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Under three's – under engaged?

Participation in Early Childhood Education

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<p>Tässä opinnäytetyössä tarkastellaan alle kolmevuotiaiden osallisuutta varhaiskasvatuksessa. Osallisuutta tutkitaan päiväkodin siirtymätilanteiden aikana Harry Shierin luomien osallisuuden tasojen avulla (<i>Pathways to Participation</i>). Siirtymätilanteet tämän lopputyön yhteydessä tarkoittavat siirtymistä lounaalle, lounalta pesutiloihin ja pesutiloista lepotiloihin. Opinnäytetyömme toteutettiin VKK-Metro hankkeessa mukana olevassa tutkimuspäiväkodissa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyössämme selvitämme osallisuuden tasoa siirtymätilanteiden aikana. Opinnäytetyö on kvalitatiivinen. Tutkimusaineiston ovat videoidut siirtymätilanteet. Analyssissa käytettiin temaatista analyysia. Analyysin luokat perustuvat muokattuun versioon Harry Shierin '<i>Pathways to Participation</i>' viiden osallisuuden tason–mallista. Myöhemmin analyysi luokkia muokattiin videoidun aineiston perusteella.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tulokset osoittavat, että osallisuutta on olemassa siirtymätilanteissa. Tuloksissa ilmeni erilaisia osallistumisen tapoja siirtymätilanteiden aikana. Työ osoittaa, että Shierin tasojen mukaan arvioituna, osallisuutta on neljän ensimmäisen tason mukaan, mutta merkkejä osallisuuden puutteista löytyi myös. Tulokset todistavat, että alle kolmivuotiaat pystyvät aloitteillaan käynnistämään kanssakäymistä. Se, että nuorilta lapsilta puuttuu kyky käyttää aikuisten kieltä, voi vaikuttaa kielteisesti osallisuuden muodostumiseen. Joitakin muita esimerkkejä kielteisesti vaikuttavista tilanteista ovat kiireinen työtahti ja tiukka päivärytmi siirtymätilanteiden aikana.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön perusteella voidaan sanoa, että hoitajalta tarvitaan herkkyyttä, jotta lapsi voidaan todella kohdata ja jotta heidän osallisuuttaan voitaisiin edistää. Itsetutkiskelu ja omien ammatillisten valmiuksien tunnistaminen ovat tärkeä osa kohti kehitystä. Lasten osallisuutta voidaan myös parantaa kiinnittämällä huomiota heihin ja tiedostamalla heidän tapansa kommunikoida, sekä uskaltamalla kyseenalaistaa vanhat työmallit.</p>	
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<p>This Bachelor's Thesis examines participation of children under the age of three. It describes participation during transition events by using a modified version of Harry Shier's Pathways to Participation model. The transition events referred to in this thesis are the transition to and from lunch, washroom and sleeping premises. This Bachelor's Thesis was done in cooperation with a VKK-Metro (Early Childhood Education development Unit) research kindergarten.</p> <p>This thesis discovers the levels of participation during transition events. The conducted study was a qualitative research. Videotaping method was used as the data gathering method. The data analysis method was a thematic analysis. The themes for the analysis were based on a modification of Harry Shier's <i>Pathways to Participation</i>-tool to enhance children's participation.</p> <p>The results of the study show that participation exists according to the first four levels of Shier's model during transition events and gives examples of such. It also draws attention to examples of non-participation. The data also prove that under three-year olds can initiate participation. Some prohibiting factors were a hectic working pace and rigid daily schedules and inability to recognise children's participatory initiatives.</p> <p>Based on the study, it can be concluded that certain sensitivity is needed from the carers to truly encounter the child and foster participation. By paying attention to children and acknowledging their ways of communication, participation could be improved. Self-reflection and becoming aware of one's own professional competences are important as they lead to the path for improvement. Children's participation may be enhanced by acknowledging their age appropriate communication, but also by questioning traditional working methods.</p>	
Keywords	Participation, early childhood education, transition events, levels of participation

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1 INTRODUCTION

This Bachelor's Thesis focuses on participation in early childhood education. It is done in cooperation with the Early Childhood Education development Unit (VKK-Metro) and a kindergarten in Helsinki (not mentioned by name for confidentiality reasons). VKK-Metro aims to develop early childhood education in the Metropolitan area and cooperates with the Metropolitan municipalities, the Department of Applied Sciences of Education at the University of Helsinki, Universities of Applied Sciences and the Centre of Expertise on Social Welfare (Socca 2010).

The idea about researching child participation, especially in groups of children under the age of three, manifested itself during a Participation-seminar, arranged by VKK-Metro, in autumn 2010. The seminar raised an interesting view of child participation; new research data (Venninen, Leinonen and Ojala 2010) suggested that the youngest children were not able to participate as much as they ought to. No clear reasons for this were obvious, but one suggested conclusion was that adults may not fully understand or recognise the youngest children's initiatives for participation. Participation is important for the young, developing children, as it improves skills, such as communication and decision-making; and empowers and enhances children's self-esteem (Sinclair 2004).

Previous research (Stenvall and Seppälä 2008; Venninen et al. 2010) describes what child participation looks like in the Metropolitan area kindergartens, but these have been done only from the early childhood education professionals' view point through surveys. For example, Leinonen (2010: 50-53), concludes that while children's participation can be said to be part of the kindergarten operations in the metropolitan area and that professionals working with children are committed to supporting and promoting children's participation in everyday functions, there is always the possibility that the early childhood education professionals (teams) taking part in such surveys may want to see their own actions as supporting children's participation. This may lead to some of the questions being answered in a more positive way, or that the reflection of the professionals is limited to only some parts of the daily routine activities.

However, this Bachelor's Thesis concentrates on finding out what the reality is through observation (videotaping) as a means for data gathering. One of the strengths of using an observation method is that it provides the opportunity to give an in-depth account of the reality. Harry Shier's (2001) model for enhancing children's participation called "Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations" was modified for data organisation and analysis.

This Bachelor's Thesis describes participation during transition events. The concept of participation during transition events came from the professionals at our working partner kindergarten; this was something they had identified as a developmental area. Transition events, referred to in this context, are the transition to and from lunch, washroom and afternoon rest and relaxation time. Our Bachelor's Thesis aims to answer the following question: **how and to what extent do children participate during transition events?**

This Bachelor's Thesis is of relevance and importance in the area of early childhood education. The literature review shows that so much more still needs to be studied in the field of young children and participation. Much of the literature today concentrates on older children and participation at schools but there is a lack of research on the youngest of the children who, due to their lack of "adult" language, cannot verbally express themselves. The working partner kindergarten, as well as other early childhood education professionals, can use the information gained from this Bachelor's Thesis in order to develop their work further. This Bachelor's Thesis can help professionals of the field to gain a greater understanding of the interaction between early childhood education professionals and children under the age of three during transition events. Linking participation to practice increases awareness of its meaning in the everyday life of kindergartens.

2 PARTICIPATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

2.1 The right to participate and its importance

Nowadays children have the right to participate and to be heard. This is partly due to the development of social theories that see children as social actors rather than simply just as objects of socialisation (Thomas & Percy-Smith 2010: 1). This has not always been the case though, and the saying "Children should be seen but not heard" is a well-known expression from the past.

Participation may mean different things in different contexts and the purpose of this thesis is not to define participation. But in order to understand it in the context of early childhood education a brief definition is needed within the parameters of this thesis. Skivenes and Strandbu (2006: 14) see participation as "interaction with others that is concerned with identifying the meaning of that which comes to expression. Individuals are taken seriously and have influence, whereby others take up their expression for consideration and discussion". Hart (1992: 5), in his *Essay on Children's participation*, used the term participation to refer to the "process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives... the fundamental right of citizenship". So participation, in early childhood education, means that small children are listened to and that their ideas and feelings are taken into consideration sincerely and seriously.

The term participation can be, and often is, used in practice to simply mean being listened to or consulted, but can this way, take on a passive connotation. Active participation, on the other hand, is in contrast to this; it refers to the empowerment of those involved by providing the children a reason to believe that they too can make a difference. (Sinclair 2004: 110-111.) Inclusion is based on full, active participation. It is not enough that children are involved and participate passively, but that participation should highlight joint participant action and activity (Tiira 2000: 42-43). Also, according to Thomas and Percy-Smith (2010: 2), just seeing participation as the process of consultation or "having a say" does not result in change as adults often continue with the decision making process without taking the children's views into account. The level

and nature of participation varies and can mean taking part in or being present at. Participation is also about knowing that one's actions and views have been noted, and thus may be acted upon. And this can in the best-case scenario lead to empowerment. (Sinclair 2000: 2.)

Participation in early childhood education is a fairly new concept - therefore it is important to understand the historical development and what it means in terms of children's right to participate as the status of children within our society and in the world at large has dramatically changed over the past years. The reformation had a positive impact on the development of children's individuality as it generally encouraged individualism. By the end of the 1600's each child was thought to have their own separate soul and each child was also given their own unique name. By the 1700's issues regarding the health and education of children had already been fairly well established and were taken seriously. (Parekh 2000: 10.)

The first international child protection conferences dealing with the status of children were held already in 1890's (Utriainen 2000: 29). The Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1924 by the League of Nations, established "children's rights to means for material, moral and spiritual development; special help when hungry, sick, disabled or orphaned; first call on relief when in distress; freedom from economic exploitation; and an upbringing that instills a sense of social responsibility" (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Finland, an inner development towards civil society emerged. This afforded everyone the opportunity to participate in a democratic national society as a citizen. An important element of this was children and childhood. However, the idea about children's rights is not a new one and the idea was put forward already five decades prior to the First World War. (Tunturi 2006: 7.) In Finland a new way of thinking regarding children and childhood took place in the 1960's when children's rights and status in society became a burning societal question as awareness rose about children being an underprivileged group (Satka and Moilanen 2004: 125).

The rights to participate and to be heard are laid down in several Finnish laws. The Constitution of Finland states, for example, that "children shall be treated equally and

as individuals and they shall be allowed to influence matters pertaining to themselves to a degree corresponding to their level of development" (The Constitution of Finland 731/1999). But the most substantial guideline regarding children's right to participate is currently the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is stated in the Convention that every child has a right to life, survival, development and respect for his own views. According to the Convention's article 13 children have the right to freedom of expression, while article 12 assures a child, who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989). According to Woodhead (2010: xx-xxi.) the UNCRC is different to any earlier rights framework as it establishes that "the child has the capacity (under guidance) to think about, communicate and make decisions". It sets out principles in which the child is identified as being active in shaping his/her own life, learning and future, while also recognising the child's growing capacity to make decisions, the right to speak and the right to be heard. (Woodhead 2010.)

National Curriculum on Early Childhood Education in Finland (2002) incorporates the basic values of the Convention into its principles, supporting every child's individuality and gradual build-up of autonomy. They lay down the primary objectives of early childhood education and state that children should feel that they are valued, accepted as themselves and heard and seen (National Curriculum on Early Childhood Education in Finland 2002: 15). Children are seen as active agents who can have an influence on their education. They have the right to express their views and even though they may have different means to communicate, they have the right to be listened to and consulted in their everyday activities.

Many theorists believe that there are certain minimum requirements that adults need to achieve, in order to endorse the UNCRC or to offer genuine participation (for example Shier 2001; Hart 1992). Although these minimum requirements may be familiar to the early childhood education professionals, it is important to link them to practice to gain a broader understanding of what they mean in the everyday life of kindergartens and this way increase the professionals awareness of children's participation.

Participation has an important role in the small child's development. To be able to successfully operate in the world, and to survive, human beings must learn to trust themselves and others. Trust is created during the first years of our lives, and it evolves in ordinary, everyday recurring events, where children learn that their needs are being met, that they are important to adults and that their wellbeing is being looked after. (Siren-Tiusanen 2002: 17-18). When children can take part in dealing with matters that concern themselves, it provides a possibility for them to gain a feeling of being listened to, and experience how one's own thoughts and opinions are appreciated by others and can have an affect (Leinonen 2010: 6). This can be very empowering for the small child. They learn that they are important beings and that their thoughts matter. Participation is crucially important because it enhances children's skills. It helps them in developing many useful skills, such as communication; negotiation and decision-making, while it also empowers and enhances their self-esteem by providing a sense of self-efficacy and raising children's self-esteem (Sinclair 2004: 108).

There is an increasing amount of literature about involving young people in decision-making (Hart 1992; Shier 2001; Sinclair 2004; Percy-Smith and Thomas 2010). In Great Britain the importance of child and youth participation has gained great momentum in the past decade or so. Several frameworks have been set up to give direction and an approach to participation. Weight is put on meaningful participation, which does not refer to any separate activities or events but more so to continuous processes that encourage constant engagement with the children (see for example Kent Trust; National Youth Agency). Unfortunately the latest research data suggest that the youngest of the children are not able to participate as much as they ought to (Venninen et al. 2010).

Despite the growth in participatory activities in general, some groups, particularly the young children, are still less likely to be included (Sinclair 2004: 112). Small children do not necessarily speak the language of adults so their initiatives may not be fully acknowledged. This is something Venninen et al. (2010: 62) also point out and according to their research children, under the age of three, have weaker possibilities to express themselves, and their participation pursuits are not always recognized by the carers or supported. This precise argument intrigued our interest to study it further

and increase awareness of small children's meaningful participation.

2.2 Participation of children under the age of three

Children spend a considerable number of their early childhood years in kindergartens. Statistics show that 62% of Finnish one to six-year old children attend municipal or private kindergartens (Lastenpäivähoido 2009). The target group of this Bachelor's Thesis is children under the age of three at the working-life partner kindergarten and for some of them being so young, it has been their first contact with kindergarten life.

There have not been many studies of the care and education of this age group (Helenius, Karila, Munter, Mäntynen and Siren-Tiusanen 2002: 3) therefore it is of vast importance to obtain more knowledge on the kindergarten experiences of under-three-year-olds, as kindergarten plays a considerable role in their lives. The skills our study group has acquired until this age influence the way they are able to participate in the kindergarten life. Therefore it is important to study their developmental levels and gain an understanding of their capabilities.

A great deal of speculation has been drawn on the impact that kindergarten might have on the social and cognitive development of children. When children start attending a kindergarten, they face a new social environment, which undoubtedly affects their lives and causes a variety of changes. New relationships, both with carers and peers, bring about a new dimension in children's social and cognitive development. Munter (2002: 37) states that children come across a new culture where they lose the primal position they may have had at home with their family members, and instead they need to adapt to the new, shared community. A kindergarten life involves parting with parents or guardians and finding new adults whom they can trust. Munter argues (2002: 42) that under three-year-olds need a caring and nurturing adult to provide them with trust and a sense of security, which will in turn support their development.

Early experience in interaction is of vital importance to children's socio-cognitive development (Mäntymaa and Tamminen 1999: 2447, 2449-2450). Interaction is a fundamental social process (Durkin, K. in Hewstone, Stroebe and Stephenson, 1996: 50-51) which affects the development of relationships, language and social knowledge.

Young children's social development concerns the implications of the first relationships with carers for subsequent relationships, with peers and other people. Social participation, Durkin concludes (1996: 71), offers prospects of learning with and from others and broadens knowledge of oneself and the surrounding environment. Children learn by observing others and interacting with the environment, so the environment, behaviour and cognition all are chief factors in influencing development. Vygotski (1982: 158-159) also underlines the environmental factor on socio-cognitive learning among children. He claims that the child's cognitive skills are "mediated by words and language and have origins in social relations" (Vygotski 1982: 160-161).

According to Siren-Tiusanen (2002: 17) during the first three years, children develop three emotional and social pillars: trust, self-control and learning motivation. Emotions play a powerful role in children's lives. Santrock (2001: 340) defines them as "feelings that involve a mixture of physiological arousal and overt behaviour". Infants' emotional experiences include crying, smiling, stranger anxiety and social referencing, whereas toddlers are capable of talking about emotions too. Children express a large scale of emotions, both positive and negative. Happiness, joy and laughing are considered as positive, while sadness, tiredness, anger and restlessness as negative (Santrock 2001: 231-233). Research has shown (Bryant and Colman 1995: 19) that expressing own feelings and thoughts and interacting with the environment help infants and toddlers develop emotionally, socially and cognitively. Munter (2002: 52) underlines that the relationship between under three-year-olds and their carers is based on emotions and those adults should be perceptive towards children's reactions.

Although infants do not speak meaningful words, they have the skills to communicate, such as cooing, babbling and vocalizing (Schaffer 2006: 391). At ten months of age, infants have learnt to take turns in 'conversation' with the carers and that way recognize patterned activities of social discourse. They also use gestures as types of non-verbal responses (Schaffer 2006: 392). They are able to point at certain objects, or raise their hands if they want to be picked up, among other examples. In other words, they have means to express themselves and initiate an interaction. Children who have not learnt yet to talk communicate in a wide range of verbal and non-verbal signals (Heinämäki 2000: 10-13; Shaffer 1996: 393). Even infants communicate by 'private speech', which is a non-social and egocentric talk, as a form of self-expression

(Santrock 2001: 278). In toddler age, children learn to communicate externally and interact with their environment. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that the carer understands the developmental needs of children and act accordingly.

Learning to talk and express oneself is a natural skill to humans. Children learn a language spontaneously during an interaction with their environment (Tolonen 2002: 163). In order to learn to speak, children need undivided attention and time. Tolonen states that children's developmental turning points occur in interactive activities with their carers (2002: 163- 164). Even infants subtly express interaction by using stares, smiles, gestures and articulations. Durkin (1996: 57) argues that in order to achieve interactive communication by using the repertoire of perceptual and motor skills, carers and children take turns quite smoothly, just as in a conversation.

Participation can come in many forms and can take place at different levels and does not necessarily mean verbal communication. According to Venninen et al. (2010: 5) participation happens as a consequence of interaction, although it does not require verbal communication. Small children's participatory initiatives can be very subtle and adults working with small children need to be sensitive towards these initiatives. Communication is part of participation, and even when small children do not have the skills to use language, they communicate using body language (Leinonen 2010: 7). According to Reunamo (2007: 92) even the very youngest of children are capable of having an effective and interactive communication without words.

Can small children participate when they do not talk? Siren-Tiusanen and Tiusanen (2002) acknowledge that one does not need to be able to speak in order to participate, and therefore, in groups with children under the age of three, adults need to be able to listen to and speak the language of the children, which is often unspoken, the language of feelings and body language. Good care and upbringing of children under the age of three requires as genuine an encounter as possible and sensitivity to recognise the children's basic and fundamental needs. (Siren-Tiusanen and Tiusanen 2002: 65-66.) Just because small children cannot yet communicate through spoken or written language does not mean that they could not pass on their own wishes, ideas or feelings forward.

Wieman and Giles (1996: 317) underline that communication does not depend solely on just one individual. It is an interaction of verbal and non-verbal utterances that creates a special relationship between the participants. Conversational intimacy, Wieman and Giles continue (1996: 319), can be communicated in a number of ways, such as by touch, smile and eye contact. These gestures provide positive feedback to participants in conversation. Interaction has become an important part of kindergarten life and is a vast challenge for the early education professionals, especially in authoritarian cultures, where children's participation is not accepted (Kiesiläinen 2002: 254). Venninen et al. (2010: 57-58) underline that the basic elements of participation are the need to be listened to and understood.

According to Kalliala (2008) interaction with small children (under the age of three) requires a certain physical and mental "squatting ability" from the adults, as well as the ability to recognise children's verbal and non-verbal messages. Unfortunately, as Kalliala (2008: 32) continues, adults may often withdraw from the company of children to speak to each other, as it is simply easier to communicate with another adult than it is to fall into an intensive interaction with small children.

In order to secure a healthy psychological development for children, kindergarten personnel must provide a supportive, educational environment where children's needs such as interest and curiosity are recognised. Munter (2002: 36) suggests that as children start kindergarten, it is vital that they gain a feeling of being listened to and being able to truly have an effect on their surroundings. This is crucial for the development of their sense of self (Munter 2002: 57). According to Tiira (2000: 43) an important component of high quality child care and early childhood education is listening to children.

Woodhead (2010) emphasises that to listen to children is different when talking about 6-month-olds, 6-year-olds and 16-year-olds. He also points out that the right to participation applies to all children, no matter what their age and capabilities. It is the responsibility of the adults to make a notion of this and support children's participation effectively according to the child's situation and capacities. (Woodhead 2010: xxi.) Even the youngest children are able to form their own views although they may not be able to communicate them verbally. Participation should not be limited only to the

expression of “adult language” (Lansdown 2010: 12), but all children, all ages and capabilities should be given the right to express their own views. Unfortunately, adults consistently underestimate children’s capabilities. Often this is because children do not express their perspectives in a way which is similar to that used by adults. (Landown 2010: 15.) Karlsson (2000: 13) argues that it is not the child or their insufficient skills that are the obstacle to children’s active participation, but it is the way activities are organised which prevent the children from taking an active initiative to participate. Since transition events have a tight schedule, they may be organised in a way that prevent children from participating. Reunamo (2007: 33) suggests that basic care events are challenging, as they require the carers’ ability to take the individual children into consideration while guiding the fulfillment of an operation.

Active participation helps children build a better picture of the world around them, but also boosts their own esteem and self-image (Karlsson 2005: 5). They begin to build self-knowledge of what they can and cannot do. Bandura (2000: 169) states that adults’ appraisal of children’s capabilities can take an important role in children’s rate of personal development. Boosting children’s self-esteem improves their interaction both with peers and adults. Social and cognitive theories (Bandura 2000: 164; Vasta 2002: 164) underline the influence of transition events with the environment on self-understanding and recognizing of oneself as an agent. Children become more attentive and competent learners in such responsive environments.

2.3 Participation during transition events

Our working-life partner kindergarten chose the transition events as a developmental area. These transition events are part of the kindergarten’s basic care events although they are not after all about basic care. Transition events are important occasions in which early childhood education professionals can meet the children individually, closely and personally and actualise important emotional refueling (Siren-Tiusanen and Tiusanen 2002: 69). They are some of the most hectic moments of the day and require the full attention and work contribution of the carers. In this Bachelor’s Thesis transition events refer to the transition to and from lunch, washroom and daily rest. These events are often frantic and full of action as a certain timetable is followed. Children need to have their daily rest during certain hours, but before they can do so

other activities must take place. These include washing hands, eating, going to the washroom, changing clothes and so on. Carers need to make sure that the timetable is being followed to ensure that children get their lunch (as lunch is served during a certain preset time), that the children get enough day rest, that they get up before the afternoon snack is being served and so forth.

Latest research suggests that children do not always have possibilities to make initiatives or choices during basic care events (Venninen et al. 2010: 57). An explanation of this could be that basic care events are adult led and organised according to a tight schedule with little room to maneuver. According to Siren-Tiusanen and Tiusanen (2002: 84), it is the responsibility of the early childhood education professionals to secure the under three year old children's adequate, disturbance-free daily rest and that the characteristics of a good daily rest entail that the early education team maintain the regularity of the daily rest schedule. In most kindergartens, the early childhood education professionals use the time when the children are resting effectively by having their team meetings. So a tight schedule must be followed in order to meet certain daily tasks and functions. To pay attention to small children's participation initiatives during such hectic events requires a certain amount of sensitivity from the carers as these initiatives can be so subtle.

According to Lehtinen (2000: 22), the relationship between children and adults is always a power relationship. Leavitt (1994), in his study, discusses the different ways that adults exert this over children and suggests that a very central form of power in infant care is that of time discipline (as cited in Siren-Tiusanen 1996: 24). For our society to function a certain time discipline is needed, although this may not follow the natural biological time of children (Siren-Tiusanen 1996: 25). But could it be that too rigid time constraints limit adults' sensitivity towards children's initiatives, and this way weakens the children's possibilities to actively participate.

The results by Venninen et al. (2010: 26) show that the most common prohibiting matter, restricting children's participation, was the daily schedule or rhythm and suggested that too strict daily rhythms and routines can be a clear obstacle to children's participation. Laukkanen (2010: 64) states that adults and children negotiate or generally speaking work together, during transitional situations, much less than in

other situations. Transitional situations, according to Laukkanen (2010), are strongly linked to the daily schedule/order.

According to Puroila (2002: 98) in the everyday life of kindergartens there are different elements of control which are based on the prevention of disturbances, such as the order of the day, drawing up the rules and regulations and creating daily routines. Following a strict daily rhythm could be connected to the adult's need to control and manage the differing situations within kindergarten settings (Venninen et al. 2010: 61). Also children's possibilities to make an impact differentiate according to the care personnel and the kind of atmosphere the kindergarten professionals are able to create (Venninen et al. 2010: 56). The adults, after all, plan and build the weekly and daily schedules and define how flexible these shall be. According to Venninen et al. (2010: 56) the daily rhythm of a kindergarten group is not that easily moulded as it is strongly connected to other instances as well. For example the kitchen of the kindergarten may regulate when dinner is served and outing-times are preset, as adults need to arrange their shifts.

A study by Emilson and Folkesson (2004) show how strong classification and framing restrict children's participation. Strong classification and framing refer to a strong teacher control, so situations that are teacher-planned can often restrict the children's choices and initiatives, while teacher-planned situations without explicit acquisition goals can enhance these. In order to enhance the strength of participation, teachers need to participate by being emotionally present (Emilson and Folkesson 2004) and by getting closer to a child's perspective the teachers are enabling participation (Emilson and Folkesson 2004: 221, 236).

This gives an interesting view to child participation during transition events, as during such events a certain routine takes place, which is tied to a time schedule and has a strong teacher control. Is it possible for adults to give away some of their teacher control in order to enhance children's participation? Learning how to give away some adult power in order to improve professional skills and working methods is a constant challenge for early education professionals.

To sum up, transition events can be very hectic due to a number of simultaneously

occurring activities that demand attention from the kindergarten personnel. Therefore, the role of early education professionals is vital and can be multi-faceted such as a caregiver, teacher, supporter and comforter. Given the age of our study group, the emphasis is on the carers' ability to observe and interpret the child, as younger children are not able to verbally express themselves (Laukkanen 2010: 74). But, in order to develop participation, their interaction must be diverse, especially concerning child-centeredness and participation (Kalliala 2008: 258). Also, it is the task of early childhood education professionals to recognise children's expression and subtle messages regarding their needs, motives and wellbeing (Reunamo 2001: 91).

2.4 Models to measure participation

We have briefly defined participation and explored the challenges and issues of participation in early childhood education. As participation can be understood in different ways there can also be different ways to measure it. For some to participate, it can mean to take part in, and for others, to have their say. Different models to measure participation can help professionals in gaining a better understanding of the levels of participation and their meaning in the process of participation.

Roger Hart's 'ladder of participation' was the most influential model for measuring child participation at the end of the twentieth century (Shier 2001: 108). Hart (1992: 5) underlines the importance of child participation, stating that children need to be involved in interaction with adults and be exposed to the skills and responsibilities involved in participation. Involving children, Hart continues (1992: 5), "fosters motivation, which fosters competence, which in turn fosters motivation for further projects." Adults often underestimate children's competence and render them unable to participate. The ladder contains eight steps, each step representing increasing degrees of child participation and different forms of cooperation with adults (Hart 1992: 9). The model depicts different forms of participation and children's involvement. It describes what children are involved in and the relationship they have with the adults in charge. The most important benefit of this model, according to Harry Shier (2001: 110), is its "exposure of these false types of participation", because they help the early childhood education professionals to recognise and eliminate them.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Shier (2001: 108-110) modified Hart's model, as a tool for workers in order to enhance children's participation, not only measure it. He divided participation into five different levels, discarding the levels of non-participation (Figure 1).

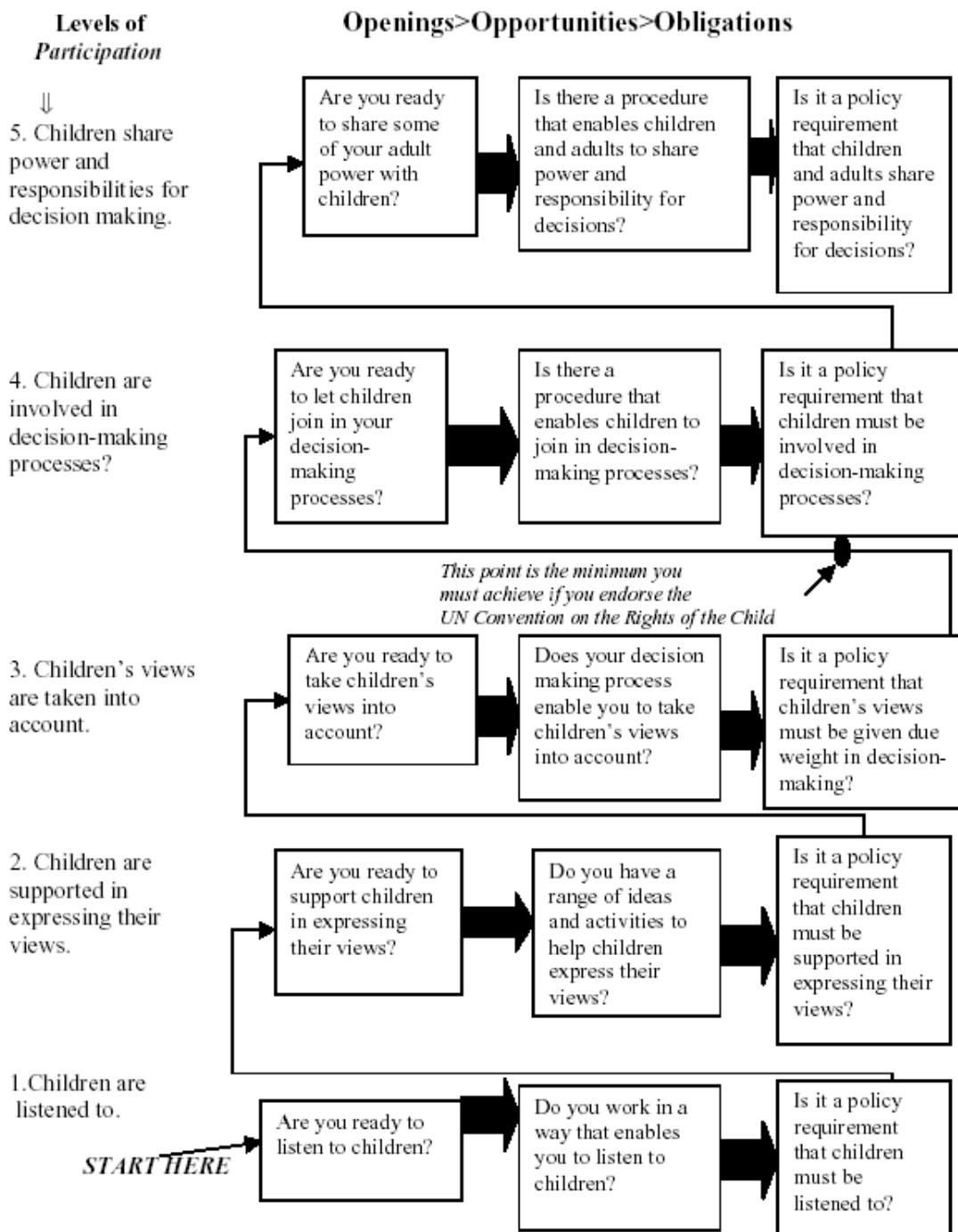


Figure 1. Pathways to participation (Shier 2001).

Shier's (2001) model of participation gives us a new way of exploring the participation process. The model displays different levels of participation, which may have however, different degrees of commitment to participation. According to Shier (2001: 110) by answering the questions the model poses helps one to determine their current position and identify the next levels to increase the level of participation.

The model consists of five levels of participation that may have three different degrees of commitment to participation. These stages of commitment Shier marked as *openings, opportunities* and *obligations*.

2.4.1 Children are listened to

The research by Venninen et al. (2010) states that participation, at the first level, exists at the Metropolitan area kindergartens in the form of hearing and listening to the children. Listening to the children is an important part of Shier's model as it is the first level. Active listening is different to mere listening. One can hear another person, but to truly listen to someone is to take in what they are saying. It requires dialogue, the ability to put one's own assumptions aside and to hear what the other person is saying. This is especially important in early childhood education. Participation always requires listening. One can listen to another in several ways but it is not the same as to listen actively. (Karlsson 2005: 8.)

Stenvall and Seppälä (2008) emphasise that one can listen with only half an ear but to hear requires full attendance (Stenvall and Seppälä 2008: 25). In the first level listening occurs only if children take it up themselves to initiate or express a view. Level one only requires from the worker that they are ready to listen.

2.4.2 Children are supported in expressing their views

Level two refers to the workers working in such a manner that enables them to listen. Early childhood education professionals should pay attention to why some children do not express their views and how, as an adult, one could support and enable these children in expressing their views. Adults should make sure that all children are supported and encouraged in expressing their views. Adults at this level, according to

Venninen et al. (2010: 30), should respect children as individuals and accept children's different views and opinions.

2.4.3 Children's views are taken into account

Level three requires that listening to children becomes an obligation or duty for all staff. It refers to adults taking the views of the children into account, without implying that adults should obey children or change their actions every time children come up with new things, but to take the child's view into consideration, and if not possible to action then at least to give grounds for this. Venninen et al. (2010: 30) explain that at this level participation requires negotiation, discussion and agreement in actioning children's wishes. Adults take part in play as agreed with children.

2.4.4 Children are involved in decision-making process

Level four refers to the decision-making process and suggests that adults share some of their "adult" power with the children, while still holding the responsibility of decisions being made. At this level, adults and children communicate together in such a manner, that adults actively take the children's views into consideration and support the children in expressing these. Venninen et al. (2010: 30) state that at this level children have a possibility to influence their environment.

2.4.5 Children share power and responsibility for decision-making

Level five refers to the shared power and responsibilities between adults and children. At this level adults should accept the fact that to provide and ensure children's participation, they must give some of their power to the children while supporting the children in carrying the responsibility, which comes with that.

2.4.6 Stages of commitment

All levels of participation, according to Shier (2001), are marked by three stages of commitment: *openings*, *opportunities* and *obligations*. At each level, Shier (2001: 110)

explains, an *opening* occurs when a worker makes a personal commitment to work in a certain way. An *opportunity* stage occurs when the needs, such as resources, skills and knowledge, are met, which enable the workers to improve and develop their work. The last stage, *obligation*, is established when an agreed working policy becomes a part of the whole system. For example, at the first level of this model, "Children are listened to", the first stage *Openings* occurs as soon as the early childhood education professionals (or other adults) make a personal commitment to work in a certain way (are ready to listen to children). The *Opportunity* stage occurs when, for example, the early childhood education professionals' needs are met so that they can operate in such a way. Needs, in this context, may refer to resources, such as staff to cover one another (so that a worker can listen to an individual child), suitable physical settings (a quiet place to interact with a child) or adequate education (training in listening skills). The *Obligations* stage occurs when the organisation states, for example, in their policy, that listening to children is part of their policy or an obligation of all the employees or early childhood education professionals to listen carefully to what the children have to say (Shier 2001).

2.4.7 Summary

Shier (2006) suggests that the questions spread across the five levels (in Figure 1) can be used by adults working with children to assess not only where they stand, but also where they want to get to. The ladder concept has been criticised as it may imply that the higher levels are better. In reality it is unlikely that workers working with children are placed at certain single points on the matrix neatly, or that one must always aim at the top of the ladder. Rather, different positions are appropriate in different circumstances and that children should not be pressed to participate in ways or levels that they do not want or that is not suitable for their level of development or understanding. (Shier 2006: 16-18.)

Shier's (2001) model views participation through the interaction between adults and children (Venninen et al. 2010: 9) and was used in the previous larger scale study in the Metropolitan area kindergartens (Venninen et al. 2010). It was a natural continuation to use it in our research as well.

3 THE RESEARCH SETTING

The concept of participation in theory, according to latest research (Stenvall and Seppälä 2008; Venninen et al. 2010) is familiar to early childhood education professionals, but whether or not professionals fully understand and acknowledge what is expected of them in order to work according to the requirements of the Convention is another thing. By linking the concept of participation to the every day kindergarten functions, such as the transitions events, we are enabling the professionals working with children to reflect on their own interaction. A modification of Shier's (2001) *Pathways to Participation* model was made to analyse participation during transition events.

The material gained from this Bachelor's Thesis can act as a tool for professional reflection and help the early childhood education professionals in understanding what is expected of them in order to support the development of young children's participation. This Bachelor's Thesis may provide useful information that could be used for professional reflection and development of our working-life partner.

3.1 The research question

This Bachelor's Thesis describes participation during transition events and provides access to new information regarding transition events and participation of children under the age of three. Our Bachelor's Thesis answers the following question: ***how and to what extent do children participate during transition events?***

The extent that children participate refers to the forms and levels of participation.

3.2 The method

In order to obtain as reliable data as possible we gave thorough and detailed consideration to a variety of ways to proceed with our Bachelor's Thesis. The methodological path chosen for this study was *a qualitative research* (Davies 2007: 9-11). This is also sometimes referred to as *a flexible design* (Robson 2002: 84-87).

Qualitative research was chosen after the working-life partner had been confirmed and the project discussed at length. Qualitative research is good for describing reality (Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 2009: 161), for it can be used to give a holistic picture of it. Reality holds many kinds of interconnected events and relations that affect each other, and they need to be carefully mapped, as the information concerning them is truly valid when presented in full detail in its context. This descriptive aspect of reality made a significant impact in choosing qualitative research as the research methodology for this project.

The qualitative research strategy used in this project was *a case study* (Robson 2002: 177-179). Case study was the chosen approach based on the fact that the project in question is focused on a single group situated in a single kindergarten. This way the two most important factors to the actual context of the case were mentioned, the group and the context. The group to be studied is the main focus in any case study, but an equally important factor in the context for the group, is the setting they are studied in. In this case study the context was a kindergarten setting and took place during certain time-events.

The data collection method used was observation and documentation through the medium of video cameras, used during the times that the desired events took place. This was done in the natural setting of the group, in the working-life partner kindergarten that the children attended. Although observation as such can be a challenging way to collect data, according to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011: 81) it is a good way to gather data when there has been little study done on a particular topic and therefore the knowledge of it is limited.

The target group of our Bachelor's Thesis was a group of children under the age of three at the working-life partner kindergarten. During the process of data gathering the kindergarten group had twenty children, all under the age of three, and five carers; one kindergarten teacher, three nursery nurses and one assistant.

The data about participation were gathered by videotaping. The videotaped situation was a transition event, starting from the lunch to the washroom and continuing to the sleeping premises. The transition events took place on four different premises:

washroom, hallway, lunchroom and sleeping premises. The flow of transition took place as follows: transition to the lunchroom, transition from the lunchroom to the washroom through the hallway, transition from the washroom through the hallway and lunchroom to the sleeping premises.

Videotaping is observation through the medium of a camera and is governed by the same principles as observation as a research method in general. The advantage of observation is seeing directly what is happening, as research have found discrepancies between what people say they do and what they do in reality (Robson 2002: 310). This is especially useful in the context of this research, as surveys and questionnaires of the topic in question have been already done by Venninen et al. (2010) and now the results gathered can be compared to the actual situations captured by the camera. The type of observation done is 'unobstructive observation' as the observer does not seek to become part of the group, which would be a part of the 'participant observation' and lacks the heavyset structures of the 'structured observation' (Robson 2002: 310).

There are several reasons for using videotaping as the method of data collection instead of observing at the scene in person. One of the reasons for not filming the transition event in person is to minimize the "observer effects", for example, making the children react to the observer instead of the caregiver or to other events that are happening around them (Robson 2002: 327-328). This may lead to the observed behaving differently than in natural circumstances, thus possibly compromising the results and the whole research. It is possible that the camera on the tripod could have a similar effect as an observer to an extent, but the impact may be less than that of an actual person. Videotaping has also the advantage that the material can be watched several times. The focus can therefore be placed on separate study angles each time, instead of having the limitations of the field observer. While observing at the scene, the observer may miss an important part of an event or may focus their attention on unimportant matter. Videotaping as a method offers the possibility of re-watching an event or scene numerous times in order to relive a moment.

Because the camera set on a tripod has only a fixed point of view, it sets certain limitations to using it (Loizos 2000: 104). This can be altered by using several video-cameras and angles. In addition to the set angle and view that the video-camera has,

as it also has a microphone, it is possible to hear things that are outside the video-cameras field of vision, thus extending what the video-camera can cover. It has also been pointed out by Silverman (2000) that every single aspect of the interaction should not be attempted to be reconstructed as this could easily render the task unmanageable. Different angles were used in order to increase its validity and reliability.

Two video-cameras on tripods were used in order to make sure that as much of the transition event as possible would be filmed as it took place in several rooms. These rooms where the transition event in question took place were the washroom, the lunchroom, the sleeping premises and the hallway between the lunchroom and the washroom. Tripods were also used because there was not enough space for an extra person with the camera in the room. This is especially true during a hectic transition event that is tied to a timetable and has its set goals that need to be reached during its timespan. Also, this way the situation was felt to be more authentic meaning that only the familiar carers were present. To ensure that minimal interference was made, the process of placing, using and retrieving the used equipment was made to be as unobtrusive as possible to the staff of the kindergarten and the children, so that this would not have an impact on the results. Observing the actual situation itself and interpreting what is observed instead of relying on the observations done by others is an advantage (Davies 2007).

The plan was to videotape the transition events until we reached the saturation point, meaning that enough data had been collected and observed, and that gathering more data would not bring any new information (Davies 2007: 149). Data saturation is also sometimes referred to as a point of saturation. The rooms for the transition event were observed beforehand and a plan was made for which camera angles would be used during the first week of videotaping. The tapes were watched after each day, to make sure the data were sufficient and to recognise any challenges or limitations of the chosen angles for the day. The plan for the following days was reviewed in the light of the material already recorded, in order to ensure that all parts of the event had been covered. This also provided us with a possibility to reuse the angles that gave productive and beneficial data.

The aim was to obtain the best possible overall coverage of different parts of the transition event during the research week, so that a coherent picture of it would be formed. We also wanted to ensure that the gathered material was as authentic as possible and to accurately portray the normal reality of the daycare. Once the data were gathered, the material was then observed, coded and analysed.

3.3 Data analysis

The thematic analysis was the analysis method chosen for this Bachelor's Thesis. The process of the thematic analysis involves the identification of themes from the data (Patton 2002: 452-453). The analysis was deductive, also known as theory driven, which refers to the data being analysed according to an existing framework (Patton 2002: 453). In the case of our Bachelor's Thesis the existing framework was the Shier's (2001) *Pathways to Participation* model and the levels of participation it introduces. The coding for the analysis in this study was based upon this model, and a set structure for the analysis was made based upon these. This structure had been formed before the data collection started.

The set structure was done to have a ready criterion for what was to be observed once the data had been collected and to ensure that the results would be definable and clear. The structure consisted of themes that the observed data was classified by and divided into. A clear structure was required in order to gain knowledge of data saturation.

A clear structure for the research was also essential for a research project as a way to keep it focused on its aims and goals. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011: 92) during the research process it is possible that interesting topics and information may arise from the data, that could be worthy of further study or of interest for the person conducting the research, but are not related to the original research. Such a topic, Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2011) continue, needs to be put aside as one research cannot cover all matters, but should be focused on covering its main topic as completely and extensively as possible.

The material was observed, as it would have been observed in the kindergarten, but

the video format allowed it to be re-examined instead of going with what had been spotted in the moment. All the material was observed by all three members and the results were analyzed in the same way. Note taking was a part of the data analysis. Notes were cross-referenced to check for consistency and increased validity of the observations made.

The data analysis process started with the tapes being watched by all three observers at the same time. Each observer separately made notes of events significant to the thesis, marking down the starting time of each event. Once all the tapes were watched, the same process was done the second time. This was done to ensure that all the significant events in the data would be noticed, and the second time was used so that there would be an opportunity to see something that could have been missed the first time. After the tapes were watched twice, the notes were shared among the observers and the tapes were watched again, but only the events that were marked in the notes. Each event was watched separately, and several times if needed. Once the event was clear, it was discussed among the observers and put into its appropriate category. Once the event was categorised, a full description of it was written down. Once the event was fully reviewed, the same process was repeated on the following event, until all the events noted were covered.

Rose (2000: 246) associates the analysis of audiovisual material with translation and the translation is filled with choices. This is shown in what is chosen to be significant enough to be presented and covered in detail, but also to what is left out. A vital part is also the reasoning behind these choices and making clear the process that was used to make the choices and what presumptions are underneath.

3.4 The model

Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation offers a model to help early childhood education professionals in exploring the different aspects of the participation process (Shier 2001: 109-110). It also worked as a framework for our Bachelor's Thesis in exploring these aspects. We focused on the five levels of participation introduced by Shier (2001).

A pre-set structure for data analysis was created in order to categorise the material. This structure was based on Shier's model of participation (2001: 108-110) and used his five levels of participation as the main themes. Of the stages of commitment only the first one, openings, was used. Use of only the openings was due to the fact that the main focus was to see the basic level of participation in the form of openings provided by the carers. The further stages of commitment were left out, as they would be more about the internal workings of the worker and the kindergarten standards, which could not be verified in the observation with the camera.

The structure used in the analysis was at first divided into five themes, being the five levels of participation by Shier (2001: 108-110) and these formed the basic themes for the data categorization. Each event of participation that was observed on the videotape was put into its appropriate theme and a description of it written down. This sixth theme, depicting non-participation, rose from the data. While it did not reach any of the levels of participation by Shier, it became clear that a separate theme was needed. This sixth theme contained data when a carer failed to recognise a child-initiated action.

4 THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the theory-driven thematic analysis, the data was divided into six themes; five depicting the levels of participation by Shier (2001) and the sixth theme non-participation. While the research data showed the participation levels in practice and the openings taking place, it also showed where the carer failed to provide such openings.

4.1 Children are listened to

At the participatory level one (Shier 2001), children's initiatives are listened to by adults. This level only requires that children express themselves and the responsible adult listens. When a carer works in a way that they are ready to listen to children, they have provided an opening. Listening is the starting point of child participation. It

means that children can express their views and opinions, and also that they gain the attention of an adult (Venninen et al. 2010: 11). Our data provided many examples of level one, such as basic interaction where children's participatory initiatives are recognised by carers.

A child cries out; a carer asks what the matter is. It calms the child.

Another child cries out; a carer notices it and gives a dummy to the child.

A child says "Thank you"; a carer nods in confirmation.

A child seems to be tired and starts crying; a carer takes the child into her arms and takes the child to the sleeping premises.

These include when children ask or say something, look or reach out to the carer, cry out or bring something to the carer that demands a response. These situations took place while children were still seated after lunch or waiting in front of the washroom to be changed and afterwards led to the sleeping premises. These occurred frequently throughout the transition events and the children reached the attention of the kindergarten personnel.

Based on the situations, a variety of responses from the carers occurred, such as asking what the matter was, giving out the pacifier to a crying child, picking up a child that needed attention and acknowledging a child. The common response of the carers was that they stopped what they were doing, and concentrated their focus on what the child wanted to express. These results support the studies of communication in early education. Wiemann and Giles (1996: 318) claim that both verbal (language) and non-verbal content (including body movements, voice quality and intonation) are relevant for establishing communication. Argyle and Dean (as cited in Wiemann and Giles, 1996: 319) recognize that by standing very close, smiling and creating an eye contact, participants in communication send an affiliative message and positive feedback. Professionals in early education, Kiesiläinen (1996: 268) argues, need to be very aware of the interactive approach in their own work. The most important and probably the most difficult issue is to preserve the good will and caring while at the same time present to others that they are there to listen and take care. Our research data gave

examples of the positive responsive approach of the carers towards children's initiatives; where carers acknowledge the child and the child becomes understood.

Early childhood education professionals' experience has been that kindergarten weeks are stressful and busy and because of the large groups and lack of personnel not every child can be taken into consideration as an individual (Stenvall and Seppälä 2008: 23). Stenvall and Seppälä (2008: 25) go on to say that to listen to a child requires full attendance from the adult, while the professional skills of a carer guarantee the know-how and means to notice, respect and hear a child.

A child is finishing her meal and says "Thank you" – the carer responds and asks the child to eat her cucumber. After a while, the child says "Thank you" again, the carer looks at her but does not say anything. Girl says "Thank you" again – no response. After a while, the girl says "Thank you" again – the carer responds and says that she can have some apple for dessert. The girl eats her apple and says "I've eaten" - the carer turns to her and nods. "I would like to have a pastille" – no response. "I've eaten" – no response. "I would like to have a pastille" – no response. "Thank you" – no response. After this the girl raises her voice and says "Thank you" – carer responds. The girl starts to get off her chair. Carer turns to the child and says "...An adult has to help you get off the chair.. Good girl for saying thank you".

Due to the child's persistency, in this example, the initiative was noticed and she gained the attention of the carer. Reunamo (2007) suggests that it is the task of the educator to recognise messages from children regarding their needs or motives. Sensitivity to recognise small children's initiatives to participate plays a huge role during transition events. During such hectic events there are more children than there are carers, and the challenge remains in how each child can be taken into consideration individually and personally.

One of the reasons, according to recent surveys, that child participation has not yet fully been materialised is the lack of resources, such as lack of staff and/or time (Venninen et al. 2010). There are several children per adult and to listen to each child individually presents a real challenge to the carers. Our results showed, in general, that such listening occurred and carers were able to pay individual attention to children, stop what they were doing and concentrate on what the children had to say.

4.2 Children are supported in expressing their views

At the participatory level two children are supported in expressing their views. This level requires that adults support children in expressing their views. When a carer works in a way that they are ready to support children in expressing their views, they have provided an opening. Adults should actively aim to reduce or remove any obstacles that prevent children from expressing their views.

During lunch a carer is sitting at the same table as a child, who does not yet speak meaningful words. The child is looking at the carer and making sounds and different facial expressions. The carer responds and asks questions from the child. The child responds and mirrors the carer. They are 'talking' about a spoon that dropped.

Here the carer is actively supporting the interaction with the child by responding to the child's communication pursuits; she uses non-verbal means, adjusts her tone and posture and makes further questions to help the child in expressing their view. There is a mutual understanding. The example supports the theory of Emilson and Folkesson (2006: 223), who underline the relational conduct in early education, explaining that there is mutuality in kindergarten communication. However, the adult is the one to tune in to children's initiatives, confirm them by using positive emotional expression and come close to the perspective of the child by co-experiencing feelings and signals. This emotional dialogue, Emilson and Folkesson conclude (2006: 223), is prevalent with children who do not yet speak and is an important aspect of communication and interaction.

Recent research (Durkin 1996: 49) show that infants and toddlers explore and initiate as well as respond to people and things around them. Tolonen (2002: 163) emphasises that supporting these basic interactions is essential in early education. Carers need to interpret children's non-verbal messages and respond to them intentionally. The mentioned example proves that the carer has responded to the child's non-verbal initiative and supported the interaction meaningfully thus creating participation.

During an adult-led activity to pass the time a carer is reading a picture book out loud to the children and showing the pictures, asking the children to express what the pictures may contain. She walks around the lunchroom so everybody can see the book and she is

showing the pictures closer to the children. She is committed to supporting the children in expressing what they think the pictures contain (the pictures are about animals) and what sounds they make.

Here the children are helped to express their opinions and are enabled to share their knowledge of the animals. Every child is supported in expressing their view on the matter, the carer takes time in walking around the room, attempts to have eye contact with each individual child, and aims to create an atmosphere where each and every child feels that their opinion is valuable and much sought after. The carer in this case, opens the boundaries for how to communicate and directs the situation carefully, by supporting and responding to the initiatives of the children. This activity has a weak-framing, according to Emilson and Folkesson (2006: 233-234), where children learn about talking and being listened to, but also that they are supported in their development of social and linguistic skills.

The most common response of level two included the carers' acknowledgement and support by speaking to the child at their level and pace, echoing the message – reaffirming what the child had uttered and making further questions to help the child in expressing their views better. According to Leinonen (2010: 6-7) children's participation can be supported in kindergartens by other means than just supporting the expression of spoken opinions. By paying attention to children's body language and actively listening the carers are able to hear the unspoken language of small children.

Level two examples occurred less frequently than level one, but on a regular basis, throughout the transition events.

4.3 Children's views are taken into account

At the participatory level three children's views are taken into account. This, according to Venninen et al. (2010: 58), is, for example, when adults use information gathered from children in planning activities. When a carer works in a way that they are ready to take children's views into account, they have provided an opening.

A boy is sitting at the table showing a book. The carer notices it and asks if he would like

the book to be read. The carer approaches the child and starts reading the book. The boy actively participates in reading, by showing pictures and by making sounds about them.

This is an example of child-initiated activity, which falls into the level three, when children's views are taken into account. The carer was sensitive towards the child's initiative and approached the child in order to clarify whether the child wanted the carer to read the book to him. At this precise moment, the carer noticed that the boy, although not saying anything in "adult" language, was making gestures, waving the book in the air, and trying to get the eye contact of the carer. The carer was able to read into these signs, and so was able to take the child's view into account. The smaller the child is the more they express themselves non-verbally. Even a small infant is already very capable of having an effective, even interactive, communication without having words or knowledge of grammar (Reunamo 2007: 92).

This was the only example of level three. The reason for this could be due to the hectic nature of transition events. Implementing children's views can be more time-consuming and we can assume that the time limitations of transition events may prohibit this.

The reason why this example was categorised as level three, and not four, was that the child was not actively involved in the decision-making. Levels four and five refer to the process of decision-making where children learn to make choices take responsibilities and exchange ideas. In this case the carer took the child's view into account, but the activity did not develop to level four or five.

4.4 Children are involved in decision-making processes

At the participatory level four children are involved in decision-making processes. Shier (2001: 113) explains that this level is already a vast step towards active participation in decision-making. When a carer works in a way that they let the children join in their decision-making processes, they have provided an opening. Level four develops children's participation by offering the possibility to plan and execute activities, take responsibilities and understand and experience the results/consequences.

The carer starts a game where children have to identify the animal she is playing by her way of movement and the sounds she makes. Some of the children develop the game to the next level by interacting with the animal (touching) and the carer supports this and sees it as a good way to include them in the decision-making. She allows them to approach the animal and pat it.

The game gained a new dimension; now the animals could also be identified through additional means, not only by aural and visual perceptions, but by sensory too. Based on Emilson and Folkesson's study (2006: 234), the carer here supported the children in their attempts to express themselves together with her by means of verbal and body language. The carer also acknowledged the children as equals, went along with the idea and involved them in the developing the game further. The interest of the carer to understand the child's perspective is crucial for participation (Emilson and Folkesson 2006: 235).

This was the only example of level four where we observed that children were actually included in the decision-making process. Again, the reason for this could be the nature of transition events, which may not support children in decision-making, and also because such involvement in the process cannot necessarily be observed in such a short timeframe.

4.5 Children share power and responsibility for decision-making

At the participatory level five, children share power and responsibilities for decision-making. When a carer works in a way that they are ready to share some of their adult power with children, they have provided an opening. At this stage sharing power and responsibility for decisions takes place. At levels four and five children work as equals with adults and these levels differ from the earlier ones as children are actively participating in the decision-making process and they do so by contributing their views (Shier 2001: 113). Sharing power at level five also includes sharing responsibility for decisions and possibly facing adverse consequences (Shier 2001: 115). Shier and Venninen et al. (2010) agree that participation is a long-term process and is not about the making of a specific one-off decision.

No example of level five was observed in this Bachelor's Thesis. As this level refers to the shared power and responsibilities in decision-making, it cannot fully take place during transition events. In the observed situations the carers always had the final say. After all, transition events are very much adult led activities, hindering the actualisation of level five in full. For example, if a child does not want to go to the toilet or put a nappy on, it means they may wet their pants. But then they would have to take the responsibility of such an act, meaning change the underwear. However, since they are not able to do that, it is the carers who need to face the consequences. Also, certain functions must take place in order to meet the basic needs of the children. These include sufficient nourishment, hygiene and daily rest and it is the responsibility of the carers to provide these. This is not necessarily something that such small children can take responsibility of. We argue that this level is also part of a wider context, so it cannot be observed in the span of this Bachelor's Thesis.

4.6 Non-participation

While observing and analysing the material, we encountered situations where no participatory initiatives were recognized. Some of them also started as a certain level of participation, but developed to non-participation once the carers failed to provide an opening. Also, some examples depict that the level one of participation, that children are listened to, was not met. Some possible initiatives were disregarded, and on some occasions the carer would try to distract the children's attention and make them more concentrated on the carer, instead of allowing them to express their views. The reason why we added another theme, the non-participation, is because we wanted to raise awareness of such events. These are everyday occurrences that may remain unnoticed.

An example of an occasion is an episode, which took place after the washroom, when children were getting ready to go to the sleeping premises:

A child picks up a book from a box and walks over to the carer in the washroom, who does not respond. The child then proceeds to another carer in the lunchroom, stops and holds the book in front of the carer. The carer is occupied with her chores and does not notice the child's initiative. Another carer comes along and takes the book away.

Shier (2001) reminds us that taking children's views into account in decision-making does not mean that adults do everything that children ask for, but it refers to children having the right to have their say and that adults listen. It is important that children are given feedback once they have expressed their views and are explained why, for example, different decisions were made (Shier 2001: 13). Adults are, after all, responsible for the decisions, but children should not be ignored. In the previously mentioned example it could be that the carers did not fully understand what the child was after and therefore did not take the child's view into account. Transition events are, especially when it is time to move to the sleeping premises, scheduled so that there is no extra time available to take individual children's views. To bring about participation, there must be something to be participant in. The carer in the mentioned case takes a dissociated attitude, which can convey a message to the child that his initiative is not a good idea or that his non-verbal gesture is not understood. If carers do not focus on the child's perspective, Emilson and Folkesson conclude (2006: 230), it is most unlikely that the child can experience strong participation.

While a carer is reading a book to a child, at the same time at another table, another child is turning towards the carer. The child is talking, singing, banging the wall, yawning and trying to catch the attention of the carer reading the book. His initiatives remain unnoticed. Later on another carer notices the child being alone and relocates him to another table with other children.

The above-mentioned example depicts the carer's response, which is classified as non-participation. It could be assumed that the carer, having read the book to the first child, was giving a response that she thought was enough for her share of participation. The study of Emilson and Folkesson (2006: 232; 236) underlines the importance of teacher's responsiveness for participation. They participate by being emotionally present and by taking notice and tuning in to children's initiatives. Also, supporting participation requires a certain amount of sensitivity from the carers to the situations that take place in kindergartens. After all, children do not necessarily express themselves the way that adults would and therefore adults should pay attention to the other means of communication small children have. A small child may speak with a quieter voice than a carer, and therefore their participation pursuits may stay unnoticed to the adults. The cited example proves that carers should be sensitive and equally aware of all participatory initiatives.

There should be an open communication between the carers in order to preserve consistency in their work. The following example shows how participation can be undermined by the lack of communication.

A carer is ready to listen to children's ideas and includes their wishes in developing the game they are playing together. Children are allowed to approach the carer pretending to be a certain animal and pat it. This creates a feeling of genuine participation to children. But then another carer enters the room without any knowledge of the previous developments. She tells the children off for not sitting in their seats and orders them to go back. The carer playing with the children, who agreed to the change of game earlier, takes no notice.

This lack of consistency creates a sense of insecurity and the children do not know what is allowed and what is not.

A child enters the dining room where children were playing and sits down on a bench reserved for the children eating in another room. She hopes to be able to participate in the game. The carer tells her to go and sit in her own seat.

The girl sat on the bench as she was interested in the game but by sitting in her own seat, this girl was unable to participate anymore. These examples show that the strong framing teachers make restricts children's participation, and that a weak classification and framing can promote children's possibility to participate on their own terms. Teachers who provided an opening, in other words, who were able to listen to children's suggestions and allowed them to develop the activities, were responsive to children's participation. Emilsson and Folkesson (2004) claim that an important issue for children's participation is a participant teacher who is creating meaningful contexts, where teacher control is about being emotionally present, supportive and responsive.

4.7 Summary

The research data and analysis have proved that participation does exist in transition events at the kindergarten partner in four different levels. The data also gives examples of non-participation. During hectic occasions, when a number of concurrent activities take place, it is an immense challenge to be able to fully listen to and concentrate on each child individually. Communication between the workers is

imperative in order to maintain the consistency of work in early education.

The data show that under three-year-olds have means to initiate participation and that even though some have been very obscure, they have been noticed and responded to by the kindergarten staff, which created participation. Our data support the findings of Venninen et al. (2010) that child participation exists in Metropolitan area kindergartens. Unfortunately, our data also support their findings in that small children may not be able to participate as much as they could. It seems that adults are not always aware of small children's pursuits of participation. This may be due to lack of awareness, lack of possibilities to identify participation due to a hectic daily schedule, lack of kindergarten staff, or the environment. A single cause for this cannot be identified.

In the study by Venninen et al. (2010) kindergarten teams were asked to identify the factors prohibiting children's participation. One such factor was the daily schedule (the daily rhythm). According to the participants of the study it (the daily rhythm) is defined by the adults and therefore prevents children's participation (Venninen et al. 2010: 26). Being busy seemed to also be a factor prohibiting children's participation (Venninen et al. 2010: 33). This is something that we also concluded, although it also seems that in some occasions a factor which prohibited children's participation was the lack of communication between early childhood education professionals.

Venninen et al. (2010) also state that by paying attention to the basic care events, which take place daily, children's participation can be supported. This is something that we want to also highlight. Although kindergartens have hectic time schedules, by slowing down during these basic care events, adults could become more sensitive to the young children's subtle participation or interaction pursuits. The results, although showed many occasions where adults stopped and listened to children, showed also occasions in which this was not the case. One does not need to be an expert of small children's nonverbal communication in order to understand what a small child, who tries to catch the attention of several adults by bringing them a book before the daily rest, is trying to indicate. Whether or not reading a book to that particular child at that particular time is possible, does not mean that the small child's pursuits should be ignored. As Shier (2001) states, adults do not have to implement whatever children ask

for, but to take the child's view into account and show the child that his/her views have been acknowledged is important. This builds up their self-esteem and shows them that their views are important, although may not be an executable idea at the time. By ignoring a child an adult is simply showing that the child's view is not important to the adult, hence why it is being ignored.

5 EVALUATION

We must take into consideration the possible effects that the use of videotaping had on the observed. Individuals may behave differently when they are aware of being observed and may act differently in natural circumstances, where they do not think that they are being observed. Therefore covert observations may capture more truthfully what is really happening than overt observations where individuals are aware of being studied (Patton 2002: 269). This was definitely the case with using videotaping as a method for data gathering. The video cameras were placed in visible places and it could be argued that as the care personnel knew that they were being observed through such videotapes it affected their behaviour.

While analysing the data we encountered several occasions where the personnel talked openly about the video cameras during the videotaping. This occurred a few times (in the beginning and in the end of the sessions), so it could be argued that they did not get used to the presence of the video cameras fully. Obviously, during hectic events, which demand a lot of attention from the personnel, they did not have time to focus on the videotaping, but seemed to act naturally. We perceived their behavior as genuine and useful for our study purposes. Also, some children noticed a new object on the premises, but their behavior was not influenced by it.

An important aspect for the reliability of a research whether it can be replicated and whether the same or similar results could be obtained (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2011: 137). In this study all the different phases and steps of the thesis were recorded, so that the process could be followed afterwards, enabling the possibility of doing similar research in the future. An open dialogue was established with the working-life partner

at the very beginning of the co-operation and was continued throughout the whole Bachelor's Thesis process. This was maintained by holding meetings and keeping contact between the meetings via electronic mails and telephone calls. This was done in order to ensure that the working-life partner was informed about the stage of our Bachelor's Thesis, but without influencing the results and analysis.

The "informed consent" (Israel and Hay 2006: 60-61) was acquired from the parents of the children that took part in the videotaping of the project (see appendices 1 and 2). This was done in order to respect the individual rights for autonomy and privacy. The informed consent was also acquired from the parents of another group of children who were located nearby, where the videotaping took place, as they might have been seen on the tapes. This did not end up happening, but the precaution for it was taken.

In this Bachelor's Thesis ethical matters were considered and taken into account to maintain the *research integrity* (Israel and Hay 2006: 5-6). Research integrity means upholding to the principles of ethical research even when there is nobody observing the person doing the research and sometimes there might be temptations to have the research conform to what the person conducting it would wish it to be. Concerning this thesis, the following matters have arisen during the process of the project and have been looked into so far.

The collected material, videotapes and notes, were only seen by those working on the Bachelor's Thesis and in the case of the video material, also by the staff of the kindergarten. All the workers and children were kept anonymous in all the stages of the study and in reporting of it. The collected data (the original tapes and dvd-copies) were kept throughout the process in a secure location.

As for the reliability of the study, several points were taken into consideration. Emphasis was on making sure that none of the people doing the project would be there when the actual filming was done, as not to disrupt and influence the situation. The time frame of one week of intensive videotaping was chosen for the children to get accustomed to the camera and act naturally despite their presence. It was also an aim that the caretakers would also become accustomed to the cameras and that they would also act naturally during the taping. One key factor adding to the projects

reliability is the fact that it is well connected to earlier research on the topic, in this case being that of Venninen et al. (2010).

Munter and Siren-Tiusanen (1999) bring up the fact that it can be difficult to recognise the impact that observer has and the attitudes and values they bring with them. This was taken care of by the fact that the project had three members who were able to observe the work of the others and therefore minimise the risk of the before mentioned problem. The structure made for the observation was there to ensure that the criteria for the observation is accurate, thus making the results also more accurate and well defined. This also ensured the possibility of modification of the structure if shown to be inadequate or flawed for its intended purpose. According to the premade plan we aimed to videotape transition events in the course of two weeks. The saturation point was reached after five consecutive days of filming.

We took the timetable into consideration and understood how much could be done in the scope of a project of this magnitude. The actual analysis of the data was done in a closed setting, and we ensured that only the ones working on this project had access to the gathered material at any time during the research. All the research material was disposed of upon completion of the Bachelor's Thesis project in order to protect the privacy and ensure confidentiality of the children and the working-life partner kindergarten staff. But, as the research data was gathered from a single kindergarten, the results cannot be generalised.

At the time of finalising this Bachelor's Thesis the results had not yet been presented to the working-life partner. A date has been agreed for the presentation of the findings, which will also allow for feedback to be given.

6 DISCUSSION

The care of children under the age of three years old can differentiate from the care of older children. The development of early childhood education pedagogy has mainly focused on the three to six year olds and under the age of three year olds has been

often seen as just recipients of basic care. This does not do justice to the being of children, as they are active social actors and learners even from early on. (Karila 2002: 273.) When working with children under the age of three, educational and pedagogical situations are born often "there and then". This is why adults need to be sensitive towards the situations that arise which will enable growth and learning. (Karila 2002: 285.)

Special attention should be paid to understanding each individual child to ensure that the participation pursuits of each unique child are identified and supported at their age specific level. The working life partner was immensely keen on developing participation during transition events. Becoming aware of one's own professional skills is a path for improvement. Professional development means also obtaining new ones and broadening awareness. There are new challenges early education professionals encounter on a daily basis, which requires constant professional reflection and improvement.

The data highlighted issues that belonged to everyday life of kindergartens, not necessarily linked to participation, but equally important in early education. An interesting aspect was noticed while observing the material concerning the cultural competence of the staff.

While playing a game where children should guess which animal the carer is, judging by the sound they make, a carer asks a child with a multicultural background which animal says "röh-röh". In Finnish it is related to a pig, but the sounds that animals make can differ among cultures. For example, in English it is pronounced as "oink-oink". The child does not recognize the animal based on this pronunciation, but the child recognises a cat based on "meow-meow".

This example shows that kindergarten staff should also be culturally sensitive and able to include children from other cultures into their work as equally. This could be an area for further research.

Another area for further research could be the physical setting of kindergartens. Physical setting refers to the way the furniture and other educational equipment are placed on the premises. We encountered that the physical environment of

kindergartens may hinder participation. Positioning the books so they are available for children to reach creates an impression that somebody is going to read the books. We assume, that the books were there to provide the children with something to do while waiting for their turn. The carers and the children may have different views on the use of the placed books, and this is something the carers should pay attention to. New research could concentrate on possible solutions that kindergartens have created in order to overcome the imposed hindrances by their physical setting. Spreading this information could be useful, especially when establishing new kindergartens.

Transition events are full of action and movement and we would like to raise a question that could some of the activities be planned in a new way perhaps? For example, kindergarten carers eat their lunch usually during the same time the children are having their lunch. By eating at the same time are they able to pay attention to the individual children? Would it be possible for them to organise their daily routines in a such a manner, that the carers had their lunch during the afternoon sleep and relaxation time? Can the carers concentrate on their own lunch, or do they feel that they need to eat as quickly as possible in order to be efficient? How does this affect their workwellbeing? There is always room for improvement and by questioning previous working methods one is able to constantly assess one's work and profesionally develop oneself.

Another research topic could study the types of children's participatory initiatives. The mapping could be based on the age of the child, and also include other matters such as what types of initiatives are responded to, which remain unnoticed and the possible reasons for both. The results of this kind of research may be used for further professional development, such as workshop, booklet or training, in order to raise awareness of children's participation.

As mentioned before, given that the research data were gathered from a single kindergarten, the results cannot be generalised. But because other care units may be facing similar challenges, this Bachelor's Thesis can provide a tool for professional reflection and development. This thesis raises awareness to participation that otherwise may remain unnoticed. It would be interesting to carry out similar research in different settings, for example during other planned activities or even free play

events. Doing similar research in a longer timespan would also be beneficial to see whether levels four and five, which may need more time to be implemented, would take place.

Children's participation is a very current research topic and an important one. Unfortunately it is not a topic, which has yet transitioned into the early childhood educations everyday terminology (Venninen et al. 2010: 62). We would like to stress that participation is a human right and should be therefore emphasised more in early childhood education. Early childhood education professionals could reflect on their own behaviour, by asking themselves how they relate to children? If a child approaches a carer, who is busy doing their chores, how would a carer respond? Would they respond in a similar manner as they would if a colleague approached them? Or differently because it is a child who is approaching them? Would a carer ask a colleague to sit down and wait until they have finished a chore, as they would, assumingly, ask a child? How can children participate if adults do not give room and power for them to do so?

In order for true participation to exist, adults need to face children as subjects and individuals with own thoughts, experiences, feelings and views. By participating children learn to take responsibilities. In the words of Thomas and Percy-Smith (2010: 3):

"...if children are to achieve real benefits in their own lives and their communities, and create a better future, they can only do this by being active citizens, articulating their own values, perspectives, experiences and visions for the future, using these to inform and take action in their own right and, where necessary, contesting with those who have power over their lives".

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Consent form in English

Hello!

We are students from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and have agreed to carry out our final project in cooperation with XX daycare in spring 2011.

The topic of our final project is recognition of child participation and initiatives during transition events, i.e. lunch – washroom - rest time. Research material will be gathered through videotaping.

Our final project will be shared with the daycare personnel and will also be published in an electric form. The name of the daycare or individual children will not be mentioned by name. The video material will be only seen by us and relevant personnel of the daycare. The only published information will be the domicile of the daycare and children's age group. Research material will be disposed of upon completing the final project. Participation is voluntary.

The method of videotaping has already been used in this daycare.

Please do not hesitate to contact us or the daycare by e-mail or telephone.

Please fill in the attached form and return it to the daycare by the latest 28.2.2011.

Yours sincerely

xx, yy,zz

xxx

yyy

xxx@metropolia.fi

yyy@metropolia.fi

My child _____ (name)

Can be videotaped

Cannot be videotaped

Place and date _____

Guardian's signature and name clarification

Signature

Signature

Name clarification

Name clarification

Huoltajan suostumus

Hei!

Olemme Metropolia ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelijoita ja olemme päiväkodinjohtajan kanssa sopineet toteuttavamme sosionomin (amk) opinnäytetyömmme päiväkodissa kevään 2011 aikana. Opinnäytetyön aiheena on lasten osallisuus ja aloitteiden tunnistaminen päiväkodin toiminnassa. Aineiston keruun toteutamme videoimalla lounas - pesuhuone - nukkumaanmeno tilanteen.

Valmiin opinnäytetyön toimitamme päiväkodille ja se tulee myös löytyämään sähköisessä muodossa. Opinnäytetyössä ei tulla mainitsemaan päiväkotia tai ketään lapsista nimeltä. Kerättävä videomateriaali on ainoastaan opinnäytetyön tekijöiden sekä päiväkotihenkilökunnan nähtävissä. Ainoat tiedot, jotka mainitaan, ovat päiväkodin sijaitseminen pääkaupunkiseudulla ja lapsiryhmä ikäjakauma. Tutkimus materiaali hävitetään lopputyön valmistuttua. Tutkimukseen osallistuminen on vapaaehtoista.

Päiväkodissa on aikaisemmin käytetty videointia työnkehittämistarkoituksessa. Vastaamme mielellämme kysymyksiin joko sähköpostilla, puhelimitse tai päiväkodilla. Palauttaisitko ystäväällisesti alla olevan lupakaavakkeen päiväkotiin viimeistään 28.2.2011.

Ystävällisin terveisin

xx, yy, zz

xxx
xxx@metropolia.fi

yyy
yyy@metropolia.fi

Lapseni _____

- saa osallistua videointiin, jossa pyritään keräämään tietoa lapsen osallisuudesta ja aloitteista
siirtymätilanteissa
- ei saa osallistua videointiin

Päivämäärä ja paikka _____

Huoltajien allekirjoitus ja nimenselvennys

Allekirjoitus

Allekirjoitus

Nimenselvennys

Nimenselvennys