Article title	**Communication and language development in early childhood education (Finland)**
Author 1	Kaisu Rättyä
Author 1 blurb	Kaisu Rättyä is University Lecturer at Tampere University, Finland
Author 2	Pirjo Kulju
Author 2 blurb	Pirjo Kulju is University Lecturer at the Tampere University, Finland
Regional Editor	Maiju Paananen
Editor in Chief	Manjula Waniganayake

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1. early literacy
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7. multilingual education

Glossary terms

1. Graphogame: an early literacy game that supports children in learning the connections between speech sounds and letters. It begins with exercises in letter-sound correspondence and progresses gradually to sound synthesis in syllables, words, and pseudo-words. It is aimed at acquisition of the alphabetic principle. The game adjusts to the abilities of each individual. The game is derived from a longitudinal study of dyslexia in Finland, and it has a global focus with a special emphasis on countries where access to literacy education is limited.
2. Multiliteracy: refers to multimodality of meaning-making; that is, written-linguistic modes of meaning can be complemented by oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile, and spatial patterns of meaning. It also refers to wide social contexts of these modes, from diverse local settings to global communities.
3. Osallisuus (participation): refers to children's ability to participate, affect, and influence as well as to allow the child to feel involved and included. It is connected to postmodern curricula which emphasizes the child's perspective and children as active participants.
4. Orthography: a system for writing in a language. In alphabetic orthographies, the writing system is based on phoneme-grapheme correspondences. Alphabetic orthographies can vary in depth. For example, English is regarded as a deep orthography containing many inconsistencies and Finnish as a shallow orthography with consistent grapheme–phoneme correspondences.

Text of the article

1. Definition of early literacy:

In order to capture the multifaceted nature of today's literacies, the concept of multiliteracy was incorporated into national core curricula for early childhood education and care (ECEC 2018), pre-primary education (NCCP 2014), and primary education (NCC 2014) as an umbrella concept. It comprises different types of literacies such as basic, visual, and media literacy (e.g., Kalantzis and Cope 2012). Multiliteracy requires a rich textual environment in early education.

The pre-primary education objective is to strengthen the interest and curiosity towards spoken language, reading, and writing (NCCP 2014) as systematic reading instruction begins at school. The two official languages in Finland are Finnish and Swedish. The process of learning basic reading skills is simple in Finnish due to a regular orthography. Upon school entry in 2018, only 28 % of children were not able to read, 11 % were able to connect letters and sounds, 32 % were able to read words, and 29 % were able to read sentences (Ukkola and Metsämuuronen 2019; Soodla et. al. 2015). Letter name knowledge has shown to be an effective predictor at early stages of reading acquisition and has led to the adaptation of a very practical measure to identify children who need help for getting sufficient preventive help (Lyytinen et al. 2019).

International studies have found that Finnish children are among the best readers. High literacy rates in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (Leino et al. 2017) have shown trends for high average scores in other international assessments for students and adults (OECD 2018; Malin, Sulkunen, and Laine 2013).

2. Approaches to language development:

In Finland linguistic identities of the children are supported through whole education (ECEC 2018; NCCP 2014). It is fundamental that everyone has a right to one's own language and culture. Furthermore, each community and community member are seen as multilingual, and thus parallel use of various languages in the school's daily life is seen as natural. Awareness of languages and cultures can bring joy and pride in learning for both children and personnel (Honko and Mustonen 2020a; 2020b). Overall, the language education policy in Finland sees multilingualism as an asset and it is recognized explicitly as a resource (Alstad et al. 2021).

Play and other approaches characteristic of children's learning are used to foster children's readiness to read (NCCP 2014, 43). Digital tools are also used in early education. Graphogame, an early literacy game, supports struggling children in learning the connections between speech sounds and letters (GraphoLearn; Ojanen et al. 2015). When more systematic instruction for basic reading skills starts at school at the age of seven, the instruction is mainly based on synthetic methods proceeding from letter-sound -level to syllables and words. Possibilities for poor reading skills are screened in pre-primary education and by special education teachers at school. Co-teaching and flexible educational solutions between preprimary, primary education, and special education are becoming more common and provides more possibilities for organizing the children into groups based on their skills. (Lyytinen et al. 2019.)

3. Role of adults:

Language and literacy play an important role in play-based pedagogies that are implemented in ECEC and NCCP. Play and child-directed activities, collaborative learning, and hands-on and multimodal learning activities are present in learning areas such as "Rich world of languages" and "Diverse forms

of expression" in curricula. Child-centered pedagogy has been found to strengthen children's reading fluency and reading comprehension. 'Teachers are expected to provide encouraging and emotionally supportive reading environment that address children's need for autonomy and belongingness'. This kind of pedagogy especially supports children with weaker literacy capabilities. (Lerkkanen 2019.)

The Finnish ECE education community has increasingly discussed the child perspective and children's social participation as these are essential elements of the Finnish curricular conception of learning (Alila ym. 2017; Arvola, Lastikka, and Reunamo 2017; ECEC 2018: 20). In this discussion focused on sociocultural framework, researchers of childhood studies and educational studies combine the term osallisuus (participation) with dimensions like participation, experiencing, and democracy. *Osallisuus* is understood as part of postmodern curricula that emphasizes the child's perspective and children as active participants more than mere targets for teacher-directed pedagogy (Korkeamäki and Dreher 2012).

Mother's educational background and time that children and mothers spend together have an effect on reading skills. The maternal teaching of reading and shared reading predicts literacy skills and development of children's language (Silinskas et al. 2010.) This has led to the promotion of reading programs. For example, the Ministry of Education and Culture finances several organizations which focus on literacy and literature. The Finnish Reading Center has a Read Aloud program, and its "Book bag to every baby born in 2019-2021" project aims to boost the equality between children and families providing books for toddlers and small children and informative materials for parents and teachers in national languages Finnish, Swedish, and Sámi. (Lukukeskus 2021.)

4. Children's literature:

NCCP (2018: 23) expresses that children should be provided with a rich textual environment. It offers children opportunities to build their understandings of cultural and linguistic diversities. Diverse textual materials support children in building up their vocabulary, which is a strong predictor of reading comprehension and listening comprehension (Torppa et al. 2016: 17).

Shared reading at home is a strong tradition in Finland. Bedtime stories are a part of informal home literacy activities and increase children's vocabulary and reading comprehension (Silinskas et al. 2019). This tradition has been supported for decades with the "first-book" in a maternal packages and literary culture with a broad network of communal libraries.

Finnish children's book: Number of new editions 1990-2019

	1990	**1995**	**2000**	**2005**	**2010**	**2015**	**2019**
Finnish children's books	95	84	83	170	227	221	309
Finnish young adult books	61	70	72	79	55	61	112
Translated children's book	305	439	801	675	626	336	457
Translated young adult books	62	61	105	148	163	76	71
Sum	**523**	**654**	**1061**	**1072**	**1071**	**694**	**949**

Table 1. Finnish children's books: Number of new editions. According to the yearly published statistics by the Finnish Book Publishers Association.

[insert **Table 1: Caption** here]

According to the statistics presented by the Finnish Book Publishers Association, the number of new children's books published yearly averages between 700–1000. (See table 1.) The proportion of domestic children's and young adult books on national languages was high during the 2010s, and the number of domestic young adult books has grown towards the end of the decade. Statistics show a rising trend in electronic publications, especially audiobooks. The children's literature in Finland is mainly published in the national languages, Finnish and Swedish (Finnish Book Publishers Association 2021.) The accessibility of children's books published in other languages varies between communities and their libraries.

[insert **Figure 1: Caption** here]

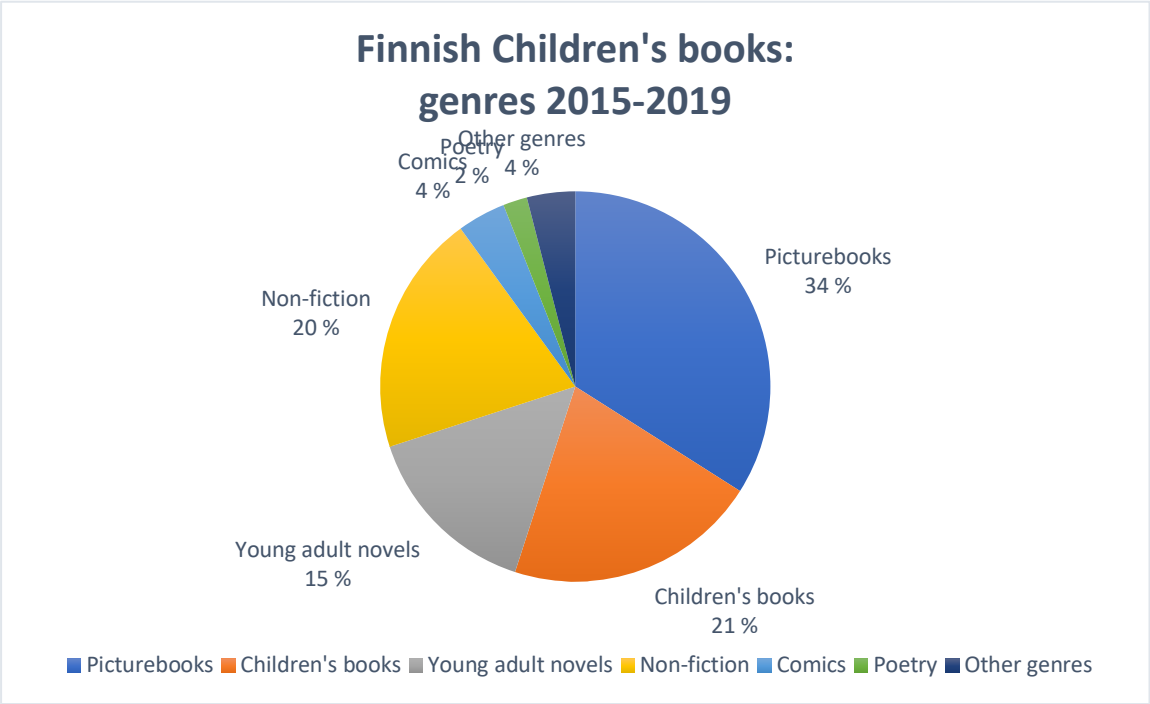

Figure 1: Finnish children's books: Genres 2015–2019. According to the yearly published statistics by The Finnish Institute for Children's Literature (LKI 2021).

Finnish children's literature has broad variation in genres of children's and young adult books. Through this century the main genres have been children's picture books and children's novels. (See Figure 1.) Young adult literature and children's non-fiction are also well represented. During 2000-2020 children's poetry found its place in book production and marketing as well as comics and toy books. The number of translated children's literature has been quite stable during these years. The main languages are English, Swedish, German, and French. (LKI 2021.)

Among the most popular and awarded Finnish contemporary authors belong poet Kirsi Kunnas, picture book illustrators and authors Mauri Kunnas, Aino Havukainen, and Sami Toivonen, humorous children's novelists Sinikka and Tiina Nopola, fairy tale and young adult authors Hannele Huovi and Timo Parvela, and the fantasy author Salla Simukka. Simukka has risen among Finland's most translated children's author since the legacy of Tove Jansson and her Moomin books. (FILI 2021.)

5. Key challenges

The key challenges regarding the promotion of effective communication and language development concern the multiliteracy practices and multilingualism in education.

Concepts and development of multiliteracy practices. There are still varying definitions and approaches to multiliteracy, and this creates challenges to systematically implement it into early educational practices (cf. Repo et al. 2019). Ensuring that multiliteracy becomes an integral part of education in early years and onwards will require professional development and more research (Kumpulainen and Shefton-Green 2019). There is also a growing need to develop practices that promote children's critical online reading skills in early years and onwards as one of the main challenges of our times is wide-spread misinformation and disinformation on the Internet (Kendeou et al., 2019; Eskelä-Haapanen and Kiili 2019). Educators should also be more aware of the disciplinary literacies which means that approaches such as science literacy (Vartiainen and Kumpulainen 2019) should be implemented in early education.

Multilingual education and language-aware early childhood education. The changes in migration situation in the early 2010s changed the language milieu in Finland. The increase in the number of spoken languages in Finland requires the development of practices that support each child's multilingual identity as outlined in the core curricula (ECED 2018; NCCP 2014). This is true for curricula as well as different programs financed by government or ministry, but more professional development and research are needed to meet the challenges of multilingualism in early educational settings. The changed situation has led to several changes in ECE institutions and pre-primary and primary schools.

Further reading and online resources

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