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**EXAMINING THE CONCEPTION OF
DIVERSITY IN THE HELSINKI CURRICULUM
FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND
CARE**

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ABSTRACT

Sahba Frooghi: Examining The Conception Of Diversity In The Helsinki Curriculum For Early Childhood Education and Care.

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The increasing diversity in Finland fills the discourse in society at large and this is reflected in a growing place for diversity in curriculum for ECEC. The context of a municipality curriculum for ECEC allows an examination of how diversity is framed in a policy document and how it is meant to shape the experience of education and care for children and staff. This thesis conducts a discourse analysis on the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC using literature from the field of diversity studies and specifically on curriculum positions to establish a framework for analysis.

The Helsinki curriculum for ECEC, designed for 'modern day' children and for a 'modern day' system of ECEC, holds up diversity as a value with children and their families accepted into an ECEC system which is enriched, not burdened, by their different needs. All children have culturally rich lives and learn to have pride in their differences and identities. However, to fully embrace the transforming and anti-discrimination school of thought, children would additionally need to learn how to identify injustice in their surroundings as well as the skills required to respond to them.

The autonomy of teachers in the Finnish system points to a need for training in diversity as much rests on their shoulders as the practitioners of embracing diversity and in creating an operational culture which welcomes and invites differences. Additionally, the emphasis on equality as the foundation for diversity can be problematic.

Keywords: diversity, policy research, curriculum

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY	6
2.1	Focusing on parental involvement and languages.	7
2.2	Schools of thought on addressing diversity in educational settings.	9
3	POSITIONS ON THE CURRICULUM	12
3.1	Conforming to society	12
3.2	Reforming society	13
3.3	Transforming society.....	15
4	METHODOLOGY	18
4.1	Policy research.....	18
4.2	Discourse analysis	19
4.3	Ethical considerations	21
5	GENERAL NOTIONS OF DIVERSITY.....	22
6	DIVERSITY AND THE MODEL OF THE CHILD AND LEARNING.....	26
7	DIVERSITY AND THE CURRICULUM PHILOSOPHY	29
8	DIVERSITY IN THE CURRICULUM GOALS AND PEDAGOGY.....	34
9	SUMMARY	38
9.1	On the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC.....	38
9.2	Reflections for further consideration	39
	REFERENCES	41

1 INTRODUCTION

While diversity in the European context several decades ago might have been taken to mean the presence of diaspora with distinct features, the trend now is to find smaller and more widely distributed groups consisting of different nationalities, cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities. This reality, layered and compounded by other emergent dimensions of difference and diversity, including identity, gender, abilities, sexuality, and socio-economic status can be described as 'super-diversities' and bring the question of diversity to the forefront of social and educational policy (Vandenbroeck, 2017).

In many settings, heterogeneity and diversity have been positioned as a problem in early childhood education which needs solving rather than being accepted or viewed as an opportunity to add to the pedagogical richness of the system (Vandenbroeck, 2017). The question then is what does it mean to suggest that diversity is a pedagogical condition which could enrich classrooms? What would that look like in policy and curriculum? And does the City of Helsinki curriculum for early childhood education reflect such an approach? The framing of diversity as a resource or a hindrance is a useful one for examining the responses to diversity.

At a fundamental level, this was the impetus for this thesis, to examine how diversity is conceived in one of the local curricula and to pose questions about how the response to diversity is framed in it. The Helsinki City curriculum was recently translated and published in English and so gives a good opportunity to study this curriculum which is applied in the largest metropolitan area in Finland. To begin, I first look at a brief selection of literature from the field of research in diversity in ECEC in order to give some context about how diversity can be approached in ECEC. Of particular interest is a framework for positions to curriculum from Mac Naughton (2003). This framework was a good fit for this thesis because a core element of it is a critical look at curricula and how curriculum and the prescribed pedagogy in it responds to diversity. The

framework identifies three frames prevalent in ECEC curricula: 1) the model of the child; 2) the curriculum philosophy, and 3) the goals and pedagogy.

After this literature review, I discuss the methodology, the reasoning behind my choices of method and ethics, as well as a description of the process of using a framework for conducting this kind of discourse analysis. The analysis of the Helsinki curriculum is presented in four sections, the first of which looks at the general conceptions of diversity in the curriculum, and the following three sections correspond to each of the frames described above and used for the analysis. The thesis ends with a summary of the salient findings as well as a brief discussion of a few tensions that have arisen from the analysis of the curriculum.

2 RESPONDING TO DIVERSITY

The emergence of 'super-diversities' has influenced the community of professionals and policymakers who are responsible for developing curricula and educational policy. Vandebroek and colleagues (2011) describe a tension in those ECEC systems which aim to respect diversity as well as maintain social cohesion. The social pedagogic perspective they outline argues that raising the prominence of this tension, or least bringing this tension to light is better for the overall purpose of addressing it and for the purpose of reforming educational and pedagogical approaches.

As the notion of diversity itself shifts and develops, it can be useful to problematize certain assumptions of diversity. A framework for looking at diversity by Rhedding-Jones (2005) highlights what is referred to as productive diversity, which is based on the premise that diversity in groups necessitates change in the members of that group. Respecting diversity is not a static notion, but one that reflects the dynamism that would necessarily arise in a system that actually embraces differences in practice rather than one which only advocates for diversity in principle.

Relating this point to the question of whether diversity is a problem or a resource, if diversity is a problem on one hand, then the solution to addressing the problem of influx of diverse individuals into a group would be to make the incoming individuals conform to the group. In other words, in order to be successful and competent in their new environment, they need to be assimilated. On the other hand, if diversity is a resource, then the presence of multiple distinctive ways of being are considered to be value adding and a beneficial feature of the group. From this perspective, the solution to the arrival of diverse individuals to the community would result in a change to the group, its norms and practices to reflect and value their presence (Rhedding-Jones, 2005).

A system of ECEC that values and embraces diversities is one that does not insist on categorizations which ultimately lead to inevitable othering and

end in integration as the solution to the 'problem of diversity' (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011). A system that is set up to value diversity would have the ability to incorporate new norms, routines and values that naturally result from the changes that occur when more views and practices are allowed into the including centre, which is a community, society or for this thesis a daycare that receives diverse members (Millei, 2019). Equally purposeful is that diverse groups merging with this 'centre' are allowed to not only celebrate their differences and uniqueness, but then when spared from the confrontational nature of integration, there is actually space and time to discover shared values and aspirations, the most obvious of which is care, given the setting of a daycare (Millei, 2019).

In this light, the argument is made that the discourse and approach to diversity has to move beyond the inclusion of diverse groups and peoples. What is needed to engage diverse communities and to make them feel valuable has to include anti-bias and anti-discriminatory approaches (Rhedding-Jones, 2005). A premise for this stance is the point that young children begin to answer questions and have experiences which form their nascent identities. They can begin to form harmful and self-degrading self-concepts around who they are if treated with suspicion, discrimination, and stereotypes. Where anti-bias and anti-discriminatory approaches play a part is the recognition that such negative identities are not necessarily formed due to overtly racist policies or overtly prejudiced staff, but due to the repeated sequence of daily, and mundane experiences and occurrences which train them into believing that the very things which make their culture unique are not as valuable as the values, lifestyles, norms and rules of the dominant culture. They might feel that their funds of knowledge are not as relevant to the day-to-day experiences of the so called 'local' children around whom an educational experience has been designed (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011).

2.1 Focusing on parental involvement and languages.

Thinking about the needs of diverse children without thinking about them with their families and involving their families and communities is futile. Taking care of

diverse children means taking care of their families (Vandenbroeck, 2017). If diversity is considered as a resource and not a problem, this shift in view is particularly relevant. On the one hand, when diversity is a problem which one tries to solve, then the important direction of cultural movement is towards the national culture and language, and the educational setting is not especially interested in the cultural heritage of the child beyond perhaps naming it. This is not to say that any malice or prejudice is necessarily being directed at the child's family's origin, just that the child's cultural background is disregarded and the approximating the target culture through socialisation and acquiring the dominant language are considered as the educational objectives.

On the other hand, in a setting where diversity is considered a resource, the child and their families' heritages, values, cultural norms, and practices are of interest and integral to the educational process which, rather than suppressing differences or pressing them into conforming, instead strives for the ideal of "unity in diversity" (Millei, 2019, p.50). This inclusive ideal brings together and connects diverse ways of being such that they enrich the cultural characteristics of the groups that are formed by diverse people coming together in spaces such as the daycare and who strive to maintain cohesion while retaining their personal and cultural distinctiveness. To attempt this this would require some knowledge of that culture, values, language, and practices, which are best expressed by the child and their family. What this entails is extending the holistic and child-centered approach towards an ecological approach which brings in families and local communities. This does not only allow educators to be better versed in the culture of the families but enhances the children's sense of belonging as their home lives are drawn closer to their experience in ECEC (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011). In practice, this would furthermore entail the provision of spaces and times for professionals in the ECEC system to learn about the child, their families, communities and their cultural distinctiveness in an open way, rather than fall back on prejudiced stereotypes that generally come from a place of ignorance (Millei, 2019).

How daycare settings react to the presence of different languages amongst children in a group is an opportunity to reflect on embedded assumptions about diversity. The idea of diversity as a resource versus diversity as a problem becomes apparent if multiple languages at the daycare are considered as a

hindrance to the ability of the children to learn the national language or if these existing languages are taken as an asset and used for the children to increase their language awareness and scaffold their learning of a new language. Here, as well as the relationship with families is very relevant, as they are the experts in their language and culture and can be called on to participate in maintaining and developing the home languages in the daycare setting (Rhedding-Jones, 2005). That being said, it is relevant to keep in mind the experience that many immigrant families see the daycare as a setting for their children to learn the national language and might not be very interested in promoting their own languages there (Vandenbroeck, 2017). Secondary to that, perhaps, is the effect on children when they realize that their families' languages are not spoken at school and how that creates a split between home life and the society at large (Rhedding-Jones, 2005).

2.2 Schools of thought on addressing diversity in educational settings.

Mac Naughton (2006) conducted an extensive review of research into issues of diversity for young children in educational settings and produced a report which identifies five 'schools of thought' which define very different approaches and practices in response to diversity. These schools of thought are: The Laissez-faire School, The Special Provisions School, The Cultural Understandings School, The Equal Opportunities School and The Anti-Discrimination School. While this is not the framework for the analysis in this thesis, it is instructive in understanding diversity how certain values and approaches differentiate these 'schools of thought'.

In the Laissez faire approach, there is an underlying assumption that there is no need for any major changes in the structure and practices of the educational setting and the status quo should be maintained (Sleeter and Grant, 1999). There is no need to focus on the actual differences between the children because the best outcomes will be achieved by treating everyone equally. The special provisions approach is what we are most familiar with as that which results in the

establishment of facilities meant to specifically cater for a group of children with a particular set of needs.

The Cultural Understanding school of thought recognises the importance of the mainstream child learning about the culture and practices of others. A well-known example of this approach is the celebration of festivals from different cultures in a daycare so that children get to learn about that aspect of that culture. However, these often lead to tokenistic representations of different cultures or representations that portray the culture as fixed in some past traditions or represented with some stereotypes rather than dynamically changing with time as all other cultures (Clarke and Siraj-Blatchford, 2000). If this view is applied, diversity is not engaged with unless children specifically bring it up.

The Equal Opportunities approach, as the term implies, holds the belief that the most important element of respect for diversity is in ensuring that everyone has equal access to opportunities and that effort is made at the policy level to remove any barriers to diverse peoples from getting opportunities. In this frame, the lack of access to opportunities is in itself the cause of inequalities, not structural or ingrained injustice (Mac Naughton, 2006). The focus on equality results in an overlooking of the actual differences between people, be they racial, gender or of sexuality, and the vector for reacting to diversity is an emphasis on the use of media to break stereotypes rather than engaging with children directly.

Lastly, the Anti-Discrimination school of thought, as the name implies, takes a stance to proactively address diversity and implement anti-bias and anti-discriminatory practices, irrespective of whether the children bring up issues with diversity or not. The aim is not just to change certain policies, but to transform the institutions which set them, as such, acknowledging, questioning and influencing power dynamics are central to this approach's practice. The role of the educators and other adults in the setting is of importance here as they are expected to bring up issues of discrimination through regular conversations with children and they are meant to pay special attention to helping children develop the social skills needed to react to being treated unfairly. The children themselves are seen as active agents with the capacity to create and construct an environment that blossoms with diversities.

In this chapter, the way ECEC systems respond to diversity has been examined. The question of responding to diversity has been framed in the context

of whether diversity is considered a resource or whether it is a problem posed by those who do not fit the mould eliciting solutions which require them to conform to the established culture and norms. Parental involvement and how multiple languages are catered to have been used as a lens to think out whether diversity is valued or not. Finally, the work of Mac Naughton (2006) in identifying five distinct schools of thought in responding to diversity has been very briefly outlined. Next, I will continue with another work from Mac Naughton on positions to curriculum, which will provide a link between the response to diversity by ECEC systems and how ECEC curricula are framed.

3 POSITIONS ON THE CURRICULUM

A curriculum is not limited to being a document which defines educational goals but is a living process of negotiation between service providers, educators, parents and children (Van der Aalsvoort, 2017). In Finland, this is particularly true as the National curriculum document is designed as a precursor document for a municipal level curriculum which is meant to be developed to take local level considerations into account (Lipponen, Kumpulainen and Paananen, 2017). This thesis will analyse one of such municipal level curricula prepared by the City of Helsinki.

The purpose and objectives of a curriculum are never independent of their context and not neutral in their stance towards social issues. Mac Naughton (2003) offers a framework for critically examining curricula and discussing how they are influenced or 'shaped' by different aspects such as their model of childhood, educational philosophy, goals and assessment. This framework uses the concept of 'curriculum positions' to show how differences in these aspects result in different outcomes and approaches to ECEC. There are three such positions to curriculum, 1) conforming to society, 2) reforming society, and 3) transforming society (Mac Naughton, 2003). These positions to curriculum are not only different ways of thinking about children and their agency and learning, but also determine how care is organised and how social and political issues, such as diversity, are conceived and handled. I offer below a brief description of each position and look at its salient features.

3.1 Conforming to society

Conforming to society is the view that education "complies with the existing social practices, rules, traditions and understandings of a given society" (Mac Naughton, 2003, p.122). The purpose of education in this position is to achieve

national goals and to perpetuate from one generation to the next, the values, attitudes, ideas, practices, and norms that define the nation. In other words, the aim is cultural transmission (Ellen, Lycett, and Johns, 2013). The outcome of education is to prepare children to meet the needs of society and the social utility of early childhood education is emphasized. ECEC is an important and lasting investment in a future generation that is less likely to end up as a burden on society. The imperative here is for the individual child to contribute to the larger needs of the community, and to fit in and sustain the system that has raised and supported them (Weinstein, 2007). A 'scientific' and 'rationalist' stance is taken towards the various aspects of education resulting in behaviouristic and technical approaches. Goal setting, targets and clear objectives are standard and inform the practice of education with developmental norms and arbitrary skill sets being the drivers behind these goals and not the children's interests. This behaviourist approach results in schedule, space, and content being highly structured and regimented (MacNaughton, 2003).

It follows that the conforming to society position defines a stance towards equity and diversity issues. The approach to diversity by educational institutions is to modify the culture and personal distinctions of incoming and marginalised groups towards the dominant culture which defines the only valid way of being. Indeed, the perpetuation of the dominant culture a tenet of education and care, with the views of immigrants and other groups and identities marginalized either actively or simply by ignoring and neglecting them. In general, the approach to diversity here by educators is characterised by an intentional lack of interest in engaging differences in children and their families. In fact, focusing on diversity is a source of inequality and educators see their work as masking these differences (Mac Naughton, 2003).

3.2 Reforming society

In contrast to conforming, the reforming position is aligned with the progressive ideals of freedom, self-determination, equality, and democracy and is centred around the needs of the individual child. This is the 'self-governing' child who has a say about their educational experience and whose interests are

taken into consideration and whose agency is developed in the process (Liljestrand and Hammarberg, 2017). Democracy, freedom, and truth are values that supersede others and with these values, the future members of society, the children now who are being educated, are meant to reform it. Schedule, time, space and assessment are more flexible and organised around children's interests and are usually thematic in nature, helping to form children's growing agencies. The focus on the individual child over standardised goals results in what is referred to as 'developmentally appropriate' programmes of education, which calls for the needs and capacities of the individual child over broad-based curricular targets.

As it concerns equity and diversity, this position might be seen as counterintuitive since this position to curriculum can serve to underline and support conservative cultural values even if it appears as progressive. This is because such curricula describe how education and care should be organised and practiced, but not the content, and little is said about how content is chosen. As a result, educators and staff become unofficial 'gatekeepers' whose personal preferences and backgrounds are transmitted forward (Mac Naughton, 2003). A challenge that arises with developmentally appropriate education is that it tends to be based on culturally specific notions of needs and capacities, usually drawing on the dominant culture, and as such, the needs of diverse groups or minorities are not taken into account and get marginalised.

The individualistic approach engendered by this position to curriculum results in another trend which is that the differences amongst children and the dynamics they create tend to be 'masked' and glossed over. After all, if the interest falls on a single child in their education and care bubble, it is unlikely that attention is paid to what makes children different from other children. This is compounded by the additional reality that educators within the child-centred approach characterised by minimal adult intervention, generally do not address equity issues unless they are brought up by the children themselves (Power et al., 2019).

A final point about equity issues in the reforming position to curriculum comes from the dimension of the observation and assessment of children, which, in this frame relies heavily on the children's perceptions of themselves and builds on the children's self-assessment. What is ignored in this kind of self-reporting and

meaning-making assessments, is the underlying and embedded power structures that have imprinted themselves on the identities and competencies of the individual children, especially those who identify differently from the rest of the group. An educator in this position will rightly give a child the opportunity to express themselves and voice their opinions, but will not question whether those preferences or choices have been unduly altered or damaged by long lasting power imbalances amongst the children or shaped by unequal structural forces present in society (Mac Naughton, 2003). The politics of childhood is trivialized and ignored since if it stays unseen, the semblance of innocence can be preserved.

3.3 Transforming society

In this position, the aim of education and care is to transform society towards justice by challenging biases, prejudices, and discrimination and by creating diverse opportunities for all children. The stance here is that any approach to education is never neutral towards inequalities, they either actively transform these inequalities or then even through inaction, serve to perpetuate them (Apple, 2019). Critical attention is paid to the structures in society that have ingrained inequalities that if not purposefully troubled, continue to work against the less powerful in society. Not the least of these structures that are routinely questioned are the power relationships which fundamentally prohibit prosperous diversity (Escayg, 2019).

A standout element of this frame of thinking and acting are its anti-racist, anti-discrimination and anti-bias aspects. This does not only influence the attitudes of the educators and staff but also becomes a part of the learning that the children experience. Children learn (MacNaughton 2003, p.191):

1. To have confidence in themselves and to have pride in their identity,
2. The value of difference and to be “comfortable with diversity”.
3. To identify what is fair and unfair in their environment.
4. The skills they will need to respond to any unfairness or oppressiveness they encounter even outside the walls of the daycare.

Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2019) succinctly describe the above four goals as Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Activism, respectively. In setting these goals with the children, children are encouraged and enabled to consider alternate ways of seeing the world as well as alternate ways of being in the world, and they are not considered too young or incapable of reflecting on injustice.

The transforming society position involves a distinct critical and intentional approach to curriculum content. Briefly, the content, or knowledge, that children are exposed to is thought through and nothing is taken for granted. The source of, agenda, and values behind any content is questioned and examined to determine if it contains vestiges of prejudiced, gendered, classist, ableist, or nativist thinking. The children's funds of knowledge are acknowledged and invited into the institutional space and content emerges out of the 'intersection' of the children's interests and questions with the educator's passions and knowledge of the children's realities (Nimmo, 2002). This reasoning extends to the organisation of space, resources and schedule so that diversity is enabled and welcomed by allowing these elements of the institution to be shaped by the actual needs of the children and their families.

A final thought concerns taking a critical look at the relationships and dynamics between the children in the group. Here again, nothing is taken for granted, the social and political dynamics taking place between the children and their educators are not assumed to be neutral or inherently innocent and the power differences that exist between children, and between children and adults are viewed as opportunities to be challenged in a supportive environment (Mac Naughton, 2003).

In this chapter, I have presented the idea that curriculum is not neutral and that its position towards social issues can be described as either conforming, reforming, or transforming according to Mac Naughton's framework (2003). A conforming position seeks to reproduce society and emphasises traditional values. Here, diversity is at best ignored and differences are neglected. The response to diverse children and families is to assimilate them into the dominant culture. A reforming position is usually child centred and focuses on freedom and democratic principles and encourages children to think independently. Here, diversity is the domain of individual preferences and the response to diverse children and their families tends to focus on equality, sometimes at the expense

of highlighting and celebrating the differences which make individuals unique. A transforming position aims to equip the child to become active in their society, seek out inequalities and assert for justice. From this position, diversity is not merely 'responded to' as the educational process and the institutional culture reflects an anti-discriminatory approach with alternate ways of being in the world established as a valid way of seeing the world (Mac Naughton, 2003).

4 METHODOLOGY

From the point of view of methodology, the purpose of this thesis is to develop an understanding of the concept of diversity and how it is represented and what practices are prescribed to address it in the curriculum for early childhood education and care in the Helsinki municipality. Broadly speaking, diversity is a theme in societal discourse, and it influences national politics and eventually, policy making. The curriculum is a space in which discourse is formulated into a tangible document (Peers, 2017), which is both representative of the posture of society towards diversity as well as having the capacity, in principle, to direct future attitudes and practices in early childhood institutions. Attempting to throw light and making sense of this discourse as well as gaining insight into the representation of diversity in the national curriculum is inherently subjective and falls within the interpretivist approach to research. This approach seeks to make meaning and draw connections rather than conclusions which are used to make generalizations (Mukherji & Albon, 2018).

The intention of this thesis is not to give an overview of how diversity is practiced in the Finnish early childhood education and care system, but a discussion of how diversity has been positioned in the curriculum.

The research questions are:

- 1. What are the prevalent conceptions of diversity in the curriculum for ECEC?**
 - a. What is the curriculum's position with respect to diversity?**
 - b. How are the considerations of diversity meant to shape the operational culture and pedagogy in ECEC?**

4.1 Policy research

It is understood in educational policy research that policy applies to a range of definitions and that it cannot be limited to the formal directives that the government issues usually codified in law (Ball, 2015). That being said, the study of policy texts is a justified and relevant part of the larger discipline of policy research. In fact, there is even the argument made that the distinction between the policy as a text, and the practice and discourse of policy are not a dichotomy and are a reflection and production of each other (Ozga, 1999). There are some advantages to studying policy texts, particularly for a study such as this of limited length and scope. Policy texts are usually publicly available and are relatively easy to get access to (Bloor and Wood, 2006). In certain cases, they are able to provide a historical perspective as changes and developments can be tracked over time. Certainly, policy texts convey messages and one of the goals of policy research is an examination of these claims embedded in documents to parse out values that have driven them (Weimer, 2009).

4.2 Discourse analysis

The term discourse itself can refer to a wide range of human expression but is generally understood to be the production of talk and text. When we think of a specific document, it is considered to be a unit or manifestation of discourse (Chalaby, 1996). The perspective of discourse analysis stands on a set of assumptions about discourse, not the least of them is that our social reality is a construction or reflection of the discourse within and around it. For example, text in documents such as a curriculum, results in, or produces, some tangible consequences in the world (Allen, 2017).

Discourse analysis, then, is a set of methods that seeks to reveal or make evident the social constructions that create and are created by discourse (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). It is meant to go beyond getting a surface understanding of a piece of text, it is not collecting and collating categories of themes drawn from the immediate meaning of the text. Instead, at its best, it is an effort to uncover the way in which that meaning was produced by dissecting the constructions within the text (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). As a result, the process is characterised by reflexivity which implies to an extent an awareness of the academic discourse

surrounding the theme being investigated and being ready to question and challenge issues around that theme and even the analytical frame being used to study it (Gergen, 2015).

As mentioned above, discourse analysis is a set of methods and there are numerous approaches and traditions within it which are specific to the kind of documents, the context, and purpose of the analysis. The approach which is practiced here is what Keller (2013) refers to as "Interpretation Schemata and Frames" for the analysis of text. This entails constructing meaning on a theme from discourse by linking it to "general meaning patterns" which are derived from and "anchored" in the knowledge base of that theme (p.14). A small selection of this 'knowledge base' of diversity in ECEC has been presented in the literature review section of this thesis, and specifically, the framework from Mac Naughton on positions to curriculum (2003) will be used to be the analytical lens.

The document studied is the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC which was released in English in 2020. The Mac Naughton framework will allow an analysis of the curriculum with respect to diversity. A set of questions from each position to curriculum from the framework will be prepared and will be used to conduct the analysis. This analytical framework will be organised in three broad frames, with each having questions related to the different positions to curriculum: The model of 1) child and learning, 2) curriculum philosophy, and 3) goals for pedagogy.

In practice, the analysis will follow Keller's (2013) steps for interpretive analysis. The first step is the "reading of the document" which entails initially reading the curriculum and becoming familiarised with the content. The second step is "contextual analysis" which is a sorting of the text to pick out the sections that are connected to the theme of diversity. This constitutes an initial analysis of the document and will conclude by collating these portions. The third step is "analytical dissection and detailed interpretation" and is in practice the analysis of these selections using the three analytical frames as well as concepts from literature in the field of diversity in education, some of which have been outlined in the literature review. The fourth and last step is "summarizing" which is bringing together and condensing the findings into a coherent discussion.

4.3 *Ethical considerations*

Research involving the systematic review of documents tends to avoid the need to outline explicit ethical considerations (Suri, 2020). This is usually because the information being gathered is mostly publicly available and no personal or confidential data is being collected. However, there are some practical ethical considerations that are important to take into account. Concerning the collection of data, the document used is publicly available and that no confidential material is added or used. Also, care has been taken to verify that the document used is authentic and that the discussion recognizes and respects the authors.

A feature of the interpretivist approach which is relevant here is that it does not claim to be free of the values and experiences of the researcher (Mills, Durepos and Wiebe, 2010). As a student, my interest in the topic itself is not just coincidental or purely of academic interest. I am an immigrant, as are my children, my parents and grandparents and so the question of how one fits into a culture or environment that is different and how that environment is designed to receive one has been of significant relevance to me. This personal experience of being an object of diversity myself and now going through that with my children has made diversity a salient issue in early childhood education for me.

The particular interest in the curriculum is also not accidental or just out of convenience, as in my practice and as a student, I have experienced and heard of many attempts to “promote” diversity overtly. Since I felt that this thesis was not adequate to investigate the actual practice or perception of diversity, I felt that a good first step was to understand what diversity is ‘meant’ or ‘intended’ to be in the Finnish daycare system by looking at the curriculum as well as other documents that have contributed to its development and trying to gain insight into the notion of diversity there. Making evident one’s personal interest and bias in a research is not just an issue of ethics but a facet of the interpretivist approach itself, where the individual’s meaning making is part of the outcome and not a by-product which needs to be filtered (Atkins and Wallace, 2016).

5 GENERAL NOTIONS OF DIVERSITY

From the outset of the Helsinki curriculum, we see that people with differences are meant to be valued, reflecting the view that diversity is not a problem to be overcome by educating children into conformity (Ellen, Lycett, and Johns, 2013). A departure from the past is being drawn by delineating the current curriculum as being for “modern-day” and for children who themselves are “modern day” as seen in the following quote from one of the first sections of the curriculum. This is perhaps a recognition of the changing nature of diversity in Finland and in many other European countries (Vandenbroeck, 2017).

Modern-day ECEC together with modern day children creates new cultural heritage.... we are building a city that is open and community-centred, a city where different people with differing backgrounds are valued and respected. (Helsinki, 2020, p.5)

The curriculum makes a subtle but meaningful point that diversity can be defined both in terms of aspects that are from our background such as culture, ethnicity, or heritage but also in terms of personal factors as seen in the quote below. This is diversity at the individual level which can often get masked over and is especially important to keep in mind in Finland where the myth of a homogenous nation has been perpetuated (Tervonen, 2014, as cited in Millei, 2019). The individual view is reflected in the following quote:

Every child has the right to develop their skills and make choices, regardless of their gender, heritage, cultural background or any other personal factor. (Helsinki, 2020, p.6)

In the following quote, the curriculum gives examples of these dimensions of diversity that should be taken into consideration and these include language, culture, beliefs, religions and traditions. Gender is highlighted as one of the dimensions through which equality is to be practiced and it is placed at the level of a basic human right, however, how gender is constructed is not made evident.

A professional, open, and respectful attitude towards the diversity amongst families and their various languages, cultures, beliefs and religions...Gender equality is a basic human right and a fundamental social value (Helsinki, 2020, p.6).

In another section, diversity is framed in terms of human rights in the curriculum as the ability for an individual to retain their “language, culture, religion and beliefs”, as in the following quote:

The community recognises that retaining your language, culture, religion and beliefs is part of basic human rights (Helsinki, 2020, p.27).

Presumably, the use of the word “retaining” implies that there are groups of people with children in Finland with language, culture, religion, and beliefs which are differentiated from the majority native population. The right for children to maintain these defining characteristics is reaffirmed in the curriculum.

Relating these points with the four goals for anti-discriminatory education from Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2019), the first two, which involve pride in one’s identity as well as appreciating the value of difference, are accounted for in the Helsinki Curriculum. However, the last two which have to do with identifying injustice and learning the skills to respond to it are either absent or underplayed.

Diversity and equality are linked in the Helsinki curriculum. Equality on its own is a very fundamental value in Finnish education as well as in the society as a whole and it is the basis for many aspects of its government and social systems (Brunila and Kallioniemi, 2018). The following quotes are examples of equality being highlighted in the curriculum:

The aim of ECEC is to provide all children with equal access to ECEC, to promote parity and gender equality. (Helsinki, 2020, p.7)

In order to develop the operating culture, it is important that the attitudes towards parity and equality are discussed. (Helsinki, 2020, p.26)

It is possible that because the value of equality has such an established place in societal discourse and policy that it seems natural for diversity to be an extension of equality. This quotes also reflect the view that the idea that all differences are equal and valid and that everyone should be treated equally (MacNaughton, 2006).

In the section titled “Our community and I”, there is a very emphatic statement which places the ability to understand the diversity in the local community as the purpose of ECEC:

The purpose of ECEC is to develop the children’s abilities in understanding the diversity of their local community and practise being one of its members. (Helsinki, 2020, p.34)

In the Helsinki ECEC curriculum, the understanding of diversity exceeds an awareness and acceptance of the presence of different cultures in the community to including an active effort to learn about those cultures and what makes them unique. From the quote above, in which the very purpose of ECEC is to develop in children the ability to appreciate the diversity around them, it can be understood that a respect for diversity is intended to be a persistent element of the Helsinki curriculum and a pervasive aspect of the culture of the daycare. The second part of that quote relates the notion of diversity to that of children’s participation by referring to them as members of the community. This idea can also be seen in this next quote:

Children are part of a community that is both linguistically and culturally diverse. We are providing children with better opportunities to participate and influence (Helsinki, 2020, p.5).

Children are presented here as participating members of society, pointing to the possibility that their educational experience of ECEC is driven by their interests and their ability to influence their community (Liljestrand and Hammarberg, 2017).

The need to proactively address diversity is explicit in the aims of the Helsinki curriculum and is evocative of the aims of the Anti-Discrimination school of thought. However, it can be argued that the manner in which the appreciation of diversity is meant to be achieved is less through the challenging of power structures and prejudiced content and more through exposing children to diverse cultural practices and providing equal opportunities for children to express themselves.

In summary, the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC sees diversity in the families and the children it serves as valuable and an asset to the community. This

diversity can be in their backgrounds, their origins, ethnicities and so on, but also covers how people have come to identify themselves and all the nuances that come with their choices, skills, experiences, and beliefs. The ability for diverse children to maintain their distinctiveness is a fundamental human right and an important part of Finnish egalitarian values. One of the fundamental purposes of ECEC in Helsinki is for children to learn about the growing diversity in their community and to practice being an active participant in building it. The institution of the daycare is a space for children to experience the diversity in their community and to actively learn about what makes other children different. These differences are celebrated and embraced in a culture of openness, support, and acceptance for all differences, be they languages, ethnicities, cultures, beliefs, religions, or gender. While these are elements of the anti-discriminatory school of thought, they do not extend to equipping children to react to injustice for staff to challenge established content and practices for embedded biases.

6 DIVERSITY AND THE MODEL OF THE CHILD AND LEARNING

In this chapter, I will discuss how the model of the child and learning are framed within the sections of the Helsinki Curriculum which are related to diversity. The main themes that emerge from this analysis include, the child and constuctions of childhood, how children learn, and the planning of education and care.

The basis of diversity at the level of the individual child is a fundamental acceptance that all children, no matter the differences between them, are valuable the way they are, as seen in the quote below. A broader representation would be that there are many acceptable ways of being in this world.

Every child is unique and valuable just the way they are. The staff members support the children's growth as human beings, characterised by striving for truth, kindness and beauty, fairness and peace (Helsinki, 2020, p.6).

In the selection above, the impression is given that whatever children bring with them to the institutional setting is valuable and good in it of itself and that children are not meant to be considered as unformed or uncultured (Mac Naughton, 2003). This reflects the ideal that there is intrinsic value in childhood. To extend this, in the following quote, children are recognized as participants and actors in constructing culture and society and opportunities are to be intentionally offered for the children to influence their learning environment.

Together with children, we are building a city that is open and community-centred.... We are providing children with better opportunities to participate and influence (Helsinki, 2020, p.5).

There is also a significant assumption about children's culture which is that it is not static and is meant to change over time. In fact, it is meant to be constructed by the children as they grow and develop within a community. This points to an understanding that children are not required to conform to the

dominant culture, nor only according to their native cultural heritage (Mac Naughton, 2003). As seen in the previous quote, children's culture and participation is not limited to the daycare but extends to the wider community in which they are considered active and enabled participants. This is a meaningful feature of the anti-discriminatory school of thought which sees children as active agents with the ability to construct their environment and in so, doing allow it to blossom with the inherent diversities that the children bring (Mac Naughton, 2006).

In describing the ways children learn, there is a recognition that there is always some prior learning, some prior knowledge that is the basis for new learning. In this way, the diverse cultural experiences of children from diverse backgrounds are legitimized as a basis for further learning as shown below:

In ECEC, learning is based on the children's prior experiences, their interests and skills. It is important that the new things that children learn have a connection to their developing abilities and other experiences and cultural backgrounds (Helsinki, 2020, p.11).

Any process of education that assumes that every child has some prior learning, by necessity must consider the diversity of the children and their experience they have built up already through learning, and who are engaged in it (Vandenbroeck et al., 2011).

In terms of content, the socio-cultural context is recognized and the culture and history of the children, their friends, and their surroundings are relevant to their learning. An example of this is seen in the selection from the Helsinki curriculum in the next quote which talks about beliefs and religions the children and staff in a group learn about as well as the practice of being non-religious or having other beliefs about the world.

The cultural and belief-related backgrounds of families are considered an asset to the children's growth, development, and learning (p. 34).

In ECEC belief education, the children mainly learn about the religions and other beliefs present in their own group. Not being religious is also discussed alongside the beliefs (Helsinki, 2020, p34).

This inclusive approach welcomes a spectrum of beliefs and worldviews and reflects an openness in the practices and content the children are engaged with. This directive highlights the idea that children are not required to conform to the

dominant culture, or religion in this case. Additionally, what is also illustrative is how this is an example of productive diversity, in which the presence of diverse children in a group results in a change in the practices and norms of that group (Rhedding-Jones, 2005). Here, the children's diverse religions, beliefs and worldviews are informing learning content. This is equally an example of the recognition of children's funds of knowledge in the institutional setting.

All children in ECEC need an individual learning plan and this is outlined in a distinct section in the Helsinki curriculum in which there is a recognition of the experiences and prior knowledge of the child as the basis for new learning. An example of this is shown in the quote below about planning for language education:

The linguistic and cultural background and linguistic skills and abilities of a child who speaks a foreign language or is bilingual are factored in when creating their individual plan (Helsinki, 2020, p.20).

In planning with the children, the unique needs of individuals are highlighted, which signifies an approach which takes into consideration the subjective realities of development and capacities of the children. Individual differences are to be taken into account and if they are considered a source of inequality, they elicit a response to provide support.

With respect to the model of the child and of learning, children and childhood are considered as valuable states of being and a culturally rich stage of life. Children actively construct meaning and identity and their knowledge of the world, their environment and culture are the basis for planning their education and care, a process in which they are meant to participate fully at the institutional setting as well as in the wider community. Children are not meant to assimilate to the dominant Finnish culture and there is no effort to normalize children with diverse backgrounds into an acceptable state. These and other factors considered allow a characterisation of a transforming position to the curriculum with respect to the model of the child.

7 DIVERSITY AND THE CURRICULUM PHILOSOPHY

In this chapter, the curriculum philosophy perspective has been used as an analytical frame on the sections of the Helsinki curriculum that are relevant to diversity. The themes that emerge from this analysis are the values guiding diversity, the role of staff, and the visibility of diversity in the institutional setting.

Differences between children are positioned as inherently valuable and openness to the needs of a diverse community are espoused as values, as seen in the quote below:

...we are building... a city where different people with differing backgrounds are valued and respected (Helsinki, 2020, p.5).

Smooth interaction between people with different cultural and religious backgrounds requires a person to understand and respect their own cultural and religious background and that of others (Helsinki, 2020, p.14).

The presence of diverse cultures within a group of children is acknowledged and the keys to successful interaction, the Helsinki curriculum suggests, is understanding and respect. While this is a simple statement, it orients practitioners away from the idea that diversity is a problem to be solved or just tolerated and moves towards acceptance and respect (Kentel, 2017). The statement about building a diverse community begins with “We” and is inclusive in many ways, not only of all the diverse individuals and cultures in the community, but the children as well. Finnish cultural heritage is also recognised here and validated as a reflection of the children themselves.

One of the arenas for the expression and construction of culture is the group setting of the daycare. In the quote below can be found the idea that groups and collective action are a space for cultural expression and opportunities for children to learn about each other’s cultures. Children and staff are able to participate in group activities which highlight their cultural heritages. By participating, they are

learning about each other's cultures and by allowing different expressions of culture they are practicing respect for those differences. The following two selections of text from the curriculum are examples, amongst others, of this approach to the experience of education and care for all the children in the group. It is worthwhile to mention that this is neither directed only at children with differences of from different backgrounds and families nor is it directed only at children the so called 'local' children but for all children.

The children are encouraged to learn about other people, languages and cultures. Experiences, knowledge and skills gained during ECEC regarding cultural heritage help the children adopt, use and change their culture (Helsinki, 2020, p.34).

The children learn about different cultures and form their cultural identities through stories, games, festive traditions and culinary customs from around the world (Helsinki, 2020, p.14).

The role of staff here is to create opportunities for these expressions of culture. For Finnish children, there are many opportunities for this to happen naturally as holidays and other festivities are occasions for expression of cultural heritage, however, for children from different backgrounds, there must be a more intentional effort from staff to provide these kinds of opportunities. The curriculum highlights stories, games, celebrations, and food as elements for cultural exchange. The experiences of what Mac Naughton (2006) refers to as the cultural understanding school of thought point out that a significant pitfall in focusing on these kinds of cultural expressions is that they can lead to a watering down and tokenization of diverse cultures (Clarke and Siraj-Blatchford, 2000). One way to guard against that could be in concert with the other directives of the curriculum which calls for cooperation with parents and to consider them as experts in their cultures.

Teachers and staff are also meant to function as role models for the children when it comes to encountering different people, languages, cultures, and beliefs positively as can be seen in the following quote. Supposedly, if the teachers portray an open and accepting attitude towards differences then this will influence the children's behaviours.

The staff function as role models for the children when it comes to encountering different people, languages, cultures and beliefs positively. The staff promote a safe and open atmosphere and treat the children and their families with respect (Helsinki, 2020, p.17).

We are aware that ways of interacting and speaking and behaviour based on stereotypical assumptions is passed on to children (Helsinki, 2020, p.26).

The teacher as a role model is a significant participant in the education and socialization of the children with the warning that acting based on stereotypes can negatively impact children (Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2005). This highlights the need for staff to actively learn about the cultures of the families they are engaging with and to learn how to manage diversity because without focused training, even professionals can fall back to prejudiced stereotypes which are based on ignorant views (Millei, 2019).

The children's educational experience is intended to develop their ability to understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of the other children in their group as shown in this next selection from the Helsinki curriculum:

...to enhance the ability to understand and respect shared cultural traditions, as well as everyone's linguistic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and beliefs (Helsinki, 2020, p.7).

This requires staff to possess knowledge of other cultures and belief systems and have the skills to view things from different angles and see things from other people's perspectives. Different ways of thinking and behaving are discussed constructively and new ways of working together are created (Helsinki, 2020, p.27).

This is an element of an anti-discriminatory stance which raises the value of diversity and the ability to function successfully with different kinds of people (Mac Naughton, 2003). Staff have an active role in educating the children about different cultures, backgrounds, and languages. This selection also seems to imply that staff need to become aware and knowledgeable, or at least sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of the children in order to plan activities and facilitate learning. Equally presented is the idea that acknowledging, accepting and being knowledgeable of other cultures is not enough, there is a next level which is to collaboratively construct new ways of doing things, new routines. This at least is not ambiguous and is an essential feature of communities that value diverse children enough to reach out and learn about them (Nimmo, 2002).

The Helsinki curriculum asks that the children's different languages, cultures and beliefs are to be clearly visible in the daycare and part of its routines. If this were to be practiced, the routines in the group would reflect the different cultures and languages represented in that group. These kinds of changes would reflect an open posture towards diverse children and their families (Rhedding-Jones, 2005).

The children's languages, cultures and beliefs are a visible and valuable part of the ECEC routines, and the children are provided with opportunities to learn about different languages (Helsinki, 2020, p.30).

The idea of highlighting both differences and similarities between cultures is brought up with a mandate to directly engage with them and to discuss them in a positive manner.

Similarities and differences are discussed in positive ways (Helsinki, 2020, p.27).

The way in which attitudes towards language, ethnicity, beliefs, disability, gender and its different forms show in speech, gestures, actions and approaches should be discussed (Helsinki, 2020, p.26).

It is notable that the text asks that the attitudes towards these dimensions of diversity be overtly "discussed" and made visible in the daycare. This is another element of an anti-discriminatory approach to diversity which does not only respond to incidents but makes issues of difference and diversity part of the regular discourse in the institution (Mac Naughton, 2006).

Concerning curriculum philosophy, while Finnish traditions and cultural practices certainly have a place in ECEC, they are meant to be brought to the table alongside an increasingly diverse set of cultures in the daycare and presented as part of the cultural heritage of the children. Differences and similarities between children, both personal and from their backgrounds, are meant to be discussed by staff and children and expressed as positive features of the community and not as sources of inequality. Speaking of inequalities, staff are meant to pay attention to situations that bring out inequality between children and intervene to address them.

There are certain elements of anti-discriminatory education present, such as children developing confidence in their cultural and linguistic identities and being accepting of diversity however, it falls short as it is left to the staff and educators to determine whether to directly address issues of justice and fairness with the children themselves. The issue here is to not only discuss prejudice and discrimination when it has become apparent in the group, or when there has been a negative incident concerning diversity, but that it is a regular part of the learning experiences of the children. As Mac Naughton put it, the children learn “to identify what is fair and unfair in their environment” as well as “the skills they will need to respond to any unfairness or oppressiveness” (2003, p.191).

Understanding the role of staff is something that I have struggled with in this analysis of the curriculum. One way of looking at it is that the staff are responsible for implementing the entire curriculum, not just the sections that are clearly labelled to be the role of staff. From this perspective, teachers are meant to take a transforming position to curriculum. This entails overtly addressing injustices, taking a stand against discrimination, and enabling children and families to have confidence and pride in themselves and in their backgrounds. The other perspective is that, as shown in the sections above, the role of the teacher is to create spaces for children and families to explore each other’s differences in a positive way and to be a role model for how to respond to diversity. I don’t believe that this second reading of the curriculum assumes a transforming position.

I do feel that perhaps my lack of clarity comes from the fact that as a teacher myself, I am overly aware of the fact that teachers only barely implement the curriculum as it is. It seems that a lot hinges on the weight teachers give the directives about their role with respect to diversity and is heavily dependent on individual teachers who have a vested interest in promoting diversity. This experience is supported by Korkeamäki and Dreher (2012) in their study about the implementation of the Finnish curriculum by ECEC teachers, who find that while there are many elements of the curriculum applied, they are often done “shallowly and on an ad hoc basis” (p.229). Again, I have had to remind myself that the purpose of this thesis is not to study the perception or behaviours of teachers, but an analysis of the curriculum as a document. However, I included this dilemma here as I felt genuinely troubled at an intellectual level.

8 DIVERSITY IN THE CURRICULUM GOALS AND PEDAGOGY

In this last analysis chapter, in focus are the goals and pedagogy of the curriculum with respect to diversity and how these goals reflect a position to curriculum. The main themes discussed are multilingualism, collaboration and supporting families, the relationships between children, and their group dynamics.

Languages have a special place in the curriculum with respect to diversity issues. The previously established principle that children have a right to retain their cultural distinctiveness is applied here with respect to languages. Among the dimensions of diversity, there is an obvious emphasis on languages, and this is understandable perhaps because other than the way a person looks, how they sound is among their next most noticeable and distinguishing features. The following quote from the curriculum is an example of how multilingualism is viewed:

The children's languages, cultures and beliefs are a visible and valuable part of the ECEC routines, and the children are provided with opportunities to learn about different languages (Helsinki, 2020, p.30).

Helsinki's bi- and multilingual nature is an asset (Helsinki, 2020, p.6).

Reiterated here as well is the framing of diversity in languages as an asset to the community of children. The fact that the children speak different languages at home and amongst themselves enriches their daycare experience, and it is not a problem to be solved. This is in line with findings from Tomter and Söpanen (2021) who study ECEC policy documents in Finland and found that overall, multilingualism is considered an asset to the community and the use of different languages at home and in the institutional setting is one the community's resources.

There is a strong sense that the children's home languages are a priority and that language development at daycare is not all about learning Finnish but strengthening the child's ability to communicate in their home language(s) as well. This in turn reinforces the child's cultural and linguistic identity as they see that their home languages are valued even though they are different from the dominant language (Rhedding-Jones, 2005). This is in line with Finnish legislation on languages and can be seen in the Helsinki curriculum in the quote below:

In ECEC, every child has the right to use their mother tongue, and using multiple languages simultaneously is considered natural and valuable. Furthermore, the staff understand that the development of a child's own mother tongue(s) functions as a basis for learning Finnish and other languages (Helsinki, 2020, p.30).

Another detail which is noteworthy from the quote above is the use of the phrase "mother tongue(s)" with the possible plural being a recognition that many children have more than one mother tongue and a recognition of the layered and more complex diversities in play.

The Helsinki curriculum highlights the importance of supporting and working with families, especially on issues of differences and diversities. This is in line with the idea presented earlier that the experiences of children are not isolated from their guardians and their families and that caring for diverse children requires attention to the families (Vandenbroeck, 2017). The need to engage families can be seen in this quote:

Children's family identity and family ties are supported in a way that allows every child to feel that their family is valuable...If necessary, a professional interpreter will be used with the guardians in order to ensure mutual understanding (Helsinki, 2020, p.20).

The reality that families with parents who do not speak Finnish are part of the community is validated by the curriculum making provisions for communication between the daycare and the home to be carried out in languages other than Finnish and that interpreters be used when possible and needed. This recognition in part defines the approach to diversity. In order to be part of the education and care of the children, the families are not required to adapt to the

native language requirements and instead, their language identity is validated (Vedder, Bouwer and Pels, 1996).

Another important directive in this next selection gives a lot of context for many of the ideas previously mentioned in the text, which is that the children's guardians are used as experts of their cultures:

The guardians are used as experts of their own cultures in the child groups' activities...Furthermore, the knowledge of the children's guardians about their own cultural heritages can be utilised (Helsinki, 2020, p.34).

In previous sections, we have seen that the curriculum asks staff and children to be aware of other cultures and to be knowledgeable of those cultures. Here, we find out that the intention is for the families to be the source of this knowledge and as such they need to be invited to educate the staff and children about their cultures. This is an important element of the transforming position which recognises, welcomes, and validates the knowledge bases of children and families with differences (Mac Naughton, 2003). This is also the recognition that the presence of diverse children in an institution should reflect in the content, norms, and practices of the group (Rhedding-Jones, 2005).

Concerning the relationships between children, they are directed to learn how to appreciate differences between each other and in the quote below, they are encouraged to be kind to each other and to see things from each other's perspective.

The children are guided towards kindness and good manners. The children learn about stepping into other people's shoes, viewing things from various angles and resolving conflicts constructively. The staff can identify any elements in children's interaction that promote disparity and will intervene gently and systematically" (Helsinki, 2020, p.17).

The staff are to examine the relationships between children and identify and intervene if there are any elements that "promote disparity". It is useful to pause and think about the use of the word "disparity" in this quote as it seems to be either a container for various forms of discrimination in order to be more inclusive or then the word is being used in an attempt to tone down the possibility of negative interactions between the children. However, is not reasonable to assume that children will act in biased and discriminatory ways towards each other? Perhaps the purpose of this 'toning down' is shift the responsibility of

positive socialising behaviour to the example of the staff and the operational culture of the institution and not the on the children directly? Returning to the text above, it is also significant that this is a case in which the role of staff can be interpreted to mean that they should be proactive and not only reactive to discrimination, if that is what “disparity” is referring to. If that were the case, then this is an example of adult interventions that are not only meant to occur when children raise issues or when they are incidents but that these values and attitudes are meant to purposefully characterise the regular educational content (Power et al., 2019).

With respect to goals and pedagogy, there is a lean towards a transformational position with vestiges of a reforming approach which are rooted in the child-centred approach. Children’s funds of knowledge are welcomed into the daycare and families are meant to be actively involved in planning. Families are meant to be a resource act as cultural experts to be drawn on to educate the staff and children and educational content is supposed to include diverse cultures and where the use of multiple languages is considered a right and a resource. Where this does not go all the way is that it is still left to the discretion of staff to critically examine the experiences and content that the children are engaged with to examine structural causes of inequality. Also, while attention is to be paid to the relationship between children, there are ambiguous statements about assumptions of power dynamics and biases among the children. Also, their choices of how and who to play and interact with are not critically examined.

9 SUMMARY

9.1 On the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC

I set out on this project with the intention of examining the conception of diversity in the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC. To do that I needed to look at the position of the curriculum with respect to diversity and find out how the considerations of diversity are meant to shape the experience of education and care. There is a wealth of research in the field of diversity, however, the starting point for this analysis relied heavily on Mac Naughton's (2003) framework for positions to curriculum. In carrying out this form of discourse analysis, I initially identified sections of the curriculum document that were related to diversity and then applied the theoretical framework mentioned above which then examines these selections of text along the dimensions of the model of the child, philosophy, and goals.

Concerning the general conception of diversity, the Helsinki curriculum for ECEC sees diversity in children and society as valuable and a resource. One of the fundamental purposes of ECEC in Helsinki is for children to learn about the diversity in their community and they are considered to be active members who participate in building it. The differences they find in people are celebrated and embraced by all, with an institutional culture of openness and acceptance. However, the emphasis in this approach to diversity is in exposing children to diverse cultural practices and providing equal opportunities for children to express themselves and less through the challenging of power structures and prejudiced content.

As for the model of the child and of learning, children from diverse backgrounds are not meant to be assimilated into the dominant Finnish culture. All children have culturally rich lives, and their experiences and funds of

knowledge are the basis for planning their education and care, a process in which they fully participate in. The curriculum philosophy also reflects elements of a transforming position such as directly addressing inequalities, developing in children the confidence in their cultural and linguistic identities, and being accepting of all forms of diversity. In order to fully embrace the transforming and anti-discrimination school of thought, however, children would additionally need to learn how to identify injustice in their surroundings as well as the skills required to respond to them. A distinctive feature of the goals and pedagogy with respect to diversity is that the families are to be fully engaged and drawn on for expertise in culture, beliefs, worldviews, religions, languages, and the myriad other sources of diversity. Multilingualism in particular, is acknowledged, and the presence and use of many languages by children and their families is framed as a right and a resource. It is assumed that an institutional culture which accepts diversity and the staff as role models for responding to differences will suffice in shaping the group dynamics and the relationships between children. There is ambiguous space left then, to consider how the children's interactions might reflect discrimination and bias.

9.2 Reflections for further consideration

The role that staff plays in ECEC is central to the experience of children in daycare, in fact Mac Naughton's framework for positions to curriculum (2003) is in many ways addressed directly to staff, it is not meant to simply characterise a written document. In many ways, the position that teachers take towards the model of the child, learning, planning, curriculum philosophy, goals and pedagogy are more important to determining the position to curriculum than the words in the text as explicit as they may be. This is particularly important as there is a strong culture of autonomy in Finland (Vitikka et al., 2012) and this can mean that teachers will place emphasis on things that they see fit. If diversity is to continue being an important element of ECEC in Helsinki then the role of the staff has to be put into focus and adequate training on diversity has to be considered as the

degree of engagement with anti-discriminatory education is in the hands of the professionals in the daycare setting.

In the same light, the issue of content, for example, anti-bias and anti-discriminatory education is also another relevant factor to be considered as the curriculum, in line with the autonomy that teachers are given, prescribes little in terms of actual technique and a lot is left up to the teachers. One reason why this is relevant is that as Korkeamäki and Dreher (2012) note in their study about the implementation of curriculum by teachers, while there are many elements of the curriculum applied, they are often done “shallowly and on an ad hoc basis (p.229). Without generalizing this to every teacher in Helsinki, it at least raises the concern of how diversity is implemented since teachers are in effect cultural gatekeepers, who might exercise diversity to the limit of their personal experience with it (Mac Naughton, 2003).

A final point for reflection has to do with the connection made in the curriculum between diversity and equality and how diversity is at times framed in terms of personal freedoms. These are very strong concepts already enshrined in Finnish law and culture (Brunila and Kallioniemi, 2018), and likely the reason that they are the underpinnings of the notion of diversity. Some problems with that are that while equality can mean cooperation, tolerance, and coexistence, it does not always imply collaboration, collectivism, or acceptance. Equality can mean equal opportunities but may not take the step to address systematic racism or other forms of discrimination (Mac Naughton, 2003). Equality can mean a level playing field, but not everyone is at the same level given that some diversities take away the ability to function on an equal playing field. This is not to say that the curriculum is calling for any of this, but that the reliance of equality as an underpinning of diversity does not come without its caveats or problems to be wary of.

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