanted to find out the role it played during and after the studies. The reality based on the feedback of former students is placed under the orange bubbles A and B since firstly, their opinions are based on real life experiences after going through the whole process of studying and finding employment and secondly,

their opinions can affect DPSS since they give feedback which could help improving the degree program. The red arrow that goes down from the black arrow forms the feedback about DPSS and the road to employment.

4.2 Title of the Final Project

The title of this final project is “Feedback from Metropolia Graduates: Studying in an English Degree Program as an Immigrant and their Road to Working Life”. The idea was to get an understanding and a view from the former students with immigrant background on their experiences in both the process of getting employment and studying in Finland.

4.3 Research Questions

The main question of the study was; what is the opinion of the DPSS graduates with immigrant background regarding the study content and the process of employment?

The answers were found with help of the sub questions. These sub questions have been carefully screened in order to find the appropriate link with the main question. This then was linked with the curriculum of the DPSS in order to present Metropolia University of Applied Sciences a concrete view and feedback on the experiences of the former students.

The sub questions were;

1. In which way does the study curriculum meet the student’s demands?
2. What elements of the DPSS have been supportive regarding employment opportunities in Finland?
3. Which factors of the multicultural study environment played an essential role as support during the studies?

The first sub question was viewed from the students opinion on the school’s curriculum, language opportunities offered by the school to students, opportunities to visit and be part of several projects organized by various organizations, the contingency to take part in exchange programs as well as work placements offered abroad and in Finland. Two teacher interviews were carried out in order to acquire more background information about the topic and the development of DPSS. The second sub question was focusing on

former students' experiences in getting employment in Finland. The third sub question focuses on the role of multicultural education. All three sub questions were answered by interviewing graduate DPSS students.

4.4 Main Theory

The key focus of the topic was the evaluation of the feedback given by former students of DPSS in English. The term former student is used in the study and means only the graduate students from DPSS. Empowerment was used in order to understand the function of the curriculum of DPSS.

4.4.1 Empowerment

Empowerment means supporting people to get greater control over their lives and the skills to manage it on their own. It is a tool that helps people to achieve their main goals. This could also involve the use of other methods in achieving the main goal such as dialogue. Empowerment includes working in partnership with those involved. Partnership between the two parties is essential in our case because it deals with the communication and negotiations between teachers and students. (Thompson 2007: 21-22.) According to Adams (2008), "the capacity of individuals, groups and /or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives" (Adams 2008: 17).

Empowerment has a range of meanings. This presents Bartunek's and Spreitzer's study made in 2006 on how the meaning of empowerment had changed and developed between the years 1966 and 2000 in religion, education, sociology, management, social work and psychology. The three main categories are sharing real power, fostering human welfare and fostering productivity and contain different meanings of empowerment, altogether 17 meanings. The term Empowerment appeared in connection with religion for the first time in the late 1960's. Then, the initial meaning of it was sharing real power, including strengthening and giving power, and focused on the poor or under-represented people. (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006.)

The category Fostering Human welfare came into view in the 1970s and 1980s. It defines the meaning of empowerment as, only to mention a few, increasing self-worth and knowledge, respect and dignity and improving lives of people. The third category fostering productivity, appeared in 1980s and 1990s, include the meaning of working in teams, enabling others to make the right decisions and taking responsibility. During the decades the discussion about empowerment had grown considerably, starting from 1970s. However, most of the articles for the study had been found from the 1990s. (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006.)

Since education plays an important role in this study, it is essential to take a closer look at it in connection with empowerment. According to the findings of the study, empowerment in education appeared in 1975 and the major meanings; increasing knowledge, control over destiny and participation in decision making, were presented for the first time. (Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006.) Increasing knowledge is crucial for students in order to learning successfully how to influence destiny and how to gain more control over their lives (Cheng and Soudak 1994; cited in Bartunek and Spreitzer 2006).

5. IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Research Method

An evaluation research as defined by Licorn and Guba in Clark (2003: 1) is a discipline that requires the application of scientific methods in collection and analysis of information about the content, structure and outcomes of a certain program. Robson defined these terms as “a study which has a distinctive purpose; this is not to say that it is a new or different research strategy” (Robson 2002: 202). Rossi and Freeman (1993: 5) defined in Clark (2003) that it is the systematic application of social research procedures for assessing the conceptualization...and the utility of social intervention programs (Clark 2003: 2).

Evaluation research fits vividly to this kind of study because the idea of an evaluation is not to create new knowledge or to judge a particular body but rather to study the effectiveness of a certain program. The views of former Metropolia students are been

exploited in this study, a feedback is given to the degree program making an evaluation method the best possible research method for this study. Once the reason for carrying out the evaluation was understood, it was transparent which type of evaluation had to be carried out. According to Clark (2003) formative evaluation aims at improving and supporting the program been evaluated. This happens through the examining and assessment of the program. (Clark 2003: 7.) Scriven (1980: 6) states in Clark (2003: 7) that formative evaluation is an evaluation done in order to give feedback to the people who are trying to improve a particular program. Robson (2002) says that summative on the other hand tends to focus on the outcome of a program. The result in this type of evaluation is likely to cover all the aspects of the program, not likely the only aspect been evaluated. (Robson 2002: 208.)

5.1.1 Types of Data

There are two main types of data that could be used in an evaluation research. In order for a researcher to make a better choice on which type of data to use, the researcher according to Clark (2003: 64) should be able to identify which variables are needed to be measured as well as the research instruments that will be used. Clark also explains that the choice of data collection method is also mainly influenced by the situation and context in which the particular evaluation is been carried out (Clark 2003: 64).

In this study, the data used are both primary and secondary data. As Clark puts it secondary data refers to the set of information that has been prepared by other organizations, for example Metropolia, several government departments and statistical boards' for their own use. Primary data involves the application of research instrument such as questionnaires, interviews that have been designed primarily for the purpose of the study. Primary data have been considered as important because they provide data that is essential in order to address the issues been evaluated. (Clark 2003: 65-66.)

5.1.2 Interview

In research there are different methods of collecting data. One form of it is the interview which is used as data collection method of this study. Interviews are suitable when exploring individuals' feelings, opinions and thoughts (Robson 2002: 224). The aim of an interview is to get answers to the questions through open talk with the interviewee.

Three types of interviews exist which are fully structured interview, semi structured interview and unstructured interview. (Robson 2002: 271.) This study focused only on semi structured interviews because it seemed most appropriate when exploring the individual's experiences. With this method Robson (2002) explains that the wording and order of questions can be freely exchanged by the interviewer when needed and it makes room for discussion. Among the three main types of questions (closed, open and scale) the open ended questions have been chosen for the interviews since this type allows for flexibility and to study the phenomenon into greater depth. (Robson 2002: 269-277.)

The interviews were carefully planned and tested in advance, so as to avoid last minute mistake. A recorder was used for all the interviews which helped in addition to better concentrate on the topic. In order to guarantee that the answers from the interviews used for this study were correct, all interviews were transcribed. The both authors of this final project were present at all times during the collections and processing of data in order to get the same understanding of the received information and interviewee's behavior. The interviews were carried out in English since the interviewees were all graduates from DPSS in English.

5.2 Process of Data Collection

The data collection started after the research permit for the final project had been granted. The names and graduation years of former DPSS students were given by a teacher of the DPSS. At the beginning, it has been planned to interview only the graduates of the years 2004-2006 in order to get information about their study time and a curriculum similar to the current one. This would have had the advantage to better compare the graduate student's feedback and apply it to the current curriculum. Since during those mentioned years not enough students with immigrant background have graduated from the DPSS, it has been decided to change the plan and also include graduates from 2001 onward. This gave more possibilities to find potential interviewees. Names of 15 interviewees have been received and 8 of them found and contacted through the internet.

Five of six arranged interviews were conducted. One interview did not take place due to sudden illness of the interviewee and another one failed due to for this study unusable

data. The data of 4 graduate student interviews and 2 teacher interviews was used in this final project. One of the four conducted former student interviews was a phone interview and the other three interviews face-to-face interviews. It has been decided to conduct a phone interview due to inability to meet personally with the interviewee. As all other potential interviewees, the former student was contacted first by email and informed about the topic and content of the final project. After confirmation to take part an appointment for the phone interview was scheduled. Since a phone interview has many advantages with the face-to-face interview in common it has been decided to carry it out. An advantage could be that the interviewee talks more freely about the topic since one feels more anonymous than in a face to face interview, there is a possibility of correcting misunderstandings and the benefit of saving time and effort (Robson 2002:282). Disadvantage of a phone interview could be that the interviewer does not see the interviewee and due to that misses important reactions or facial expressions when asking the questions. Robson states that “the lack of visual cues may cause problems in interpretation” (Robson 2002: 282).

The three face to face interviews were all carried out at places the interviewees chose and suggested. This had the advantage to feel well in their known environment and talk freely about their opinion. Interviews have been carried out in English language and interview lengths of the four interviews were together 145 minutes. All interviews have been recorded and afterwards transcribed and marked.

5.3 Data Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the primary data achieved in this study were achieved through interviews. A recording tape was used during the interview sections in order to get the most out of the materials. The authors of this final project had gathered the data acquired during the data collection stage by first transcribing the recorded interviews. The transcribed data was then analyzed using the content analysis approach. Content analysis as described by Weber is a research method that uses several procedures in making valid inferences from texts, meaning deriving conclusions from setting materials presumed to be true (Weber 1990:9). Weber further explained that one key idea of content analysis is classifying many words from the text into few content categories. These categories could further more contain words, phrases, other units of texts classified in the same category according to the purpose and meaning of the

words. There could be sentences or words with similar meanings or relating to similar point of view. These elements are grouped together by the author/s. (Weber 1990: 12.) Weber in his book explained further that to make the classification procedure reliable, different people should code the same text in the same way (Weber 1990: 12).

This was taken into consideration during the coding and analyzing of the materials in this final project in making sure that the authors had coded and understood the materials that had been processed. The materials were separately coded by both authors at different times using the same methods and then cross checked again as the materials were exchanged in order to find any hiding data that one could have omitted. The materials were later checked again together with both authors before the coded data was further used in the study.

6. FINDINGS

The data of all four interviews has been equally applied and represented in this study since this is a feedback and all of the former students' opinions and experiences are important and useful. The interviewees have all studied individually and are graduates from separate years. This gave wider feedback about DPSS since the former students studied in different stages of the degree programs development. The main parts of the questions for the interviews were initially divided into three parts as stated earlier in this study. This helped in getting direct information to the different areas that the feedback was focusing on as well as answering the research question.

After informing the interviewees about the purpose of the study, asking for confirmed consent and permission to record the interview, the interview got started. So called warm up questions were asked first and are appropriate at the beginning of an interview since they help to soften a possible tense atmosphere and create an easy and flowing start (Robson 2002: 277). The warm up part focused on the interviewees' interests and reasons for applying to the DPSS as well as their knowledge and expectations before starting their studies. These questions were chosen in order to find out what factors motivated the students to apply to the DPSS. Motivation is an important factor that plays right at the beginning of the studies an important role since there must be a reason that helps them through the studies to reach the goal of graduation.

All the interviewees stated as their primary reason for applying to the DPSS in English was because they did not have either enough Finnish language skills or no Finnish skills at all. They assumed that the standard of Finnish needed for studying in the Finnish degree program would be too high for them to master. Therefore the degree program in English was their best option.

“I chose the English language degree program over the Finnish due to the fact that I didn’t think my Finnish was nowhere enough for that level of studying in Finnish” Interviewee 3

“Just because I didn’t speak at all Finnish” Interviewee 4

All four interviewees mentioned also other reasons for applying to the DPSS which were interest in doing social work in Finland or to further previous studies and so enhance the knowledge in the social field.

6.1 Demand during the Studies

The first part of the interview focused on the curriculum and in which way it met the demands of the former students. In this case, the curriculum means all elements of the studies in the DPSS including study units, work placements, international exchange programs, group works, study guidance, and field visits. The demand in this context is seen as an individual process towards working life. In this final project the demand is defined as all the elements that are beneficial and needed for preparing the students for later working life. Though the students had different expectations and demands during their studies they were nonetheless all related to getting a workplace after graduation. All of the interviewees had high expectations of getting employment with the certificate received from the school since the interviewees understood that in Finland education is important. In that sense their expectations for the degree program itself were not too high since they did not know much about the degree program before applying.

“...my expectations were not especially course motivated, it was more to do with what to do afterwards.” Interviewee 1

In addition to that, interviewee 2 also mentioned the benefits and said that it is going to be good because it was multicultural and a very good way for him/her to get into the Finnish culture in order to understand how this country works (Finland). Two of the interviewees stated that the curriculum was quite broad and confusing since they did not know what was expected from them. One student said that sometimes he/she was surprised because the courses were better than expected and that's why he/she was quite happy with the subjects. Anyway, important elements of the curriculum were described as the empowerment lessons, the student exchange and the work placement.

Empowerment was mentioned by two interviewees as important and one student mentioned that he/she needs it in everyday working life with the clients. Here one can note that empowerment is useful for students of the DPSS since it can be applied in every work field in later working life. Giving tools to the clients and encouraging them to develop their own skills is an essential part when applying the concept of empowerment. Thompson says that professional staff in services with people need to be empowered otherwise they cannot play a positive role in supporting others in achieving their goals (Thompson 2007: 34). Thompson further explains that helping to empower others involves the use of professional knowledge, noting that it is essential to have academic background in order to understand people and their life situations. Also, use of support network is seen as important for staffs in terms of support; good support network improves the wellbeing and acting of the workers. Taking the opportunity to challenge or remove barriers is also needed for workers to be able to identify and tackle obstacles as professionals of the social field. However Thompson further stated that empowerment is not something we do to people rather empower them to empower themselves. (Thompson 2007: 34-35.)

“One of the courses I thought which helped me a lot, even today ... would be the empowerment course... I use that every day.” Interviewee 1

Interviewee 2 thought that the international exchange program was useful for him/her. The interviewee explained that it helps one to get other perspectives of viewing issues relating to the social field.

” one of the best things I have gone through my studies was to make an exchange program to different countries...” Interviewee 2

The former students also mentioned the courses that had been practical oriented and provide information on different types of pedagogy that could be used in different work fields, organizations etc. In this sense the practical part has the benefit to see a real case in order to apply the knowledge to real life. Two students explained these as helpful and enriching. A major part of the feedback that was not pleasant about the whole study time at the DPSS was the language barriers. Three students felt disappointed regarding the level of English language skills the teachers had at the time of their studies. The language skills were described as poor. A former student said during the interview:

“...the level of language, linguistics is quite poor... I think that was one of the biggest things, that was probably the problem at least for me and other students as well.” **Interviewee 3**

Out of these students one mentioned also the beneficial side of Finnish speaking teacher teaching in the English DPSS and explained that as it is easier to work with teachers whose native language is not English since he /she was also non-native speaker of English. One interviewee described it as sad that when Finnish students did not understand some terms in English they suddenly started to have a conversation in Finnish language which was of disadvantage to the interviewee as his/her Finnish language skills were low at that time of his/her studies. In addition the interviewee also revealed that there was a situation where he/she was told that it was not necessary for him/her to attend a particular class since it was solely in Finnish language. In this case one could question if this is empowering that a student does not receive all the important knowledge he/she is entitled to.

The Finnish language courses provided by the school also raised an alarm. Students thought the courses were helpful but thought it would have been more productive if more courses were provided. This would have helped the students' with immigrant background to cope better when introducing them into the working life. An interviewee thought that

“...the Finnish language course, I think it could have been more tailored to work situations...” **Interviewee 1**

The curriculum of the DPSS has so far, as at the point of writing this final project been productive and useful to the former students during and after studying. Nevertheless it cannot be generalized from the perspective of a group of students but rather individually. The interviewees had different point of views and their expectations were met in different manners but similar ways as described above.

6.2 Road to Employment in Finland

All the interviewees as at the time of the interviews were fully employed in different fields of social work. Most of the interviewees mentioned that since they got a professional job in the social field, they have been constantly employed within the field. The main elements of the DPSS that had been supportive for the former students that came up during the interviews were mainly work placements, study visits, empowering courses as well as courses relating to music, drama and art. The road in getting a professional career was according to some of the students a long process. One of the interviewees said that he/she had applied to about four hundred places; sending about twenty CVs each day. Interviewee 2 recommended that its worth to only concentrate on few applications at a time in order to be successful since one can better focus, prepare and does not get confused with different work places. One of the interviewees mentioned that he/she got a job before graduation. The interviewee explained that he/she did not have to go through the process of being unemployed and seeking for a job which most graduates go through. Amongst the four interviewees, one of them did not get a work place maybe because of his/her language skills resulting to him/her moving out of Finland for further studies. After the former student returned to Finland with a master's degree in social work, a job was offered as well to him/her.

The most important element that the former students thought was useful were the work placements, knowing that they are more or less the channels from the study field towards working life. Interviewee 1 for example had requested throughout his/her studies for work placements in Finnish language knowing that it will provide some sort of opportunity to learn the Finnish language, learn about the Finnish culture as well as about the Finnish working life. The interviewee also got an offer to work for a short period of time after his/her work placement ended. At this point it seems transparent that students have found work place opportunities through work placements provided by the school.

“I did get one right at the end...for 4 months...I got that from the work practice placement” **interviewee 1**

An interviewee thought that the work placements were good ideas, even better when carried out in a Finnish environment especially when one is intending to stay in Finland after graduation. This would help to get into the Finnish environment and also understand how things work in Finland. The interviewee thought that the Finnish language plays an important role when working in the work placement. Interviewee 2 explains that it was difficult with only knowing Finnish vocabulary since one cannot say the things one want to say. The interviewee realized that no responsibility was given by the supervisors to him/her which again made him/her feel not comfortable about the situation. Another Interviewee told during the interview that he/she was able to see examples of work done in the social work field.

“ I could see many things for example like social a social work field, what kind of clients, like what kind of problems...” **interviewee4**

Interviewee 4 also mentioned that it is hard to find a good work placement when the Finnish skills are low and that one could only go to English speaking places which are not so many to choose from.

“...that’s a problem, this work placement it was really difficult in Finland if we speak just only English.” **Interviewee 4**

Empowerment was mentioned a great deal during the interviews. Some of the students said that the empowerment course was interesting and also useful for later working life since one of them uses it daily at work as mentioned earlier.

” ...information on the different types of pedagogy that could be used in different work fields, organizations... working life related topics and stuff... knowledge on different origination systems in Finland in the social sector, private sector...I think they were quite helpful” **Interviewee 3**

The answers of the interviewees showed that the work placements are the most beneficial element of the curriculum regarding employment opportunities in Finland. All the students agreed that seeking for employment after graduation is a process that sometimes takes time, but it was found in nearly all their comments that as a bachelor of social services one will always get a job. All interviewees mentioned that it was difficult at the beginning to have the work placement in Finnish language but it resulted to be the most beneficial in the long run. Finnish language courses were needed more in order to feel more prepared when applying for a job. Few interviewees mentioned during the interview that they still have problems with using the Finnish language in daily working life.

6.3 Benefits of Multicultural Study Environment

Most of the interviewees saw the multicultural environment as vital for the social work profession as well as in the social field studies. One interviewee did not think about the DPSS in a multicultural context since only the English language played a big role for the student, two out of four interviewees described their experiences in a multicultural study environment as nice, interesting and enriching.

Interviewee 2 said;

“...the most amazing thing when you are in a multicultural environment when you are studying is that everyone has very different opinions...different languages it is how people have different ideas...this is the most amazing, this is so enriching.” **Interviewee 2**

Interviewee 3 thought that the multicultural study environment added a balance to the study and made it more interesting since students where from different places.

“It’s good to have the diversity because we live in a diverse multicultural society...so I think it is important to keep that alive.” **Interviewee 3**

Interviewee 3 had a good opinion on multicultural study environment as stated above but he/she also mentioned that during his/her study years a two team environment comprising of Finnish speaking students and non-Finnish speaking students developed which in his/her opinion was not the best environment.

The former students thought that the multicultural environment has been helpful also in their working lives. They saw this as an opportunity to learn about people, their backgrounds as well as other multicultural entities since working in the social field easily involves dealing with people of different backgrounds. They explained that it was important in order to understand people of different cultural behaviours better and it helped to accept other people better as well as other ideas better. It makes communication faster, eases teamwork and gives an overview of different people. Since currently there are many people with immigrant background working as well in the social field, it is helpful for the students to learn about different cultures.

“...this is going to make your life easier when you make teamwork in the work...it helps you to cope yourself with the situation at work...”

Interviewee 2

Interviewee 4 even had a different understanding of multicultural studies than it really was and thought of it as more international. He/she said during the interview that there were only few foreign students in the group, though the advertisements of the degree program made it look international. He/she repeatedly said that he/she was shocked to have seen the amount of Finnish speaking students in the class.

“...it was big disappointment like why Finns are inside this class because I was thinking no Finns at all, it's more international...” **Interviewee 4**

He/she also wished for more foreign friends in the class which then would have been more useful to him/her.

Some elements of the DPSS's curriculum that added more strength to the multicultural environment other than the diversity of the students were the exchange teachers (visiting lecturers from abroad) and the student exchange programs. All the interviewees were pleased about teachers coming from abroad to give lectures. Some thought that the school should organise more of these, and also improve it. International teachers coming from abroad to lecture at the DPSS was seen as one of the most important part of the DPSS. The former students thought that students benefit a lot from these lectures describing it as new perspectives, useful and that one pays more attention to teachers from abroad since it gives more variety.

“...it is one of the most interesting part of the DPSS when there are international lectures from abroad...I think it is a really good thing I hope that it remains in the study program...I really liked it, I think that student’s benefit a lot from other experiences from outside...” Interviewee 3

Experience and opinion on student exchange were positive for all the interviewees. Some students had gone on the exchange program during their studies while others did not, except for the traditional one week exchange program to Hildesheim in Germany, which one of the former students thought was good and would have wanted to have it few more times during his/her studies. The former students recommended the international student exchange programs for students of the DPSS. Interviewee 2 states that the exchange gives you experiences all the time and even if it is hard at the beginning it is the best one student can do.

“...the time I was making my exchange program was one of the best moments of my life, so with that I tell you everything already... I strongly recommend make an exchange program.” Interviewee 2

The multicultural study environment generally played a supportive role for the former students of the DPSS; most of them saw it as a source of strength not only during their studies but also during their working lives. The above mentioned elements have been the main core that the former students wanted to mention as tools that had either been useful during their studies or later working life. This also included tools that they would want to be improved for the current and future students of the Metropolia University of Applied Science’s English Degree Program in Social Services.

In summary, the feedback of the study indicates that some students of the DPSS had difficulties with Finnish language during their studies and on the road to getting a professional career as well as in their current jobs. The data received also indicated that though there was a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the level of language used in teaching, students were generally satisfied with the outcome. Students were mainly motivated about getting a Bachelors certificate since they knew that the degree program will provide them one, therefore increasing their chances of getting better jobs. Motivation is seen in this final project as the need that makes one act upon achieving a

certain goal. Torman (2007: 3) defined motivation as the desire to do something so strong; it propels one to actually do it.

7. CONCLUSIONS

According to the findings, the research question of this study was answered. The opinions of the former students on the study content of the Degree program and the process to working life has been an essential part of this study and it had enabled the authors to compile this feedback and made it compact and usable.

The interviewees mentioned some things they wanted to add or change in the curriculum. Since there have been some elements, according to their opinions, missing in the curriculum that would have been needed in order to better meet their demands, the interviewees described what they would change or add to the curriculum. All the former students wanted more practical related subjects in order to be prepared for working life. Work placements were regarded as too long especially the third one since it is not paid and students have to be in the work placements for 4 month making it difficult to make a living. Some students suggested that it could be divided into several parts. The interviewees thought that there could be some additional elements added to the curriculum of the DPSS that could be useful for the future and current students. Though they did not have the opportunity to get these elements during their studies at the DPSS, these elements could ease the process in getting employment. The hygiene pass was mentioned in this context so that students would not have to apply separately to get the license after graduation. Also the possibility for DPSS students to be able to give medicine was brought up. In addition students should be more involved with study related matters in the DPSS.

The elements of the curriculum of the DPSS used in this study have been viewed from the lens of empowerment. Empowerment has been a symbolic element in this study. It has been seen as the process of helping individuals, groups and organizations increase their personal strength and influence through improving their circumstances (Zastrow 2010: 72). Ginnodo (1997: 33) defines the term as “providing the means and opportunity to make decisions and take actions which directly affects the client”. The authors of the study believes that for one to be able to empower others, he/she needs to

be empowered, meaning that students need to be first self-empowered and learn how to apply empowering tools during their studies. This however will enable them to apply this concept in their daily working lives. Knowledge in social work practice comes from combinations of professional knowledge including empirically tested variables and practice wisdom, the knowledge base of a preferred theory or approach, ... knowledge about people served and their environment (Lee 2001: 56). This study shows that the DPSS has provided necessary tools needed for a start in the social work field.

The students were pleased with their study time at the DPSS in Metropolia (or Stadia at the time of their studies). The DPSS was seen as a door opener for working life and described as the best time of their lives.

“I like to thank all teachers because they were so helpful...they were all so kind and I liked them...” Interviewee 4

It is important to note that the earlier study done on the DPSS in form of a survey had produced similar feedback of the former students in some ways as this current study and showed the elements that needed to be improved in the opinion of the former students with immigrant background. When comparing these two studies, both proved that the students would have wanted more native English speaking lecturers. The survey showed that students were not satisfied with the level of English proficiency received during their studies in preparation for later working life. Students were generally satisfied with their courses in both studies but would have wanted more functional or practical related courses. Another similarity with these studies showed that students with immigrant background would have wanted more Finnish language courses. This study has shown that students of the DPSS often have similar opinions in relation to demands of the study content of the degree program. Since the earlier survey was made, there have been some changes in the English degree program including the HND which no longer holds, Polytechnic Stadia had become Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

The English Degree Program in Social Services of Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences is seen as a case that this study has been based on. The main reason for choosing Metropolia as the working life partner is because the authors were current students of the school as at the time of writing this final project. The data in this study was collected from a small unit of graduates from the DPSS and therefore one can not apply the result to the entire former students of the degree program. It is also important

to note that it is difficult to have a favouring curriculum that suits all students since individual demands vary, they cannot all be met and satisfied.

8. DISCUSSION

One could argue that this kind of study could have been done using questionnaires or in form of a survey. Nonetheless, this was one possible option for the authors of this final project but it should be noted that this study aimed at getting the feelings and thoughts of the former students rather than just numbers and positive/negative answers. During and after the interviews, some information came up which would have been missed if some sort of questionnaires were used. Communication was fairly easy since all the interviewees spoke English and Finnish as well. The interviews were carried out in English language. Nevertheless there were also some difficult moments regarding the process of contacting and finding the former students.

After receiving the research permit, the authors decided to ask the Metropolia Student Office for assistance in contacting the former students. The reply from the Student office was slow and in the end they could not help with providing the contact addresses. The next option was to ask from the school, this proved to be successful as the authors received about a dozen names. Receiving the names was only half part of the solution since the contact numbers or email addresses were still unknown. In the end almost all the names of the former students that were received from the school were contacted via different means such as email, call to a potential workplace, and the use of the Facebook mail. During this process some critical thoughts were revealed by one potential contact and an interviewee. Though all the contacts wanted to know how we got their names, one of the contacts seemed upset and did not want to have anything to do with this final project. The contact had also mentioned in his/her email that the authors should take a look at their methods of potential contact approach.

Another question that came up during the process of data collection was the informed consent. The authors had written and printed out an informed consent for the interviewees to sign. The informed consent included the title of the topic and who it may concern. Before the interviews, the informed consent was given to the interviewees while one of the interviewers read and told about the final project and the

ethical considerations that had been taken. Nevertheless, an interviewee mentioned that it would have been more formal if two copies of the informed consent were printed out in order to allow the interviewees keep a copy of the signed consent. This the authors had not thought through before the interviews began. Towards the end of the interview sections, the authors also realized that a copy of the curriculum relating to the year of graduation of the interviewee could have been printed out and handed to the interviewees for a brief refreshment of memory. This could have helped in increasing the amount of data received for the first part about helpful elements of the curriculum. A part of the curriculum was sent by mail to some interviewees in advance but they did not have the time to read them through.

During the process of writing this study it became transparent that it would have been helpful if the DPSS had a social network group consisting of current and former students in case of future group discussions and other information related matters. If the DPSS had its own page on a social network community such as Facebook for example, the amount of time and effort spent on searching for potential contacts for the interviews would have been tremendously reduced.

A follow up study would be interesting in order to see the future changes of the degree program and to see the demands of the current students in order to compare with the demands of former students as well as their process of getting employment. The follow up study could be done in order to see the difference in the degree program comparing the survey done by Tuula Hyppönen, this current study and the follow up study. This then could show the demands that have been fulfilled and no longer appear in the follow up study as well as new demands of the students.

9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION AND RELIABILITY

All interviewees and other participants took voluntary part in this study and gave their confirmed consent. Information on aim, purpose and function of the study was given to the participants and their rights were explained. Confidentiality of the received data was assured and the data only used for this study. Furthermore, in order to promise privacy participants stayed and will stay anonymous. Other actions that would have made the study unreliable and unethical have not been taken into consideration neither applied in

this study. The research started only after a research permit from Metropolia had been granted.

The data used in this study does not in any way generalize the total reality of both the experiences of the former degree program student's time as students in the school, nor the current reality and situation of the school. The current DPSS is constantly undergoing different forms of improvement as at the time of writing this report. Some of the interviewees made it clear during the interviews that they do not remember much about their study time at the school or the information they are giving may not be accurate.

“So I have to say what I remember I of course I have to say that all of the things I said to you are maybe not even 50% of the whole truth because I don't remember basically” **Interviewee 2**

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17.11.2010

Appendix 1

29 §

Research Permit to students Ekhoë Osazee and Yasmin König

The President decided to grant a research permit to Helsinki Metropolia UAS students Ekhoë Osazee and Yasmin König studying in the Faculty of Welfare and Human Functioning for their final thesis on "Views of Former Metropolia Students - Exploration of their Experiences on Employment in Finland and Studying in a Multicultural Group as an Immigrant".

Copy of the final thesis is to be sent to the Director of Faculty of Welfare and Human Functioning Johanna Holvikivi.

For information: Steering Group

Attachment Research Permit Request

Riitta Konkola
President

1. Study curriculum and expectations

(Curriculum means all studies, work placements, study guidance, international exchange, group works, etc.)

- Tell us briefly about your reasons for applying to the DPSS in English?
- Tell us what you knew about the DPSS before applying?
- What were your expectations before starting your studies?
- Upon starting your studies, how were your feelings on the first week or term?

- In which ways did the curriculum meet your demand during your studies?
- Which elements of the curriculum would you say have been useful for you?
- What would you like to change or add to the curriculum if you had a chance?

2. Employment opportunities in Finland

- During your study in DPSS did you have a professional job? If yes tell us how you got the job.
- Upon graduation, tell us the process you went through in getting a professional career. (How long did it take, how many different places you applied to, etc.)
- How did you feel about it?
- How did you feel about (using) Finnish language when applying and/or during your job?
- How supportive was the curriculum regarding employment opportunities in Finland? (Finnish language courses, work placements, study visits etc.)

3. Multicultural study environment

- Please tell about your experiences in studying in a multicultural study environment at the DPSS? (Describe elements that were important and useful in your opinion and why)
- What kind of advantages does a multicultural study environment have based on your opinion;

A: over studying in the Finnish degree program?

B: regarding later working life? (Own experiences)

- In which way did working with students of different nationalities help you understand cultural differences?
- What are your experiences and opinion on?

A: Student exchange

B: Teacher exchange (lecturers from abroad)

C: practice placement in Finnish environment (how prepared were you before and during the placement e.g. Finnish language skills)

INFORMED CONSENT

This study is a final project of students of Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences. The final project focuses on the feedback of former students with immigrant background who have studied at Metropolia in the Degree Program in Social Services in English. Information is gathered through interviews.

All received information from the interviews is handled confidentially and only used for the purpose of the study. Interviewees are guaranteed of anonymity meaning that any information relating to their identity will be removed during the process of analyzing the data.

The interviewees have been informed about their rights before the interview. All interviews are strictly based on voluntariness.

I have read and understood the above and give my consent

Consent giver's signature

Place and Date