

SUMMARY: An Exploration into Participation

– Development and Research at Day Care Centres II

The second project period of VKK-Metro, the Helsinki Metropolitan Area early childhood education development unit, which ran from 2009 to 2011, involved the development of new ways to increase the well-being of children and their families and the professionalism of employees. The focus was on strengthening participation. The development was carried out at day care centres, which are natural growth environments for children.

The practical development work concentrated on the 21 research day care centres selected for the project period, whose staff developed their expertise and pedagogical skills. The results were new working methods that strengthen the participation of the child, parent and employee. Examples of these include the documentation of activities, parent meetings to increase participation as well as improved communications. In addition, everyday activities were captured on video, and employees reflected on their working methods together with their work community. The strengthening of participation was linked with the work for the early childhood education and care plan.

At VKK-Metro, research and evaluation are part of everyday development work, which is one of the basic tasks of every employee. Day care centre employees are acquainted with the production of research data and encouraged to apply this data in their work. VKK-Metro's employees support the staff by providing consultation, organising training and co-ordinating extensive peer support activities.

Cross-municipal peer support activities proved an important way to share experiences and expertise. Peer meetings were organised for, among others, the contact persons at the research day care centres, day care service directors supervising the development work and heads of day care centres. There were also educational peer visits between day care centres.

The development processes at the research day care centres were monitored by means of regular surveys, whose results guided the progress of the development work. The project period also included extensive surveys for early childhood education personnel in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and for the children's parents, dealing with participation at day care centres. The results were reported to the day care centres that responded to

the survey and utilised in the development work. The results of the surveys will be specified in separate research reports.

This publication provides a colourful account of VKK-Metro's operations over the two-year period. Stories from the day care centres will be supplemented with articles on, for example, participation, supporting development activities and regional development.

The 2009–2011 activities of VKK-Metro, the Helsinki Metropolitan Area early childhood education development unit, were part of the Child's Voice development project. The funding was received from the municipalities in the area and from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health's Kaste programme. VKK-Metro deals with both permanent development that establishes structures and projects with changing themes. Its core consists of 21 research day care centres that change at the beginning of each project period. Parties involved in the co-operation are the cities of Espoo, Helsinki, Kauniainen and Vantaa, the University of Helsinki and the universities of applied sciences in the area.