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## Seeking the Goals – Defining the Work

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### **Abstract**

*During decades one top-question in Finnish early childhood education has been, 'what's the main purpose, who defines it, whose interest it serves?' Our effective Day Care Act (1973) was clearly built for adults' needs, work and study. Politicians defined which family had need and provided 'solutions'. The National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education And Care (2003) In Finland give right for all children under school age (7 years) to receive early childhood education. Families, not, politicians, may make decisions and have associated responsibility. Good cooperation among them, staff and stake holders is a key issue. In my research second year kindergarten teacher students have written their thoughts about goals in early childhood education, concerning roles in child welfare work or educare. They identify concerns they have participating in multi-disciplinary settings and their current and future roles within it.*

**Key words:** *early childhood education and care, administration*

National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland provide guidance for implementing the context of early childhood education and care (ECEC). The ECEC guidance comprises the perspectives of care, education and teaching. It encompasses the comprehensive character of the Finnish system and covers both the day care arrangements offered to families and the perspective of goal-oriented early childhood education that is open for children. In addition, it describes the way in which Finnish early childhood pedagogy combines care, education and teaching into a whole that is realized in daily activities. Early childhood pedagogy varies with the age of the children, the elements of care, education and teaching having different emphases in different situations. ECEC partnership requires mutual, continuous and committed interaction in all matters concerning the child. The experience of being heard and mutual respect are essential for attaining shared understanding. Multi- and cross professional cooperation are important. Stakeholders are playing a growing role also in this field. Finland is well known about being "the land of associations" and the third sector is making its valuable contribution in the development work concerning early childhood education and its association with life long learning. ECEC is based on the uniqueness of each and every child. Cooperation is a must. Well-being of the child is the best preventive measure in child welfare. Parental and professional skills require responsible, intuitive ability to notice, be aware and even make interventions when needed. Discussions and agreements between parents and professionals are an essential part of cooperation. The success of cooperation between home and daycare is one main factor in the work for the best interest of child.

My research material has focus on the opinions of second year kindergarten teacher students concerning general discussion about the administrative solutions in early

childhood education and care. Our effective Day care Act (from 1973) has lived its time. There has been a real paradigm shift, all agree, with increasing focus on the child and their family, but the new Act, working name “Early Childhood and Care Act” is still some where in the future. Already two governments have promised in their political programmes to enact it, but somehow it seems to be too problematic. The Act from 1973 was built on the needs of parents, adults, to make them possible to work or to study. For more than ten years politicians and officials decided which family was in need of daycare place for their children. Since 1990’s years all children under school age (7 years ) have had a subjective right to a place in publicly funded ECEC-services. This system is comprehensive in coverage and integrated and coherent in organization. ECEC has been seen as an essential part of life long learning on the way to grow up as reasonable, caring citizens.

In my teaching module “Cooperation in institutional early childhood education” the main point of view is very much framed with social sciences. Child welfare and consumer citizenship education play a big role. One growing challenge is to search for new lasting even social-pedagogical points of view referring the realities of daily life and the needs of today’s families. In my lessons we confront these controversial issues which can sometimes be seen even as “fighting” aspects in discussion. Everybody agrees the first focus may be pedagogical and didactic framed but this may be threatened by a broader societal approach. At the heart of this debate is a lasting question about the main administrative responsibility concerning ECEC-administration. In my teaching, students see others work as being as important as their own, but should be happy to know which the professional reference group they will be, to be a social worker or pedagogue. Discussion with students has centred on debates surrounding the benefits or otherwise of administrative orientated solutions, and the relationship between social work and pedagogy. Our students know well the historical roots of ECEC in Finland. The work was earlier more social work orientated but has always recognized the importance of pedagogical development. An important outcome from this is realization of the necessity for good cooperation and the possibility to increase professional awareness of ECEC services and develop multi-,inter-, and cross-professional and cultural cooperation between different services supporting children and their families in normal good life, with the aim of preventing problems, making early and even immediate interventions when needed. To work in the field of ECEC-services is challenging and emphasizes work for the best interest of child and not privilege for any one profession. Educational issues, team work and the social pedagogical point of view are all present. In students’ concerns one of the biggest problems seems to be a motivation problem, in that “Everybody is doing everything”. There is lack of reasonable division of duties. “We are so democratic. Our education and professional abilities don’t have enough place”. Student’s opinions follow the general discussion especially in the field concerning the core duties of kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers have a university level education, Bachelor’s degree, focusing most on pedagogical and psychological issues in child’s development. They have very high level on these fields and they should be ready to take this pedagogical responsibility too. But “if everybody is doing everything how can we take it”. I don’t have here any possibility to go more deeply into this issue but want to point out that in students’ writings the possibility to profile with real, professional abilities found much more expression than the administrative solution. Most students support educational administration. Argumentations for it are most just

associated with common , shared profession picture, “we are none social aunties”. Students can see their work as future teachers as essential part of life long learning. “But under school, is it too schoolish. What happens with playing?” ”What is the ability of school to understand and help families?”

I have taken here only some examples, they all reflect same phenomenon which is deep-seated in common Finnish discussion. They highlight the students’ perceptions of difficulties associated with practice in multi-disciplinary environments and their future roles. It also points to a need for recognition of the issues and responsibility for action at government level to resolve the controversial issues fostered by a paradigm change and policy guidance. At course level, the materials gained from discussions with my students will prove invaluable in developing teaching to help students engage with these issues, and so help motivate and develop their practice.

### **Reference**

National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet) (2003) See <http://varttua.stakes.fi/EN/index.htm> for English translation.