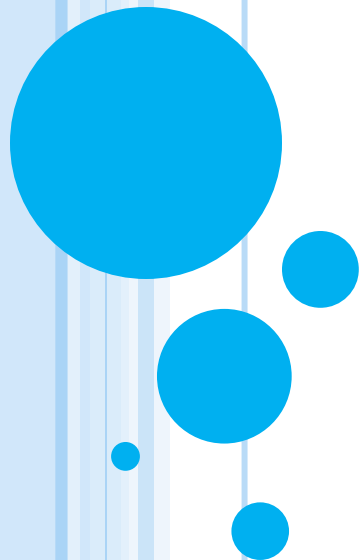


UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

# DESIGN THE LEARNING PROCESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

## – PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING WITH CHILDREN

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# KEY ELEMENTS

- **Children's participation**
- **Early childhood education in Finnish context**
- Short **method** walkthrough
- Children's participation in the **design learning process**
  - Participation in planning stage
  - Participation in implementation stage
  - Participation in evaluation stage
- Children's **competence and age**
- **Conclusions**

# PARTICIPATION THEORIES

- Ideology of participation comes from:
  - Convention of the Rights of the Child  
(United Nations, 1989)
    - PARTICIPATION, PROTECTION AND PROVISION
  - New Sociological paradigm  
(e.g. Corsaro, 1996; Woodhead, 2010)
    - Child as an agent, with voice and knowledge
  - Democratic education
    - Learning to be an democratic and empowered citizen
- Child is competent actor (eg. Nyland, 2009), who has opinions and views about her own life (eg. Pramling-Samuelson, 2001)
- Communication and interaction are parts of Participation (Clark, 2005; Greve, 2009)
- Participation needs adult's support (Berthelsen, 2006, Thomas 2002)
- Participation is in early childhood education: Getting support of initiatives and ideas, safety of learning and experiences of being important from the adults (Venninen, Leinonen & Ojala, 2010)

# FINNISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(NATIONAL CURRICULUM GUIDELINES ON ECEC, 2005)

- EduCare = Both education and care exist together in Finnish kindergartens
- Children spent 9 hours per day on average in kindergarten (Statistics Finland, 2009)
  - 3 meals, naptime and outdoor activities are included
  - The education is part of these care activities
  - Pedagogical activities exist also in subject-orientated activity groups:
    - Subjects within 6 orientations: (natural-science, ethical, aesthetic, mathematical, historical-societal and religious-philosophical)
- The designing the learning process (planning, implementing and evaluating) is viewed important part of teachers' profession (Härkönen, 2002).

# METHODS FOR OUR RESEARCH

- The VKK-development project in Metropolitan area of Helsinki 2009-2011
- Data was collected using e-survey from working teams in kindergartens
- 1105 teams (56 %) with 1 to 5 educators in each participated
  - For this study of designing the learning process 676 team answers were analysed
  - teams worked with 3-5 year olds “playage groups”, 6-7 year olds “preschool groups” or 3-7 year olds “mixed groups”
- The open-ended quotations were analysed with qualitative content analyse
- The quantitative variables were analysed statistically and compared with each other

# RESULTS: CHILDREN PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING AND EVALUATING

Age Group		1. Children can participate in <b>planning</b> activities with educators	2. Children can <b>implement</b> design and activities by themselves	3. Children can participate in <b>evaluating</b> activities with educators
Play-age group	Mean	<b>2.76</b>	<b>2.70</b>	<b>2.92</b>
	S.D.	0.824	0.887	0.852
Preschool group	Mean	<b>3.18</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>3.31</b>
	S.D.	0.776	0.884	0.879
Mixed groups	Mean	<b>2.92</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>3.16</b>
	S.D.	0.825	0.828	0.792
Total	Mean	<b>2.90</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>3.06</b>
	S.D.	0.831	0.895	0.864

1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 =sometimes, 4 = often, 5 =always

Highest

Lowest

## RESULTS: COMPETENCE AND AGE

- Children's ages **impact** on the participatory practices available to them.
- Preschool children participated in both evaluation (mean 3.31) and planning (mean 3.18) more often than children in play age groups of mixed groups
- **The older** the children in group are, the **more opportunities educators give** them to participate in the design learning process in all three phases.

# RESULTS: CHILDREN PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING PHASE

- Participants highlighted the important **interaction** between children and adults. The aspects of **having voice** and having **opportunity to make initiatives** were also mentioned:

*“At the start of the season, we interviewed all the children and hear their wishes and goals for the year. The design of the year is based partially on this information. During the ordinary day, children have opportunities to influence the course of the day for the free-play time, where they get to decide what to do. In morning-circle they have the opportunity to share their feelings and wishes.”* Preschool group

*“Adults and children together plan activities, such as a physical education lesson, what to do in crafts, or what to do on excursions. Children also planned a spring festival performance.”* Play-age group



# RESULTS: CHILDREN PARTICIPATION IN IMPLEMENTING PHASE

- Participants highlighted the **motivation and excitement** of the children and mentioned the educators role as a **supporter**:
- *"A child gets an idea and begins to implement it. He knows what equipment and materials he will need and gets them. An educator is an enabler who offers the child any materials that are unavailable, but necessary. Such an idea often sparks other new ideas, and the original idea develops during the process. The participation is seen from the child, who is excited and involved. The activity draws attention from other children, who begin to implement their ideas too."* Mixed group
- *"When planning festivals (e.g. for Christmas or spring), children may create their own performances. The children imitated an idea, and together we began to design and implement it. The excitement and the joy of creating are evident in the children when they are allowed to implement their own ideas."* Preschool group

# RESULTS: CHILDREN PARTICIPATION IN EVALUATION PHASE

- Participant rarely mentioned the evaluation in their answers. Evaluation was however viewed to have important **impact on the future activities**:
- *"The portfolio for following children's development: An educator works together with one child. The child evaluates his/her development and working, and chooses his/her own achievements for the portfolio. Preschool age children participate in designing and evaluating the curriculum for the group."* Mixed group
- *"We often ask the children which activities have been fun and which ones less fun. On the basis of the children's wishes, we implemented a weekly music lesson and organised new forest excursions. Participating in planning group activities is exiting and motivating for the children."* Preschool group

# RESULTS: PARTICIPATION AND DESIGNING THE LEARNING PROCESS

- Children voice was heard and their opinions were often asked and their interest were taken to account:

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4. Educator ensures that every child has an opportunity to express his/hers <b>opinions</b>	Mean 4.33 (S.D 0.593)
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5. Educator plans activities based on <b>children's interests</b>	Mean 3.83 (S.D 0.661)
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- These variables had **low correlations** with planning, implementing and evaluating
- ⇒ Children participation as “becoming listened” is viewed important, but the connection with the actual design learning process, in which both children and educators participate, is weak.

# EDUCATOR AS A DESIGNER OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION?

- The designing process can be considered as an important activity where educators and children share experiences in interaction.
- *The practices of designing learning could be developed further to facilitate children's participation.*

# FINALLY

- Incorporating the perspectives of children into **planning, implementing and evaluating**
  - ➔ Design learning not only *for* children, but *with* children and finally *by* children



Picture: OECD.org

# ○ Thank You!

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