

“Tell me and I forget.  
Teach me and I remember.  
Involve me and I learn.”  
~ *B. Franklin*

Department of Teacher Education  
Faculty of Behavioral Science  
University of Helsinki

# **Enhancing children's participation in early childhood education through the participatory pedagogy**

Jonna Kangas

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

to be publicly discussed by due permission of the Faculty of  
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at 12 o'clock.

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## Abstract

Children's participation in early childhood education has raised concern and discussion in the international researches lately. Young children have been considered to have lack of participation experiences in early education settings because of institutional policies, social understanding about childhood and perspectives of educators (Bae, 2009; Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Smith, 2002). Focus of children as active agents of their own development through sociocultural learning paradigm the approach of participatory learning has been considered important in early childhood education and research (Berthelsen, Brownlee & Johansson, 2009). This approach of children's learning views participation as a developing and dynamic cultural phenomenon.

This research is focusing on the educators' perspectives and the conceptions of children's participation in everyday pedagogic practices and is based on a survey conducted in early childhood education in Metropolitan area of Helsinki in 2010. The survey was realized in the VKK-Metro development and research project funded by the Ministry of Social and Health affairs. The participants represented 1114 working teams from 350 kindergartens. The working teams included 3721 educators taking care of 19 907 children.

The analytical framework of research is based on an abductive approach conducted with mixed methods. The findings indicate that children's voice was considered important by educators. Also opportunities to make independent initiatives and choices were considered as a right and an item of learning and of developing of skills of participation. However children's chances to participate in decision making process and pedagogical processes were weak because of challenges of children's participation experienced by educators. These challenges were connected to both institutional issues, such as routines and adult-child-ratios, and professional skills and beliefs about children's competence.

According to findings of this research children's participation is understood to include such aspects as having opportunities to have an influence in their learning and the culture of kindergartens, becoming respected and listened to by educators and having chances to practice responsibility and self-regulation. The role of educators as facilitators of children's participation is found essential and the research builds knowledge of children's participation through framework of participatory pedagogy in early education context. Through this framework the challenges of children's participation could be reflected and a culture of developing participation built in co-operation between educators, children and political and social environment of early childhood education.

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*Keywords:* children's participation, participatory learning, pedagogy, early childhood education



Jonna Kangas  
Lasten osallisuuden mahdollistaminen osallisuuden pedagogisen mallin kautta  
varhaiskasvatuksessa

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## Tiivistelmä

Lasten osallisuus ja sen puutteet varhaiskasvatuksen käytännöissä ovat nousseet tutkimuksen keskeisiksi elementeiksi viime aikoina. Pienten lasten osallisuuden toteutumisesta varhaiskasvatuksen kontekstissa on löydetty puutteita, joita aiheuttavat institutionaaliset rakenteet, yhteiskunnallinen käsitys lapsuudesta sekä kasvattajien käsitykset (Bae, 2009; Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Smith, 2002). Erityisesti sosiokulttuuriseen oppimiskäsitykseen keskittyvissä tutkimuksissa on osoitettu lapset oman kehityksen ja oppimisen säätelijöinä pystyviksi toimijoiksi (Berthelsen, Brownlee & Johansson, 2009). Tähän näkemykseen pohjaa varhaiskasvatuksen kontekstissa käsitys osallisesta oppimisesta. Tässä tutkimuksessa lasten osallisuutta tarkastellaan kehittyvänä ja dynaamisena osana lasten sosiaalista ympäristöä.

Tutkimuksessa keskitytään tarkastelemaan varhaiskasvatuksen työntekijöiden käsityksiä lasten osallisuuden toteutumiseen päivittäisessä pedagogisessa vuorovaikutuksessa lasten kanssa. Tutkimus perustuu laajaan surveyhin, joka toteutettiin pääkaupunkiseudulla 2010. Survey toteutettiin osana Varhaiskasvatuksen kehittämiskeskus VKK-Metron kehittämishanketta, jonka rahoittajana toimi Sosiaali- ja kulttuuriministeriö. Tutkimukseen osallistui 1114 pääkaupunkiseudun päiväkodeissa työskentelevää kasvattajatiimiä 350 päiväkodista. Tiimit koostuivat 3721 kasvattajasta, jotka työskentelivät yhteensä 1907 lapsen kanssa.

Tutkimuksen analyttinen ote on abduktiivinen ja se on toteutettu hyödyntäen laadullisia ja määrällisiä menetelmiä. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että kasvattajat pitivät tärkeinä lasten näkemysten kuulemista. Lisäksi kasvattajat korostivat sekä lasten oikeuksien että lasten kehittyvien vaikuttamisen taitojen vuoksi lasten omien mielipiteiden ilmaisemista sekä lasten mahdollisuutta tehdä aloitteita. Käytännössä lasten mahdollisuudet osallistua päätöksentekoon, oman oppimisensa suunnitteluun ja ohjaamiseen sekä pedagogisiin prosesseihin osoittautuivat pieniksi ja kasvattajat kokivat esteitä lasten osallisuuden tukemisessa. Nämä esteet olivat toisaalta institutionaalisia ja rakenteellisia, mutta toisaalta myös ammatilliseen osaamiseen ja käsityksiin lasten taidoista liittyviä.

Tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella ehdotetaan, että lasten osallisuus varhaiskasvatuksessa tulisi ymmärtää mahdollisuudeksi vaikuttaa omaan oppimiseensa ja vertaisryhmän kulttuuriin päiväkotiryhmässä. Kasvattajien rooli lasten osallisuuden mahdollistajina on tutkimuksen tulosten perusteella keskeinen ja tutkimuksen tavoitteena on rakentaa ymmärrystä lasten osallisuudesta varhaiskasvatuksen käytännöissä pedagogisen tuen kautta. Tulosten avulla on kehitetty ”Osallisuuden pedagogiikan” viitekehys, jonka avulla lasten osallisuuden esteitä voidaan tarkastella sekä osallisuuden mahdollistumista edelleen kehittää varhaiskasvatuksen arjessa kasvattajien, lasten ja institutionaalisen järjestelmän välisessä vuorovaikutuksessa.

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*Asiasanat:* Lasten osallisuus, osallinen oppiminen, pedagogiikka, varhaiskasvatus

## Preface

Four years ago I received the status of a grad student in Department of Teacher Education in the University Helsinki. In my case the journey had already begun almost a year earlier, when I joined the VKK-Metro project during my apprenticeship period, during my master studies. There I met an enthusiastic postdoctoral fellow who wanted to start a research project that could draw attention to Finnish early childhood education system in the field of education research internationally. I accepted the challenge to join the process with her supervised by professor with experience of cross-national research of developmental psychology and inclusion. During these five years I have learned a lot about how to make fluent research (and how not to). I have figured out that the unknown - and ill defined - phenomenon of children's participation was not the best theme for doctoral research and maybe it would have been much easier to conduct research analysis (and write papers) if the data would have been based on standardized questionnaires, observation sheets and such acknowledged theoretical frameworks that make work easier for a young researcher. That kind of equipment, however, would have caused severe limitations to building deep understanding about children's participation and the enhancement methods of it. Therefore I'm happy that we chose the harder way for the process. From the starting point of my project I have had persistent support from my both supervisors. Docent, PhD. Tuulikki Venninen and professor emeritus Mikko Ojala have guided me through any difficulties. They have always negotiated and discussed with me, let me present my own arguments, asked for references and argued back. Above all, they have had faith in our shared research goals and believed in me, even when I haven't or when I have had underrated feedback from fellows of the early childhood education society in Finland. Tuulikki and Mikko, I am deeply grateful for your commitment and unconditional support for my work throughout our years together and the years to come. I also have had essential support from Professor Heikki Ruismäki and Adjunct Professor Inkeri Ruokonen in their seminar group and from visiting Professor Paul Ilsley in his summer school courses during these years. I also like to mention Professor Lasse Lipponen who supervised my work for a short time during the process.

The decision of making article based thesis instead of monograph was made from the start. I want to express my sincere thanks to all of my co-authors. With PhD Annu Brotherus, docent PhD Sara Sintonen, Professor Lasse Lipponen, PhD Reko Niemelä and M.Ed Anna-Leena Lastikka from University of Helsinki, PhD Johanna Heikka from University of Eastern Finland, PhD Tuulikki Ukkonen-Mikkola, PhD Elina Fonsén, M.Ed Janniina Vlasov, PhD Päivi Kupila from University of Tampere, docent PhD Niina Rutanen from University of Jyväskylä and PhD Sonja Rutar from University of Primorska I have had excellent opportunities to reflect my scholarship, and interpret and reproduce phenomenon considering themes of my doctoral research. Though not all of our papers are part of this particular thesis - or even submitted yet - they all have supported my journey to scholarship. You all have. Also the peer reviewers and editors of journals I have submitted my research paper to have offered great help by giving feedback and suggestion that have improved the quality of this research.

Statistical research in human science is a challenging path. There is an existing tradition that all results are treated through their dependency of background information of the participants. In our case this would have meant that the age, gender, working experience or the color of hair would have more to do with the existing participation of children than social and cultural issues in the kindergarten or society. I needed to find ways to measure the existing pedagogy (or even, pedagogies) in the early childhood education without relaying



on easily accessible background information. For this journey I have had help and support from the scholars of statistical research methods docent, PhD Jyrki Reunamo and professor emeritus Erkki Komulainen. They have challenged me to interpret my results and use my creative skills to master the statistical research methods.

From the start of my PhD studies I have also had support from Dean, Professor Patrik Scheinin and Head of Department of Teacher Education, Professor Jari Lavonen. I wish to thank you for interesting discussions, quick responses and involving me in the issues of the Department and the Faculty. From Professor Scheinin I have adopted my guiding principle: “Odysseus would not be famous without his Odyssey”. A more direct route could have been easier, but it would have been boring and indeed would not lead me to such high-quality research.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my pre-examiners Professor Riitta-Liisa Korkeamäki from University of Oulu and Assistant Professor Shannon B. Wanless, from University of Pittsburgh. Your encouraging comments have helped to improve the quality of this work. I want also thank Professor Eeva Hujala from University of Tartu of becoming my opponent.

The Finnish Cultural Foundation and Ebeneser Foundation have granted me funding for the thesis work and thus helped me to idle from my job to focus in this research. For linguistic help I am thankful to Marlene Bromer, who has language revised all our articles. Each time it has been a pleasure to receive your precise revisions. Warm thanks also to MA Joonas Katko and my father Markku Kangas of revision and comments about the language of the summary of my thesis.

My love of knowledge I have learned from my parents, Arja and Markku Kangas, who never doubted my competences and have supported my childhood hobbies with books and science to cultivate my curiosity and encouraged me to build a strength from my stubbornness. I want also thank my friends of the Usual Suspects and especially Anssi, who have not let me forget that life exists also outside of research world. PhDs Maija, Pekka and Jussi have also guided my journey and lead me with an example of becoming a scholar in natural sciences. Because their feedback and interesting discussion about research my thesis benefit best part of both human and natural sciences.

I have took a rather long journey to become a scholar, but still I prefer to identify myself as a teacher. Teaching with children have been essential for my knowledge and understanding of childhood, participation and learning and therefore I want to send my thanks to all the children in the kindergartens of Huvilinna (2006-2009), Keilaniemi (2010-2012) and city of Espoo (2012-2015) who have shared the joy of learning, show me the magic of creativity and interpretation and above all accepted me as part of their joint meaning making.

I devote this doctoral thesis to my daughter Kiira, the best teacher of happiness in the world.

In Espoo, 1.1.2016  
Jonna Kangas



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**List of original publications**

(I) Leinonen, J., Brotherus, A. & Venninen, T. (2014). Children's participation in Finnish pre-school education - Identifying, Describing and Documenting Children's Participation, *Nordisk Barnehageforskning*, 7, 8, 1–16.

(II) Venninen, T., Leinonen, J. Lipponen, L. & Ojala, M. (2013). Supporting children's participation in Finnish child care centres, *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 42, 3, 211–218.

(III) Kangas, J., Ojala, M. & Venninen, T. (2015) Children's self-regulation in the context of participatory pedagogy in early childhood education, *Early Education and Development*, 26, 5–6, 847–870.

(IV) Leinonen, J. & Venninen, T. (2012). Designing learning experiences together with children, *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 45, 466–474.

(V) Kangas, J., Venninen, T. & Ojala, M. (In Press). Educators' Perceptions of Facilitating Children's Participation in Early Childhood Education, In press: *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*

## 1 Introduction and the focus of the research

The focus of my study is to produce knowledge about children's rights (UN, 1989), especially participation in the context of early childhood education (ECE) in Finland. My viewpoint comes from participation, which I considered an experiences of being important and belonging (see Karlsson, 2012; Thomas, 2002). More than anything else, participation in early childhood is a personal experience of being listened to and involved. In my thesis participation is understood to be a democratic right of a child (UN, 1989) and a learning strategy of shared meaning making and in a wider perspective the process of transformation from a helpless child to a competent and an active member of the society. This conception of young children's participation states that children's experiences of membership of the society, where other enjoy their company are essential. Children have the competence and the courage to have influence in everyday activities while educators respect their perspective and seek to promote children's participation. (Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003; Venninen, Leinonen & Ojala, 2010). Sinclair (2004) has expressed that participation is a complex and dynamic phenomenon. She suggested that the key elements of participation are children's involvement in power-issues such as decision-making, nature of the participation activity and practices, characteristics of the children involved and the level of participation. By investigating children's participation, researchers can have a better understanding of their competency, vulnerability, and control issues (Sinclair, 2004; Woodhead, 2010). This research is based on the knowledge of learning through socio-cultural paradigm, where the children are competent actors and active agents who shape their development path through shaping, sharing and reproducing their learning (Corsaro, 2011; Kronqvist & Kumpulainen, 2011; Rogoff, & all. 1995). This research aims to build knowledge of children's participation in Finnish early childhood education settings (see The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005; Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland, 2010 and 2016) through pedagogical support for children's

participation from the point of view of practice and policies. This research offers a theoretical concept of participatory pedagogy in early education context.

In my research I'm aiming to introduce and synthesize existing theories about children's participation from sociological and educational literature, learning paradigms, educational perspectives and policy documents and, with a critical approach to show the problems and pitfalls in the literature considering young children's participation in early childhood education contexts. On the other hand, I seek to build through methodological and analytical choices a framework of participatory pedagogy that could be adopted in early childhood education. The congruence of the study comes from abductive approach, which combines the theoretical phenomena, children's participation and learning theories to form a framework for pedagogical enhancement of children's participation. The combination of the focus, data collection, analysis, and finally the findings of this research is designed to form a holistic viewpoint to discuss about the phenomenon of participation as pedagogical practices in early childhood education. The research is focusing on the educators' perspectives and the conceptions of children's participation in everyday pedagogical practices in kindergarten groups. The data for this research is collected from municipal kindergartens of four cities in the metropolitan area of Helsinki within a development project of early childhood education development center VKK-Metro, funded by the ministry of Social and Health affairs in 2009-2011.

The first mission for my research is to bring the phenomenon of children's developing participation in the discussion in the context of early childhood education both nationally and internationally. Through the research papers published in international peer-reviewed journals this mission is already partly achieved, this thesis will sum up the findings and conclusions of those five research papers and continue the critical discussion about the pedagogical knowledge about enhancing children's participation. My second mission is to prove that early childhood programs, both in Finland and internationally, are not considering the phenomenon of enhancing and supporting children's participation seriously enough. This research aims to implicate the importance of children's participation in pedagogical interaction through children's equity, democratic rights and sustainable learning, and show challenges of participation in early childhood education practices and policies. My third mission is to state that the quality of early childhood education could be improved in the point of view of children's participation rights. Thus, participatory learning

can be developed with the new knowledge my research offers about enhancing children's participation.

In this research the views and reflections of educators who are implementing and developing the practices of early childhood education are considered to form a holistic picture of the phenomenon of participation. The pedagogical support for children's participation is to be considered from the point of view of practices and policies. This research offers new theoretical knowledge of young children's participation as a phenomenon in early education context. It also focuses on pedagogical activities which an educator could use for enhancing children's participation in early education settings.

The research problems (1 & 2) and questions (a-f) for this research are:

1. Identifying and understanding the key elements of children's participation existing in the practices and policies of Finnish early childhood education settings.
  - a) How the curriculum of pre-school education is considered to enable participation in pre-school practices?
  - b) How educators could overcome challenges of children's participation in pedagogical practices?
2. Framing a concept of participatory pedagogy for enhancing children's participation in early childhood education.
  - c) How children self-regulation activities are supported through participatory pedagogy?
  - d) What opportunities do the pedagogical processes offer for designing learning by children?
  - e) How educators perceive their chances to enhance participatory pedagogy in early childhood education?



## 2 Theoretical background

Exploring the theories and research of early childhood education is hardly enough for the purpose of understanding the concept of children's participation. Therefore in this thesis I shall present the viewpoints of sociology of childhood, childhood studies, and educational studies to constitute a holistic picture about children's participation in our society. I will present both ideological and critical studies and discuss controversial issues of children's participation. After that I introduce recent early childhood education theories to build a context for my research and, finally, I shall show how the phenomenon of participation is understood in early childhood education both nationally and internationally.

Participation can be seen as a common activity to interpret the world with adults who respect and listen to children and are interested in their affairs. This means that children are assumed to have a chance to be listened to, an opportunity for independent initiatives, choice-making experiences and chances to take responsibility. It also includes safety in social and physical environment, where children can adapt to shared and meaningful learning opportunities with adults and peers. (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012). Through active membership of their society children's skills of self-regulation and self-esteem are enhanced (Mayall, 1999). Participation means taking part in activities knowing that one's actions are acknowledged and may be acted upon (Boyden & Ennew, 1997; Morrow, 1999). On a more general level, participation means involving and enabling children to participate in decision-making processes in their everyday lives. It is important to respect and recognize children's voice and empower their ideas to support them to have impact on their own lives. (Hill, Davis, Prout & Tisdall, 2004; Sinclair, 2004).

## **2.1 Ontological and epistemological consideration about children's participation**

This research is based on ontological understanding about childhood and holistic learning adopted from researchers in educational science as well as in developmental psychology and sociology. This new viewpoint is known as the whole child approach (e.g., Diamond, 2010; Liew, 2012). Recognition of the whole child has been rooted very strongly in pedagogical philosophy and practice of early childhood education (e.g., Epstein & Hohman, 2012; Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland, 2010; Balir & Razza, 2007; NAEYC, 2009; The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005).

The guidelines for this whole child approach are introduced in the sociological research, where participation is considered from the point of view of decisions and events of children's life (Corsaro, 2011; Woodhead, 2006). The aim of this approach is to study and understand children as subject of their own lives and not the object of the education operation, participation is considered as a dynamic and evolving concept of individual and shared competence rather than a child's property or a stable status quo. (James & James, 2008; Smith, 2002). As thus the participation is related to contextual social environment and culture including interaction, shared meaning-making and ethical issues in children's everyday lives (Berthelsen, 2009; James, James & Prout, 1998; Karlsson, 2012).

The concept of participation can be found in UN's (1989) Convention of the Rights of a Child, where the existing rights can be divided into four category of P's: the Protection rights, the Provision rights, the Participation rights and the Promotion of rights. As stated by Nyland (2009) and Woodhead (2006) the Participation rights state that children have a right to be heard and to have their opinion taken into account, as they are competent subjects of our culture. Participation rights for children include issues such as a freedom of expression with or without language, a freedom of thought, a right to have appropriate information, the protection of privacy and a right to have influence in and have opinions taken to account in their everyday lives (Nyland, 2009; Smith, 2002). Participation is often considered an idealistic value where children master their abilities of taking the control of their own life (Berthelsen, 2009). In other words participation is a process which aims to empowerment and is thus connected to the values of education. As stated by Värri (2007; 2015) educational

research should actively aim to influence the values of social knowledge and understanding about the goals of education through pedagogical and political processes. Empowerment of an individual child is considered through the power shifting from institutional level to individual level. In early childhood education the issue of children's participation has been in the focus of development and administrative procedures and thus considered supporting better decision-making by adults and improving policies aimed at children (Mayall, 1999; Sinclair, 2004, Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen & Ojala, 2012).

Bernstein (2000) has considered participation to be essential in educational systems that promote democracy. He states that in democracy participation is a 'pedagogical right'. Participation can be seen as a practical and developing issue which should have positive outcomes when considered through pedagogy. This means that this right '... is the right to participate in procedures whereby order is constructed, maintained and changed' (Bernstein, 2000, p. xxi). Through this children skills of responsibility and understanding about moral and values are developing (see Värri, 2015). Giving children a voice is one aspect of democratic education that offers them an opportunity to take an active role in everyday issues concerning their learning, well-being and development (Taylor, 2000). In Nordic countries this democracy aspect is strongly implemented in early childhood education policies at the institutional level. (Einarsdóttir & Puroila, 2013; National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005). Participatory democracy in early childhood education setting is considered to emerge through social interaction between educators and children where both share power and responsibility (Emilson & Johansson, 2009). Through this democratic education approach children's participation is viewed also through shared responsibility of wellbeing. For example, the national curriculum of pre-school education in Finland states that the goal of pre-school education is to promote children's development as socially sensitive and caring human beings by guiding them to honor other peoples' rights and support ethically responsible behavior (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010).

One theoretical framework that has influenced this research process and my conceptions about children's participation is Shier's (2001) model of the Pathways to participation. It is a model of five levels of participation where adults bear the role of the enablers of participation through commitment. Every level requires three steps of development. First step is an opening stage where adults are willing to start working in that level. Second step

is an opportunity stage where the will is met by the needs for that level in practice and the third step is an obligation stage where the practices and processes of that level are adopted also at the organizational level and built in the system. These three steps of adults are required in every level of children's participation, which are according to Shier (2001)

- 1) Children are listened to. In this level adults are first open to hear children's voice in everyday interaction situations. Then they work to remove any obstacles and create environments and practices for children to become listened to, and finally these practices become a duty for staff to listen children's voice.
- 2) Children's expression of views and opinions is supported. In the second level adults first open up to idea of supporting children's views. Then they actively offer chances for children to express them. And finally the idea of supporting children's views and opinions are adopted in policy level of organization.
- 3) Children's views are taken into account. This means that children are not only expressing their ideas and opinions, but they also know that their views have influence in everyday activities in their society. This requires the adults thinking of how children's views should be taken to account. Next it requires that new practices are adopted where children ideas become visible and finally also in this level these new everyday practices become part of organization culture.
- 4) Children are involved in decision-making process. The fourth level of this model requires that power issues in the society are re-considered to offer opportunities for children to participate in decision-making processes. In this level adults need to first consider the idea of involving children in their decision-making. Next these new practices of processes should be put into action and finally adopted as an internal law of the organization.
- 5) Children should be able to share power and responsibility for decision-making. In the final level of the *Pathways to participation* model children share power with adults. For adults this mean that first they should consider the power-issues in their practical work and adopt the idea that children could join those practices. Also new practical ways for children to share the power with adults needs to be found and, finally these practices should become part of the organizations action culture.

The article 12 at the UN Convention of the Right of a Child (1989) stating "*child...has a right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child and the views...being give due weight*" is considered framing the minimum level of children's participation. This definition

requires that at least the second and the third levels of the Shier's model have been adopted in on the practice of education to promote and develop children's participation (Shier, 2001). However in the early childhood education the approach of participation as a right has been challenged with an approach of participatory learning. The goals for children's development and learning in Finland (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012; National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005) and internationally (Berthelsen, Brownlee, & Johansson, 2009; Paris U.N.E.S.C.O, 2008; Moss, 2007; Schweinhart, 2006) require stronger and more developed support for participation. I shall discuss these aspects in the next chapter.

## **2.2 Participatory learning and pedagogy in early childhood education**

This research aims to build knowledge of participation as a pedagogical process in early childhood education settings. In the general level, pedagogy can be understood to mean upraising young children into the society. In the Greek origin word *paidagōgia* simply means "to lead the child". In English speaking world the word "pedagogy" is related to formal learning environments and classroom based learning as a result of teaching as teachers' intervention (see Watkins & Mortimore 1999). In the context used in continental Europe, the concept of pedagogy is related to the support of children's development trough care and education. (Petrie & al., 2009; Hellström, 2010). In Finland, the word of pedagogy is considered to include the complete educational process where children's development is supported through policy and practice in formal early childhood education programs combining educare, i.e. care and education (HE 341/2014; Lipponen & al., 2014; Brotherus, Hytönen, Krokfors, 1999). Children's participation is considered a part of pedagogical process in early childhood education in policy documents in Finland. For example the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (2010; see also 2016) recognized children's participation as a part of their learning through taking part in planning and evaluating educational activities. The curriculum ensures that children's initiatives and actions are taken into account in the pedagogical practices and teachers are suggested to support and guide children to become conscious of their own learning.

Children are viewed as active learners, agents of their lives and reproducers of the culture instead of being needy and helpless beings (Corsaro, 2011; Piaget, 1976; Rogoff & al. 1995).

This approach has been adopted widely in research of early childhood education since the Piaget's (1976) and Vygotsky's (1978) theories of learning and has found support in other disciplines such as sociology (Corsaro, 2011), developmental psychology (see Berthelsen, 2009) and cultural studies (Nyland, 2009). The concept of learning in early childhood education can be viewed as a dynamic process where the children merge into the culture of their society, its practices and values through active meaning making (Kumpulainen, & al. 2009). This conception of learning is connected to the theoretical concept of the Relational Developmental Systems by Lerner and Overton (2008) which understand the learning as development between individual and context relations. For example the self-regulation is broad and refers to both behavioral and cognitive processes (Liew, 2012) and it is recognized as an important issue in children's development and learning (see Taguma et al., 2012). As a construct, self-regulation between the individual and context relations can be understood through the "Five Cs" (competence, confidence, connections, character and caring) and thus though adaptive development regulations support positive development through resources in families, kindergartens and communities (Lerner & Overton, 2008). For example self-regulation can be identified in classroom behavior to be connected to taking turns, persisting on a task, or remembering the directions (McClelland & Cameron, 2011). In those the link between individual development and development of context can be identified, researched and findings to promote social justice and positive development of an individual can be formed.

As discussed by van Oers (2008) learning stated in curriculums or teachers' conceptions can be clustered in four discrete categories according to their cultural-historical goals. The categories are learning to perform, learning to make meaning, learning to belong and learning to participate. First two categories include learning of important concepts and skills that are appropriate for the cultural community, and set as a goals by more advanced members of community. However, as suggested by Flear (2010) the last two learning categories view the learning process also from the children's perspectives. The 'learning of belonging' category focus on the learners' identity, motivation and values and aims to support development through these. The final "learning to participate" category aim to empower children to creative and critical citizenship where they can share learning experiences and adopt agencies to develop their own learning (Flear, 2010; van Oers, 2008). These two final categories can be viewed to support children's participation and therefore considered also through participatory learning (see Brownlee, 2009). The concept of

pedagogy is connected to the knowledge of learning also on the policy level where the national curriculum guidelines and the teacher-training programs are designed. These have influence on the social level where the concepts of childhood, development and learning are discussed culturally and on the level of individual educators planning, implementing and evaluating the pedagogy (Brownlee, 2009).

In early childhood education the issue of children's participation is often seen in quite narrow view, through listening to children's voice (Clark, 2005). Rather than viewing a child as an isolated actor from their social and cultural environment, the more general view of participation considers children an active subject interacting with both other people and the environment. This viewpoint of the new sociological paradigm about children as competent actors and active agents rather than needy and helpless being (see Corsaro, 2011; James & James, 2008) has been adopted as a part of early childhood education ideology (Kronqvist & Kumpulainen, 2009; Berthelsen, 2009). With this learning paradigm, the question of children participation is a key aspect in both education and research. Young children's participation in early childhood education settings is a multidimensional issue, where the key elements are well-being and active competence. (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012). According to Lerner and Overton (2008) there should be synthetization between basic and applied research so that theoretical finding could always have twofold outcomes: positive human development for individuals and social justice for communities.

In this thesis as well as in international research considering participatory learning (see Berthelsen, Brownlee & Johansson, 2009) the learning is understood through socio-cultural paradigm of learning where children are considered as active agents of their own learning (Rogoff, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1997). The socio-cultural learning approach sets requirements on beliefs, policies and practices for pedagogy in the early childhood education settings. It is considered that learning is strongly connected with experience of participation where child's perspectives are respected. This approach creates a feeling of belonging where the joy of learning emerges and motivation and resilience are developing. (Kronqvist & Kumpulainen, 2011; Bath, 2009; Smith, 2002).

Pedagogy includes active listening, arguing, discussing and through that reflection and interpretation that supports children's involvement and participation (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In this process, the perspectives of both children and teachers are taken into account,

and when educators are sensitive to assume the children's perspectives, children can have rich participatory learning experiences in their educational life. Bath (2009) states that for overcoming the gaps of participation children's participation requires active planning from educators. In Finland, however, the relationship between educators and children has been considered important but the quality of interactions have been found variable in recent doctoral dissertations. For example, Vuorisalo (2013) states that children's do not share equal chances for participation and children's and educators experiences of daily interaction differ and Roos (2015) suggest that educators lack skills of listening children's voice in their everyday practices.

Through the cross-national research and discussion the theoretical concept of participatory learning in early education context has contributed to in recent years. In their book of *Participatory Learning in Early Years* Berthelsen, Brownlee and Johansson (2009) highlight the phenomenon of participatory learning in early childhood education context in the international discussion. The concept of children's participation as active meaning making in early childhood education research is only recently adopted and in Finland this participatory learning is not a basis nor a goal for learning in *The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland* (2005). Despite this successful development projects of supporting children's participation in their education context have been conducted and through these projects educators' have gain new professional skills and adopted more sensitive beliefs about children's competence (see Kataja, 2014; Venninen & al. 2012; Turja, 2010).

When adopting the participatory learning approach, children's participation is not considered as a status quo, but rather a developing and dynamic cultural environment, where every individual has an influence their society. This requires that children's abilities to participate in and experiencing participation are considered through learning and developing. (Berthelsen, Brownlee and Johansson, 2009). The participatory skills, such as negotiation, waiting one's own turn, and sharing both equipment and ideas, are necessary to develop through practice and repetition (Göncü, Main & Abel, 2009). With these skills, children may achieve better learning outcomes (Wanless & al., 2011). In relation to self-regulation, participation can provide opportunities for the development of children's agency and autonomy (e.g., Mullin, 2007) and creates experiences of enthusiasm and involvement (Wanless & al. 2011). By combining ideological values (political and social context),



educational values and beliefs (teacher's perceptive) and children's perspective (participatory learning) (figure 1) new knowledge about children's participation can be viewed as holistic phenomenon through the context of pedagogies of participatory learning.

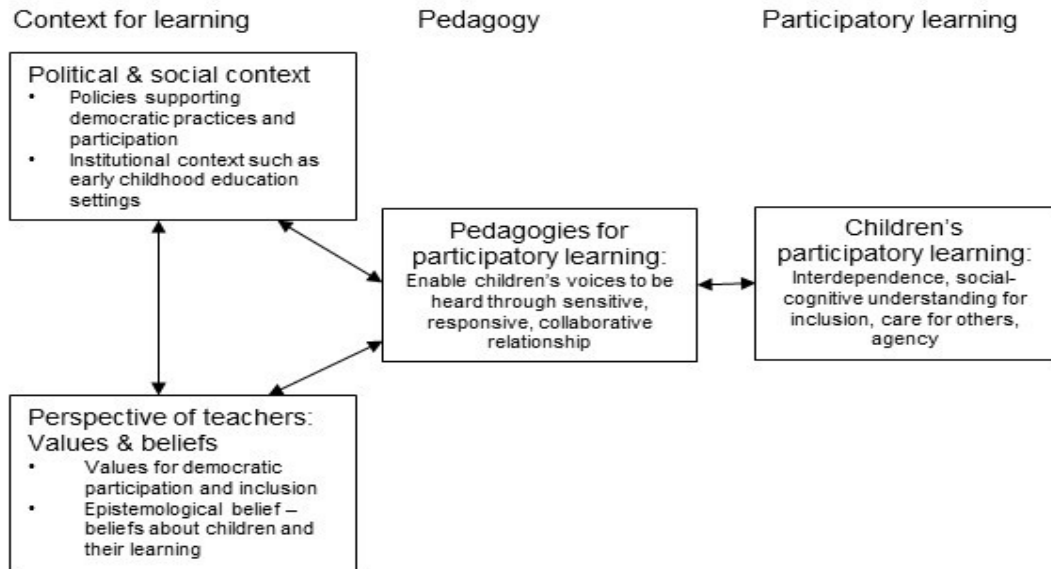


Figure 1 Context, pedagogy, and participatory learning (originally published by Brownlee, 2009).

Brownlee (2009) suggest that this pedagogical approach could be the integration theme for future research in early childhood education. However the question and challenge to understand participatory pedagogy remains:

*This gap of our understanding might be addressed in the future research by examining how teachers' perspectives and pedagogy mediate between children's learning and the broader political and social context. (Brownlee, 2009, 203).*

In early childhood education children's point of view, experiences, perspectives, and abilities to act and express ideas and views already from young age are found important and thus the competence to influence their life and master their learning should be recognized (Smith, 2002; Karlsson, 2012). Participation is seen to include the right to enjoy self-responsibility and self-empowerment through growing up (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012; Wanless & al., 2011). Through those means participation provides also other developing skills of children such as empathy, responsibility, sense of ownership and belonging and increasing self-

esteem (Shier, 2001). Thus participation is strongly linked in democratic education where also the quality of services offered to children is increased (Adams & Ingham, 1998). The Freirean approach of dialogic learning states that a dialog between the educators and the learners is shared in an active learning process (2000). This influence is also shown by Smith (2007) who brings out the meaning of participation to children's learning by stating: "Social interaction and participation with others in cultural activities with skilled partners leads to the internalization of the tools of thinking, enhancing children's competence (p.4)." For children's participation in pedagogical context of early childhood education Nyland (2009, 39-40) has presented the guiding principles. Her approach presented below is based on the Convention of the Right of Child (UN, 1989) as well as on the participatory learning approach.

- 1) The right to participate includes the idea of making meaningful choices and suggest that educators should take the voice of children into account when planning everyday learning environment, activities, interaction and routines.
- 2) Right should be considered as a "living thing" so that children could express their right to participation in action and also develop their skills concerning participatory rights
- 3) Participatory rights exist in the everyday context, which means that chances to express and experience participation should be available for children here and now and thus giving the meaningful learning experiences.
- 4) Participatory learning can be promoted only in environments where dialogical interaction is encouraged. There shared experiences based on listening, interest and respect support children to build knowledge and become active agents in their learning processes.
- 5) Participatory learning is active process where educators scaffold and enhance children's understanding through children's experiences and ideas to promote children's self-regulated learning. This requires that both verbal and non-verbal expression of children is taken into account.
- 6) Participation encourages growth, well-being, and imagination: Opportunities to solve problem and explore environment support children's skills in reasoning, developing logic and reflection. These are essential for creativity for new thought, ideas and knowledge.

## 2.3 Supporting children's participation

The issue of how to support children's participation in educational institutions has attracted considerable attention in recent years (Sinclair 2004; Woodhead 2006). Supporting children's participation is regarded as important for several reasons. First, research has shown that children's participation can enhance their skills and self-esteem, support better decision-making and protection of children, and improve policies toward children. Focusing on children's participation can lead to a better understanding of children's competence, vulnerability, and power issues (Mayall, 1999; Sinclair, 2004). Secondly, any educational institution or cultural setting should support learners participation and capacity for active learning to improve their learning competence (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005; Dockett, Einarsdottir & Perry, 2009). Thirdly, a participatory environment in which children's voice and opinions are attended to enhance democratic processes and children's rights (Clark & Moss, 2010; Smith, 2002; Woodhead, 2006).

Children's participation in early years is often understood as simply the act of listening to their voice. Thus communication and interaction with adults and peers is considered important (Berthelsen, 2009; Clark, 2005). Research on children's participation in early childhood education highlights that even young children are competent in understanding their experiences and indeed, they are very capable of expressing themselves. Children's capacity to formulate and express views, and to participate in decision-making is highly dependent on the context, and especially on the extent to which adults can support and facilitate children's participation. (Smith, 2002; Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2001).

Supporting children's participation can be viewed through three different approaches of educators states (Karlsson, 2005). In first approach children's perspectives and competence are supported only in low level when educators only seek strengthening for their own ideas and learning concepts. In the second approach educators support children's development in interaction based on goals or values of learning considered important by the adults. In the final approach educators are sensitive to children's perspectives and they consider it is important to understand children's ideas as a basis for their own work with children. According to Pramling-Samuelsson and Sheridan (2003) educators' attitude towards children's participation, their voices, perspectives, and culture, is the key element to reflect

and develop when children's opportunities to influence everyday life and taking active role in their learning is promoted. When interacting with children, they can inspire them and help them to commit to different activities. Increasing the possibilities for children to experience participation in everyday activities requires educators to engage in and concentrate on interaction (Kirby & Gibbs, 2006.)

In early childhood education the problem of recognizing the participation of children has been stated for example by Nyland (2009). She states that despite the fact that the participation rights are known they can be ignored in everyday interaction between children and teachers. The routines and cultural understanding about children and childhood have a strong role, when teachers plan, implement and evaluate their everyday practices in a group of children. For example institutional routines can cause lack of daily interactive moments, because tightly scheduled timetables offer children little opportunity to practice expressing their views (Nyland, 2009; Rodd, 2006; Smith, 2002). Nyland (2009) also points out that the quality of interaction in cases where children should have freedom of expression (UN, 1989, Article 13) or their opinions should be taken into account (UN, 1989, Article 12) vary and children may not have chances to influence in their basic daily care routines or even have their voice heard. Also I have similar experiences in practical early childhood education where teachers and other educators act as they consider best for the children without really consulting children's voice or asking their opinions. Educators do not intentionally make the decision not to listen children but are adopting the institutional culture and practices without considering and reflecting them through the children's perspective. According to Berthelsen (2009) the educators' role as supporter of children's competence and an enhancer of their participation is more essential than children's capacity for influencing their everyday life.

The age of children can affect their access to participation; young children are considered more incapable than older ones (Smith, 2002). It has however been shown that toddlers' chances to influence and experience participation in their everyday activities in early childhood education depend on educators beliefs about their competencies and learning. In their research Brownlee & Berthelsen (2009) state that educators with instructive conceptions of children's learning considered toddlers as dependent actors who would need adults to guide them and act their role models. However educators with constructive conceptions of children learning viewed toddlers as competent agents to interpret the world

and shape their learning while the role of adults was considered through supporting children's participation. In his model for supporting children's participation, presented in the chapter 2.1, Shier (2001) suggest that children's voice should be listened to and their views supported even if common language does not exist or the communication is otherwise complex. This can, for example, mean that children who do not yet speak, could express their ideas with body-language and other non-verbal communication, using pictures, signs etc. This viewpoint is also adopted by Bae (2009), who has observed that self-expression is often non-verbal, and thus children have experiences of becoming listened to when their actions like gestures, moves, singing, artistic activities and playing are recognized by educators. This requires however, sensitive approach from educators who work with children, like Clark (2005) has noticed in his research. He suggests that listening to children included three stages: observing non-verbal messages, active interpretation i.e. building meanings and, finally, linking listening to everyday interaction and decision-making so that children learn to understand that the messages they say or otherwise express are taken into account.

Children's participation concerns also pedagogical choices and adult-child-interaction where educators are in charge. The scaffolding approach that considered learning as active process where the educators role is support children is adopted in Finnish early childhood education (see Lipponen & al. 2013) and suggested as practical implementation by Roos (2015) that listening to children's voices offers an opportunity to understand their perspectives, while Tahkokallio (2014) suggests that the experiences of children should be observed and reflected on by educators. Child-initiated activities are a part of participation, where the educators' role is to facilitate participation and support and build an environment open for child-initiated activities (Ahn & Kim, 2009). Observing children's interests and initiatives in pedagogical planning and implementing pedagogics in learning activities is important when focusing learning through shared meaning making (Fonsén, Heikka & Elo, 2014; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) and through that guided participatory learning (Rogoff, 2008). From a more holistic viewpoint the young children's participation in early education settings can also be viewed as a common activity of interpreting the world and sharing experiences with peers and educators who respect and listen to children and are interested in their affairs (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012).

Participation entails within interaction between children and an educator in a learning environment (Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelson, 2001; Woodhead, 2006). In the

participation process the educator plays a meaningful role as the observer and supporter of the development of competence (Berthelsen, 2009). Trust between the children and educators forms a basis for participation issues. Children communicate better with adults they trust and with whom they enjoy a good relationship (Thomas, 2002). Children's right to express themselves (UNCRC, Article 12) and have their views taken into account (Article 13) varies. The way educators respect the children and believe in their capability in everyday practice affects children's rights to participate (Smith, 2002). Even young children are capable of parttaking in participatory practices if only their educators would give them the chance (Nyland, 2009). Emilson & Johansson (2009) state that children cannot experience participation by choice if educators fail to enhance the opportunities for them to participate. This requires sensitivity and willingness to adopt children's perspectives. Active interaction and development of pedagogical practices have been considered important issues to support children's participation (see Venninen & al. 2012; Emilsson & Johansson, 2009; Pramling-Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003).

In this study, children's participation is seen as a common activity of interpreting the world with adults who respect and listen to children and are interested in their affairs. Participation is seen to include the right to enjoy self-responsibility and self-empowerment through growing up. The role of educators who work with children and interact with them in daily practices is seen as essential for supporting children's participation and enhancing the participatory pedagogy. Children's participation in early childhood education is considered through children's agency by Kronqvist and Kumpulainen (2011). They point out that participation in learning is emerging through experiences of joy and motivation that support the metacognitive learning skills and shared learning experiences through social interaction and shared meaning making. These create the ongoing process of development. The previous findings of the phenomenon of young children's participation in early childhood education context suggest that there exist seven key-elements of children's participation that require active and ongoing support from the educators (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012):

- 1) Children have experience of belonging and joy of being themselves. This requires that children's views are respected.
- 2) Participation is experienced in a secure environment where children's needs are taken into account and their initiatives are responded to.

- 3) Children are a part of a home, peer culture, society and current events, sometimes scary and unpleasant ones, and need educators and other adults to help them understand the world
- 4) Participation develops when children express initiatives and make choices that influence their and others everyday life. They have experiences where their initiatives and choices enhance shared learning.
- 5) Through making choices, negotiations and discussions children learn responsibility.
- 6) Children have a right to be educated and cared for by adults who respect and listen them and are interested and involved in the children's world.

When enhancing children's participation it seems essential to increasing educators' awareness about children's perspectives in everyday activities. This requires that the pedagogical practices are re-considered from the point of view of children's voice (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012; Smith, 2002). Facilitating child-initiated activities as suggested by Ahn & Kim (2009) is seen only a part of supporting children's participation. Developing children's participation requires support to individual child's independent initiatives, but also enhancement for children's active competence in group activities, where children can develop their social skills, positive emotions and active agency. This creates a concept of participation as a multidimensional issue, where child-initiated activities and shared activities between children and educators could be improved jointly. Participation as a developing pedagogy becomes possible with reflective practices where an educator has opportunities to enhance participation and to become the participant jointly together with children (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012).

In the theoretical discussion of early childhood education two essential questions remain unanswered. Firstly how the concept of participation emerges in the everyday education of young children and secondly how the early childhood education professionals i.e. educators can pedagogically support children's skills in participation and empowerment. For the first question the problematic issues remain in conceptualization of the multidisciplinary phenomenon of participation and in finding methods to understand participation in early childhood education settings. For the second question problematic issues exist when considering children's participation from pedagogical point of view. The children's chances to have influence in the practices of early childhood education are on the one hand a *status quo* and on the other hand an improving issue where children's learning and their developing skills of participation create a changing process of interaction and power issues.

### 3 Context and method

This research is conducted in the settings of Finnish early childhood education. The current early childhood education system in Finland is based on the Act on Children's Day Care (1973) and the Finnish Basic Education Act (1998/628). Finnish early childhood education practices and pedagogy combine care, education and teaching in the daily activities as a whole, aimed at promoting children's balanced growth, development and learning (The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005). The daily practices of Finnish kindergartens include educator-initiated activities, such as reading to children and presenting materials-based learning. Such activities as eating lunch, dressing for outdoor activities, and taking naps are also considered educationally valuable, and educators play an important role in these activities by guiding and helping children. Children are considered as active learners and meaning makers, who are tutored to explore their environment and to initiate and organize their play activities (Karila & Kinos 2012). In addition, during the day, children receive three meals, have a rest break, and take part in outdoor activities around the year. On average, a child spends about nine hours per day in the day care (Statistics Finland, 2009). The political and institutional understanding of early childhood education have been considered through social and health services until recently: from 1 January 2013 the Ministry of Education and Culture has had the overall responsibility for the early childhood education services and it should be concerned as a part of educational system.

The development of early childhood education has been considered important in several research and policy documents. For example Finnish early childhood education received recognition for the way it supports educators' opportunities to develop their professional skills throughout their careers via long-term continuing education (OECD, 2006). According to Karila & Kinos (2012) the quality development of educational practices is based on well trained staffs ongoing development in multi-professional working environment conducted through interaction and reflective practices. Also both national curricula (2005; 2010) pay account to the continuous development of early childhood education, which is predicated on correctly allocated, long-term development within the practical education. Early childhood



education training in Finland is based on academic teacher education which, according to Hujala (2008) provides a theoretical basis for developing the pedagogy of learning. Developmental guidelines for pedagogy can be founded in research-based knowledge of how it is possible to promote and support the child's development. This can be acquired through strong and complex professional understanding containing divided professionalism into four types of relationships: the relationship with the children, the relationship with the parents, the relationship with the work team, and the relationship with other expert groups (Karila & Kinosh, 2012).

In a recent VKK-Metro developing project in the capital area of Finland the focus was in pedagogical development in the everyday interactions and activities of early childhood education through reflective practices (see Venninen & al., 2012). Development was based on teamwork, where the members review educational thinking, the content of development and the operating environment in a critical fashion. This required the participation of individual educators, managers, administrators together with children and their parents. In this project, the development was found successful through interaction between the micro and macro levels of educational services i.e. the level of individual staff members in kindergartens and the administrative level. The research data for this doctoral dissertation has been collected in the context of this VKK-Metro development project that operated in years 2009-2011. It aimed to develop pedagogical processes and children's participation in 21 pre-selected research-kindergartens during two years of development. However with this development process, the project also had influence also in other kindergartens who were not participating in the development process and it seemed that the administrations of early childhood education as well as professionals working in kindergartens were interested in the phenomenon of children's participation (see Venninen & al., 2012).

As a researcher, I was assigned to this project to collect and analyze data of the whole early childhood education field in Metropolitan area. The idea was at first that I could use the survey data for my Master thesis (which I did). The problematic issue in this research was (and still is) that it was never planned to be a research for a doctoral thesis, but more to be a descriptive information gathering about the practices in educational field. Therefore I have started to call the research process a pathway. It has been changed, moved and taken influences from both theory and institutional practices of early childhood education field. It

has some sideways that I am not so proud of, but most of those have helped me in the process of becoming a scholar.

For me the process of research was at first (i.e. when working with my Bachelor's and Master's thesis's) only the process of understanding the data for producing good and valid results. The way of how the measurements were done, data collected or how it was analyzed was not interesting, but a compulsory part of making research. The easier I could find the results, the better. During my doctoral studies I have found a completely new world of methodological considerations and questions. I have learned to understand that there is not only one truth hiding in the phenomenon in focus, and therefore the methodological process can go many different ways and end up with many different results. The process of considerations and asking questions not only from the data but also from myself (i.e. my values, identity as a scholar, my knowledge of the truth, my epistemological beliefs etc.) is becoming a more and more important part of my research process. In this chapter I shall introduce the methodological process for my doctoral thesis. I shall consider some questions and challenges in both data collection and analysis plan. Finally, I shall present those choices and answers to my work I have ended up.

### **3.1 Methodological approaches**

The focus of my PhD thesis is to identify young children's participation in Finnish early childhood education contexts and, further on, frame and describe the enhancement process of children's participation from the viewpoint of every day educational practices. Because the concept of participation of young children was rather new and fresh in early childhood education research the research was conducted with abductive approach. Abductive approach is described by Peirce (1931) as "to compare alongside...to show side by side". This Peircean approach to abduction is adopted in social sciences and logistic reasoning (see Kóvacs & Spens, 2005). Abduction as a research process can be viewed through intuition or as a kind of a systematized creativity in research to create "new" knowledge (Andreewsky and Bourcier, 2000). In this research the abductive approach was adopted to create new knowledge about children's participation concerning interaction, social knowledge, learning and influence together with pedagogical methods and everyday life in kindergartens. In abductive approach the specific observations and more general processes of such situations are concerned together to determine the aspects of the phenomenon that could be

generalized and differ from the others specific to situation itself. In this process the researchers understanding of the cultural experience linked in the phenomenon is essential (Danermark, 2001; Kóvach & Spens, 2005).

To identify children's participation in cultural settings of Finnish early childhood education it seemed essential to understand how early childhood educators – i.e. teachers, nurses, assistants and managers – described the phenomenon. Therefore a good option for data collection in this first phase would be a survey, which is described by Lodigo, Spaulding and Voegtle (2006) as a method for gathering opinions and perspectives from a rather large population about how the current issue, in this case children's participation, is understood in practical early childhood education work in Finnish kindergartens. This survey was conducted in a development project called VKK-Metro, whose focus was to develop children's participation through reflective practices in 21 public kindergartens around the Metropolitan area of Finland. To gain a wider picture of this phenomenon the survey was put into practice with all early education practitioners (not only those who worked in the VKK-Metro kindergartens). The process that accomplished this survey is described in the Methodological choices for the survey chapter below.

The survey gave, however, more information about the phenomenon of participation that was expected for. Educators, who participated in, described not only children's participation, but also their own pedagogical choices and interactions to support children's competence and capability. I made a choice to use the data from the survey in three different phases of my research: To identify the phenomenon of children's participation and model pedagogical processes of support to create framework of enhancing children's participation. This is part of the analysis process and is therefore described in the analysis plan chapter.

### **3.2 Methodological choices for the data collection**

The data for my doctoral research was collected via survey, based on a self-report questionnaire designed to measure educators' conceptions and practices of children's participation. Because survey is data-collection method the researcher could not chance or affect after it is given to the participants, it is important to check that the survey questionnaire is congruent (Lodigo, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). In case of this research, the congruence was ensured with three different methods. First, the questionnaire was developed within a theoretical frame of children's participation and early childhood

education research. This cause some controversial issues to emerge, because in 2010 participation was rather new conception in early childhood education settings and models of children's participation could not be found. This problem was solved by using open-ended questions were participants were asked to describe actual moments of children's participation in their group. Secondly, these open-ended questions were supported with several quantitative variables, where participants rated their everyday practices and interaction with children with Likert scales. These pedagogical practices in the questionnaire were selected and the rating scales was designed by the team of researchers who all had practical experience from the field of early childhood education in Finland. Third, a pre-survey was conducted with the pilot research kindergartens operating in VKK-Metro Unit (see the context of this research). The pilot-results from the 82 teaching teams helped researchers to focus in pitfalls of children's participation. With the pilot-survey the actual research questionnaire developed to include also practices and pedagogical choices for supporting children's participation.

During the process of conducting and piloting the survey, the knowledge of children's participation in pedagogical context was evolving through theoretical and practical understanding. For evaluating the actual survey three critical questions can be found. In these I follow the principles for questionnaire construction in educational research by Johnsson & Cristenssen (2004):

1) First, does the questionnaire items match to research objectives?

The survey questionnaire was consisted both on qualitative and quantitative items. The quantitative variables were presented in three sets: First set was describing children's chances to experience participation, i.e. opportunities for making choices, initiatives and chances to become listened to. Second set was describing educators' pedagogical practices of supporting children in different activities (learning activities, play activities, teacher initiated and child initiated activities, care activities). Third set was describing the conceptions of challenges that prevent children's participation in everyday activities. Between these sets there were total of ten open-ended questions, where participants could describe exact moments of children's participation, teachers' support and overcoming the constraints for participation. Therefore all the research objectives were taken account in the questionnaire design process.

- 2) Second, are the response categories exclusive and exhaustive and are there different types of response categories available

The questionnaire included total of 90 quantitative variables, which were, as explained above, divided in three different sets. In two first sets, the children's chances to experience participation and the educators' pedagogical practices the Likert scale was developed to measure the regularity of each item with scale items always – often – sometimes – rarely – never. This kind of scale prevents the usage of “we don't comment” or “whatever” options, because they are not rating the participants opinion, but actions. For example of variables in the set of children's experiences of participation would be a question of “how often child can choose a playmate for free play” and example for the set of educators' pedagogical practices would be “how often adult makes sure, that every child has an opportunity to express opinions”.

Different type of response category was in use with the third set of variables. There the Likert scale rating options for twenty everyday constraints were whether the participant team felt that they could “totally have influence and decide about the issue – have influence and somewhat decide about the issue – to have influence but not to decide about the issue – somewhat have influence but not to decide about the issue – not to have influence nor to decide about the issue”. In this third set the variables were measuring more participants' conceptions about having influence, but like in the previous sets, didn't allow answers with “whatever” choices.

- 3) Third, did the questionnaire prove that researcher understand research participants

In the conduction process of the questionnaire the practical knowledge of everyday teaching and interaction was taken in account. The knowledge of researchers working with the survey was very accurate, for example I myself worked same time in kindergarten as a part-time teacher and had five years of experience of early childhood education practical work. The other researcher, who worked as post-doctoral researcher had also long experience from the field as a teacher and a manager of kindergarten. Therefore we had cultural insight about the practices and policies behind the Finnish ECE settings. The level of abstraction was decided to keep very low in the questionnaire and the different variables were designed with the same words and actual way of speaking when working in kindergartens. The questionnaire was also evaluated and discussed with the steering group members of the VKK-metro project, who had experience of both practical pedagogical work, administration and development of

early childhood education field. By this process we wanted to ensure that the questionnaire was understandable and clear for the participants and the research items in it were based to familiar everyday issues in early childhood education.

The survey was sent to every early childhood education team in the Metropolitan area of Finland, and it was returned by 56% of the whole educator population. The participants were 1,114 working teams representing 350 kindergarten (out of 500). Because researcher intended reflection of pedagogical practices in children's groups, participants was asked to answer to the questionnaire by teams instead of individual educators. The study was conducted among teams, because teams plan and carry out the daily program in kindergartens and are the basic functional and pedagogical units of the kindergarten. According to Reed (2011) these kind of working teams also have social knowledge about the required issue and with sharing it together they could acquire more essential knowledge of the issue. The working teams were composed of 3,721 educators taking care of 19,907 children aged 1 to 7 years. The team members have different educational backgrounds. The majority had nurse qualification from college (N=1,947), while others had teacher qualification from a university (N=1,256). There were also assistants (N=256) or trainees (N=112) without educational qualifications. In the 1,114 teams taking parts in the study, the average number of children per group was 17.86, while the average number of staff was 3.34 (adult/child ratio=1:5.50).

### **3.3 Analytical framework**

The survey data was analyzed in three separated phases, which linked together with the growing knowledge and understanding about the issue of children's participation in early childhood education setting.

In the first phase I analyzed the two first sets of quantitative variables for gaining knowledge about the frequency of children's participatory experiences and educators' pedagogical practices. Because of the similar Likert scales, these sets of data seemed best to analyze together. I used exploratory factor analysis with SPSS-software to build a model of children's participation levels. The results of this analysis have been published in my master thesis study and are therefore not explained here throughout (Leinonen, 2010). To be mentioned, important finding was that the descriptive data collected from Finnish early childhood

education settings was theoretically valid with international participation research. The results could be explained based on Shier's (2001) model of Pathways to participation and with that results it seems that Shiers model could be used also in early childhood education.

On the second phase of analysis the researchers focused in the open-ended variables of the whole data set and with abductive content analysis formed frameworks of children's participation key-elements in ECE together with models for participatory pedagogy. In Finnish educational research tradition Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009) state that the content analysis is suitable method for summarizing the contest from the data with systematical and objective viewpoint. Content analysis gives also room for human viewpoints and meaning making process i.e. focusing in to essential core of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Inside of the content analysis tradition can be found different approaches of using the methodology. For example Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) have found the quantifying approaches, where the themes and items are counted for summarizing or comparison. This approach is called summative approach by Hsieh & Shannon (2005) and it involves counting and comparisons through keywords, followed by the interpretation of the summative underlying context. The context analysis approach, the data is described with qualified expression rather than quantified counting (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009). According to Hsieh & Shannon (2005) this context approach can be divided into two sub-approaches: The directed approach starts the analysis with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes, while the conventional content analysis approach coding categories are derived directly from the text data. In this research the data was first concerned through summative approach (quantifying approach) because the amount of data was huge. At the end of the analysis was implemented hand-by-hand with both approaches, where the quantification was used to support the context analysis to open and explain the results. The analysis can be better referred through the abductive content analysis, which is a mixture of inductive and deductive analysis approaches (Kováč & Spence, 2005; Fann, 1970). It is rarely recognized in Finnish educational research tradition. For example Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2009) state that in abductive content analysis the common tread is hardly findable. In my research I have, however, leaned on international methodology, which recognized the abductive analysis. In an inductive approach, data about the phenomenon under investigation guide the analysis process, and in a deductive approach, the analysis is theoretically derived and it is a theory testing process (Hyde, 2000; Mayring, 2000), whereas in abductive analysis, the key element is the interaction between the theory and the data to acquire new knowledge about the

phenomenon (Fann, 1970). The researcher creates a framework of different theories together with the data in a creative process of “theory matching” (Kováč & Spens, 2005), Figure 2.

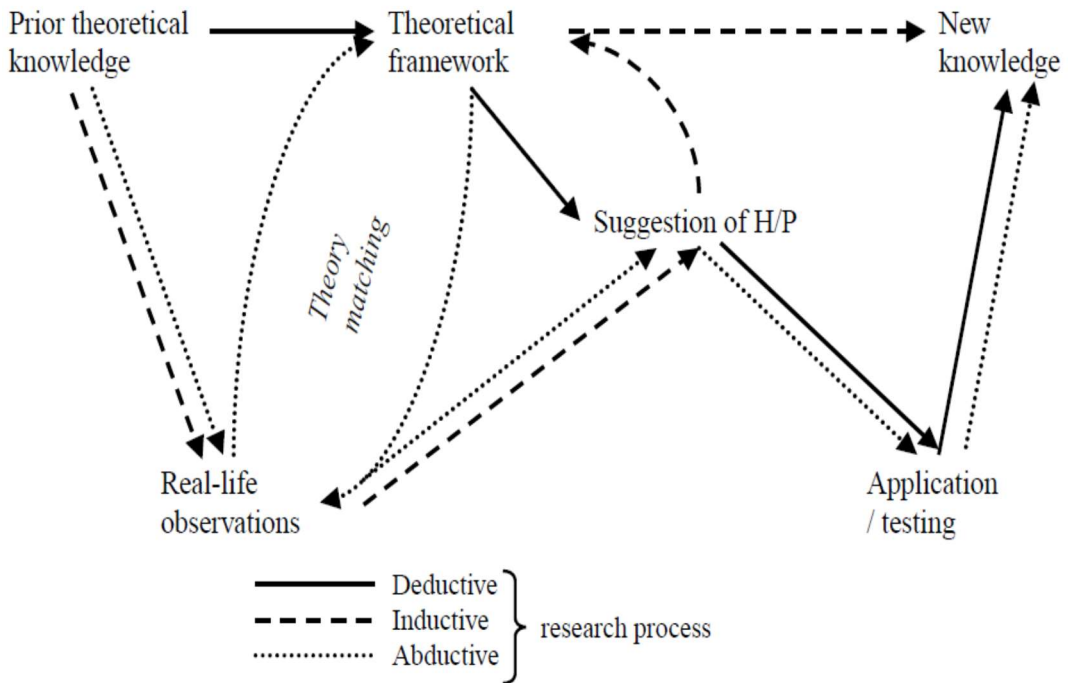


Figure 2 Three dimensions of research process (Spens & Kováč, 2005)

In this process, the prior theoretical knowledge was a guideline for the phenomenon studied through the real-life observation, this case the reported practices of participants. It is important to notice, that both the theoretical knowledge and the depth of understanding the survey data were both developing simultaneously, through cycles of analysis (see Fann, 1970). Kóvach & Spens (2005) states that the process of abduction starts when theoretical knowledge and the real-life observations does not match. In this process the interaction between theories and observation data are forming ongoing cycles of analysis, where intuition and the researcher’s cultural understanding have essential role (see Fann, 1970; Kóvach & Spens, 2005). Finally, the findings in each specific research items are results of individual processes of going through the data and the theoretical background, but also connected to each other through evolving knowledge of enhancing children’s participation in early childhood education contexts.



On the final phase of the analysis focus of research was transferred back to the quantitative variables sets and those were analyzed together with qualitative analysis results to create a mixed methods approach. This kind of method mixing is described by Johnson and Christensen (2004) to include both quantitative and qualitative analysis phases systematically in the process of gaining knowledge about the research items. In this phase the interpretations of the data analysis was done with dialogic way with both findings from quantitative variables sets and qualitative open-ended questions together with theoretical background to create new knowledge of the process of enhancing children's participation from educators perspectives. This kind of approach is described recently by Tolan and Deuch (2015) who state that mixed methods approach seems advantageous when exploring and understanding phenomena in developmental sciences. They mention that with this approach it is possible to seek knowledge combining both the universal level of the phenomenon (through quantitative analysis) and uniqueness of voice and conceptions of each participant (through qualitative analysis) (Tolan and Deuch, 2015). Through mixed methods approach it seemed possible to reach the qualitative experienced phenomenon together with the incidence and frequencies of statistically measured variables about enhancing children's participation. Finally through the abductive approach both data sets were used and content analysis of the qualitative data with the different statistical methods, like factor analysis, comparing of means and basic descriptive statistics from quantitative data were found useful to build a big picture about the phenomenon of participatory pedagogy.

The results of this mixed-model analysis phase will be published in five research papers. First one focuses to compare the Curriculum of Pre-school education in Finland and the participants' practices in pre-primary school groups. The second one is focusing on children's chances to design their learning together with teachers, i.e. plan, implement and evaluate the pedagogical activities in participatory practices. In third paper the focus is on everyday constraints that prevent children's participation and teachers' opportunities to influence on those. Fourth paper that is so far not yet accepted for publishing aims to find connections between children developing skills in self-regulation and teachers' support for that development with participatory pedagogy. Final one aims to explain a tentative framework of participatory pedagogy and teachers duties and responsibilities in it.

### **3.4 Reliability and limitations of the research**

In quantitative research the considerations of reliability are linked in two different approach, the reliability of the data collection methods and the consistency and repeatability of measured data. Trochim and Donnelly (2007) explain the meaning of the reliability revisions by suggesting that it can be only estimated, not calculated, because with all statistical methods there exist a chance of coincidences. The problem of reliability can exist in the process of data collection, if the groundwork for the research has not done properly. The errors can also occur within the statistical measurement methods, if these are not used or interpreted properly, even the calculations itself would give appropriated results. The reliability of data collection is explained carefully in the chapter of Methodological choices for the survey above. The consistency and repeatability of measured data was observed with appropriated method in each of the research papers published.

I shall next explain further consideration the reliability issues in both, the data collection method and the data analysis methods of this research. I shall also take account the limitations of this research to prove the validity of my thesis. With the survey, which was the method for data collection for this research, several problematic issues exist because no identification data (such as age, gender, working experience) were not collected from participants. Later on I have many times pondered the choices I have made with the participants. Some sort of crisis in data collection is certain even if the researcher has experiences over decades of doing research, states Goldstein (2011). This is not very relief information, because I have pondered the problematic issue of learning not to do mistakes in research. For statistical analysis tradition, it would be compulsory to have background information about each individual member of those working teams. When submitting research papers to journal our papers have been sometimes been rejected because the lack of individual background information. However, in my knowledge the educational process (i.e. the pedagogics of early childhood education) are not choices of only one individual teacher in the group, but part of the educational culture of the whole team, kindergarten and early childhood education system. They are social and have to be negotiated and changed during the semesters with staff meetings and interaction with children. Therefor I still defend this dataset: It was collected to understand the social and cultural phenomenon of children's participation in Finnish early childhood education culture, not to compare or rank individual teachers' skills and abilities to teach and support children's participation. In fact

it would feel un-ethical choice to rate kindergartens and teachers within this phenomenon which is so recently adopted as an ideological and democratic value and children's right (UN, 1989) in Finnish early childhood education. A referee from an international journal asked me to re-write the research and collect a data set from kindergarten groups where children's participation was not part of the pedagogy. I had to say no to this suggestion: First of all it is hardly possible to find such groups in Finland (because no teacher should willingly act against children's right and the law) and the focus of the paper is to show benefits of participatory pedagogy, which is possible in other ways than only comparing our data to "zero-groups". Finally, the reviewers agreed with me that the focus for the research was acceptable and it gives new knowledge about phenomenon of children's participation in Nordic ECE context without comparing or ranking individuals, groups or kindergartens. The paper is published and is the third paper of this thesis.

In the analysis process of the qualitative data the researcher's triangulation was the most essential method to ensure the reliability. In general, method triangulation refers to use of both qualitative and quantitative analysis tools with the dataset (Tolan & Deuch 2015). Research triangulation was conducted to ensure that the analysis was based on valid understanding and previous knowledge (Golafshani, 2003). In this case different methods were used to ensure that errors in analysis would be recognized and the quality of the results were evaluated in group of researchers. With the abductive content analysis the identified meanings were discussed and evaluated based on theoretical background in shared meetings of researchers. I had the major responsibility of the process together with my first supervisor, and having backgrounds as early childhood education teachers with university degrees gave us expertise in educational practices. Together we could use the knowledge and qualifications of the research team members who all had higher degrees of the education sciences and specialties within the early childhood education research, developmental psychology and in the fields of methodology experience with content analysis. These expertises are considered to give us insight of the knowledge and critical evaluation skills for Finnish early childhood education. In this research the quantitative data collected with the survey was analyzed and presented based on good scientific principles. The reliability was checked with proper analysis methods (such as Cronbach's alpha or the p-value test) when necessary. In the process of analysis the triangulation was socially conducted also with the multiple reviewers of the research papers. I have no further insight of the identity of these reviewers but their critical comments and discussions about the problems and pitfalls of our

research paper were valuable for improving the quality of the research publications. My role in our research team was to take responsibility of the reviews required and also write response letters for these reviewers. In this process I learned new understanding about the justifying and reasoning the choices made with data analysis and writing the results.

### **3.5 Ethical consideration**

This research is aimed to consider young children's rights in early childhood education from the viewpoint of UN's (1989) Convention of the Rights of Child, which states that children in early childhood education have a right to be involved their everyday life and learning and also become listened and noticed as active agent. This viewpoint comes closer to idea of democratic education, where responsibilities and, thus the power, could be share (Göncü, Main & Abel, 2009). The focus of my research is to bring children's participation, i.e. their conceptions of everyday life and opportunities to influence to the professional debate of quality of early childhood education. My focus for this participation approach is to analyze and evaluate the pedagogical processes in ECE practices and policies in Finland. To reach my goal I have focused in early childhood educators perspectives about children participation in Finnish ECE as well as create frameworks (models) about enhancing further on children's participation. For enhancing children's participation in early childhood education, the voice of the educators working on the field is essential to listen and understand. The practices they are working with have not emerged by accident and I refuse to believe that none of them would have been made to harm intentionally children. More beneficial approach for development can be founded, when co-operation between research and practices are done and they can participate in the development process of new participatory practices. Freire writes about participatory research which cause is to empower participants to take account of their lives (2000).

As a kindergarten teacher, I have faced problematic ways of conducting early year pedagogics and even beyond that, disregarding practices that harm children's right to influence in their own life. Later, when giving lectures to educators who works as kindergarten teachers and childminder I have faced underestimation and even aggression towards children's competence and their agency. To me it seems, that there is still ignorance about children's rights and some educators seems to think, that it is in their power do decide weather of not children may participate in everyday decision about their lives. There is also old-fashioned

believes about children as helpless and needy (even creedy) beings, who's actions should be restricted and education should be only socialization to existing world, not reproduction and creative interpretations (Corsaro, 2011; Rogoff, 2008). From more wide perceptions about the role of human and developmental research I am holding upon the Relational Developmental Systems Theory by Lerner and Overton (2008). According to them the focus in developmental science should be considered through the adaptive developmental regulations between individual and social context to promoting social justice within a society to maximize chances of positive development for all individual children. Through this theoretical consideration the ethical justification for this research is not only identify children's participation, but aim to understand deeper the phenomenon of pedagogical support through participatory learning paradigm and by applying the new knowledge to educational programs and policies to better promote positive development.

In this research I rely in the guidelines of ethical research of Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. According to these guidelines the three main ethical principles of research in the humanities should be the guiding values in each research (Kuula, 2006; National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2009). I shall present these principles as they emerge in my research:

1. Respecting the autonomy of research subjects means that the participants volunteer in research and their participation is based on informed consent. The participants agreed that their responses to the survey were used for research and development and they could change their responses during the data collection period if they felt they had made any errors with the survey sheet. This was made possible by asking identification information (name of the kindergarten and the ages of the children in the group that participant team was working with). This identification information was removed from the data afterwards. Participants were told why the research was conducted and how the data was used afterwards. It was also considered important that the participants got the results in first handed, so before publishing any results in public, several meetings and lectures where organized in the context of the VKK-Metro development project to inform participants of the findings and discuss with them about the challenges and opportunities of supporting children's participation. The participants had also support for developing participatory practices through research and reflective practices in their everyday work with children from researchers and administrators, the

results of this process are published in international journals (see Venninen & Leinonen, 2012; Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen & Ojala, 2012).

2. Researcher should avoid causing harm to participants with all means necessary. In my research I have considered this through participants' perspective and children's perspective. From children's perspective the participation of the research was reported to make the participant reflect their pedagogical practices from the viewpoint of children's participation. Some participants reported about this reflection process in the survey sheets' feedback or in the organized meetings (see Venninen & al. 2012). In the viewpoint of participants the research was designed to support their professional competence and the results that are published are all in line with this principle. Critical considerations were discussed with participants and the research papers aims to show pedagogical practices that could overcome challenges of children's participation.
3. Privacy and data protection was conducted by requiring minimal identification data as explained before. All identification data (names of kindergarten and children's groups) was removed before the data analysis. The data is also storage only in protected e-storages in University of Helsinki.

Some problematic ethical issues have emerged during the research process. In the data-collection process the problem of informed consent were emerging. Lindsay (2000) states that participants should always ensure that participants understand both short-term and long-term implications that research could affect. Short-term implications in this study were concerning the ECE groups' pedagogy and interactions between children and educators and the questionnaire acted as a tool to bring out several problematic issues in pedagogies in kindergartens. The teams who participated in the pre-survey gave for example feedback about the questionnaire that *"Your questions made us to think, negotiate and re-organize our practices"*. This was a short-term implication of the research that we as researchers were not think about before, but with this message it seemed important to send back to the kindergartens their responses to be used for pedagogical development. The research group provide information to each kindergarten's manager considering her kindergarten and also give recommendations about using those in development of pedagogy. This was also implicated in the questionnaire form so the participants knew they would have their responses back. Second short-term implication of witch the participants were aware was an

opportunity for participants (and also those member of ECE staff in communal kindergartens, who didn't participate) to take part in several lectures and discussions about the results of that survey. These lectures and coming-together situations were the first occasions where the results of the survey were revealed and discussed with participants. I consider all this discussion work the most essential part of my research. I hold with Freirean ideology about that people's own knowledge about practices and action-culture in their field is valuable and therefore they should be considered active agents who can analyze and develop their work (Freire, 2000). In that process researcher is more like an enhancer or a facilitator who participates in the development and the research process itself brought the participants as owners of their knowledge (see Rahman & Fals-Borda, 1991). If this kind of empowerment should happen among early childhood education practitioners, could children and adults participate equally in sharing power and responsibility in the local level of kindergarten and even further on, more global level, where children could become visible members of society (see Robinsson & Diaz, 2007).

Long-term implications of this study were however quite abstract (like having an effect to future curriculum of ECE in both local and national level). For example in one of the participant communes children's participation were adopted as a key development issue for several years after the VKK-Metro development process for all communal kindergartens. I would considerer the research paper of our team also part of the long-term implication, because through them the national ECE teacher education have had influence. It is also been important to shed light in Finnish ECE settings internationally.

## **4 Results**

In this section I shall present the main findings of my five research papers published in different research journals during 2012-2015. The findings of each paper have been first introduced in separate sub-chapters of this Results section. In each sub-chapters I shall briefly introduce the focus and the goal of each research papers. Then I briefly describe the methods for each particular paper as they are used to obtain the goals of the research and finally I shall present the main results of each papers. Concluding aspects from all five research papers are drawn in the final sub-chapter the Conclusion of the results.

### **4.1 Children's participation in Finnish pre-school education – Identifying, Describing and Documenting Children's Participation**

Published in Nordic Early Childhood Education Research Journal in 30<sup>th</sup> April 2014 by  
Jonna Leinonen, Annu Brotherus and Tuulikki Venninen.

In the first research paper the participatory pedagogy of early childhood education in Finland was introduced with National curriculum and practical data-set in a comparative study. The aim in this particular research was to show controversial issues concerning children's participation that exists between the institutional goals stated in the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (2010) and the practices described by the participants of my research.

In this first research paper of my thesis my responsibilities were focusing on the theoretical background and analyzing the data from the participant pre-school classes. This part of the process I first conducted alone during spring 2012. After that the triangulation was used during the process of theory-matching and writing the results in the research paper. With



triangulation between me and the other two researchers the conclusion of the two different data sets: The core-curriculum and the practices were formed.

During the process I have learned the basis of making comparative research. From my perspective, this is essential skills for researcher who is trying to build a knowledge of a scholar as well as a development professional of ECE practices. The idea of comparative research is not discuss only similarities and differences between the data sets, but find holistic causalities to interpret and explain the existing phenomenon in different contexts, like in this case in ECE practices and policies.

In Finland there is two different national curriculums for ECE. Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland (2010) is compulsory and it has to be followed in pre-school education for six years old children in ECE. However, as showed in the original research paper, the other National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (2005) is not compulsory according the Act on Children's Day Care (1973). Therefore in this paper has been used the compulsory curriculum guidelines and the data only from participants who worked in pre-school groups. There were 174 pre-school groups' educators' teams (N = 568 educators); the children's age in the groups was either 5-7 years or 6-7 years of age.

In this paper the participatory practices in Finnish pre-school groups are described, analyzed and evaluated. More specific it will focus on how participation became visible in these practices. The research questions are:

1. How does participation become evident through the Core Curriculum?
2. How does participation become evident through the descriptions about daily activities of pre-school educators?

#### **4.1.1 Methods**

The analysis for this research was carried out in three stages. First, the National curriculum guidelines for pre-school education was analyzed with deductive content analysis to describe how children's participatory rights as well as their role as active agents are understood in pre-school education curriculum. Then the findings from this analysis were used to analyze the data from pedagogical practices with abductive approach (see the chapter 3.3 Analysis plan in this thesis). Finally, the both data sets were analyzed together with theoretical

frameworks to build understanding of the phenomenon of participation in Finnish pre-schools and the controversial issues between the curriculum and the practices.

#### 4.1.2 Findings

According to the analysis, the participation of children is only lightly adopted as a goal for pre-school education in National curriculum guidelines. However from the wider perspectives considering children's participation issues such as promoting children's growth to humanity and supporting them to become responsible member of society have been understood essential in Finnish pre-school education. These goals are achieved with enhancing children's joy for learning and giving opportunities for social and shared experiences. The role of teachers is to promote these goals by organizing learning environment and sharing joint responsibility of children's development with parents, not children themselves. Children's role is considered as active member of society who are involved in and making choices and expressing opinions. Participatory practices by teachers are described more specifically to be supporters for children's learning and development as well as their wellbeing. The curriculum guidelines (2010) states from whole child perspective that "*...through the participation, educators support a child's growth, learning and well-being...*".

On the other hand, in practical pre-school education described by ECE professionals who participated in the study the concept of children's participation was understood from multitude perspectives. In some pre-school classes for example participation was considered to mean that children participated in special learning activities designed by teachers. The opportunity to make choices was mentioned to exist only when children could choose activities for time of free play. In few descriptions children's participation was considered harmful for pedagogical practices and therefore it should be limited and only offered as an opportunity in specially designed activities like helping adults in meal times or tidying toys or environment. The goals for children's participation from the Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education (2010) did emerge in the data from pedagogical practices of some of the participants' pre-school classes. Children's participation was considered, in rare occasions, through chances to participate in, organize, and implement activities for their peers with or without educators. Opportunities to have voice and participating in negotiations and children's meetings were considered important, and teachers organized opportunities for these activities in some pre-school groups. In addition, participation was understood as the

ability to influence and participate in common activities. Participants suggested that the participation of children was reflected in the rehearsing rules upon which the group agreed. The role of the teacher in pre-school groups as a supporter for children's participation seemed not to emerge. Teachers' role was described rather distant gatekeepers, who consider children's views, when designing learning environments and accepting children's suggestions about play ideas. The process of scaffolding children's community in activities that promoted kind of a group-spirit was considered essential.

As a result for this research can be stated that the idea of pre-school education described in the National curriculum guidelines (2010) differs essentially from everyday practices when children's participation is concerned. *"Pre-school promotes supportive interaction, cooperation, joint responsibility and participation."* (National curriculum guidelines for pre-school education, 2010). This participation manifested in the curriculum guidelines can be considered as a multidimensional issue that is characterized as child's interaction with teachers, peers and the environment. However in pedagogical practices these aspects of participation do not become evident. Children's are not considered as active learners and members of society and therefore their chances to have voice and influence in are limited in occasionally chances, mainly focusing on free play activities.

Even more controversial is that when the National curriculum guidelines underline children's developing skills in learning and participation, these aspects are not considered even as minor issues in pedagogical practices. Only issue that was considered essential for children's participation both in curriculum guidelines and pedagogical practices were play activities. The curriculum guidelines states the importance of learning through play but does not describe how it should appear and how children's skills could be supported. Also according to the educators children's participation emerges mainly in play activities, but even there it does not exist as part of the children's learning process. Finally both the curriculum guidelines and pedagogical practices seems to lack of idea of children's perspectives about their own learning and membership of the society. It would be essential to consider children's perspectives as a basis for both institutional guidelines for organizing the early childhood education as well as realization for pedagogical practices in everyday interaction in ECE.

## **4.2 Supporting children's participation in Finnish Child Care Centers**

Published in *Early Childhood Education Journal* in 30<sup>th</sup> April 2013 (online, ahead of printing). Printed version published in 2014, no. 42, pp. 211–218 by Tuulikki Venninen, Jonna Leinonen, Lasse Lipponen & Mikko Ojala.

The aim of this paper is to describe the existing challenges for children's participation in ECE and through recognizing them, build understanding about teachers' chances to overcome those challenges. In the second research paper of my thesis I was responsible of the analyzing and reporting the quantitative results of the research. The research team of all four author met almost every week during the process in semester 2011-2012. In those meetings the methods and the results were discussed and common understanding about the phenomena of children's participation was formed. I also met with specialist professor of quantitative methods in educational sciences several times and with his help with MPlus software the analysis were conducted. Finally I was responsible about the submitting process and the revisions needed for accepting the paper for publishing.

In this paper children's participation in early years is considered as a dynamic and ongoing process, where educators have important role to build knowledge of the phenomenon in their everyday work. This requires also that teachers can identify the existing challenges and develop the pedagogical practices to overcome these challenges that limit children's chances to participation. These challenges for supporting children's participation in ECE context can be linked in the issue of ill-developed practices in the context of the everyday practice in ECE settings. For example, strict everyday timetables or lack of time for professional discussions and meetings can prevent development of practices. This lack of time creates a sense of haste, when working staff is holding to existing routines and rules, and may result in disorganized work practices. (Duncan, 2009; Rodd, 2004). However it has also shown, that educators' beliefs about children's competence and needs, as well as the educators' personal values about learning activities either challenge or aid children's participation and this, on the other hand, have influence in the quality of the early childhood practices (Nyland, 2009; Rodd, 2009; Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelson, 2001). Supporting children's participation is a process of development in which educators in groups should be involved together with the entire ECE institution on the municipal level should also be committed to such support.

In this study, the research problems are to classify what are the most critical challenges to supporting children's participation in the early childhood education settings, and identify on which of these challenges educators could influence in. The goal of this paper is find understanding about overcoming the challenges that limit children's participation in ECE practices by pedagogical solutions. During the process I learned to understand how the statistical data and multivariable methods, in this case, the factor analysis offer possibilities to interpret and evaluate the research phenomenon in the context of prior theoretical and practical knowledge. I have learned that thought the results of an analysis are not easy to interpret or understand, the hard work is required to find connections and causal relations within large data set. This information was further on used to build knowledge about the phenomenon of participatory pedagogy and its challenges in ECE settings.

#### **4.2.1 Methods**

For the goal of the paper the quantitative data about participants experiences about existing challenges and their chances to influence those were considered bear the most important value. The participants documented these challenges in practice on Likert scale variables about their everyday practices. The 5-point scale ranged from 'I fully agree' to 'I fully disagree.' The contents of the statements presented in the questionnaire were formed from the previous research on children's participation together with the pre-survey conducted by the same research group. The teams also rated how highly they thought they could influence these challenges on a 5-point scale from 'we can't influence' to 'we can influence and decide'.

The exploratory structural equation modeling (ESEM) analysis was considered best method for these variables to find the optimal solution for grouping the variables about existing challenges. The ESEM was used instead of the maximum-likelihood methods, because it is known to be able to produce better factor-model testing sequences for testing the number of factors (Asparouhov and Muthe'n 2009). ESEM would also offer more stable solution for factor-model because the simultaneous estimations of both confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were allowed in the process. The ESEM gave a results of five factors, when loadings less than 0.30 were excluded from the matrix. The reliability of the analysis was measured with both Cronbach's alpha and Tarkkonen Rho, because the Rho is more suitable for the data collected from the real working environments

rather than from laboratory tests (see Vehkalahti & al., 2006), like in this case. The each factor of the five-factor model got Rho's values between .611 and .781 and are considered reliable ( $> 0.6$ ).

After the factor analysis gave five factors as a results, they were interpreted and described based on theoretical knowledge about the phenomenon. Then the correlations between the factors were identified. Finally the participants' chances to influence in each of these factors were measured with comparing the means and deviations within the sum-variables formed based on the five factors.

### **4.2.2 Findings**

The ESEM analysis yielded a five-factor solution of the challenges of supporting children's participation. The connections interpreted between variables in each factors were identified in the labeling process. Factors were called: Adult-child Ratio; Professional Skills; Managing Work; Work Practices, and Special Needs.

In first factor, Adult-child ratio, existing knowledge about large groups of children together with too a large number of children per educator were identified and confirmed. This factor didn't give any new information about the challenges of supporting children's participation, but was in line with previous research. In the second factor, Professional Skills, challenges that were connected to problems of professional knowledge and skills were identified. These challenges included lack of knowledge about children's development as well as missing observation skills and lack of participatory practices in everyday activities. Important issue was that the factor of Professional Skills was connected to the third factor, because it shared to variable with it. The third factor, Managing Work, included items that were relative to organizing everyday work in kindergartens. It contains variables that are linked in skills of managing work, such as inability to prioritize work practices and additional responsibilities that can be considered as charging issues for educators and trough that they a causing limitations to children's chances to experience participation. The third factor has also loadings with variables that are connected to educators' individual wellbeing, such as exhaustion and experience of haste. The fourth factor, Work Practices, had loadings about routines and fixed schedules. The Work Practices factor was considered causing limitations for children's participation because in strictly monitored environment there is not enough time and resources for non-formal adult-child interaction or chances to children to have

their voice heard. The final factor, Special Needs, was focusing on issues of, on the other hand, children's communication skills and, on the other hand, requirements of parents and the children with special needs. This fifth factor was connected to children's individual experiences of participation and the challenges that are faced when supporting each child in a group situations.

The factors of challenges were not totally independent and the relations between factors were observed with correlation matrix. Rather strong correlation was found between the Adult-child Ratio and the Special Need factors, which is understandable because it seems that educators feel like focusing only on the individual child and his/her family's needs. The findings suggested also that Professional Skills have rather strong correlation together with Managing Work factor (0.638) and minor links in both Working Practices and Special Needs factors. Therefore we suggested that the educators' professional skills are essential when children's participation is enhanced and the development process of participatory pedagogy is realized in everyday activities in ECE environment.

Finally the results of educators' experiences of influencing in the five challenges of supporting children's participation were examined by comparing means of sum-variables. The sum-variables were formed to represent each factor. The findings suggested that educators' have experienced strong influencing opportunities on challenges of Professional Skills and Managing Work. This means that even the challenges of supporting children's participation caused by lack of professional skills and ill-managed working environment exist, they are considered possible to overcome with developing skills of professional knowledge and work management. However, the challenges of Work Practices and Special Needs were considered more problematic to overcome and the educators had experience only average chances to have influence on those. Finally the challenges of Adult-child ratio were considered almost impossible to influence on, only few outlier hits were counted on having influence according to the participants.

### **4.3 Children's self-regulation in the context of participatory pedagogy in early childhood education**

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The third paper of my research is focusing to connect research tradition from developmental psychology studies to early childhood learning research. With this research the concept of children's self-regulation was adopted with the new theoretical knowledge. The aim of this paper is to build knowledge about how children's self-regulatory processes in early childhood education learning context can be executed through participatory pedagogy used in ECE program in Finland. This goal requires understanding about the mechanism in both self-regulation and participation early childhood to build pedagogical approach for the phenomena. The theoretical background was formed in co-operation with me and co-author Mikko Ojala, whose experience and deep knowledge about developmental issues was essential in the process. In the process my role was forming the synthesis of the theoretical knowledge of two different approaches. I was mainly responsible for the process of analysis, where the existing data was analyzed from new these to form understanding of children's self-regulation in Finnish ECE context and to create a framework of participatory pedagogy. Tough, the triangulation between the researchers was essential in the abductive analysis cycle, where also the reviewers of the paper were considered to participate: With their revisions request answered improved the original manuscript greatly. Finally, the process of forming the discussion was shared with the researcher in several lunch meetings and proof-reading cycles where the level of abstraction level could be set as high as required for the paper. My duty was to write those discussed ideas for the final paper and process the developing understanding to the knowledge of participatory pedagogy as a form of a new theoretical and practical insight. During this process my knowledge of essential issues of child development was growing together with the understanding of participation in larger scale. I learned to consider children's participation through the whole child approach and find connections between developmental psychology and early childhood education pedagogical theories. I also have learned that through my scholarly work I can contribute to the international discussion of children as competent and capable actors of their learning and development.



The paper adopts a whole child approach from developmental psychology which offers viewpoint for researchers working in education and child development (e.g., Diamond, 2010; Liew, 2012). Recognition of the whole child has been rooted strongly in pedagogical philosophy and practice especially in Finland (e.g., Finnish National Board of Education, 2010; National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005). For example, the national curriculum in Finland states that the goal of education is to promote children's development towards humanity by guiding them to ethically responsible behavior and honor other peoples' rights (Finnish National Board of Education, 2010). Through this whole-child approach, self-regulation is related to participation and through it to enhancement of children's skills and self-esteem, as well as support better decision-making, and improve policies toward children (Mayall, 1999; Sinclair, 2004).

The focus of study is on teaching practices as pedagogical processes that intend to improve children's participation including having a voice, practicing independent initiatives and sharing power in decisions making about everyday activities (Shier, 2001; Venninen & Leinonen, 2012). The framework of supporting children's self-regulation through participatory pedagogy is adopted from Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation, where children's increasing opportunities for participation can be linked in pedagogical processes and practices. The framework requires from teachers to adopt children's participation as primary value and goal for their pedagogical work.

The aim of this paper is to build knowledge about how children's self-regulatory processes in early childhood education learning context can be executed through participatory pedagogy.

The research questions are:

1. What experiences of self-regulation do children have when engaging in participatory activities?
2. How do teachers offer pedagogical support to children as they engage in these experiences?

#### **4.3.1 Methods**

In this study the results were found through abductive approach with mixed methods in three staged analysis process. The abductive approach was founded suitable for this

particular research, because the aim of the paper was conduct results from two different theoretical basis: The developmental psychology of self-regulation and the early childhood education research about supporting children’s participation. The task required three staged process of analysis where researchers creates a framework of different theories together with the data in a creative process of “theory matching” (Kováč & Spens, 2005).

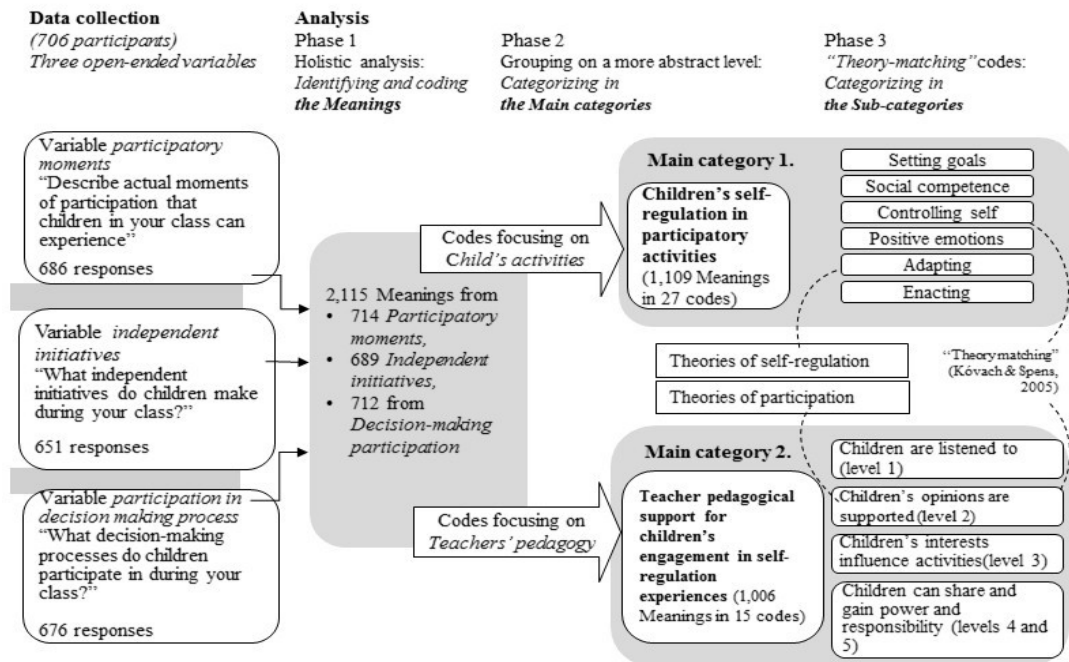


Figure 3 The process of analysis in abductive approach

First, the data from participant ECE groups’ staff members was coded with the “idea of meaning” using content analysis. In the second phase these meanings were grouped for major categories of Children’s self-regulation and Teacher’s support to shed light to the differences of these approaches. Both major categories were under the main focus, participatory pedagogy, of the paper. At same time the essential quantitative variables were used to find more information about the existence of phenomenon in major categories in different stages of participation. Then finally, the main categories were grouped in sub-categories following the prior theoretical understanding about the phenomenon of both participation and self-regulation. In this phase the abductive approach was essential for making interpretations and mapping followed phenomena of supporting children’s self-regulation through participatory pedagogy visible and understandable.

### 4.3.2 Findings

The findings of this paper were divided in two categories according to the research problems of the study. First task was to focus on children's experiences of self-regulation through engaging in participatory activities. Major finding was that activities that provided social competence and goal setting were activated more often and over half (54 %) of all documented self-regulatory activities belonged into these sub-categories. Also activities that provided self-controlling skills and positive emotions were common. However adaptation, enacting and the skills necessary to participate in activities were mentioned rarely in the documentations of children's everyday activities.

Second, the mechanism of supporting children's self-regulation was built through a framework of participatory pedagogy. The framework suggest that children's participation is dynamic and ongoing process that can be adopted through five-level model of Pathways to Participation by Shier (2001). The support for children's participation were analyzed with participant teachers' supporting and enhancing actions and were collected by the highest level of participation. The results show that in Finnish ECE children's participation is supported in each levels of the framework and because the higher levels are dependable of the lower level, enhancing children's participation is considered important in Finnish ECE and implemented throughout.

In interesting finding was that children's age seems not to influence in the pedagogical support of teachers. Only in the highest level of participation, where children could share power and responsibility with teachers the differences between kindergartens classes (3 to 5 years old children) and pre-primary school classes (6 years old children) were significant and meaningful. This means that children's age does not prevent children from participating in self-regulatory activities and children's competence and agency is recognized by Finnish ECE teachers and participatory pedagogy is conducted in all age groups. The level of participatory pedagogy is not, however, stable in Finnish ECE, because the deviations between participants were growing in the higher levels of the framework.

Overall the findings of the paper Supporting children's self-regulation through participatory pedagogy indicates that through participatory pedagogy teachers' could enhance children's attentional flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control or self-regulation and a whole child approach could be adopted as a key element of ECE policies and practices.

## 4.4 Design learning experiments together with children

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In this fourth paper of my study the focus of research is understand processes of design learning where also children's gain opportunities to be listened to and to participate in daily early childhood education planning. The aims is show how the educators design learning participatory ways and how children in pedagogical practices gain opportunities to participate in designing their own learning

In this research paper of my thesis I was responsible of conducting the whole paper from the original idea of using the concept of Design learning with data of the participatory pedagogy to the final research paper. I first conducted the process during spring 2012 and presented the results in the congress of Design Learning in University of Helsinki. In the next phase the findings were discussed and interpreted in triangulation with the second author. Finally I was responsible of completing the paper.

In Finnish ECE the process of planning activities is considered an important part of an educator's professional skills (Ojala, 2010; Härkönen, 2002). These processes include planning, implementing and evaluating activities and interactions that support children's learning. The process is called designing learning in this second research paper. Designing learning is viewed as thinking educational practices beforehand (Härkönen, 2002) and also reflect them during the implementation and finally evaluate those for developing practices (Ojala & Venninen, 2012). In Finnish early childhood education the goals for children's learning are set in the two curriculum guidelines (2005; 2010) and the national curriculums creates a basis for goal-oriented interaction and collaboration which systematically supports children's development and learning. Designing learning activities is considered an important part of an educator's duties, even it has been pointed out that taking care of small children especially limits the time available for staff's professional meetings and planning (Rodd, 2004).

National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (2005) states that children's learning should occur during playful activities. The play is viewed as a children's best opportunity to express themselves and to make decisions in ECE (Bae, 2009;

Duncan, 2009). Children feel that they have more choices during free-play than in other activities and they have chances to make initiatives, influence themes in play and choose on their own actions (Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelson, 2001; 2005). The ideology of democracy exist also in play, when children negotiate, have an impact and became interested in participating (Bae, 2009; Göncü et al., 2009). For these reason learning through play activities were also considered essential part of designing learning processes in this paper. In this study, we explore issues connected with design processes and children's opportunities to be listened to and to participate in daily early childhood education planning. The research problem is:

What kinds of design learning processes exist are available for children to participate in?

#### **4.4.1 Methods**

In this paper the mixed-methods approach is used. It means that data from likert-scale quantitative variables in sets of three have been interpreted together with open-ended variables to gain understanding about the processes of planning, implementing, evaluating children's learning. The participants of play-age groups (3 to 5 year olds), pre-school groups (6 to 7 year olds) and mixed groups (3 to 7 year olds) were divided in separated groups to show similarities and differencies between groups in design learning processes. Abductive approach was used to shed light to children's chances to participate in these processes as well as have other kinds of influence in design learning were especially accounted. The findings were presented according to mixed-method approach with results from both quantitative and qualitative mixed.

#### **4.4.2 Findings**

The design learning process as explained before can be viewed through three stages: The planning phase, the implementation phase and the evaluation phase. These phases were compared through statistical variables (in table 1) where can be seen that children's chances to participate any of these phases are at most at average level.

table 1 – Children’s chances to participate in the design learning process in three phases (scale from 1=“never” to 5=“always”)

		1. Children can participate in planning activities with educators	2. Children can design and implement activities by themselves	3. Children can participate in evaluating activities with educators
Play-age group	Mean	2,76	2,7	2,92
	S.D.	0,824	0,887	0,852
Preschool group	Mean	3,18	3,13	3,31
	S.D.	0,776	0,884	0,879
Mixed groups	Mean	2,92	2,99	3,16
	S.D.	0,825	0,828	0,792
Total	Mean	2,9	2,86	3,06
	S.D.	0,831	0,895	0,864

Interesting finding was that children could participate in evaluation phase most often in all groups. Opportunities to participate in planning and implementation phases were lower. In pre-school groups children can most often participate in all phases of designing their learning. In play-age groups children got these opportunities less often while in mixed groups children opportunities to participate were in between. This means that older children are considered to be more capable of designing their learning.

The findings from qualitative data showed that participants have founded different ways to support children’s participation in the design learning process. Participants considered interaction between children and educators giving important understanding about children’s perspectives. They also mentioned to have chances to interview children about their interests and ideas at the start of the school year. In implementation phase the role of educators was described to be supportive. Educators could, for example provide materials and time for children’s self-initiated activities. However examples of children and educators sharing responsibilities in activities were not brought out. The phase of evaluation were mentioned only few times even according to the quantitative data it emerges more often than the other two phases. In the evaluation phase the importance of listening child’s voice was highlighted. The evaluation phase were considered also to giving information for future learning designing process.

Finally, the correlations between the quantitative variables were considered to give information connections between the different phases of design learning process. The

strongest correlation exists between planning and evaluation, but implementing activities is also strongly connected to planning and rather strongly to evaluation. It was also founded out that educators did plan pedagogical activities for children based on children's interest had meaningful correlation with planning phase. Educators' sensitivity, i.e. the willingness of chance plans when children's interest sifts elsewhere had significant correlations between all the phases of design learning process.

#### **4.5 Educators' Perceptions of Facilitating Children's Participation in Early Childhood Education**

In press to the Australasian Journal of Early Childhood by Jonna Kangas, Tuulikki Venninen & Mikko Ojala

The focus of this final paper is to create a tentative framework of supporting children's participation in ECE context. This framework is created based on strong literature review of existing models and theories about children's participation together with the knowledge of my own research work with the concept of children's participation.

This final paper of my thesis was conducted in a ongoing triangulation process with the second author. The writing process of this paper was rather long; the idea of constructing a framework of supporting children's participation was discussed already in 2010 in the first phase of the research process and the framework was created, interpreted and re-produced through several cycles. The paper was also submitted for publishing two other journals, where we got supportive feedback witch we used to revise and rewrite the paper. At the end the scope of these two journals was not suitable for this paper. My role in conducting this final paper was growing stronger during the process and finally I made the decision for the journal as well I took responsibility to take care of the final editing and submitting process. In the writing process of this last research paper of my thesis I have start to understand how the knowledge of new theoretical issues, in this case the children's participation, can be formed to support everyday practices in the ECE settings. I have learned to think out of the box and see the more holistic picture of pedagogy of ECE through my findings. Within this research paper I wish to create a framework that give new knowledge about participatory pedagogy as well as new ideas to implement it in ECE practices.

Participation is understood through democratic education, where facilitating children's participation can be seen an essential part of promoting children's rights (Smith, 2002; Woodhead, 2006). Participation is also seen as essential part of socio-constructive learning paradigm where enhancing children's participation is seen as promoting children's capacity for social learning in which children actively build peer cultures of their own (Corsaro, 2011; Kaartinen & Kumpulainen, 2012). Finally participation is also considered as an important issue to lead a better understanding of children's competence, vulnerability, and power issues and also promote better decision-making and protection of children by educators (Mayall, 1999; Sinclair, 2004).

Previous research have shown that in ECE children's participation occurs within the interaction between a child and an educator in a learning environment (Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelson, 2001; Woodhead, 2010) and within the community of children and educators participating in everyday practices (Kaartinen & Kumpulainen, 2012). Chances to express independent initiatives, and with support of educators, practice having influence and bearing responsibility with enjoyment and feelings of belonging was found essential for children's participation in our previous research (Venninen & Leinonen, 2012). We have also found that children's participatory skills can be supported through taking part in design learning process, where children can practice and finally master activities of planning, implementing and evaluating their learning (Leinonen & Venninen, 2012). Finally we have found that children's skills of learning through self-regulation grow stronger in the environment where they are supported with participatory pedagogy (Leinonen, Ojala & Venninen, 2015).

There are acknowledged models of an educator's role in children's participation that attempt to capture the rich characteristics of this issue (Hart, 1992; Shier 2001). However, using these models to develop participatory practices in early childhood education has limitations because they only describe participating in the decision making process. Participation is a more complex and comprehensive issue than just decision making. Therefore we suggest that a new framework is needed in which participation is viewed as an ongoing practice where all the activities in the child's life are taken account. The world of small children in an early educational context is full of doing, acting and learning in interaction with both peers and educators (Leinonen, Ojala & Venninen, 2015; Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Smith, 2002; Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2001). The main goal of this paper is to find and



describe educators' perceptions and conceptions of facilitation of children's participation through participatory pedagogy in everyday activities and interaction, and through this observations propose a tentative framework of ongoing support process of children's participation via developing practices of participatory pedagogy.

#### **4.5.1 Methods**

This paper have been conducted using mainly data of qualitative description about everyday pedagogical practices and children's participation implantations in ECE settings. The analysis method for data is abductive content analysis, where the theory matching (Kovach & Spens, 2005) were conducted in three phases.

In the first phase of analysis each response was sectioned in units of analysis and coded with a 'meaning of idea' titles and 5294 meanings were formed. Secondly, the unit of analysis were grouped to the categories of different types of supporting children's participation by the educators. Theoretical background theories (such as Berthelsen, 2009; Clark, 2005; Nyland, 2009; Shier, 2001) were used for grouping and identifying the different forms of facilitating participation. 27 categories were formed. Thirdly, these categories were named to describe common characteristics of children's participation. The categories were then further conceptualized into three main categories of participatory practices. By counting the number of various units of analysis, we found a percentage for each main category. The main categories were:

- 1) Facilitating participation by environment and atmosphere (12.3% of units of analysis)
- 2) Professional skills for learning and supporting children's perspective (36.6%)
- 3) Facilitating ongoing participatory practices (51.1%).

Finally, the mixed methods approach was used to find the occurrence of these three categories by using frequencies of statistical variables to support or find controversial issues of each of these variables. These quantitative variables explore both children's chances to influence the activities of group as well as educators' support of children's participation. For the first main category, variables in which children had chances to influence their environment were chosen. For the second main category, variables of how educator perceived and adopted children's perspectives perceived were selected, and for the third main category, variables about the educator's role as a supporter and enhancer were chosen. The frequencies of these variables were presented within the results of each

variable in the original paper. This mixed methods approach was used to increase the reliability of the analysis and show further information about the three categorized phenomenon of enhancing children's participation.

#### **4.5.2 Findings**

The findings on the first main category, Facilitating participation by environment and atmosphere, suggest that essential for children's participation is the atmosphere in the class. The positive and supportive atmosphere supports children to experience belonging and joy, which in turn create positive learning experience and support children's competence. Educators' attitude towards children and their active learning was described to be important supportive issue in this. Atmosphere was also linked in physical environment were educators' highlighted that children's opportunities to organize their learning environment create important experiences of participation, even the environment itself is considered unsatisfactory. When comparing different age group, we found that when children grew older, they received more opportunities to affect their environment and use tools and equipment of their own choosing. However chances to influence in environment by re-organizing the classrooms or using equipment to explore it was prohibited in one-fourth of all groups. Mostly children could have influence in their environment by choosing activities where they used the environment creatively (like art or sports activities). Educators emphasized that ECE environments have been designed for children and to support children's activities.

In the second main category, Professional skills for learning and supporting children's perspective, was considered important for supporting children's participation in 40 % of all coded mentions. This included both passive and active interaction with children. Observing and documenting children's growing competence and developing skills was considered essential passive interaction. Together with passive interaction active role of educators who shares experiences with children and is sensitive to their initiatives was highlighted. However in quantitative measurements opportunities children's interest was taken into account on average level in all of the age groups. Nevertheless, toddler's initiatives were considered less among the educators than in groups of elder children and toddlers could participate rarely in the design learning process with educators while older children could participate on average (see the findings also in the 2. research paper of this thesis).

In the third main category, Educators as facilitators of ongoing participatory practices, the children's participation was concerned as developing phenomenon and it was considered essential to develop participatory practices continuously. Educators support to children's participation were described to have many forms: For example, participants highlighted that educator can help children to both implement their ideas and bring their own ideas when taking a part in play activities. It was also considered essential to support children's voice by stopping to listen when children want to discuss or showing an idea and to enable the expression of individual opinions. This support required also pedagogical planning and chances to divide children in small groups or clubs where every children had chances to experience participation. Finally, the findings were considered together to form a holistic picture about the process of enhancing children's participation with the issues mentioned in the main categories. The framework of ongoing process of enhancing participation is formed of core-elements. This tentative framework with the four core-elements of the process of developing participatory practices (figure 4).

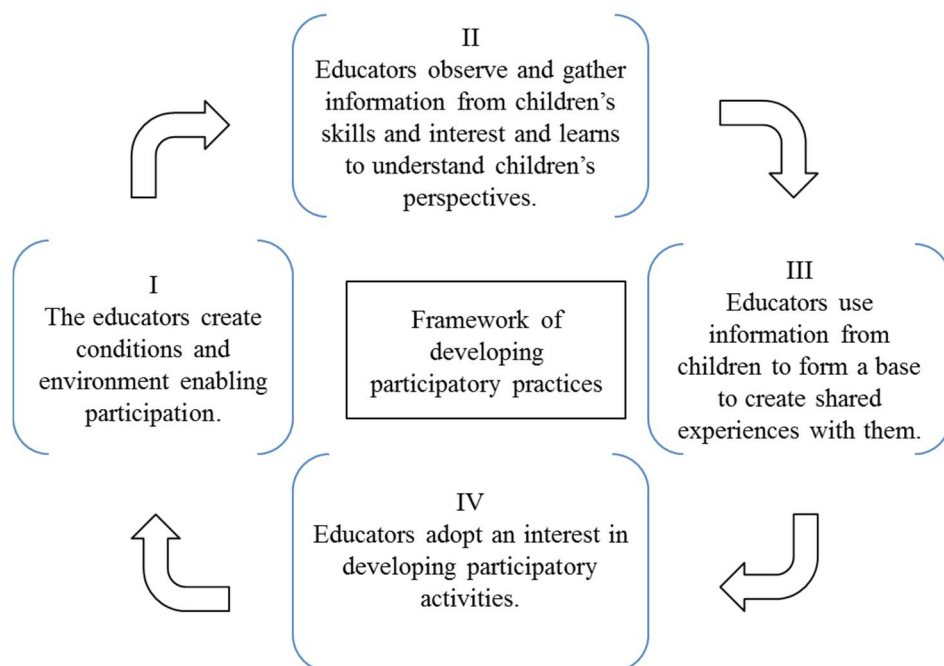


Figure 4 The framework of developing participatory practices

The first core element, Educators create conditions and an environment that enables participation, is based on the first main category where the importance of environment and

atmosphere was emphasized. We consider that this is the starting point of developing children's participation. In the second core-element, the educator observes and collects information from children and learns to understand the child's perspective, which was highlighted as essential professional skill through passive interaction. The third core-element contains the active interaction empathized in the second main category. The educator and children join in shared experiences where educator uses the information from the children's skills and interest to support children to participate. It includes professional understanding of making interpretations and drawing conclusions from the information received from children. All this information is used as a basis for shared planning between educators and children. Both the second and the third core-elements are based in the findings of the second main category. The last core-element is based on the idea of enhancing children's participation and developing participatory practices in everyday life in the ECE settings.

## 5 Conclusions

For the conclusion of the results presented above I shall use two different theoretical frameworks. With the first one, the Shier's (2001) Pathways to participation, I shall focus on the development of children's participation through teacher's support on each levels of participation. The perspective of this model will combine both children's participation and teacher's support for it. However, as shown in my master thesis (2010) and further on the third research paper of this thesis (Leinonen, Ojala & Venninen, 2015) the levels four and five are existing together considering the power-issues of children's participation in the ECE settings, therefore these highest level will be evaluate together. For the second viewpoint of concluding the findings I will use the Tentative Framework of Enhancing Children's Participation as presented on the final paper of this thesis. This framework published by Leinonen, Venninen & Ojala (2015) offers opportunities for planning, implementing and evaluating the ongoing process of enhancing children's participation by teacher's perspectives. Therefore it can considered important when focusing on participatory pedagogy in early childhood education settings.

As shown and discussed on each of the research paper children's voice is considered important in Finnish ECE and therefore children have chances to become listened to. This is also the first level of participation according the Shier's (2001) model of pathways to participation. Listening children's voice become evident in many pedagogical practices in this research. Teachers are, for example, interested in children's views and experiences and children can also express their interest in other ways than talking. As Malaguzzi (see Moss & Clark, 2011) has described in his writing, children have hundreds of languages and it is essential that adults are sensitive enough to "listen" all these, not only spoken words. Gestures, expressions and other non-verbal forms of communication are considered important also in this research and the whole child approach is considered in all of the research papers. Listening children's voice is part of everyday interaction between educators

and children and therefore it can be considered essential part of participatory pedagogy. Giving children opportunities to become listened is part of children's rights in United Nations Convention of Child's Rights (1989), as suggested also in the research papers one and three. As explained in the third paper of this thesis, expression of one's voice is not considered only as a right, but also an item of learning and developing of skills of self-regulation such as adaptation and social competence. In the fifth research paper the importance of social environment and atmosphere of the group is discussed in the light of building pedagogical opportunities for children to express their voices. Certain limitations of the expression of the voice was also found in my research. For example, as shown in the first, third and fourth research paper, children's opportunities to become listened limited strongly in activities of free-play: Their views were not considered as important in other activities and teachers even planned learning for children, not with children. This can be understood through educators' limited professional knowledge about children's participation, as discussed in the second research paper. However these constraints in professional skills were considered to overcome by influencing the action culture of group and kindergarten together with developing professional knowledge.

In the second level of participation children's opinions and views are supported to. In his model of the pathways of participation Shier (2001) suggests that the level is strongly connected to the first level, but included more active support from educators. This is also visible in my research, which implicates that supporting opinions is strongly linked in listening children's voice. As shown in the fourth paper of this research, children's opinions are asked and their views mapped by educators in the Finnish ECE context. This can for example mean that children can evaluate the learning activities, like explained in the fourth research paper, or their opinions are asked concerning the excursions made with group, books to be read aloud or activities arranged by educators, like shown in the first and the fifth research paper. This is considered to suggest that the children's views are connected to actual activities happening in the ECE groups, therefore this second level can also be linked in the next level of participation explained further on in the next paragraph. The second level of participation is not empathized as strongly as the first level in the pedagogical skills and activities of the educators. It was shown in the first and fourth paper that children's views and opinions are asked and each individual child is supported in morning meetings, where each child may have their own turn to express them. During the daily routines it nevertheless seems that these views are not asked continuously. Constraints to children's

participation might exist in too tight routines and schedules, as suggested in the second paper. These constraints were not considered easy to overcome. Another reason for these constraints can be viewed through the management of work, where the lack of organizing the daily pedagogics and lack of concentration can cause limitations to children's participation.

Children's views and interest should be taken account and the learning environment and activities should be planned and implemented influenced by children's initiatives and ideas. This is the major improvement of participation in third level of pathways to participation. (Shier, 2001). As explained before educators were interested in listening children and supporting their views, they were also keen to take children's initiatives into account and carry out their wishes about plays and other activities. Therefore it can be argued that level three participation is adopted as a part of daily pedagogy in most of Finnish ECE groups. As explained more carefully in the fourth paper of this thesis, children's chances to express interest and make wishes are considered as a part of planning process when designing their learning. In the same paper the worries about children's chances to participate in the actual planning process are expressed, because it seems that in average only children considered as active planners and designers of their own everyday life and learning. These same results raised concern also in the first and the fourth papers of my thesis. It seems that educators are willing and capable to take children's views and initiatives into account, but they gather this information mainly by observing and listening children, not participating in negotiations and decision making with children. The second paper about challenges of children's participation suggest, that the lack of chances to participate together with educators in the pedagogical planning and implementing can be caused by lack of educators' observation skills and lack of participatory practices in groups. These both were considered part of lack of professional skills factor which, according to our findings can be influenced and changed by educators.

The two highest levels of participation are combined here together, because in both the participation is mainly depend of growing power and decision-making abilities of children. According to my findings, presented in the fourth paper of this thesis, children's participation is in focus of Finnish pedagogy. Children's opportunities to participate in decision-making situations are considered important and reported to happen often in everyday practices. However my findings indicate that the process of participation has not considered to be as essential, it seems that while children are offered chances to participate

in, they are not truly having opportunities to share the responsibility of their own and peers wellbeing. This understanding comes from the results of the research papers, where the findings indicate that the culture of participation with open and dynamic interaction is only emerging in some ECE groups that participated in the research, while in others children's participation is limited on the lower levels and children can experience full participation only on average. Chances for participation was depend of children's age only in rare power-related issues, which also suggest that the participation is not considered a developing and ongoing practice. Also the results of the first and third paper show that challenges that limit children's participation exist in the policies and pedagogical culture of ECE and educators don't feel they can truly have influence on those challenges. Positive results about enhancing children's participation also in the highest levels of Shier's (2001) model, where however found in the fourth research paper of this thesis. The idea of the Design Learning process, introduced in the paper, were formed to bring these practices of daily pedagogics in the focus of participatory pedagogy.

In this research I have shown that by creating opportunities for children to design, i.e. plan, implement and finally, evaluate their own learning process through active participation and shared experiences it is possible to enhance children's participation through all activities of ECE and support children's competence and active agency. The Shier's (2001) the Pathways to participation model is found promising to build knowledge of children's participation and focus on the elements of participatory practices and policies for enhancing participatory pedagogy in ECE settings as shown in my research papers. Through this approach I reach the first goal of my thesis mainly with the first and second research paper by identifying and understanding the key elements of children's participation in the practices and policies of Finnish early childhood education settings. The second goal of my thesis was to frame a concept of participatory pedagogy for enhancing children's participation in early childhood education. This focus is considered in the first and the second research paper where the aim is towards knowledge of the participatory pedagogy. Mainly this focus exists in the three final research papers, where participatory pedagogy is considered in different perspectives.

The participatory pedagogy can be modeled with the tentative framework of developing participation presented in my fifth research paper. As the framework suggest, first goal is to design environment and atmosphere to support participatory practices. According to my findings presented in the first, the second and the fourth research papers, the quality of



environment is essential when children's participation is to be enhanced. This does not however mean that environment and atmosphere should be stable and unchangeable, but rather open and dynamic where children can explore and gain meaningful experiences while interacting with social and physical environment. Several limitations and challenges to children's participation exists however in the routines and rules considering the learning environment as shown in the second paper. The results also indicate that this first key element is not part of the daily practices nor policies in all ECE groups as results in the second and fourth paper show.

When the first key element of designing and building supportive and dynamic environment where children can practice participatory activities is reached, educators should focus in gathering information from children to understand their perspectives in the second key element of developing participation. Part of this information can be obtained through passive observation where educator interpret children's activities to find essential information about their development, interests and competences. Educators conduct this kind of observation as a part of daily pedagogics as shown in the results in the papers one, two and four. However, it seems that partly because of the lack of observation and other professional skills, as the second paper suggest, and partly because children's competence and agency is often misunderstood, as the theories of children participation suggest, the passive observation is not enough to gain information and help children to acknowledge their influence in to pedagogical practices. As the findings of the second and the fourth research paper indicate, to understand children's perspective and enhance children's participation opportunities to participate at all levels of pedagogics are important. This means that listening children voices and asking their opinions and views to understand their perspectives and thus supporting their active participation of becoming agents of their own learning and wellbeing can be reached through participatory pedagogy.

Through this gathered information and children's perspectives the third key-element of participatory pedagogy can be formed. In the third element the focus is in shared activities with children, including planning, implementing and evaluating the activities and practices, as results in the fourth paper suggest. Here also the role of professional knowledge is essential and if challenges exists in educators' knowledge and skills of children's development and participatory practices, as findings in the third paper indicates, development of practices are needed in ways to support children's participation. According

to the fourth paper enhancement of children's participation seems to realize in some of the ECE groups at this level of developing participation through these kind of pedagogical practices. The pedagogical practices can however suffer from lack of resources, such as time and number of staff as well as lack of knowledge about children's participation and competence, as the findings of the third paper suggest. The policy documents that guide ECE practices can also be interpreted to prevent children's participation, if they are viewed through the viewpoint of how children should be taught by educators. This can lead towards practices where adult initiated learning activities and child initiated free-play activities are considered separated activities, as the findings from the first paper show. The aim of the third key-element is to guide educators to develop the pedagogy to become more dynamic and sensitive for children to participate with educators in all daily practices and the design learning processes.

Finally, the framework of developing participation returns to the starting point through the last key-element where educators adopt the ongoing process of development of participatory pedagogy. For educators adopting interest of developing participation requires influencing and changing existing routines and managing their own work with children, as the findings in the second paper implicates. The process of participation has to be ongoing, because as discussed in the fourth and the second paper of this thesis, children's capacity and skills of participation are developing and growing and thus the participation should evolve and change dynamically through pedagogy. As shown in the fourth paper of this thesis children's participation is not only for preschool children and the practices could be conducted also in the groups of toddlers and 3 to 5 years old. However findings in the third and the fourth paper indicates that these opportunities for younger children are not always considered possible by educators as discussed on the second research paper. Therefore the participatory practices cannot be just copied and repeated, but they should be designed and reflected for the pedagogical culture of the ECE groups to enhance participation not only for children, but with children. Adopting the perspective of enhancing children's participation and supporting them to become active agents of their learning and wellbeing as a focus of early childhood educators work requires new knowledge and professional skills. I will discuss about the changing view of early childhood education in the following chapter.

## 6 Discussion

My conclusions about the children's participation in early childhood education settings seems to be in line with the previous findings about the same subject. In the previous research about young children's participation the focus have been on the existing participation or the lack of participation at the context of early childhood education, and the question how to facilitate and enhance children's participation in ongoing pedagogical process have been remained unanswered. Children's chances to influence in practices of their everyday education are an improving issue where children's learning and their developing skills of participation create a chancing process of interaction and power issues. As suggested by Brownlee (2009), I have been focusing in my research to the pedagogical practices from educators' perspectives about children's participation. I have considered the mediation between children's learning and development, and political and social context of early childhood education in the light of theories of participation in sociology, educational science and early childhood education. The concept of participation, as presented in this doctoral dissertation, has found to be as a developing competence of children that requires dynamic pedagogical processes in everyday education of young children.

The phenomenon have been considered from different viewpoints and perspectives, such as from the viewpoint of learning goals set by curriculum, challenges caused by both practical and institutional constraints, children self-regulation skills, and children's opportunities to influence and share power. This dissertation also gives new understanding about how early childhood educators can support pedagogically children's participation and enhance their empowerment. I have shown critical discussion about existing cultural practices of early childhood education and discussed about possibilities for developing the pedagogical support for children's participation in everyday practices considering both an individual child and dynamic group of children and educators. The development of pedagogical process in the level of reflective practices and curriculum has also been discussed about.

Through the improving knowledge of children’s participation together with the conceptions about the childhood and learning on the political and social context and educators’ perspectives and beliefs about children’s as competent social agents I have reconsidered Brownlee’s model of Context, pedagogy, and participatory learning (2009). I suggest that the role of pedagogy could be understand as a more holistic issue mediating between the children and the society (figure 5). As framed in the figure 5 of the context of participatory pedagogy is presented to emerge in the middle of the model. Through the cycle it would be possible to interact between the political and social context, educators’ perspectives and beliefs and children’ participation and to aim towards enhancing children’s participation.

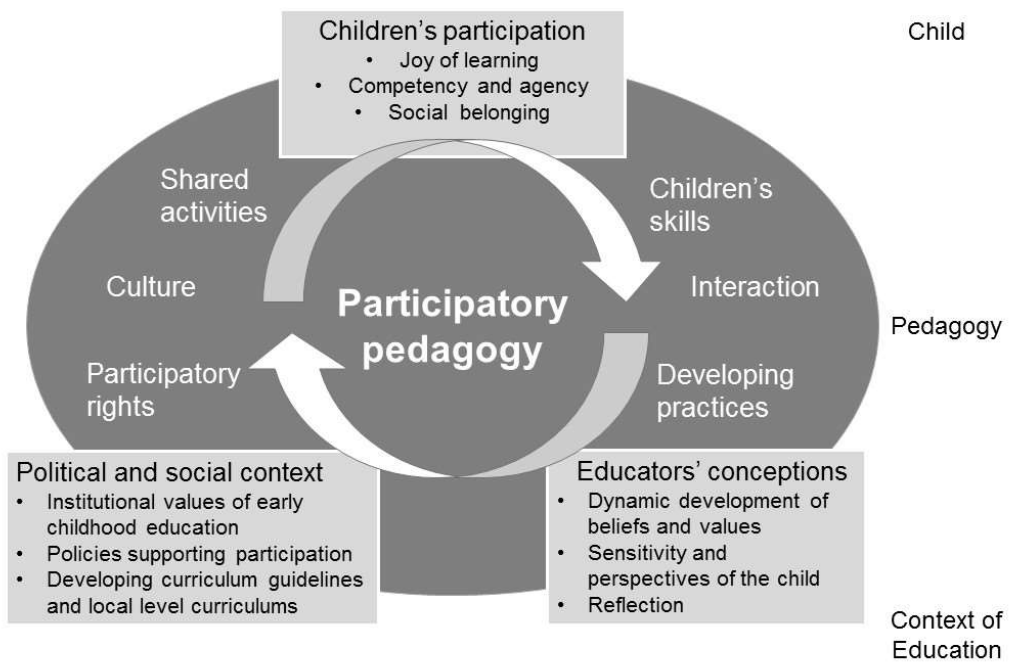


Figure 5 The context of participatory pedagogy

I think it is essential to view the children’s participation as an ongoing and dynamic process, rather than static skill or attribute of children. When viewing participation through pedagogy it can be considered to involve both children and educators in the political and social context of early childhood education. This approach gives also opportunities to focus the development process where children and educators share the power for interpretation and reproducing the pedagogical culture through their everyday interaction and developing practices. As Corsaro (2011) have suggest this interpretative reproduction of culture is in line

with socio-cultural learning approach where children are competent actors who shape their own development but also the surrounding environment and culture through shaping, sharing and reproducing their learning (see also Kronqvist & Kumpulainen, 2011; Rogoff, & all. 1995). This approach considered that learning is strongly connected with experience of participation where child's perspectives are respected and through interaction it creates a feeling of belonging where the joy of learning emerges and motivation and resilience are developing (Kronqvist & Kumpulainen, 2011; Bath, 2009; Smith, 2002).

The role of educators, as presented in the figure 5, is stated essential for children's participation by other researchers of children's participation. I have found the model of the pathway of participation by Shier (2001) as important guide for framing children's participation as ongoing process. Shier (2001) states that adults bear the role of the enablers of participation through commitment thought the stages of opening, opportunity and obligation. As in my model of participatory pedagogy the development needs to be considered as an ongoing process where the practices and processes of each level are adopted and built in the system. This requires pedagogical interaction and educators' willingness to focus on children's experiences. As found by Emilsson & Johansson (2009) this requires sensitivity and willingness to adopt children's perspectives (see also Venninen & Leinonen, 2012).

Finally the political and social context of early childhood education bears an important role in the participatory pedagogy (Brownlee, 2009), because values and goals of education are based on national documents (see The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, 2005; Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education in Finland, 2010 and 2016). The Finnish early childhood education has been considered as a part of social services until 2013 when the political responsibility of young children's learning in institutional context was moved to the Ministry of Education. This should mean that also young children are now considered as an active and competent actors of their own learning rather than needy and helpless being (see James & James, 2008). In the recent changes of early learning in Finland the new act of early childhood education have been validated in Finnish parliament at March 2015. The new Act of Early Childhood Education (HE 341/2014 vp) recognizes children's right to participation by stating that their opinions and wishes should be examined. However it is curious that the law does not state anything about the influence and opportunities to participate for children, only for their parents. No instruction

is given about how children's conceptions should be taken account, not even when the personal learning plan is going to be compulsory (OKM 8.5.2015). Therefore it seems that the approach of children's participation is considered only through ideology of becoming listened to and the concept of participation – in Finnish *Osallisuus* – is used in rather limited and pedagogically misunderstood way. As stated by Nyland (2009) about the emerging participation in early childhood education participatory learning should be considered as active and dynamic process where educators scaffold and enhance children's understanding through children's experiences and ideas to promote children's self-regulated learning. The findings of my doctoral dissertation show that for enhancing children's participation also in social and political context the pedagogical knowledge of professional educators is required to mediate between the levels of institutional decision making and individual child's perspectives. Though this participation can be seen as encouraging pedagogical reality where children development, well-being and imagination are enhanced (Nyland, 2009). Otherwise the concept of participatory pedagogy will not become an educational reality of young children's everyday life in early childhood education.

## **6.1 Limitations of the research**

This research has been conducted during my doctoral studies in four years and the tight schedule has set some limitations for the research. First of all the research is based in one data-set collected via survey within the development project VKK-Metro. The VKK-Metro project was funded by the Ministry of Social and Health affairs and the funding was mainly targeted to development, not research. The research data collected within the project was aimed to support the development process of children's participation and therefore it has limitations. On the other hand the amount of participants reached through the survey was larger than measurements conducted by observations, interviews or methods of actions research could have gain. The dataset contained conceptions of almost 4 000 educators working in 1,114 teams with almost 20 000 children in the field of early childhood education. As shown in previous research (see Bae, 2009; Brotherus, 2004; Emilson & Folkesson, 2006) and in this thesis the concept of children's participation appears multidimensional and pedagogical practices differs depending of the professionals skills, beliefs and the action culture of the kindergarten. The children's chances to participation and pedagogical processes reported by the participants are based on their responses, which can be considered a lack of reliability in this research. However the participants formed their responses as

teams, not as individual professionals and reported about discussions and reflection that the questionnaire have bring forth in their teams. As I claimed before in the context and method the pedagogical practices participants are working with have not emerged by accident and I refuse to believe that none of them would have been made to harm intentionally children. I choose to use the survey data as reported by the participants as a basis for my doctoral dissertation to gain knowledge of the different concepts of children's participation together with multitude pedagogical practices to support them.

The main limitation of this doctoral research is the lack of children's voice. Via survey it was not possible to gather children's conceptions and perspectives and four years were limited time to gather information with other methods. I made a choice to focus on educators' conceptions of children's participation and pedagogical practices in my doctoral dissertation. The viewpoints of educators are considered to represent children's interests and ideas of their daily environments and activities by Sylva & al. (2010), Brownlee and Berthelsen, (2009) or Copple and Bredekamp (2009). Therefore this research, which aims to build knowledge of pedagogical processes of participation is based on educators' views. The research based on children's perspectives will be my next goal in the future research.

Finally, this research lacks also a deep scan of early childhood education institutional and policy documents of children's rights and participation. Only the National curriculum of pre-school education was considered in the first research paper. The main reason for this is that policy research have been conducted during recent years in Finland early childhood education (see Onnismaa, 2009; Karila & Kinon, 2012) by researchers with accurate knowledge about early childhood education as political and social issue. Focusing on institutional debate would also require different methodological perspectives. The time is an existing limitation for conducting a doctoral thesis and therefore it was considered best to leave for future research goals.

## **6.2 Future research themes**

In early childhood education settings children's participation include issues such as become listened and supported to make independent initiatives and decision and feelings of being important in daycare group (Venninen & Leinonen, 2013) but children's viewpoints are considered only in few research of early childhood education. Sheridan and Pramling-

Samuelsson (2006) and Bae (2009) have found out that children can have influence in issues related to play. The aim of my future research is to understand children's conceptions about their participation in everyday activities in early childhood education. I shall also focus on children's conceptions about educators' role as an enhancer of shared and common action. This research will be conducted via action telling method with narrative inquiry. The story telling approach where children are listened to is adopted in Finnish early childhood education (Karlsson, 2012), but in action telling method children focus in their conception and understanding about their initiatives, interactions, decision-making and dilemmas they face in early childhood education setting. In my method I shall inspire children's narratives with pictures of participation moments based on this doctoral thesis and our previous research about key elements of children's participation (see Venninen & Leinonen, 2012). I shall aim towards participatory research where children are not only informants but they can also influence in research. For this I shall arrange discussions about children's narratives with the participant children. My goal is to build knowledge about the concept of participation viewed from children's perspectives compared to the educators' perspective, presented in this doctoral dissertation.

Through similarities and differences between children's views and educators conceptions I shall then focus on participatory pedagogy as lived by stories of children and educators. The lived by stories is a concept of narrative approach method where children's actions are considered as stories of their everyday life by viewing children's initiatives and actions through interwoven interpretations of children and adults (Clandinin & al. 2006). Narrative approach is used with young children also by Puroila, Estola & Syrjälä (2013) to shed light to children's wellbeing in early childhood education. They have found both positive and negative experiences dealing with inspiring and enabling environment, interaction with peers and educators in meaningful activities, limiting institutional structures, exclusion from peer and adults in relationships, and not being respected as a subject. To gather these lived by stories we have already videotaped and observed children's play activities in kindergarten groups during the year 2014. The videos were shown to children to help them also verbalize their play and product stories about those lived by experiences. Children were active actors in their play and also willing to watch and verbalize these activities. I expect to find essential result about children's conceptions about their lived participation in early childhood education. Through these previous findings and the results shown in my research



I'm aiming to build phenomenological knowledge about participatory pedagogy as shared meaning making process in early childhood education.

### **6.3 Concluding thoughts**

The aim of this research was build knowledge of children's participation in pedagogical interaction. Thus, participatory pedagogy could be developed with the knowledge my research offers about enhancing children's participation, through children's equity, democratic rights and sustainable learning. Short-term implications in this study were concerning the pedagogy and interactions between children and educators in the participating early childhood education centers. Discussions, meetings and lectures was arranged to give opportunities to professionals of ECE in practical, administrative and research level to reflect the research findings and plan development of participatory pedagogy together. Thus I hold with Freirean ideology about that people's own knowledge about culture and practices in their field is valuable (Freire, 2000) I consider this multi-voiced discussion the most essential part of my own journey to understanding and critically reflecting the phenomenon of children's participation in pedagogical context. During these four years the knowledge about children' participatory learning and the supportive practices founded in this research and development process have been spreading in many Finnish municipalities and the children' participation is adopted as main development goal in early childhood education. I have had opportunity to write research papers, give lectures and participate development meetings where I could have acted as a supporter for professionals who are willing to develop their own work. In that process researcher is more like an enhancer who participates in the shared development (see Rahman & Fals-Borda, 1991). If this kind of empowerment should happen among early childhood education professionals, could children and adults participate equally in sharing power and responsibility in the local level of kindergarten and even further on, more global level, where children could become visible members of society (see Robinsson & Diaz, 2007). Thus after these four years of research and development I can state that the short-term implications of the original project have become also long-term implication: The concept of participation as pedagogically supported phenomenon is widely discussed in Finnish early childhood education and hopefully it will also emerge in the political and social debate and decision making of young children's education. It has been adopted, though only lightly, in the new Act of Early

Childhood Education (HE 341/2014 vp). Through this research I have had an opportunity to give international audience information and knowledge about Finnish early childhood education development policies and practices. Through that I will in the future participate in international discussion about conceptualizing children's participation as a process of and for learning. I hope that in the future, the participatory pedagogy can be adopted and developed further on in different cultural and social early childhood education environments. Participation through developing pedagogy comes possible with reflective practices where educator has opportunities to enhance participation and become the participant jointly together with children. Therefore I finish this dissertation where I started it. My understanding about children's participation lies within the statement of our research teams' (see Venninen, Leinonen & Ojala, 2010) knowledge that "children have a right to be educated and cared for by educators who respect and listen them and are interested and involved in the children's world". Participation, children's and educators', exist *when the shared experience transforms as a collective joy*.

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