Bullying and its prevention in early childhood education

“Our job is not to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. Our job is to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless.”

L.R. Knost
Laura Repo

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to study the phenomenon of bullying in the preschool environment in order to expand understanding of the phenomenon and to be able to conduct effective anti-bullying practices. Thus, the aims of this research were to study the prevalence and forms of bullying and to find what kind of organizational and pedagogical practices used in preschools were related to bullying behavior and the prevention of bullying. The study also interprets qualitative research data, disclosing what meanings children give to the bullying phenomenon.

Two kinds of data were collected for the study: a qualitative data from interviews of children, preschool teachers and practical nurses and parents (N = 114) and data from a survey of early education professionals (N = 771).

The results of this study indicate that systematic bullying does occur in preschool groups. The interviews showed that young children were able to describe the phenomenon, and its content varied only slightly from adults’ speech on the topic. Results showed that 12.6% of preschool children were involved in bullying in one way or another. The most common form of bullying was exclusion from peer relationships. The findings also showed that bullying is a group phenomenon already in preschool groups. However, children with special educational needs were significantly more often involved in bullying situations than children without special educational needs. Thus, the bullying prevention programs developed in early childhood educational environments should be applied both with individual children and at child group level.

A common way to intervene in bullying situations was excluding the child from the group. However, in those groups that exclusion was used as an intervention to bullying, respondents reported that they were unable to stop bullying behavior. In addition, in those groups where different pedagogical solutions were tested and evaluated often, less bullying occurred than in those groups that did not test and evaluate their practices.

As a conclusion to this study, in order to prevent bullying in preschool environments, even more attention should be paid to strengthen the child group cohesion and to the pedagogical solutions when encountering misbehaving children. A child has a right to an appropriate education where he/she can learn alternative and socially acceptable ways to behave in relations with others.

Key words: bullying, early childhood education, peer victimization, special educational needs, bullying prevention, discipline, bystander
Kiusaaminen ja sen ehkäiseminen varhaiskasvatuksessa

Laura Repo

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli tutkia kiusaamista varhaiskasvatuksen toimintaympäristössä sen luonteen ymmärtämiseksi sekä tehokkaiden ehkäisevien toimenpiteiden ja käytänteiden rakentamisen pohjaksi. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää kiusaamisen yleisyyttä sekä huolehtia sen ehkäisevien toimenpiteiden ja käytänteiden rakentamiseksi. Tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin millaiset päiväkodin organisatoriset rakenteet ja pedagogiset käytänteet olivat yhteydessä kiusaamisen esiintymiseen. Tutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin myös päiväkodin aineiston avulla millaisia merkityksisiä lapsi, lasten kanssa työskentelevät aikuisten sekä lasten vanhemmat ilmioille antavat.

Tutkimusta varten kerättiin kaksi tutkimusaineistoa: kyselytutkimus Vantaan vanhakasvatuksen työntekijöille (N=771) sekä laadullinen, lasten, varhaiskasvatuksen työntekijöiden ja lasten vanhempien haastatteluaineisto (N=114).

Tulosten mukaan kiusaamista esiintyi päiväkotiryhmissä. Haastattelujen mukaan lapset pystyivät kuvailleen kiusaamisilmiöitä ja lasten sekä aikuisten kuvaukset poikkesivat vain vähän toisistaan. Tulosten mukaan 12,6% päiväkotilapsista oli suoraan tekemisissä kiusaamisen kanssa. Yleisin kiusaamisen muoto oli toverisuhteiden ulkopuolelle jättäminen. Tulokset myös osoittivat, että kiusaamisen on ryhmiä, joilla varhaiskasvatusikäisten lasten parissa. Lisäksi lapsi, joilla oli erityisen suuren tarvitsevat kasvulleen ja kehitykselleen, olivat merkitsevääsä useammin lapsi, joilla ei ollut erityisen suuren tarvitsevat lapsi, joilla ei ollut erityisen suuren tarvitsevat lapsi, jos erilaisiakin toimia kokeiltiin ja arvioitiin runsaasti, esimyytä, kiusaamista kuin niissä ryhmissä, joissa erilaisia toimia kokeiltiin ja arvioitiin runsaasti, lapstone toimia kokeiltiin ja arvioitiin runsaasti.

Yleinen tapa puuttua kiusaamiseen päiväkodissa oli lapsen eristäminen muusta ryhmästä. Kuitenkin niissä ryhmissä, joissa puuttuikin kiusaamisilmiöitä, vastaajat arvioivat, ettei kiusaamisen olisi puuttumisen jälkeen loppunut. Lisäksi niissä ryhmissä, joissa erilaisia pedagogisia tapoja toimia kokeiltiin ja arvioitiin runsaasti, esimyytä, kiusaamista kuin niissä ryhmissä, joissa erilaisia toimia kokeiltiin ja arvioitiin runsaasti.

Tutkimuksen johtopäätöksenä todetaan, että kiusaamisen ehkäiseminen varhaiskasvatuksessa edellyttää huomion kiinnittämistä aiempaa vahvemmin lapsiryhmän koheesioon sekä yksilöton pedagogisiin ratkaisuihin, silläkin kun lapsi on kiusannut muita. Lapsella tulisi olla oikeus sellaisen asianmukaiseen ohjaukseen, jonka avulla hän oppii vaihtoehtoisia sekä sosiaalisesti hyväksyttyä tapoja toimia yhdessä toisten kanssa.
Preface

Bullying behavior is perceived as unfair and unacceptable interaction no matter what form it takes. It is a complex peer problem that has long-lasting effects on individuals’ lives and serious actions have been taken to eradicate bullying behavior among youths and adolescent. Society debates on a regular basis what kind of action prevents bullying behavior and whether the primary responsibility for prevention lies with schools or with parents. Despite the fact that we seem to know a lot about bullying as a phenomenon during primary school years, bullying behavior within preschool environment have not been the focus of bullying research until recently.

This study aims to create a review about bullying behavior among young preschool children. It provides a basis for developing preventive practices in the preschool environment. The study is based on a socio-cultural approach in which the child is seen as an inherently moral being. Bullying among young children reflects the inability to cooperate within a child group. Without a valid and sensitive educational upbringing this inability provides a risk that the child’s behavior eventually turns to bullying. Thus, a child that bullies others has a human right to an appropriate education where he/she can learn alternative and socially acceptable ways to behave in relations with others. Moreover, every child has a right to a safe growing environment without being victimized or experiencing the fear of being victimized. The key role is that early childhood professionals should focus on building safe and positive climate where every child can feel a sense of belonging in his/her peer group.

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I dedicate my research to my mother.

Helsinki 8 April 2015

Laura Repo
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List of original publications

This dissertation is based on the following articles, which are referred by the numbers I, II, III.


1 Introduction

1.1 The basis for the research

This study concerns bullying and its prevention in early childhood education (pre-schools). There is growing interest, both nationally and internationally, about the possibilities to prevent bullying progression already in early childhood. Within recent years a growing body of research has shown that the origins of bullying lie in early childhood and preventive practices should specifically be developed within preschool environments (Vlachou, Botosoglou, & Andreou, 2013; Lee, Smith, & Monks, 2011; Monks, 2011; Monks & Smith, 2010; Alsaker & Nägele, 2008; Perren & Alsaker, 2006; Alsaker & Valkanover, 2001; Perren, 2000; Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Kochenderferr & Ladd, 1996). It has been found that bullying and other peer problems, like withdrawal, loneliness and peer rejection, are often overlapping and simultaneous (Laine, Neitola, Auremaa, & Laakkonen, 2010). The concept of bullying is complex and rarely occurs in isolation from other behaviors (Baumeister, Storch, & Geffen, 2008). This study uses the concept of bullying, although it could fit under a larger concept of peer problems and/or social justice. There is a great many concepts, such as Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties (EBD) or/and aggressive behavior, that are related to bullying behavior. For example, when taking a closer look at a situation where a child hit others, these concepts might be entwined together. These different extensive concepts are difficult to separate. In addition, although the roots of bullying may lie even earlier relations within families, this study is based on a socio-cultural approach whereby bullying is seen as a complex group phenomenon. Thus, this study focuses on the concept of bullying in the context of early childhood education (preschools).

Peer relations and a sense of solidarity play a significant role in children’s growth and development. At their best, cooperative activities offer shared experiences of success, learning, joy and fellowship. At their worst, they create conflicts which, when left unresolved, can endanger a child’s balanced development and may lead to bullying. It may result in significant detrimental and long-term effects on a child’s social, mental and physical development.

Finnish early childhood education implements the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child (1989). It acts as the starting premise for national plans for early childhood education. The rights of a child are legally binding in those countries which have ratified them. According to the convention a country must assure, through legislation or other means, that every child has the necessary prerequisites to a healthy and normal physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development in a free and dignified environment. When passing related legislation, a child’s interests must be considered as the most important aspect. Further, all children have a right to receive education that advances their general education and offers them an opportunity to develop their talents, individual judgment and both moral
and social responsibility in order to become valuable members of their societies (UN, 1989). Long-term bullying is a breach of a child’s rights and the principles of the convention. Bullying can become an obstacle to children’s learning and thus affect their right to develop their abilities. Furthermore, the dynamics prevalent in bullying cause children to act against their social sense of responsibility and their still developing morality. At its worst, bullying is deeply detrimental to a child’s human dignity and can even lead to a diminished or entirely lost sense of self-worth. Thus, bullying acts as a serious hindrance to the realization of a child’s rights.

Early childhood education advances an ethos in which equality and morals are seen as bases for human rights and democracy. Human rights education aims at teaching values such as democracy, human dignity, tolerance, participation and respect as early as in preschools (Flowers, Brederode-Santos, Claeys, Fazah, Schneider, & Szelenyi, 2009). A child must be able to live in a morally safe atmosphere. Bullying jeopardizes the learning of mutual responsibility. This concerns the child that bullies others, the victim, as well as those children who have to witness the lack of human respect or infringement of the victim’s human dignity.

1.2 The consequences of bullying: why bullying research is needed in early childhood education

Research has unequivocally established that bullying is a serious risk factor for the healthy growth and development of both children and adolescents. A growing amount of research evidence indicates that bullying has a strong marginalizing effect. It has been found that school-age victims of bullies experience feelings of low self-esteem in later life more often than others, and also they more often experience depression, anxiety and self-harming ideation (Copeland, Wolke, Angold, & Costello, 2013; Sourander et al., 2009). One longitudinal study discovered that the bodies of bullied children may develop a chronic state of inflammation which may last long into adulthood. There was a correlation between the physical state and how often the children felt they were being bullied. According to researchers, the results are similar to those found among children who have experienced physical abuse. (Copeland, Wolke, Lereya, Shananhan, Worthman, & Costello, 2014.)

Children who bully others have an increased risk of antisocial behavior later in life, such as substance abuse and criminal acts; in other words, they are at a higher risk of marginalization. Some correlation with antisocial personality disorder has also been found (Sourander et al., 2007). On the other hand, there are indications that bullies do not show as many symptoms as those who have been bullied (Copeland et al., 2014). However, bullies’ models of action have been shown to be quite persistent and there is a risk that they will continue bullying later in their working environment (Sourander et al., 2009).

The strongest correlative symptoms are found among those who have been both targets of bullying and bullied others themselves (bully-victims) during their school age (Copeland et al., 2013). Copeland et al. (2013) also discovered that men who had been bully-victims in their childhood had a significantly raised risk of
suicide later in life, and the equivalent group of women had a higher prevalence of agoraphobia.

One study followed problematic issues in children’s peer relations and how they changed through kindergarten (age 5), preschool (age 6) and the first year of compulsory education (age 7). The problems listed were exclusion, introversion, loneliness, bullying and victimization. The conclusions stated that there were significant differences in the occurrences of these issues between the age groups. For some children the issues dissipated within the three-year time period and for some children they increased, while for others there was no change. It was common for children to have multiple issues simultaneously. The conclusion of the study was that when five-year-olds have problematic issues in their peer relations, it is likely that they will still have issues at age seven. (Laine et al., 2010.) Nonetheless, the conclusions indicate that the onset of peer relationship issues at an early age can be addressed and the problems are not necessarily long lasting. High-quality early childhood education can indeed change the direction of existing developmental paths.

Early intervention strengthens children’s psychological, social and physical safety, and a safe learning environment plays an important role in their growth and development. A child can experience the joy of learning and participation in a safe group. It is the prerequisite for high-quality, successful early childhood education.

1.3 Bullying in Finnish early childhood education documents

The current early childhood education system in Finland is based on the Act on Children’s Day Care (1973) and the Finnish Basic Education Act (2003/1136, §1). In addition, two guiding documents are used to determine the contents of the early childhood education policy: the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (2005) and the Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education (2010). The former document is not a normative one, while the Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education content is guided by the implementation of a prescriptive curriculum for children aged 6 for four hours per day. The Act on Children’s Day Care (1973) regulates the number of qualified members of staff in child groups. Children under three years of age are generally educated and cared for in the toddlers’ groups and there must be one qualified member of staff for every fourth children. Children aged three to five are generally placed in the same group, and there must be one qualified member of staff for every seven children. The maximum size for groups is not regulated. A common group size for children aged three to five is 21–25. However, a wide variety of mixed groups is also possible, for example depending on the size of the municipality. Six-year-old children comprise the preschool groups, and the size of the group can vary a lot. However, the minimum size of a preschool group is seven children and there must also be one qualified member of staff per seven children. (Act on Children’s Day Care, 1973; Finnish Basic Education Act, 2003/1136, §1.) The Finnish education system implements the idea of inclusion, whereby children with special educational needs (SEN) are educated in an institution (kindergarten, preschool, basic education) near
home with other children. (Saloviita, 2006). However, there is a wide variety of arrangement policies in different municipalities concerning preschool education for the children with special educational needs.

This study was conducted within early childhood education (ECE) among children aged three to six. In Finland ECE consists of kindergarten (children aged 0 to 6) and preschool (children aged six/ four hours a day). In many European countries, children from 3 to 6 years are preschoolers and only the youngest ones attend kindergartens. Following the terminology used in ECE research internationally, I will use the term preschool to cover the ECE for children aged 3 to 6 in this study. Further, I refer to children aged three to six as young children or children under school-age.

The ECE groups in Finland are staffed with professionals from various educational disciplines. One in every three qualified staff members has to have a teaching qualification, either a university degree in teaching or a degree in social studies from a university of applied sciences. There are also early childhood professionals with different educational qualifications (for example licensed practical nurses, nursery nurses, etc.). In this study the term early childhood professional is used to describe all staff working with children aged 3 to 6. The terms preschool teacher and practical nurse are used when separating different educational backgrounds.

At present, under the current legislation (The Act on Children’s Day Care) or the guiding document (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2005) the education organizer is not required to take steps to recognize or prevent bullying. The guiding document is seen as a framework for discussing and implementing mutually agreed practices and working guidelines within municipalities and various preschools. Since the document is not normative, the responsibility of implementation and evaluation lies with the communities and units; hence, differences in pedagogic approaches between different units and municipalities are possible and indeed common (Hujala et al., 2012; Kalliala, & Onnismaa, 2010). It has been stated that the pedagogic development of these functional units follows firmly entrenched institutional traditions (Kopisto, Brotherus, Paavola, Hytönen, & Lipponen, 2011; Brotherus, 2004). In this manner, any pedagogic decisions are carried forward within organizations as customs or traditions. The conduct of a group’s teacher is pivotal in either the conservation or the development of the operational culture (Brotherus, 2004). In other words, pedagogical traditions are based on teachers and practical nurses concepts of humanity and learning and thus play a crucial role in preventing bullying.

However, the Finnish Basic Education Act (preschool four hours per day and compulsory school) requires the education organizer to prepare an action plan to protect children from violence, bullying and harassment, and the education organizer has an obligation to monitor the implementation of the law. In addition, the education provider must draw up and, where appropriate, carry out a plan of disciplinary procedures within the curriculum process (2013/1267, §29).

In the Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education (2010, 40–41) the section on bullying begins thus: “As part of curriculum design, it is imperative to draw up a plan for safeguarding pupils against violence, bullying and harassment, to execute the plan and to supervise adherence to it and its implementation. Prevention of and
intervention in violence, bullying and harassment is assigned to everyone working within pre-primary education. Violence, bullying or harassment may be direct or indirect verbal or physical use of force or social manipulation, which violates a person’s physical, mental or social integrity. The perpetrator may be a child, an adult or a person from outside the pre-primary community”.

An action plan to protect children from bullying must be drawn as a part of a student welfare plan. A new regulation in Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education (05/11/2014) further defines the contents of the action plan by the following:\1:

“The plan must encompass:

- The prevention of and intervening in bullying, violence and harassment,
- Processing the above at the community, group and individual level,
- The individual support, care and other action needed when taking into account both the perpetrator and the victim, and the follow-up,
- Co-operation with parents
- Co-operation with the relevant authorities
- Implementation, orientation and informing about the plan to workers, children, parents and coworkers
- The updating, following and evaluating the plan” (Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education, 2014, 50–51).

1.4 The ethics and challenges of studying bullying in the early years

When studying small children, the ethical issues are of the utmost importance. In the recent years, the rising trend among child researchers has been to emphasize the child’s participation and personal agency. Listening to the child’s own narration and understanding their active role in generating information about their own life and environment is valuable and important. At the same time one should remember and pay attention to the child’s age and level of linguistic development. When generating narratives, a child is unable to have a clear concept of what the context of the research is and how that information will be interpreted. Data gathering and analysis methods need to follow ethical principles. When studying children, there is a risk that while they generate narratives concerning their childhood, they have no power over what the material will be like, or how it will be used. Biased questioning and accepting the narrative as complete can lead to conclusions that have little real input from the children themselves (Strandell, 2010). What matters is the proper interpretation of the information and how it is used. The researcher must be aware of these issues and act in a responsible manner, recognizing both the devel-

\1 Authors translation
Developmental factors at play and the contextuality of the research before any meaningful conclusions can be made. The researcher also has to be well aware of their own biases and how they might affect the collection of data and its interpretation.

Studies on bullying phenomena also need to be ethically scrutinized. It should be highlighted that studying bullying amongst young children is by no means trouble-free. Children’s classification as bullies or victims may lead to a real risk of stigmatization. Labeling children at this early age can turn the child into a victim of a taxonomic system. The stigma can produce behavior that is expected from bullies or victims as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Careful consideration should be used when using the word ‘bullying’ among under school-aged children. Further, children who are being bullied may steadily internalize the negative messages and the role of a victim. It is a common belief that personal characteristics offer a reason for someone being victimized. This may support a process where the role of a victim will be gradually incorporated in the child’s identity. Hence, all efforts for identifying and labeling victims in early education should go together with in-depth ethical considerations.

In this study, preschool teachers and practical nurses were asked to recognize and name any child that bullies others and their victims within their child groups. This in itself involved an inherent risk of stigmatization. But since this information was considered crucial to the study, an arrangement was made with the City of Vantaa that the early childhood professionals would receive training on this issue after the study. Two training sessions were organized, with discussions on the dangers of categorizing children and whether the terms bully and victim are needed in the discourse at all. This was based on the socio-cultural view that the bullying phenomenon is not just dependent on the personal traits of children, but is instead a bigger issue including the operational culture of the child group and the group dynamic nature of bullying.

Further, it might be problematic that by exaggerating the bullying phenomenon we can actually accelerate its existence and negatively mark individual children. Indeed, it is important not to categorize children at an early age and necessary to consider whether it is purposeful to use terms such as “bully” and “victim” with regards to young children. However, the results clearly indicated that the roles of ‘bully’ and ‘victim’ are already visible amongst children as young as three years old. Therefore, it is important to recognize bullying behaviour at an early stage and, at the same time, to be aware of harmful effects of stigmatizing children.

Studying bullying in early childhood education is challenging. The field is still unknown and there are a number of points which need discussion and a consensus. The major problem has been the lack of discussion about definitions and a lack of proper critical and theoretical tools. For example, there has been controversy about whom to ask and how. When discussing bullying research and the prevalence of bullying consideration should be given to such factors as who is conducting the research and how the data are collected. The common and traditional mode of data collection among school-aged children is to ask students themselves (self ratings) (e.g Salmivalli, 2010). One alternative is to ask teachers for their evaluations (teacher ratings) about the situation in their classroom. Peer ratings (e.g. Adams, Bartlett, & Bukowski, 2010; Kochenderfer-Ladd, & Pelletier, 2008) or parent rat-
ings have also been used (e.g. Humphrey & Crisp, 2008). It is possible that the results differ according to the data collection method. The situation might be even more complicated among under school-aged children. It has been assessed that young children are able to recognize children who bully others but not victims (Alsaker & Nägele, 2008). In addition, young children often say that they have been victimized (Gillies-Rezo & Bosacki, 2003). The prevalence of bullying is significantly lower, however, when the data is collected as teacher ratings. Among young children the data can also be collected by observations. When studying bullying in early educational settings these factors should be taken into account and attention should be paid to how by whom the data is collected, as well as how the results are interpreted.
2 Bullying among children aged three to six—
Theoretical frame reference and principal concepts of the study

2.1 Bullying as a socio-cultural phenomenon

Bullying may be viewed in the light of various theoretical frameworks. With the help of these frameworks or models we are able to construct, explain and integrate the phenomenon. Theoretical frameworks provide a basis and context for future research, and may have implications for the design of intervention measures to reduce further bullying (Swearer & Espelage, 2011). In their review article, Monks, Smith, Naylor, Barter and Coyne (2009) describe five different theoretical models for understanding the phenomenon. These models are based on evolutionary theory, attachment theory, social learning theory, social cognitive theory and socio-cultural/socio-ecological approaches (Monks, Smith, Naylor, Barter, Ireland, & Coyne, 2009). Through these different perspectives, bullying may appear and may be interpreted in slightly different perspectives. From an evolutionary perspective, bullying can be viewed as an evolved mental adaptation, a physical trait that can be inherited in genes. This perspective view places the underlying motivational basis of bullying behavior in survival and securing appropriate mating opportunities (Volk, Camilleri, Dane, & Marini, 2012). The evolutionary perspective does not in any sense defend the morality of bullying, and it does not focus on the role of education in human development. Scholars in evolutionary psychology also base their argument on the findings that bullying occurs across cultures, history, and among many other social animals than humans (Volk et al., 2012). Respectively in everyday thinking, it is common to perceive that maltreatment and ‘the survival of the fittest’ is a natural part of children’s peer behavior. However, history and research have proven that communities with reciprocity, mutual caring, and cooperation are those that are the most successful (e.g., Szalavitz & Perry, 2011). Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) is based on the idea that the caregivers (parents) influence the development of a child and the way the individual subsequently relates to others later in life. Insecure attachment may lead to hostility and aggression towards peers in childhood and adolescence. Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) points out that the impact of family variables on bullying behavior may be via social learning. Several studies have found significances between bullying and victimization and interparental violence or being bullied by a teacher during childhood (Baldry, 2003; Twemlow & Fonagy, 2005). Thus, individuals may learn bullying behaviors through observation, role-modeling and reinforcement. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) tends to focus on the development of cognitive and social skills. Traditionally, it has been suggested that bullying is related to poor social or cognitive skills or capacity. However, this is only a partial explanation. There is research that suggests that bullying appears to require some social skills on the part of the child that bullies others (e.g., Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). Socio-cultural
(or socio-ecological) approaches concentrate on understanding the importance of situational factors in behavior, instead of individual difference factors, individual traits or a behavioral disorder. Socio-cultural theory describes bullying as a complex social phenomenon, influenced by numerous social variables within a child’s school, home, peer, and community environments (Harcourt, Jasperse, & Green, 2014). Research indicates that bullying is more common within an organization that is nondemocratic and authoritarian (Roland & Galloway, 2002). This theoretical framework is used when designing whole-school approach models to prevent bullying, in which all members of the organization are committed to tackling bullying (Monks et al., 2009).

The evolutionary approach tries to explain the causes of bullying behavior, but does not provide the means to understand the influence of existing social environment and education. Even a young child is deeply surrounded by complex social environment with a constant interaction of the actor and the environment. Bullying prevention in early childhood education always takes place in a group, and thus it is reasonable to be viewed through a socio-cultural framework. However, among young children and among the roots of bullying, it is essential to focus on the development of the social and emotional skills of an individual child. Thus, my study is based on social cognitive theory and socio-cultural approaches, where bullying needs to be seen in the context and the culture of the organization in which it is taking place, and in order to prevent its progression we need to focus on changing the system rather than the individuals within it. Within this framework, bullying is seen as a learned behavior connected to both the community and the context. The values and meanings gradually developed in a community over time form a coherence in which individuals adopt communal behavior patterns and individual roles within it.

Furthermore, in this study, bullying is examined through the viewpoint of social constructivist learning, in which learning and internalizing specific behaviors happen through participating in the social conventions of a community. Within this model a child is seen as an active learner, but in relation to the community (Jonsassen & Roher-Murphy, 1999). One part of the research explores preschools as arenas for bullying, examining how the socio-cultural environment (preschool) as an institution is related to bullying.

In this study, the concept of group cohesion is used and defined according to Hirsjärvi (1982, 164) as follows: “Group cohesion means the extent to which a group draws each member of the group towards the group”. Thus, cohesion can been seen as a tendency for a group to work towards a common goal and to satisfy the emotional needs of its members. Researchers have suggested that the phenomenon of group cohesiveness among group members develops from a heightened sense of belonging, group-level attraction, task commitment and group pride (Carron & Brawley, 2012).
2.2 Bullying in children’s peer relations

Due to the lack of research, discussion on the definition of bullying among small children is limited and the definition used in research is mainly based on research into bullying among school-aged children (e.g. Alsaker & Gützwiller-Helfenfinger, 2010; Alsaker & Nägele, 2008; Monks et al., 2005; Perren, 2000; Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Bullying is defined as an interactive relationship which gradually becomes more and more hostile and less equal, and in which the victim’s ability to take action and make decisions gets increasingly narrow. Over time the victim’s value as a human being is questioned, and eventually the victim can even be seen as responsible for the negative actions against him- or herself. The victim is isolated and cast out from the community entirely (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999; Fors, 1993). On top of this, research indicates that bullying is a relatively stable phenomenon over the years. (Salmivalli, Lappalainen, & Lagerstedt, 1998). The most frequently used definition of bullying was formulated by Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus. According to Olweus (1994 p. 98.), “A person is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons.” He defined negative actions as behaviors that intentionally inflict, or attempt to inflict, injury or discomfort. Separate negative actions can be defined as bullying if they are continual and occur over a longer period of time. In contrast, occasional, separate and minor negative actions targeted at a variety of people should not be defined as bullying. (Olweus, 1994.) In most definitions, bullying is seen as an imbalance of power relations between the victim and the bully where the victim has trouble defending him/herself against the negative actions targeted against them (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Furthermore, bullying has been seen as part of the problem in interaction processes where a student is regularly hurt, harmed, and/or discriminated against by one or several students without being able to defend him/herself or affect the way he or she is treated (Olweus, 1973; Salmivalli, Lagerstedt, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). Some researchers also emphasize the use of power and aggression without highlighting the repetitiveness of the actions (Pepler & Craig, 2009). For decades, bullying has been seen as a group phenomenon where a few people take part in the actual violence while many more observers allow the gradual increase of the violent behavior (Heinemann, 1972). This relatively narrow view of bullying as a group phenomenon has been further broadened by Professor Salmivalli, among others. She emphasizes that the group’s passive acceptance of negative actions has a significant influence on the continuation of bullying (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Within these definitions there are three traits typical of bullying that separate it from everyday squabbling or various conflicts among children. These traits are intentionality, repetitiveness and power imbalance. However, these criteria are somewhat problematic among young children.

Power imbalance takes place within the peer group and has to do with the group dynamic nature of bullying. Since one of the subjects of this study is bullying as a group phenomenon in early childhood educational groups, more will be presented on its theoretical background in Chapter 2.3. Of the three criteria for
bullying, intentionality may be the most problematic among young children. As mentioned earlier, bullying leads to a situation where one individual is excluded from the community. This might happen unconsciously due to the fact the group creates the norms which requires the group members to behave certain way. The group decides collectively what kind of behavior is allowed in that group, for example exclusion or bullying. Thus, it is possible that bullying or excluding is intentional behavior for some young children, but it is also possible that the behavior is caused culturally without the individual understanding of the consequences of the behavior (see more in chapter 2.3). Nevertheless, the ultimate outcome is an exclusion of certain members. Thus, repetitiveness and duration of an action might be better measurements of bullying than the intentionality of actions. Moreover, the developments of moral abilities or empathy skills are individual, and the intentionality of an action by a small child is difficult to assess both for researchers and teachers. (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). Further, following the dominant Piagetian theory (see Piaget, 1952) a child is naturally egocentric. It has been a general belief that young children lack a sense of empathy and therefore are not able to bully. However, according to more recent research, young children have some capacity for responding empathically to another person’s perspective. Children as young as three are able to show an awareness of other people’s feelings and can identify specific situations that evoke different kinds of affective responses. Hence, children can be viewed as cooperative and helpful by nature. An increasing body of research strengthens the notion that human beings tend to help, share and respect each other (e.g., Sajaniemi & Mäkelä, 2014; Hamann, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2012; Mahajan & Wynn, 2012; Tomasello, 2009).

Also the requirement of repetitiveness is by no means trouble free. Using the repetitiveness criterion comes with the risk that only repetitive actions and those spanning a relatively long time will be considered bullying. There is an inherent danger that many actions, perceived as degrading and offensive by their victims, and with possible long-term consequences, are ignored. Single attacks may create in the victim a fear of being bullied in the future (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; Peura, Pelkonen, & Kirves, 2009).

Some researchers have warned against too strict or narrow definitions of bullying (Eriksson, Lindberg, Flygare, & Daneback, 2002; Hamarus, 2006). It is important to remember that children’s experiences of bullying are different both at an individual level and for different age groups. Bullying is a subjective experience and it is important to take the individual nature of the situation into account. Thus, it is important to always take the child’s own experience into account when defining bullying. Among small children this is particularly challenging due to the level of their linguistic development and their tendency to give concepts variable meanings. In the qualitative part of this study no definitions were used. Instead, the aim was to create an understanding how children, early childhood professional and parents understand the phenomenon. In the quantitative part of the study, one aim was to study whether prevention of school bullying is possible even before school age, so it was justifiable to use the same definitions and terminology that is used commonly when studying school bullying.
Bullying can be seen as a subtype of aggression. However, not all aggression is bullying (e.g., Ostrov & Kemper, 2015). Aggressive behavior is widely studied among young children. The normative developmental trends in the expression of aggressive behavior decrease dramatically when children come of school age, especially among boys (Ostrov, Masseti, Stauffer, Godleski, Hart, Karch et al., 2009). Aggressive behavior can be divided into two types. Reactive aggressiveness has its roots in frustration-anger theory (e.g., Berkowitz 1989; Stack, Martin, Serbin, Ledingham, & Schwartzman, 2011). It occurs as a consequence of threat and provocation and can be described as impulsiveness with anger and a loss of control (Brendgen, Vitaro, Tremblay, & Lavoie, 2001). Proactive aggression is based on social learning theory (Fandrem, Strohmeier, & Roland, 2009) and is manipulative in nature. Behavior is guided by the anticipated advantages of aggression (Merk, de Castro, Koops, & Matthys, 2005). Proactive aggression is dominating and initiated behavior (Vitiello & Stoff, 1997). Despite the overlap between the two subtypes of aggression, reactive and proactive aggression appear to constitute two separate forms of aggression (Merk et al., 2005), and it has been suggested that children with a tendency to reactive aggressiveness are at increased risk of being rejected in their peer group and of becoming both victims and bullies (bully-victims), while children with a tendency to proactive aggressiveness are at increased risk of bullying others (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Rigby & Slee, 1991). When studying specific features in the interaction of children who bully others, victims and bully-victims among preschool-aged children it has been found that children who bully others have trouble in conflict management, harm avoidance and peer support. Victims have problems in joining and maintaining interactions, whereas bully-victims have difficulties in choosing situation-appropriate behaviors (Laaksonen, 2014).

Several studies have shown that peer rejection might be a risk factor which could lead to becoming involved in bullying (Schuster, 1996; Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995). Godleski, Kamper, Ostrov, Hart, & Blakely-McCure (2014) found in their study that peer rejection increases relational victimization in early childhood and that emotion regulation skill predicts decreases in peer rejection and physical victimization.

A well-established way to categorize bullying is to divide it into direct and indirect forms (e.g., Björqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1994). In direct bullying, the bullies aim their negative actions directly at the victim, for example by hitting, pushing or name-calling. Indirect bullying may include actions such as exclusion, spreading rumors or talking about the victim behind their back (Björqvist, 1996). Terms such as physical, relational, verbal and psychological bullying are also widely used. There is a great deal of discussion in the field as to what is the right approach—relational and overt aggression, direct or indirect forms, or reactive versus proactive aggression. (Ostrov & Kemper, 2015). Different approaches emphasize slightly differently on what these concepts includes. For example, Ostrov and Kemper (2015) suggests that direct aggression (or victimization) is most similar to physical acts, while indirect (social aggression) are not synonymous with relational aggression (or victimization). Further, they emphasize that there are conceptual similarities between relational, social and indirect forms of victimization,
but also important differences. For example “social victimization includes nonverbal and verbal victimization that are not included in the relational victimization construct” (Ostrov & Kemper, 2015, 2). Recently in several studies these concepts have been viewed within the context of bullying studies (e.g., Bradshaw & Johnson, 2011). The literature also struggles with cultural differences in aggression and how they are manifested.

Young children focus more on forms of physical aggression in their definitions of bullying, whereas school-aged children also pay attention to relational aggression (Monks, Smith, & Swettenham, 2003). Young children easily equate bullying with physical aggression, and physical aggression often forms a part of six-year-old children’s definition of bullying (Smith & Levan, 1995; Vaillancourt, McDougal, Hymel, Krygsman, Miller, Stiver, & Davis, 2008). Furthermore, research has shown that bullying takes a decidedly more aggressive form among small children (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997) and indirect bullying methods increase as they grow older (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1994). However, in Perren’s (2000) research, indirect bullying methods were common with small children as well. The differences in results may be explained by different data gathering methods. It is likely that the younger the children in question, the more difficult it is for them to connect their feelings of externality with the concept of bullying. In Perren’s study (2000) the material was gathered from adults. Since the research conclusions at this stage are contradictory, I particularly wanted to examine the prevalence of physical bullying compared to psychological bullying among young children. For these reasons I used Höistad’s (2005) definition. He divides bullying into physical, psychological and verbal bullying. An example of psychological bullying would be any behavior where the victim is treated as non-existent: bullies turn their back on him; he is not answered when he speaks; or the victim is excluded from the group by some other means. In addition, psychological bullying may include different forms of manipulation, such as blackmailing and exclusion. Physical bullying means physical violence, breaking or hiding the victim’s belongings, or something similar. Verbal bullying involves name-calling, spreading gossip, teasing and mocking.

2.3 Typical features of bullying

All members of a community influence the norms and values that acquire meaning within the group. Social understanding is constructed in interaction with others, and it varies from group to group. From this it follows that bullying is a gradually-formed behavioral pattern in a community and is adopted by individuals and influenced by their actions. Community norms such as group hierarchy (Garandeau, Ihno, & Salmivalli, 2014) or perception of one’s inequality or normality play a role in bullying. In other words, the norms and values developed in and by the group regulate the behavior of the individuals in the group. For example, in some child groups, ethnic background may be a determining feature of disparity and inequality, whereas in other groups such background has no meaning in that sense. Furthermore, if according to the group’s informal norms bullying behavior is com-
Bullying among children aged three to six

monplace and acceptable, then the behavior is further reinforced by the group. Dijkstra, Lindeberg, and Veenstra (2008) have pointed out that group norms have a direct effect on how socially rewarding bullying behavior is. When the bully is generally popular within the group, the bullying actions meet with acceptance more often than when the bully is not particularly well-liked. These norms (such as access to playing with peers) may control an individual’s way of behaving in a group. Thus, the group’s informal rules and habits may affect an individual’s behavior more than his or her social skills.

According to a socio-cultural point of view, bullying rarely takes place between two individuals. The other members of the community are thought to support (either directly or indirectly) bullying behavior through their attitudes towards it (e.g., Salmivalli et al., 1996). Hence, there is increasing agreement that prevention of bullying should be targeted to the entire peer group rather than at individual bullies and victims. Bullying as a group phenomenon is shown in the way the group’s passive acceptance of negative actions has a significant influence on the continuation of bullying (e.g., Salmivalli, 2010). It has been suggested that a high status and an influential role in the peer group can incite bullying behavior (e.g., Garandeau, Hai-Jeong, & Philip, 2011). Children with aggressive behavior are popular in their group, and they often have a high social status. Further, Garandeau, Hai-Jeong and Philip (2011) found in their study that the stricter the hierarchy is within a group, the more popular aggressive children are. Therefore, children who act aggressively do not feel a need to change their behavior; on the contrary, in many child groups bullying is a socially rewarding mechanism to achieve high status and an influential role in the peer group (Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Salmivalli, 2009). However, Dijkstra, Lindeberg and Veenstra (2008) noticed in their study that this phenomenon is affected by the group’s norms. When the bully is otherwise popular within the group, the bullying actions meet with acceptance more often than when the bully is not prominently popular among them. Corsaro (2003) and Löfdahl (2006) have shown that young children’s peer cultures encompass social structures and hierarchy. According to Corsaro (2003), cultural valuations influence and develop the peer culture in the group and affect the individual status and role within the group. Thus, the group is important for the development of different social phenomenon, such as bullying already in the preschool environment. It has been suggested that bullying is socially rewarding (Sijtsema et al., 2009). Reunamo, Kalliomaa, Repo, Salminen, Lee and Wang (2014) have studied children’s responses to bullying situations in preschool groups (children aged 3 to 6). They state in their conclusions that bullying seems to be an effective way to get in contact with other children. The child that bullies others is able to attract other children’s attention and make them process the situation on his or her own terms. Thus, the situation is rewarding already in early childhood education: bullying is an effective strategy for getting into contact with others and the child that bullies is able to determine the content of the interaction.

It has been noticed that different members of the group have different roles in bullying situations. A bully is someone who actively initiates bullying behavior towards others. The victim is the bully’s target, and bully-victims are those children who both bully others and are bullied themselves. In addition, various mem-
bers of the peer group take different prosocial or antisocial roles in bullying situations (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Björqvist et al., 1994; Pikas, 1987). These different participant roles were first categorized in Salmivalli’s et al. study (1996). They named the roles as follows: assistants of bullies; reinforcers of bullies; outsiders; and defenders of the victim. Assistants are children who join the bullies. They are described as active (similar to bullies), but they show more following than leading behavior in bullying situations (Pöyhönen, 2013). Reinforcers provide positive feedback to bullies (for example by laughing or cheering); outsiders withdraw from bullying situations; and defenders side with the victims by comforting and supporting them (Salmivalli et al., 1996). These roles have since been established in the literature and research and have been found to be relevant for the prevention of bullying (e.g., Salmivalli, Voeten, & Poskiparta, 2011). For example Pöyhönen (2013) found that children who thought that they were able to influence a bullying situation were more eager to support the victim. When action is taken to try to diminish bullying behaviors in a group, it is equally important to increase the number of defenders as it is to lower the number of assistants and reinforcers (Salmivalli et al., 2011). Bullying as a group phenomenon is clearly an under-researched subject in preschool groups. Previously, it has been discussed that bullying among younger children might be more a matter of dyadic relationships rather than a group phenomenon (Monks, Smith, & Swettenham, 2005; Monks & Smith, 2010).

Previous studies suggest that children with disabilities (SEN) are more frequent targets of peer victimization, social exclusion and physical aggression compared with their non-disabled peers (e.g., Rose, Monda-Amaya, & Espelage, 2011; Norwich & Kelly, 2004; Mishna, 2003; Whitney, Smith, & Thompson, 1994). According to Rose et al. (2011) children with disabilities are at great risk for bullying others as well. There is evidence that this increased risk of peer victimization is associated with lack of social competence, academic difficulties, disruptive behavior and language impairment (e.g., Bauminger, Edelsztein, & Morash, 2005; Whitney et al., 1994; Kaukiainen, Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Tamminen, Vauras, Mäki et al., 2002; Savage, 2005). These problems have been linked to internalizing problems associated with peer rejection (Coie & Cillessen, 1993; Savage, 2005). According to Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker and Frerichs (2012) students (ages 9–16) who received special education were 1.43 times more likely to self-identify as bully-victims than their classmates without the needs for special education. Rose et al. (2011) suggest that victimization of SEN students may be exacerbated by individual character traits or an inability to interpret social cues effectively. Emerging body of research on bullying and children with SEN (Swearer, Wang, Maag, Siebecker, & Frerichs, 2012; Son et al., 2012) indicates that there are significant connections that deserve further attention despite the problems concerning definitions in both fields: bullying and SEN children. Similar findings have been observed in preschool settings (Son, Parish, & Peterson, 2012).

Children with developmental difficulties represent a heterogeneous group who often receive special education (McManus, Carle, & Rapport, 2014). Children with special educational needs have a number of competing definitions and classification systems which may differ between countries and municipalities. Specific categories of disabilities often have their origin in psychological and/or medical classi-
fications, such as learning disabilities, language delays, behavioral problems or sensory and/or physical needs. Arguments in favor of applying such categories are utilized in order to recognize those eligible for support (Nilholm, Almqvist, Göransson, & Lindqvist, 2013). However, in Finland, as well as in other Nordic countries like Sweden, there has been an effort to get away from disability-based classification, both in the school and preschool environment (Nilholm et al., 2013; Pihlaja, 2009). Classification and categorization might have consequences for the identities and rights of the children as they are defined in relation to a specific trait of characteristic. Disability classification tends to underline the problem that the child is categorized as ‘not normal’. This may lead to stigmatization and non-inclusive educational solutions (Nilholm et al., 2013). However, the theme reflects a complex process and is seldom a clear decision (Hanson, Horn, Beckman, Morgan, Marquart, Barnwell et al., 2001).

In the City of Vantaa no classification system is used for children with SEN. This is due to the fact that young children’s problems are often simultaneous and overlapping, and the cause-effect relationship is not readily identified. Thus, it is seen as more important to detect and provide adequate individual support (Guidelines for growth and learning for children with special educational needs, 2012). In Vantaa inclusive education basic values are founded on early childhood education. However, there are some special groups, for example, for severely autistic children.

In sum for the chapter 2.3: At least two different typical features of bullying can be elicited from the theories. First, bullying may be considered to be a group process, and second, some individual risks of becoming involved in bullying situations may occur.

### 2.4 Prevention of bullying

There is very little literature or few ready-made models on preventing bullying in preschools. Due to the lack of research on bullying amongst children under school-age the models developed for early childhood education are mostly based on anecdotal evidence. New anti-bullying programs should be disseminated using high quality standards of implementation in a way that ensures that the program is more likely to have an impact (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009). The Swiss researcher Professor Alsaker has compiled a program of measures for preventing bullying, “The Be-Brox” model, based on her research. It is strongly based on training preschool teachers. The training consists of six steps which are aimed at familiarizing teachers with bullying as a phenomenon and with preventive practices related to it (Alsaker & Nägele, 2008). The Be-Brox model has been involved in an extensive study evaluating programs for measures against bullying, and it was found to be amongst the nineteen most effective programs as well as the only research-based program developed for the preschool environment (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009).

On the other hand, there have been numerous anti-bullying intervention programs developed for schools over the years; The Finnish KiVa program and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program are probably the best known of these. The operational models and principles emphasize the importance of “showing warmth
and positive interest, and involvement with students’ lives, setting firm limits to unacceptable behavior, the use of nonphysical and non-hostile negative consequences when rules are broken and the existence of authorities and positive role models” (Olweus & Limber, 2010, 126). For example, Olweus’ program mentions negative consequences that follow from bullying situations. However, Olweus does not specifically mention what these consequences are, but does emphasize their non-hostile nature. He also underlines that anti-bullying rules for each classroom should be an independent part of the school’s discipline policy (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

In the KiVa program, intervention in bullying situations consists of individual and small group discussions with victims and those who have participated in bullying. These investigative discussions are modeled on the dialogue method created by Pikas as well as on Olweus’ recommendations on the nature of dialogue with bullies (from Sainio, Kaukiainen, Willför-Nyman, Annevirta, & Salmivalli, 2009). Investigative discussions use two different approaches in the dialogue with the children or youths who have participated in bullying: the Shared Concern method (SC) and the Disapproval of Bullying method (DB). Based on his own experiences, Pikas (1987) evaluates the suitability of these methods in various situations. According to Pikas, the method of disapproving of bullying, which he calls suggestive confidential discussion (SCD), works best when the bullying is not of a very serious nature, when the children involved are still quite young, or when the bully group does not have strong social cohesion. The Shared Concern method is more effective when the children are older, when the bullying is of a serious nature and when the bullies have formed a socially cohesive group and there is a risk that an external order to desist might actually result in escalating the behavior. According to a study made during the KiVa school program, both methods of discussion have shown positive results in decreasing bullying behavior (Sainio et al., 2009).

Other researchers and programs (for example Davis & Nixon’s Youth Voice Project, 2013) also emphasize raising the students’ strong sense of belonging by positive means, for example by increasing the students’ experiences of involvement in reducing and preventing bullying.

Even though various intervention programs emphasize fellowship, a warm atmosphere and supportive encountering as the most effective means in preventing bullying, society still holds a general and persistent view that intervention in bullying requires punishment. It seems indeed that many think there should be even harsher punishments (Helsingin sanomat, 11.8.2014) and the detention punishments are still common among school-aged children. Wolfgang and Wolfgang (1999) have studied the different ways that teachers react to misbehavior in groups of children in early childhood education. In their theory they divide these methods into three philosophies that teachers follow in handling misbehavior: (a) relationship-listening, (b) confronting-contracting and (c) rules and consequences. Relationship-listening is a non-judgmental philosophy grounded in humanistic thinking. It is based on the idea that the role of the teacher is to provide the misbehaving child with a supportive, facilitating environment and that no use of power is needed. The confronting-contracting philosophy is based on social and developmental psychological theories, where the teacher must confront the misbehaving
child to stop the misbehavior. The main idea is to negotiate with children in a way that gives them the power to decide how they will change their behavior and encourages them to make a contract concerning behavioral change. Rules and consequences is a controlling process where the teacher uses a high level of power in the child group. This philosophy is based on experimental behaviorist psychologies, where the teacher identifies the rules and behaviors that he or she wants. The teachers teach these rules and reward positive behaviors and punish negative behaviors. (Wolfgang & Wolfgang, 1999.)
3 The aims of the study and the research questions

The study contains both qualitative and quantitative data and analysis. The qualitative part concentrates on what kinds of meanings children and the adults working with them give to bullying in their own living environments and cultures. The purpose of the interviews was to find out how the children, preschool teachers and practical nurses and parents define bullying and their attitudes towards it, and whether their concept of bullying is the same as the one we use when describing school bullying. The aim was to understand the social reality of the children both through their own descriptions and through the thoughts and viewpoints of the adults interacting with them. The first premise was to find out if bullying does occur in early childhood educational groups and if it does, how exactly can the phenomenon be understood. The qualitative part of the study aims at understanding the bullying phenomenon within early childhood education and also at defining the nature of the phenomenon with the aid of the children’s own descriptions. To complement these descriptions, parents and the preschool teachers and practical nurses were also interviewed.

The quantitative part of the research is empirical: it is a dialogue between the findings and the various theories concerning school bullying. In other words, the empirical findings are mirrored through previous research data and theories. Thus, in the survey, it was justified to use the common definition that is used when studying school bullying. The aim was to find out what different forms of bullying occur in the ECE groups and how common it is (the prevalence of bullying). In addition, preschools as arenas for bullying were studied: the aim was to see if there are any educational or organizational practices in preschools which are related to bullying and which could be used to affect the phenomenon. As research about school bullying suggests that bullying prevention can only be effective when targeted at individual and classroom levels (Saarento, Garandeau, & Salmivalli, 2014), this study aims to find out whether this is the case already in preschool groups. Hence, the study observed bullying from both group and individual points of view. The qualitative data, especially the children’s interviews, acts as a framework for the quantitative data.

Research questions:

(i) How do children, their parents, preschool teachers and practical nurses understand bullying as a phenomenon and a construct?

(ii) How common is the phenomenon and what forms does it have in the context of early childhood education?

(iii) Does bullying occur as a group phenomenon within preschool groups?

(iv) What kinds of organizational and/or pedagogical factors within preschools are related to bullying behavior and the prevention of bullying?
This study consists of three independent publications. They form a logically coherent picture of what constitutes bullying in early childhood education among children aged three to six.

The qualitative data for the first article (I) was collected in 2009 in a joint enterprise with the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and Folkhälsan, entitled “Preventing bullying among children under school age.” I worked for the enterprise as the Mannerheim League planner. The first article reports the findings from the qualitative data and aims to create a wider understanding of what the phenomenon consists of among young children. These conclusions are appended to those results of the survey which measure the prevalence of bullying and its various forms among children under school age. In this manner, the qualitative polemic about whether young children bully each other is supported by the survey conducted among the preschool teachers and practical nurses. It gives the answers to the first (i) and second (ii) research questions.

The second article (II) examines preschool groups as arenas for bullying. The aim was to scrutinize preschools as operational environments from both organizational and pedagogic points of view. This lays down some groundwork on which to build models of action which aim to prevent bullying. It gives the answer to the fourth (iv) research question.

The third article (III) examines bullying at two levels: at the individual level and at the child group level. Research conducted in schools argues that intervention programs against bullying should be targeted at the whole peer group. On the other hand, it has been argued that bullying during the early years might be more a dyadic relationship than among school-aged children (Monks & Smith, 2010). To be able to develop effective practices, more research is needed into how to create anti-bullying programs in early childhood education. The third article gives an answer to the third (iii) research question. As the conclusions of the first and the second articles strongly indicated the high prevalence of special needs children in bullying situations, it was important to discuss this observation more deeply in this article, paying special attention to the roles of special needs children in bullying situations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Published</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Participants and methods</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article I: Bullying in early educational settings</td>
<td>Early Child Development and Care</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Mixed data (qualitative n=114 and quantitative n=771), collected years 2009 and 2011</td>
<td>Children, early childhood professionals and parents from eight preschools (interviews) from two municipalities, early childhood professionals from the city of Vantaa (survey)</td>
<td>Content analysis, Frequencies, Chi-square test ($\chi^2$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article III: Bystanders’ roles and children with special educational needs in bullying situations among preschool-aged children</td>
<td>Early Years: An international Research Journal</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Quantitative (N=771), collected 2011</td>
<td>Early childhood professionals from the city of Vantaa (survey)</td>
<td>Chi-square test ($\chi^2$), Mann-Whitney test, Linear regression analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1.** The design of the study
4 Execution of the study

The study was conducted according to the guidelines and statements of the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. I agree with the statements of ethically acceptable and reliable research practices. The research content has been accepted by the cities that participated for the study. All measurements and results will remain confidential. The preschool teachers and practical nurses understood that they were part of a research project. Their privacy will be maintained. Permission to interview children was also obtained from their parents. The children were interviewed on a voluntary basis, and therefore not all the children in all the groups were interviewed; instead, children participated according to their own willingness.

4.1 Methods and participants

Two different separate data were collected: (a) the qualitative data were collected by using interviews in two different municipalities in the metropolitan area of Helsinki and (b) a survey from the city of Vantaa.

The interviews

The qualitative data were collected by interviewing children aged three to six (n = 61), parents (n = 24) and preschool teachers and practical nurses (n = 29) in eight preschool groups. The preschools were chosen randomly by sending information about the study to preschools in two municipalities in the Helsinki metropolitan area. The first to express their willingness to participate were chosen.

The interviews were carried out during a Mannerheim League for Child Welfare and Folkhälsan joint enterprise; the material was collected by a team of two—the researcher herself and her colleague working with Folkhälsan. The interviewers invited one child at a time to discuss bullying in private. The children proved to be willing to talk about the subject and hardly any declined. The interview situations were semi-structured, using an interview model (Appendix 2) developed by the University of Turku’s research venture “Origins of exclusion in early childhood” (Laine & Neitola, 2002) as a framework. Half of the preschools were Finnish-speaking and half of them Swedish-speaking. The interview model was tested first in two preschools that did not take part in the study itself. Special attention was paid to ethical issues, especially when interpreting the interviews. It is important to realize that the interviewer can, for example, subconsciously steer the children to answer questions in a way that supports his/her own bias. By asking questions about the children’s favorite games, food or toys we tried to lighten the mood and create a confidential atmosphere.

The adults interviewed were from the same child groups as the children. These interviews—as well as those conducted with parents—were also voluntary.

2 Finnish and Swedish are the two official languages in Finland.
interviewing adults, a ready-made questionnaire form was also used (Appendix 2). In addition, the interviewees were able to offer their own narratives outside the fixed focus of the questionnaire. Parents in particular often had bullying-related narratives, thought about beforehand, which they wanted to share. These narratives and other material from the interviews were used to try to define how adults who interact with preschool-aged children see the bullying phenomenon and what their definition of bullying is. Listening to these narratives was meaningful to the study, since they often tell much more about the issue than any number of answers given to fixed questions. While interviewing people, the interviewees were not given any definitions as to what constitutes bullying in advance; on the contrary, we wanted them to tell us how they define it themselves.

**The survey**

The questionnaire on bullying in preschool was designed for the present study to assess early childhood professionals’ perceptions of bullying and its prevention in early educational settings. The questionnaire was sent to each member of staff working with children aged three to six in every preschool in the City of Vantaa. A total of 1,316 adults worked in the groups. The response rate was 58.5%; 771 adults from 336 preschool groups in 135 different preschools completed the questionnaire.

Those employees who worked in toddlers’ groups (0–3-years old) did not answer the questionnaire. The scope of the study encompassed 76.6% of the children involved (6910 child). The average group size was 18.8 children. The median of the group size was 20, with a range of 6 to 29 children. At the time of our study, there were 763 (11.6%) children classified as needing special education (children with SEN) for their learning and/or daily support for their everyday life at the time of the study. Children with SEN were distributed in 270 (74%) groups. At the time of the study, 15.0 % of the children had an immigrant background.

**Table 1. Total number of children by group (number and %). Children reported with no gender information given n=8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>6,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>3,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>3,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants</td>
<td>1,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special needs</td>
<td>765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information about the respondents’ education, work experience, and gender was collected for background information. In addition, the basic information about the child group with which the respondent worked was collected: the size of the child group, the number of girls and boys, the number of SEN children, the number of immigrant children and the number of adults. The questionnaire was web-based.
The City of Vantaa’s Director for the development of early childhood education was responsible for sending the questionnaire to the directors of all preschools, who in turn e-mailed it to all their staff members.

In the questionnaire, bullying was defined according to the definition given by Olweus (1996), with the addition that quarrels between children that had been mutually initiated were not counted as bullying. When defining special educational needs, the same definition that the City of Vantaa uses in its ECE policy was used, as described in Chapter 2.3.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections (Appendix 1). Section (a) comprises the prevalence of bullying. Respondents were asked to look at the name list of the children in their child group in order to remember all the children. They were asked to identify children who either bullied others, were victimized or both. The questionnaire had a separate entry for each of these children. Respondents were asked to fill in a column and mark whether the child bullied others, was victimized or both. In addition, the respondents were asked to mark if the child was a girl or a boy, had an immigrant background, a need for special education and his/her age. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to choose from the menu what forms and ways of bullying this child used against others or was targeted for. The options were: hitting, kicking, tripping, pushing, obstructing the victim, tearing clothes, pinching, throwing rocks and sand, messing up others’ play, chasing, name-calling, mocking, teasing, pointing and laughing, commenting on hair and/or clothes, threatening, manipulating, blackmailing, making faces, grinning, excluding, changing the rules of a game, ignoring and/or talking behind one’s back.

Section (b) comprises the bystanders’ (also referred to as peripheral) roles in bullying situations: assistants of bullies, reinforcers of bullies, outsiders, and defenders of the victim. The definition as described in the introductory chapter was given (Salmivalli et al., 1996). The participants were asked if they recognized the peripheral roles in their child group at the time of data collection.

In Section (c) (Intervening in bullying), respondents were given eight items to assess the intervention measures in bullying situations in their preschool using a Likert scale (1–7). The items were:

1. Bullying situations are handled well in your preschool.
2. Your preschool has common agreements for solving bullying situations.
3. If bullying situations have occurred and an intervention has been carried out, has the bullying stopped?
4. Do you feel that the victim has received help?
5. Do you feel that the child that bullies others has received help?
6. Do you feel that you can handle bullying situations in preschool?
7. If needed, do you get support from your supervisor for solving bullying situations?
8. If needed, do you get support from your colleagues for solving bullying situations?
Section (d) examined what kind of consequences or punishments the preschool teachers and practical nurses use or have seen others use in preschool after a child has misbehaved. Several options were offered in a pull-down menu, and these could be expanded using one’s own words in the open question. The questionnaire provided ten ready-made options and one open field, where the respondents were asked to list other consequences or punishments that they have used or have seen others using.

In section (e) (The climate of bullying prevention) the respondents were given nine items concerning the prevention of bullying in their preschool. The respondents assessed the climate in their own preschool as well as pedagogical practices related to the prevention of bullying, such as testing and assessing certain pedagogical solutions. The items were (Likert scale 1–7):

1. Our preschool has a positive climate.
2. There is enough time reserved for discussions related to education.
3. Different pedagogical solutions are tested.
4. Different approaches are assessed together.
5. I believe that children feel safe in our preschool.
6. Children’s individual needs are taken care of.
7. The children are taken care of in a warm and loving manner.
8. The parents are satisfied with the operation of the preschool.
9. The director is involved when pedagogical solutions are considered.

### 4.2 Data analyses

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the content analysis method. The analysis aimed at understanding what the children meant by the term ‘bullying’ and how they were able to conceptualize the phenomenon. The adult’s answers were used to broaden this understanding by reflecting the children’s speech to adult’s speech. Did the children and adults talk about the same phenomenon? What exactly children mean when they talk about bullying? The material was also categorized according to definitions used in describing school bullying; that is, the researcher looked for any elements that pointed to repetitiveness, intentionality or power imbalance. Thus, the results were compared with the definition of school bullying in the analysis.

All the statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS software. Pearson’s correlation was used, as well as the Mann U Whitney test, since the material was not normally distributed and thus T-test could not be used. The between group differences were tested using the $\chi^2$-test. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Linear regression analyses were conducted with those factors which were found to correlate significantly with the background factors of bullying. The items from the survey (section c and e) were combined as a sum
variable for the analyses. In the data, there were one to three respondents working in the same child group. To avoid the situation where one child was reported many times, one answer from each child group was selected. From each group, the highest educated staff members' answers were chosen. This data (n=336) was used when reporting the results of the forms and ways of bullying that children with or without SEN were subjected to by others and/or used against others. More detailed definitions of the analyses are given in each of the articles.

The answers to a question about the consequences used (section d) were categorized in three categories (relationship-listening, confronting-contracting and rules and consequences) according to Wolfgang and Wolfgang (1999). (see Chapter 2.4).
5 Central findings

5.1 How children, early childhood professionals and parents see bullying

The results of the children’s interviews imply that children understand bullying in very much the same way as adults do. There was also little variation among the children’s perceptions. They had a fairly good understanding of what kinds of actions are hurtful towards others. They were able to describe and answer questions on what kinds of behaviors cause hurt in peer relationships. They could also categorize these behaviors as bullying fairly well. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that within the age group of 3 to 6 linguistic abilities vary a great deal. In addition, it should be highlighted that all children were not able to address bullying and a typical answer was “I don’t know.” When asked “Have you been bullied here in preschool?” many children said “Yes”, but on request to tell more, a common answer was “I don’t remember”. This is in line with other studies, for example Gillees-Rezo and Bosacki (2003) who suggested that the data about the prevalence of bullying in preschool should be collected by teacher ratings rather than self ratings. However, the experiences and stories about bullying can and should be asked from young children themselves. In addition, there were answers that were difficult to interpret.

Girl, age 6: “A boy bullied me outside when he showed me a dead bee, which was all slimy”.

When children were asked to describe bullying they often mentioned different physical acts and verbal violence. Instead, when children were asked about things that make them feel bad or sad, they mentioned exclusion and being left alone. In children’s definitions of bullying it was typical that any behavior that caused bad feelings to peers was considered as bullying.

Boy, age 5: “Bullying is when you’re not nice to others and do something the other doesn’t like”.

The results were also used to determine whether the phenomenon described as school bullying happens among children even before school age. I looked for characteristics typical of school bullying: intentionality, repetitiveness and power imbalance. Answers were sorted into these categories. Direct quotations aim to illustrate a typical answer and give the reader a better understanding of the analysis.

When asked what they thought bullying was, the children often gave answers related to physical actions such as hitting, pushing or pinching. Name-calling was also a common answer, as was mocking and making faces. Children also recognized different methods of psychological bullying, such as exclusion or messing up and disrupting other children’s games and play.
Interviewer: “What do you think bullying is, what happens when someone is bullied?”

Boy, age 6: “When they come and interrupt your game, and then they bully you.”

Interviewer: “What else could bullying be?”

Boy, age 6: “When someone messes up someone else’s game.”

Interviewer: “What do you think bullying is?”

Boy, age 6: “Hitting, and kicking and such things.”

Interviewer: “Anything else?”

Boy, age 6: “Calling someone bad names, but that’s all I know.”

Interviewer: “What do you think bullying is?”

Boy, age 5: “It’s when you’re not allowed to play.”

Not all examples in the responses were physical actions; the children were also able to give answers that were indirectly connected to psychological bullying carried out in order to hurt the victim indirectly or through someone/something else. In the following examples, a six-year-old girl reports that there is something called blackmailing, then she describes what it is and finally concludes that it is a form of bullying.

Girl, age 6: “Then there’s this blackmailing, it’s like when you blackmail someone, like, say that they won’t be your friend if you don’t do this and that, and that’s bullying.”

The following example illustrates the purpose of bullying behavior. A child describes a situation that is meant to harm and cause bad feelings to someone else. Children describe here the experienced intentionality of the actions:

Interviewer: “Is there anyone in your group who bullies others?”

Boy, age 5: “Yeah, there’s Niko, he orders others around and hit me on my head on purpose, he did.”

Interviewer: “Maybe it was an accident?”

Boy, age 5: “No, he meant to do it.”

Interviewer: “What do you think happens when someone is bullying someone else?”

Boy, age 5: “When you do something the other one doesn’t like.”
Repetitiveness also appears in the answers. In several interviews the children describe bullying targeted recurrently at the same person. Another theme in the answers is power imbalance. This included, among other things, using various threats. Leaving someone without a friend was also considered threatening and therefore also bullying.

Boy, age 5: “It’s like always tricking the same person.”

Girl, age 6: “Like, the whole group picking on just one person.”

Interviewer: “If someone is bullying someone else, what is she or he doing to that person?”

Boy, age 5: “He’s hurting them.”

Interviewer: “How does he hurt them?”

Boy, age 5: “By threatening and lying.”

The interviews gave us an opportunity to scrutinize the different ways children use the concept of bullying, and how reliable these accounts are. According to the preschool teachers and practical nurses, bullying is an everyday occurrence that they had to face on a daily basis. The different views on what constitutes bullying varied only slightly even if defining the phenomenon itself was difficult for some. The interviewees did not see the questionnaire beforehand, so they did not have a chance to reflect on the subject. When trying to formulate a definition for the phenomenon, many were surprised to find it complicated. Some started to hesitate when giving answers, which is illustrated in the following example. Here, a preschool teacher first defines bullying as being recurrent, but ends up considering the nature of one-off incidents and finally declares that formulating a definition is difficult.

Preschool teacher: “A one-off incident can turn into bullying when it becomes habitual or recurrent, so bullying often has this... how could I put it?... the significant thing about bullying is that it is repeated, or even when it’s only a singular incident. But that, if you can call it bullying, may be only a one-off thing... I don’t know how to put this, maybe it’s a quarrel, in which... this is quite hard to put into words, let me think about it for a minute...”

The preschool teachers and practical nurses did not question the usage of the term bullying. They used it habitually but had not really thought about its definition or content. In the following example, a practical nurse ponders on the use of the term. She brings up the fact that while children often use the term, adults do not necessarily know what has happened. In other words, she implies that children may use the term in a variety of ways to describe different situations. The interviewee resolves the dilemma by stating that no matter what term the children use, it is the adult’s job to find out what exactly has happened. But, she finally agrees, bullying does happen.
Practical nurse: “Bullying, it’s such a strong word, I don’t know if I want to use it... Yeah, and it quickly turns into ‘he’s bullying and she’s bullying and they’re bullying’ and he said and she said...”

Interviewer: “How do you know what has happened?”

Practical nurse: “By watching and listening to the children, that means following the situation closely, you can always spot the words that matter and it’s like ‘you’re stupid’ and it is bullying of sorts, name-calling is not nice.”

The early childhood professionals also found it difficult to tell the difference between bullying and quarreling between children.

Practical nurse: “Well, yeah, I don’t know if it’s squabbling or bullying, where’s the line?... no, I mean bullying or squabbling, when does it cross the line?”

The early childhood professionals’ narratives were quite similar, and they also had similarities with the children’s narratives. There were parallels to school bullying in the narratives of both groups.

The following example is fairly typical. The speaker tries to put into words how bullying and arguments differ. This respondent ends up talking about recurrence.

Nurse: “And of course there’s bullying while playing, like, soccer, and someone throws a fist and it’s all sorted out there and then. I wouldn’t classify that as bullying, that would be something that happens repeatedly between specific children.”

The concept of repetitiveness is also apparent in the following example. The interviewee feels that a single incident is not bullying, but becomes such if it is recurrent and aimed at the same victim. This example also shows us the element of power imbalance. The interviewee means that children who consider themselves equal can occasionally tell each other that they don’t want to play together. But if this continues and it is always the same child telling the other this, it becomes dominance.

Practical nurse: “Well, on principle, I think that all that continuous name-calling, like if one child is constantly told that he or she is stupid or something, well that’s bullying. Also, if that someone is excluded from playing, all that is bullying. But basically it’s not bullying if it’s only once, saying ‘we’re not playing with you’, but it’s bullying if it happens often or if it always happens to the same child saying ‘we don’t want you to join us, we won’t play with you’.”

Departing from the definition of school bullying, early childhood professionals also wanted to include the importance of the children’s own subjective experience, and their abilities—which differ between children—to withstand different actions towards them. Some of the interviewees felt that it is problematic to define bullying through any other element, that the experience of the child involved is pivotal in
Central findings

In the following example a preschool teacher ponders on this:

Preschool teacher: “Bullying or being bullied is such a subjective experience and it’s hard to define, but bullying is something that feels like your basic safety gets broken.” ... “It’s hard to define except through the subjective experience.”

Quarreling was often seen as having something to do with an object (e.g., a toy), while bullying was seen as a wish or need to insult or hurt (intentionality). Preschool teachers and practical nurses were quite unanimous in stating that a preschool-age child is aware of their actions when hurting or insulting others.

Preschool teacher: “...so it’s easy to see in the children that they are able to look around and see if an adult is paying attention. That makes it at least partially intentional, doesn’t it?”

Instead, the parents’ narratives differed slightly from those of the early childhood professionals. The phenomenon itself was described identically, but the parents were not sure whether the infringements in this age group could be construed as bullying. They saw it more as a part of normal development, or small children not yet capable of controlling their aggressive behavior.

Mother: “It’s more like that the child doesn’t control the situation, and it all comes out in bursts, and in violence”

Power imbalance was a recurring theme in the interviews, too. It was seen to occur in situations that are connected to the children’s social networks. The teachers felt that some children can and do dominate others and manipulate the group, e.g. using birthday party invitations as currency. It was said to be common that with some children the list of those invited to their birthday party kept changing according to whether the others acted in a way the child expected. The group phenomenon in bullying is illustrated in the next example:

Preschool teacher: “... And in a way it’s hurting someone in a very, very intentional manner, sometimes it’s like scheming, and that happens in groups, too. It’s not just one kid coming up with it all but the whole group planning it.”

In sum, the interviews revealed that the children in early childhood education knew the phenomenon and were able to describe it. However, the use of the term bullying varied some. Exclusion from the peer group and being left without a friend was noted by children and surprisingly young children could categorize it under the phenomenon of bullying. The similar features to bullying in school environments were already visible in preschool context. There was little difference in how it was discussed among children or adults. However, parents were not certain whether small children are capable of bullying or whether the negative behavior towards others is just a part of a developmental stage. It is worth mentioning that several participants, both children and adults, were unable to define bullying and it was
difficult for them to distinguish bullying from quarreling. The traditional definition of bullying occurred in both children’s and adults’ speech I studied. However, early childhood professionals included the children’s subjective experience in their definition and at the same time parents were uncertain if bullying occurs. Children were able to tell stories about bullying and insulting behavior, though there were also many children that were not able to produce stories about bullying. The common answer in the interviews was “I don’t know.” This might be due to several reasons. Children might be fearful about the interview situation or more simply not all children had encountered bullying.

5.2 Prevalence and the forms of bullying among children aged three to six

The results of the survey showed that 7.1% of preschool children bullied other children, while 3.3% were bullied by others, and 2.2% were bully-victims. Fifteen percent of the children included in the study had immigrant status. Of those, 6.9% were bullies, 5.2% were victims and 2.7% were bully-victims. Thus, immigrant children did not bully others more than the native Finnish children, but they were victimized more often \( (p < .05) \) than the native Finns. Furthermore, 11.6% of the children in the study had special educational needs; of those 13.5% were bullies \( (p < .05) \), 6.7% were victims \( (p < .05) \) and 7.8% were bully-victims \( (p < .05) \). This is clearly higher than the average for children with no special needs. Boys (64.3%) were bullies more often than girls (35.7%). The difference is statistically significant \( (p < .05) \). In addition, boys (62.5%) were more often bully-victims than girls (37.3%, \( p < .05 \)).

The most common form of bullying was psychological bullying (10.7% of all children experienced this), such as threatening, manipulating, blackmailing, making faces, excluding, ignoring and talking behind one’s back. The most common single form of psychological bullying was exclusion from the peer group. The second most common form was different kinds of verbal bullying (8.18% of all children experienced this), including name-calling, pointing and laughing, mocking, and commenting on hair or clothing. The least common was physical bullying, such as hitting, kicking, pushing, messing up playing, chasing, throwing rocks and sand, pinching (7.45% of all children experienced this). (see Article I).

5.3 Bullying and children with special education needs (SEN)

According to the survey, there were significantly more victims, bullies and bully-victims among children with SEN than among children without SEN (described in Table 2). The high proportion of bully-victims with SEN is notable although expected. Further, the number of children with SEN in a child group explained 18% of the variance of bullying \( (r = .419, r^2 = 0.18, p < .001) \). (see Article III).
Table 2. Proportion of victims, bullies, and bully-victims among children without and with SEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>without SEN (n=6130)</th>
<th>with SEN (n=763)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>181 3 %</td>
<td>50 7 %</td>
<td>26.06</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullies</td>
<td>389 6 %</td>
<td>103 13 %</td>
<td>51.31</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bully-victims</td>
<td>93 2 %</td>
<td>60 8 %</td>
<td>123.02</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results show different behavioral patterns among bullies without and with SEN. Bullies without SEN used significantly more psychological forms of bullying than bullies with SEN and correspondingly, bullies without SEN used significantly less physical bullying than bullies with SEN. Further, bully-victims with SEN used and were subjected to by others very significantly more physical forms of bullying than bully-victims without SEN. No differences were found comparing victims without and with SEN regarding psychological and physical bullying. Instead, victims with SEN were subjected to somewhat more verbal forms of bullying than victims without SEN. (see Article III)
As can be seen in Table 4, psychological bullying increased significantly and at the same time physical bullying decreased very significantly among bullies without SEN by age. (see Article III)

Note. Results of Mann-Whitney U tests.

Range of the scales are 0-10.

Table 3. Different forms of bullying among children without and with SEN.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of bullying</th>
<th>Bullies (n=550)</th>
<th>Victims (n=251)</th>
<th>Bully-victims (n=148)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>without SEN</td>
<td>with SEN</td>
<td>without SEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>-3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>7.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Results of Mann-Whitney U tests.

Table 4. Forms of bullying among children without and with SEN in different age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of bullying</th>
<th>Bullies without SEN (n=419)</th>
<th>Bullies with SEN (n=116)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-4y</td>
<td>5-6y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>Z sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Results from Mann-Whitney U tests.
5.4 Bullying as a group phenomenon

The respondents reported the existence of the peripheral roles in bullying (as described in Chapter 2.2) as follows: 78% of early educators recognized bully assistants, 84% recognized bully reinforcers, 86% recognized victim defenders, and 94% recognized outsiders in their child group.

According to the results of the survey, bullying appears to be a group phenomenon especially among boys. Child groups with reinforcers had a higher proportion of boys ($U=8456.0, \ Z=2.38, p = .017$) and a larger group size ($U=6892.5, \ Z=2.10, p = .036$) than the groups without reinforcers. However, these differences were not found when comparing the groups with assistants and defenders and the groups without assistants and defenders. Further, the child groups with reinforcers had a higher proportion of boys among bullies and victims ($U=10054.5, \ Z=5.09, p < .001$) than the group without reinforcers. The case was the same with assistants ($U=12233.0, \ Z=5.04, p < .001$) and defenders ($U=7026.5, \ Z=2.37, p = .018$). No other significant differences in background variables were found. It was notable that the proportion of SEN children among bullies, victims or bully-victims was not related to the existence of peripheral roles. (see Article III)

In those child groups where bully reinforcers existed, it was less common that agreements on how to intervene in bullying situations were reached than in those groups that had no reinforcers. Further, if the bullies were reinforced, the respondent felt that bullies and victims did not receive help as much as in those groups where bullies were not reinforced. (see Article III)

5.5 Pedagogical and organizational factor related to bullying

The examined organizational and pedagogical factors were respondent’s education, group size, an action plan how to intervene and prevent bullying and the consequences of bullying (what happens after a child has misbehaved, for example bullied others).

Of the 771 respondents, 43.2% had a higher level education (bachelor’s degree), 56.8% had a lower level of education (vocational school), and 7.8% gave their education as “other.” The level of education was related to recognition of bullying. The less educated respondents reported significantly less bullying than respondents with a higher education (Mann-Whitney $U$-test $p<.01$). Interestingly, the prevalence of bullying was not more common in large groups. Instead, the amount of bullying increased with decreasing group size ($r=-.270, p<.001$). Furthermore, considering the strength of the relationship between the group size and the prevalence of bullying, bullying decreases to close to a statistically non-significant level ($r=-.076, p = .036$) when the number of children with special education needs is used as a control variable in a partial correlation analysis. (see Article II)
An action plan against bullying

We asked respondents whether their preschools had a written action plan for preventing bullying or whether one was being developed at the moment. Of the respondents, 54.7% declared that they had a plan or that work was in progress to develop one. On the other hand, 26% stated that they did not know whether their preschool had a plan or not. The remaining 18.3% answered that they were going to create a plan at some point in the future.

The existence of an action plan for intervening in and preventing bullying was not related the amount of bullying. However, all items in section (b) and section (d) (see page 43–45) correlated significantly with the action plan. Those respondents who answered that they had an action plan perceived that intervening in bullying is more efficient and that the climate of bullying prevention in their preschool is better compared to those respondents who admitted to not having a plan. (see Article II).

The use of discipline and punishment

In the interviews, children were asked about how adults act when a child misbehaves by bullying or in some other way. Almost all the children reported the usage of ‘time out or penalty bench’. According to the interviews, the children had internalized that certain actions led to certain consequences. Time out was repeatedly mentioned as a measure that follows from breaking rules or bullying someone.

Interviewer: “I meant to ask you, what do the grownups do if someone is being bullied?”

Boy, age 6: “Often they just come and say that bullying is forbidden and they do this penalty bench thing.”

Interviewer: “So it’s off to the penalty bench, then?”

Boy, age 6: “Often they just say ‘no bullying’. Time out is rare, but I've been there too. But it’s not just bullying that gets you there, it’s also for when you do something you’re not supposed to.”

Interviewer: “So what did the grownup do then?”

Girl, age 6: “Sent Oskari to time out.”

Girl, age 5: “The adults put you on a penalty bench.”

Boy, age 5: “Well they put you on a bench and then you have to sit and think, we have that at home too.”

Boy, age 6: “They just do the time out punishments.”

Girl, age 4: “They say you have to stop crying.”

Boy, age 6: “The adults will reprimand you or put you on the penalty bench.”
Boy, age 5: “If you do something really really stupid you’ll have to do that (sit on the penalty bench) but that happens when you do REALLY stupid things and it’s very rare.”

Many of the interviews also mentioned saying sorry, although many children connected that to the penalty bench, too. The following example lets us assume that the adult’s object is to make the child think about their actions through saying they are sorry. In the end, the penalty bench is the final measure that the adult uses to make the child understand that he or she has done something wrong.

Interviewer: “Okay, but if the grownups see that someone is being bullied, what do they do then?”

Girl, age 6: “They sit them down and make them say they’re sorry, and if they don’t, they have to go to the penalty bench.”

Some answers reflected the adults’ indifference or reluctance to interfere.

Interviewer: “So what do the grownups say then?”

Boy, age 6: “When we go and tell them, they just say ‘oh’ or they come and put them on the penalty bench.”

Interviewer: “What happened next?”

Girl, age 6: “Well the grownups said that we shouldn’t play with them if they keep on bullying us.”

Reprimanding was also mentioned as a consequence.

Interviewer: “But what do the grownups do?”

Girl, age 5: “They reprimand you or perhaps take you to the penalty bench.”

Some answers show that the children trust the adults to sort out the situation.

Interviewer: “And what did the adult do then?”

Boy, age 6: “She came and cleared things up and calmed it down.” (Repo, unpublished results)

Since the penalty bench seemed to be such a common and everyday occurrence in the children’s speech of the day-to-day routines, I added a question to the questionnaire to early childhood professionals: What kinds of sanctions or forms of punishment have you encountered in your work? The answers were divided into three groups according to Wolfgang and Wolfgang (1999) categories, as earlier discussed in Chapter 2.4. Table 6 shows these consequences in their categories (1. Relationship-listening, 2. Confronting-contracting, 3. Rules and consequences) and the percentage of respondents who have used them or seen them being used.
Table 6. The consequences that the respondents used or have seen used in preschools (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category:</th>
<th>Method:</th>
<th>Used: (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships-listening</td>
<td>Discussion with the child</td>
<td>94 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confronting-contracting</td>
<td>Reprimanding</td>
<td>89.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apologizing</td>
<td>98.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules and consequences</td>
<td>Penalty bench*</td>
<td>75.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time out</td>
<td>50.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking the dessert away from the child</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Threatening to move the child to the toddlers’ group to learn to behave</td>
<td>43.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moving the child to the toddlers’ group (for a certain action: to eat or to take a nap)</td>
<td>22.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolating the child from the other children</td>
<td>37 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The other children are allowed to decide the penalty</td>
<td>10.8 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The penalty bench is a direct translation from the Finnish term “jäähynkkki”, which is primarily used in ice-hockey when a player is removed from the rink for a certain amount of time due to a breach of rules.

In addition, there was an open-ended question that the respondents were able to give more information on regarding the consequences and punishments used. The purpose was to expand the quantitative data with qualitative information about the early childhood professional’s ways of intervening misbehavior.

In the open-ended question some specific forms emerged. Using emotional cards was an example of the relationship-listening philosophy. A method that I named as “hand in hand with an adult” was found in both the relationship-listening and the rules and consequences category. In some answers this method was based on trust and reassuring the child through the warmth and understanding of an adult. However, some other answers revealed that this method was a punishment and was based on prohibiting play. Other examples of the specific forms from the open-ended question were: prohibiting play, taking the child away from plays to do “table things” and ignoring the child.

Although, I focus here on the rules and consequences based methods, it should be highlighted that 94% of the respondents used relationships-listening based methods and 98.5% used confronting-contracting based methods. This means that early childhood professionals use varied methods and the use of these methods likely vary depending on the situation.

The following examples are from the open-ended answers to the question and are presented to give a more detailed cultural picture of the subject. In some of the answers, the humiliation inherent in punishing a child was understood, and no punishment was used. These answers can be seen as representing the relationship-listening method.
“In preschools, yes, in our group we ALWAYS use discussion, negotiation and mediation.”

“We also actively use emotional images & emotion cards as a solution; they’re used to work on both the bully’s and the victim’s emotions before and after the situation.”

“Part of the consequences listed above are, in my opinion, punishments, and should not be used. A point of view: isn’t the adult bullying a child through questionable means committing an act of bullying?”

“We don’t use punishments.”

Many of them expressed the idea that when a child misbehaves, something nice will be taken away from him/her.

“The children are indeed punished. Different methods include all of the above (options in the pull-down menu) and not allowing the child to have something enjoyable, like going to the gym class, eating treats (like when it’s someone’s birthday) or participating in crafts.”

Quite often ‘losing something nice’ means participation in playtime is forbidden. The answers mention several times the play ban that takes the form of isolating the wrongdoer from other children. This might include seating the child at a table and instructing them to do something on their own, like crafts, playing a game or drawing.

“Exclusion from playing, and not being allowed to play with their best friend.”

“Excluding the child from events for a short duration, by isolating.”

“Not being allowed to continue the play activity they want, and being seated at the table for a while.”

“Taking away nice things that the child enjoys. But on the other hand, being rewarded for good behavior and progress.”

“Traffic lights: amber is a warning, red means table activities for the afternoon no joining in games.”

“The traffic light method, where red means the end of free play and sitting at the table with an adult, playing games etc.”

In the following answer the respondent talks about something that the child may construe as a punishment:

“A child who causes a physical threat is made to wear a reflective vest when outside (with parents’ permission) so that s/he can be spotted easily in the yard among a large group. This may seem like a punishment to the child.”
Ignoring a child was also mentioned; not reacting to the child at all even though the respondent suspects that the child’s bad behavior may have stemmed from their need for adult attention.

“Ignoring the child for a certain time period; if the child obviously acts up in order to get close to an adult.”

Some methods using confronting-contracting ideology could be found in the answers as well. Especially amending bad behavior was brought up.

“The most common is probably reprimanding, and sorting the issue out with adults. Apologizing and possibly amending the damage caused, for example fixing a game one broke, with an adult or under supervision.”

Both the adults’ and the children’s interviews gave the impression that the penalty bench is an everyday practice to which children have been thoroughly conditioned.

Since answers falling into the rules and consequences category were common with both children (interviews) and adults (survey) we gave the category rules and consequences a closer scrutiny. The analyses based on the sum of variables revealed that rules and consequences was related to both: the relative amount of bullying in a group (.153, p< .001) and with the absolute number of children encountering bullying. The more the rules and consequences method was used, the more common bullying was found to be.

It is worth highlighting that the more ‘strict consequences’ were used in a group, the less the respondents perceived that bullying had stopped (respondent specific: -.099, p=.010, group specific: -.156, p=.004). The rules and consequences variable also correlated with the items considering the intervening in bullying (section b) and the climate of bullying prevention (section d) (see page 43–45). In sum, the groups in which these methods were used did not test and evaluate different pedagogical methods and solutions as often as in those groups that did not use strict methods. Further, in those groups that used strict consequences did not have common agreements about intervening in bullying as often as those groups that did not use strict methods. In addition, in those groups that the strict consequences were used the respondent reported that bullying had not stopped after intervening. Attention was especially drawn to the observation that the groups in which strict methods were used had a weaker social climate in their preschool, the children were not handled with love, and the parents were not as happy with the operation of the preschool, compared to the groups where strict methods were not used.

We further examined children separately by groups (bullies, victims, bully-victims) as well as by method-specific variables. The results revealed that in the groups where children were isolated from other children as a punishment method, bullying was more common than in other groups (.121, p=.026). This was particularly evident with regard to bully-victims (.111, p=.043). Boys who bullied were moved to toddlers’ groups as a punishment method (.111, p=.041), whereas girls who bullied were merely threatened to be moved to the toddlers’ group (.116, p=.033). (see Article II)
6 Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether bullying occurred among children under the school age; how this phenomenon manifested itself; what significance the children and the adults working with them granted to the bullying phenomenon; and the different forms of bullying and how common it is. In addition the aim was to find out if there were any pedagogic or organizational practices related to the bullying phenomenon within the preschool groups. The data was collected by using mixed methods combining qualitative methods with quantitative methods.

This study revealed that systematic bullying is a well-recognized and common phenomenon among children who are attending institutional early education. In the light of the results, it is important to emphasize that behavior patterns related to bullying as well as roles associated with it emerge already in early childhood. The qualitative data was gathered through interviews with children, preschool teachers and practical nurses and parents, and was used as a framework through which to inspect the statistical analysis. When working with small children, developmental issues, especially linguistic ones, add to the challenge of the definition. For example, a small child may find it difficult to perceive exclusion as a form of bullying; on the other hand, children may list a wide variety of different things as bullying. Since the goal is to prevent bullying, it is not productive to dwell excessively on the problematic details of definitions (e.g. whether small children are aware of the consequences of their action; or when are actions frequent enough to warrant the term bullying) but to prevent the progression of offensive behavior and ensure that it does not evolve into bullying over time.

According to the interviews, children and adults seemed to judge same kinds of behavior as bullying. Children were able to produce stories about bullying and they knew which kinds of actions were hurtful towards others. Children were surprisingly capable of nominating various psychological acts, such as blackmailing, as bullying. Bullying was a daily phenomenon to early childhood professionals and their descriptions were similar to those of the children. However, parent’s views were slightly different. Parents identified and described the bullying phenomenon in terms fairly identical to those of both the children and early childhood professionals, but at the same time they were unsure whether children this young are even able to bully each other. They sometimes explained the phenomenon away by claiming that it is part of the natural developmental stage typical to small children (“throwing punches is just something they do at that age”). Since the reactive aggression typical to young children tends to decrease as children grow older, it was somewhat surprising that only parents were unsure whether young children bully. This might be due to the general understanding that young children’s offensive behavior is not bullying but maybe some less serious “teasing”.

There is only a small amount of research on parents’ views on bullying in early childhood education (see Hartcourt, Jasperse, & Green, 2014). Humphrey and Crisp (2008) have conducted a qualitative study on those parents of preschool-aged
children who felt that their child was being victimized in preschool. The parents perceived that they did not get enough support or help from preschool teachers. The study revealed that the teachers and early childhood professionals were not aware of bullying, and parents felt guilty because they were powerless to protect their children from it. They were afraid of being labeled difficult and overprotective parents. These results differ somewhat from the current research and in further research it would be important for future work to examine the parents’ roles and the home environment in anti-bullying efforts during early childhood.

This research was the first in Finland to study the prevalence of bullying in early educational settings. According to the results, 12.6% of preschool children aged three to six were directly involved with the bullying phenomenon (children that bully others 7.1%, victims 3.3%, bully-victims 2.2%). Thus, the incidence of bullies in each preschool group was, on average, 1.3. There are few studies made on the prevalence of bullying among young children. According to Jansen et al. (2012) study in Netherlands (children aged five to six), 17% were bullies, 4% were victims and 13% were bully-victims, also based on teacher nominations. In Perren’s (2000) study in Swiss preschools (aged three to six) the rates were: children that bully others 11%, victims 6% and bully-victims 10%, and in Alsakers and Nägele’s (2008) study also in Swiss preschools: children that bully others 12%, victims 6% and bully-victims 7%. Similar feature in all of the results were that there were more children who bullied others than victims in the child groups. This seems to be typical among young children. As children grow older, the amount of perpetrators is getting closer to the amount of victims. However, the prevalence of children who bully others increases again among youth and adolescents. This indicates that the victims’ situation gets more serious when they get older (Salmivalli, 2010). Notably interesting are both Jansen et al. and Perren’s results, where the number of bully-victims was substantially high (10% and 13%). This may be due to the fact that reactive aggressive behavior is more typical among young children and it decreases when children grow older (Ostrov et al., 2009).

In all age groups boys were more often involved in bullying situations than girls. Further, at age six victims were more often girls than boys, but boys were bullies and bully-victims more often than girls. It might be important to rethink our attitudes toward gender-based behavioral expectations. It has been argued that boys are allowed to behave more roughly and overtly aggressively than girls (Werner & Grant, 2009). In addition, it is supposed that boys prefer peer group relationships with dominance issues and girls prefer dyadic relationships (Baron-Cohen, 2010). These attitudes might mean that excluding behavior is allowed for girls and competitive, aggressive behavior for boys. In consequence, negative behavior associated with bullying might remain unrecognized or even strengthened.

According to the current study, the most common single form of bullying was exclusion. The second most common form was pushing and the third was threatening. In sum, the psychological forms of bullying were more common than the physical forms of bullying. This is in line with Perren’s (2000) results, which found that the most common form of bullying in a preschool setting was exclusion from the peer group. However, researchers have pointed out that when young children describe bullying they usually mention only different acts of physical aggression.
and physical aggression has been found to be more common among younger children than older children (e.g., Monks, Ruiz, & Val, 2002; Vaillancourt, Brendgen, Boivin, & Tremblay, 2003). These opposite results may be due to a different data collection method, as young children often cite only physical aggression as bullying (Crick et al., 1999). It is also possible that the participants of the survey in this study recognized that not all physical acts were perceived as bullying but as conflicts or arguments. This might explain the contradictory results in earlier studies.

In the light of this research it is alarming that the first signs of exclusion occur in preschool groups among children as young as three to six. Exclusion from play among young children is a clear sign of peer rejection. The research knowledge about the roots of sociability and its essentiality to our well-being has increased recently (Siegel, 2012). Social exclusion is a process where rejection and feelings of worthlessness and failure accumulate (Sajaniemi & Mäkelä, 2014). Peer rejection is also seen as a risk which may lead to bullying behavior or victimization (Godleski et al., 2014).

Bullying is particularly problematic for children with special educational needs (SEN). According to the principles of inclusion, the perceived need for special education no longer requires a medical or psychological evaluation. Segregating and separating children according to their diagnosis or specific needs might be a human rights issue (Gustafsson, 2011). In the City of Vantaa no classification system was used. The children were categorized as SEN children according to the city principles, where the need for special education was agreed for each child separately in a pedagogical meeting. Of the children surveyed in this study, 11% received SEN assistance. Of these children, 13.2% were bullies, 7.9% were victims and 6.3% were bully-victims. In other words, the prevalence of bullies and victims was twice as high as among other children, and the amount of bully-victims was four times higher. According to the results, it was typical that primarily problems (special educational needs) are followed by secondary problems, such as peer rejection and bullying. Since bullying has such a high prevalence in this group, further research might help in finding out which primary difficulties might correlate with problematic peer relations and how to effectively help these children to participate in and be equal members of the child group.

The operational models of SEN and non-SEN children differed greatly. Bullies with SEN used more physical forms of bullying such as shoving and kicking others, or throwing stones and sand at others significantly more often than bullies without SEN. It is understandable that a child with these behaviors may well be rejected and excluded. To be able to guide the pathways of SEN children it is critical to understand the individual learning process of each child that needs special support. Peer rejection deprives individuals from opportunities to practice various social competences. It can also be assumed that these children lack the skills to manage the more complex social entities required in different forms of psychological bullying (e.g., manipulation or blackmail). To learn coping strategies for peer rejection and emotional stress might be an important developmental task that improves children’s social skills and thereby also strengthens the cohesion of the child group (Reunamo et al., 2014; Godleski et al., 2014).
The high proportion of children with SEN involved in bullying should be taken into account when preventing bullying, and programs should strongly support the inclusion of these children. Studies have demonstrated that children with SEN are more accepted within their peer group if there is an open communication about their SEN (Frederickson, 2010). It has also been demonstrated that children with SEN are less victimized in inclusive school settings than in segregated school settings (Rose et al., 2011). Teachers need to create a climate that encourages the group as a whole to accept children with SEN.

According to the results, the use of psychological forms of bullying were significantly more common among younger children (years 3 and 4) without SEN than among older children (years 5 and 6) and at the same time physical forms of bullying decreased significantly by age among children without SEN. Instead, among children with SEN physical bullying did not decrease with age. Observations support the hypothesis that proactively aggressive children can have fairly developed social skills (Sutton et al., 1999), and that they have the competence needed to control their social networks in various ways, such as manipulating their peers. The psychological forms of bullying are manipulative in their nature.

Thus, it seems that there are two types of bullies among young children; children with SEN using reactive aggression like throwing sand and stones towards others and children without SEN using proactive aggression like exclusion of others. The former are often also peer rejected and excluded and thus also victims. These types of bullies have been observed previously in the school environment and according to this study the pathways are already observable in early childhood.

The one aim of this current study was to study if any pedagogical or/ and organizational factors were related to bullying. This was done by examining the ways how bullying was intervened (what happens after the child has misbehaved), group sizes, the educational backgrounds of the participants and the action plan against bullying.

According to the results, nearly all respondents reported that they discuss (94%) with the child. Discussion with the child was categorized in the relationship-listening category (according to Wolfgang and Wolgang described earlier). Apologizing was also very common (98.5%). Further, 76% of preschool teachers and practical nurses used or have seen used a penalty bench (time out), and 37% used or have seen used isolation (exclusion) as a punishment when a child has misbehaved, for example bullied others. Hence, all categories were used simultaneously and the respondent’s pedagogical ways of handling bullying behavior varied.

Some other strict ‘rules and consequences’-type methods emerged, like banning the child from play, being sent to the younger children’s group (this was particularly used for boys) and threatening with removal to the younger children’s group (this was more common for girls). In their study Erden and Wolfgang (2004) also found that preschool teachers used more rules and consequences-based methods when the misbehaving child was a boy, and confronting-contracting –methods when the misbehaving child was a girl. In addition, in child groups where strict discipline methods were used, more bullying occurred than in groups where more sensitive methods were adopted. Further, in those groups that used strict methods the respondents felt that they were incapable of stopping bullying behavior and that
children were not treated with warmth and love. This strongly indicates that by using time out methods children do not learn alternative ways of behaving.

Strict methods of punishment were brought up in the children’s interviews, too. Children seemed to have strongly internalized the penalty bench method. In his master’s dissertation, Mäkelä (2009) examined the development of children’s morality as well as how they felt about the punishment they had received. He outlined three categories of punishments. One was exclusion from play, which was by far the most common way preschool children perceived punishment. Exclusion from play and apologizing was also seen as coming from an authoritarian perspective rather than aiding in the development of the morality required to understand the situation. Commonly with anti-bullying programs for schools, the operational models and principles emphasize the importance of setting firm limits to unacceptable behavior, having commonly shared consequences when rules are broken, and the existence of authorities (e.g., Olweus & Limber, 2010). Even though the experts of bullying prevention highlight the use of nonphysical and non-hostile negative consequences when rules are broken, there is a general and persistent societal assumption that bullying behavior has to be punished. The general atmosphere even seems to indicate that punishments for bullying among school children and adolescents should be even harsher than they are now (e.g., Helsingin Sanomat 11.8.2014). In the light of the research, all methods that stress otherness strengthen feelings of exclusion and are therefore harmful to children. (Siegel & Bryson, 2014). In addition, it entitles children to adopt exclusion tactics themselves in later life. In a hostile climate it is difficult to build a sense of safe cohesion in a child group. Insufficient preventive practices might jeopardize children’s well-being and participation in the group, especially for children with increased developmental risks. Since bullying among adolescents and adults can meet criminal criteria, calling for harsher punishment is somewhat understandable. Nevertheless, there is a very real risk that these common societal attitudes ‘trickle down’ to include even younger children. On the other hand, it is possible that the use of tough measures were not meant to punish children but to teach children. If preschool teachers and early childhood professionals have powerful beliefs about behaviorist views and beliefs about children’s learning, they might consider that this is the best way to teach appropriate behavior.

The results of this study point to the need for a public discussion concerning discipline methods and behavioristic thinking in early childhood education. The lack of discussion means that personal values, choices and beliefs are allowed unchecked sway. The criticism of education in which learning is externalized as rewards and punishments is not new (Deci, 1971). By externalizing learning and basing it on rewards or punishments we even might weaken the individual’s internal motivation. Internal motivation and aims are also related to an individual’s well-being (Martela, 2014), which further affects group cohesion. As the child has naturally an internal motivation to behave positively in relation to others and towards others, we should strengthen this in a positive manner and abandon methods that weaken internal motivation.

One of the research questions was whether bullying as a group process is already present in early childhood educational groups. One aim was to find out
whether preventive methods and actions should be aimed primarily at the individual or the group level. It has been suggested that bullying as a dyadic interpersonal phenomenon is more prevalent among younger children than later at school. According to our results, bullying did indeed appear to be a group progress even among preschool-age children, especially among boys. Hence, this study found similar indications than those of Baron-Cohen (2010), according to which group-characteristic bullying is particularly common among boys. According to the results, if the adults working in the same child group had a common agreement on how to intervene and to prevent bullying, the number of peripheral roles was lower than in those groups that did not have common agreements. Paying attention to group norms concerning how to achieve status and power in the child group especially among boys could be an effective way of preventing bullying, and it should start as early as in preschool. In the light of these results the adult’s role is to build an environment in which children can learn such ways of interacting with peers that do not fall within exclusion.

Of the organizational factors, it came as something of a surprise that the size of the group did not make a difference. There was no more bullying in larger groups than there were in small ones. In fact, the opposite was the case: bullying was more prevalent in smaller groups. This may be caused by the fact that SEN children are often situated in smaller groups, or the group size has been cut. It is, however, a significant finding that the prevalence of bullying cannot be explained by group size. Even though large group sizes have numerous negative effects on children (e.g., Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2010), it is too simplistic to assume that larger groups mean more bullying and vice versa. The higher the educational level of respondents, the more they reported bullying. This may indicate that people with a higher education recognize bullying better than those with lower education. Thus, bullying prevention should be a part of the teacher’s and practical nurses basic and updated training.

The law for basic education (compulsory education and preschool) requires both schools and preschool groups to have a written proposal on how to protect students from bullying, harassment and violence. Preschoolers under six years old do not have the same requirement. Despite the fact that The Act on Children’s Day Care (1973) does not require an action plan against bullying in early childhood education, many municipalities in Finland have added the prevention of bullying in early childhood education to their municipal-specific plans and require that plans are also prepared for early childhood education units. This is sensible, taking into account the fact that the majority of preschool groups are located in kindergartens. However, there are no substantive recommendations about what kinds of preventive practices or issues the action plan should consider. A non-governmental child welfare organization in Finland has published a non-academic book about bullying in preschool. It contains practical instructions on how to develop an action plan for preventing bullying in Finnish preschools (Kirves & Stoor-Grenner, 2011). Many preschools have drawn up action plans on the basis of that report. However, no evaluations have been made that suggest that an action plan (in school or in preschool) actually reduces bullying. According to the results of this study, whether the preschool had this plan or not had no effect on the prevalence of bullying. The
existence of the plan did, however, correlate with many positive issues that can be assumed to reduce bullying indirectly. In the child groups that had a plan, different pedagogic solutions were tried out and evaluated more often than in child groups without a plan. Since the planning concept is a very recent introduction, we cannot draw any reliable conclusions at this stage, and more research is needed.

6.1 Research frames and methods

There were limitations to this investigation. There are several considerations worth mentioning when studying bullying among young children. As Vlachou et al. (2013) have stated, measuring bullying behaviors among young children is challenging. It is hard to draw reliable data on a topic that is both difficult to define and very subjective. Attention should be paid to the age of the children involved in this study. The developmental differences in linguistic and social skills between children aged three and six vary a lot. What can be expected from six years old might be developmentally unbearable for children aged three.

Bullying research among young children requires also accurate ethical consideration. The major problem when studying bullying among preschool children is the lack of proper tools. The results may appear differently depending on the data collection methods used: we need to consider who to ask and how to ask, especially among young children, when children’s developmental factors are taken into account.

As far as I know, there are no questionnaires that have been tested to measure the prevalence of bullying in early childhood education. Thus, a questionnaire was designed for this study. With regard to self- and peer-ratings techniques, I chose teacher-ratings as the technique concerning very young children even though this meant that the study includes only the bullying that adults have recognized.

The qualitative material does, however, support the results drawn from interviewing preschool teachers. In further research it is important to consider the methods used in collecting data on bullying among young children, as well as the observational methods used. Monks and Smith (2010), among others, have discussed children’s ability to recognize and report the different roles inherent in a bullying situation within their group. According to Alsaker and Nägele (2008), young children clearly recognize bullies within their group but have difficulties in recognizing victims. Perren (2000) and Gillies-Rezo and Bosackin (2003) noticed that almost all children reported having been bullied (87%). According to researchers, future studies should pay attention to children’s ability to assess their own roles in bullying situations. It has been suggested that preschool teachers are able to evaluate bullies and victims most reliably (Alsaker & Nägele, 2008; Ladd & Profi-let, 1996). However, it should be noted that all bullying, especially psychological bullying, is not always perceivable to adults (Peura et al., 2009). In addition, aggressive behavior in early childhood can also be confused with bullying behavior and the differences may be difficult to identify. This has been supported by Vlachou’s et al. study (2013), where teachers had difficulties in distinguishing bullying from other conflicts. They deduce that the research into bullying among
small children is hindered by the difficulties in defining concepts, as well as the paucity of relevant concepts and the lack of valid measuring instruments. In the future, research mixed methods, including video-based observations, might be a reliable way to measure and observe the dynamics of the child group.

The results of this study revealed that children with SEN were often involved in bullying situations. The questionnaire did not separate different specific needs that these children had. Thus, the data do not permit us to take a closer look on these children’s needs. Although, it is good that this does not stigmatize certain children with certain disabilities to be bullies or victims, more detailed information about the needs of these children would help early childhood professionals to recognize the risks. The subject indeed merits additional study.

6.2 Closing words

Young children practice their skills in everyday situations. Since anti-bullying work among young children is preventive by nature, it has to take place in those everyday situations in which children practice getting along with others as well as their self-regulating abilities; situational pedagogic choices are of utmost importance in the prevention of bullying. Therefore, it does matter what kinds of pedagogic choices are made, and how legislation and the national curricula direct this decision-making process.

Legislative documents in early education do not identify bullying (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2005; Act on Children’s Day Care, 1973). However, it is legally required that every school has an action plan to protect students from violence, bullying and harassment (Finnish Basic Education Act, 2013/1267, §29). The law covers children from age 6 (4hours/day) all the way to children age 18. Legislation concerning bullying should be extended to cover the entire pedagogic and educational path of a child. Consistent work requires training and commitment from the regulating authorities. Efficient procedural programs that recognize the developmental uniqueness of small children can be designed based on legislation and by standardized documentation.

All preschool classes in Sweden are required by law to compile a plan for equal treatment, including intervention and prevention of bullying (Lag, 2006:67, §67). In Norway, several political parties have signed a manifesto directed at eradicating bullying, which applies to daycare as well (Manifest mot mobbing 2011–2014, 2010). At the time of the writing of this study, Finnish early childhood education is experiencing significant changes. In early 2013, its administration was relocated from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Education and Culture. Existing legislation for daycare is going through a reform to become a new law on early childhood education and it should include an obligation to conduct anti-bullying work.

According to the results, preventive measures should be aimed at both individual and group levels already in early childhood educational groups. In preventing bullying, it is essential to construct the environment and the child group so that each child can experience a sense of being an equal, involved member of the group.
Instead of the children’s individual personality traits, the emphasis lies on an adult acting in a sensitive pedagogic manner. A sensitive adult notices children’s initiatives and messages and replies in a manner meaningful to the child. In this manner the adult encourages children to act within their own developmental level and gives individual support to them. This enhances the child’s ability to learn in an involved manner and to seek solutions in interaction with other children as well as adults. This requires a safe environment where every member can feel that they belong to the group. Instead of viewing bullying as an individual behavioral disorder or a personal trait, the educators should focus on strengthening the group norms against bullying, make sure that bullying is not rewarded by bystanders, and support the positive and prosocial behavior in a child group.

Altering the concept of learning away from rewards and punishments enables the adult to consider various pedagogic means to aid the children in learning interpersonal skills more efficiently. Since children involved in bullying are often those in need of special support for their growth and development, it is especially important to select the appropriate pedagogic methods to assist their learning in order to prevent any peer relationship issues and strengthen all children’s inherent prosocial skills. Bullying prevention among young children is based on strengthening the individual internal motivation towards prosocial behavior. This is considered important in order to reach children who behave offensively towards other children. Adults taking active part in games and play with children enable the development of group cohesion. Young as well as older children are motivated by feelings of competence and relatedness to others. Exclusion, coming from peer or adults, jeopardized this feeling of relatedness. A child that feels that she/he has a competence to cope in different situations successfully and at the same time feel a sense of relatedness to others in a child group does not feel the need to act offensively towards others.
References


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Keltikangas-Järvinen, L. (2010). *Sosiaalisuus ja sosiaaliset taidot* [Sociability and social skills]. Helsinki: WSOY.


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Appendix 1

A survey on bullying within early childhood education

A questionnaire for the preschool teachers and early childhood professionals pedagogic for children aged 3 to 6

Read the instructions carefully before answering. Answering the entire questionnaire will take approx. 15 minutes. Before beginning make sure you have a list of the children in your group at hand.

Data cannot be saved before the end of the survey. If you have to interrupt answering the survey, please begin at the top again when you return to it. The survey cannot identify individual people and results reported will not identify any single preschool. The City of Vantaa has given permission for this survey, which is part of the author’s dissertation research “Bullying in early childhood education and how to prevent it” for the University of Helsinki’s Faculty of Behavioral Sciences.

For more information contact: Laura Repo, laura.repo@helsinki.fi

Background

Name of the preschool: [pull-down menu]  
My education:
- Kindergarten teacher, vocational school
- Bachelor of Early Childhood Education
- Master of Early Childhood Education
- Bachelor of Social Services
- Social pedagogics degree
- Practical nurse
- Daycare nurse
- Childcare nurse
- Other, what?

My working experience in preschools:
- 0—1 years
- 1—5 years
- 5—10 years
- Over 10 years

My preschool has:
- Less that 30 children
- 30—60 children
- 60—100 children
- Over 100 children

I am:
- Female
- Male
**Definition of special needs:**
In this survey, the term ‘special needs child’ means a child who has been qualified as requiring special support, having been assessed by an expert or the early childhood special education board.

**Definition of bullying:**
Not all conflicts between children are bullying. Typical traits for bullying are repetitiveness, intentionality and the victims’ inability to defend themselves (power imbalance). Two children fighting on an equal level is not bullying. The intentionality means that the bullying behavior is intended to hurt the victim directly or indirectly, for example by damaging their friendships. Bullying causes negative emotions in its victim.

Please answer these questions as they apply to your own preschool group during this operational term (autumn 2010 - spring 2011)

How many children are there in your group?: _____
How many girls are there in your group?: _____
How many boys are there in your group?: _____
How many special needs children are there in your group?: _____
How many children with immigrant backgrounds are there in your group?: _____
How many preschool teachers and early childhood professionals do you have working with your group?: _____
Total number of adults working with your group?: _____

(a) Bullying

Is there a plan for bullying prevention and intervention in action at your preschool?

Yes / yes, we have started drafting the plan / yes, the decision to introduce a plan has been made

No

I don’t know

Has your preschool professionals (the staff) discussed bullying among children?

Yes

No

I don’t know

Have you received any training specific to bullying situations?

Yes

No

Do you think there is bullying among children under school age?

Yes

No

I don’t know
The frequency and different forms of bullying

In the following section, fill in information on only those children in your group who have bullied others or have been victims themselves (according to the definition above). If the child has both bullied another child and has been a victim of bullying, tick box bully-victim. There is also a list of different types of bullying. First, decide on which child you are reporting, then fill in their age and then tick all options that apply to that child.

The grid has room for reporting six children. If there are more bullies/victims in your group, push the button *more children* and you will be supplied with extra grids.

Child 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>A child has used or been a target to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o Victim</td>
<td>Age: _____</td>
<td>Hitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Bully</td>
<td>o Girl</td>
<td>Kicking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Bully-victim</td>
<td>o Boy</td>
<td>Tripping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Need for special education</td>
<td>Pushing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Immigrant background</td>
<td>Obstructing the victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tearing clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pinching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Throwing rocks and sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Messing up playing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chasing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Name-calling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mocking</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pointing and laughing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Commenting on hair, clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Threatening</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manipulating</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blackmailing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Making faces, grinning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Excluding</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Changing the rules of a play</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ignoring</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talking behind one’s back</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Child 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>A child has used or been a target to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○ Victim</td>
<td>Age: _____</td>
<td>Hitting, Kicking, Tripping, Pushing, Obstructing the victim, Tearing clothes, Pinching, Throwing rocks and sand, Messing up playing, Chasing, Name-calling, Mocking, Teasing, Pointing and laughing, Commenting on hair, clothes, Threatening, Manipulating, Blackmailing, Making faces, grinning, Excluding, Changing the rules of a play, Ignoring, Talking behind one’s back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Bully</td>
<td>o Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Bully-victim</td>
<td>o Boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Need for special education</td>
<td>o Immigrant background</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>A child has used or been a target to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○ Victim</td>
<td>Age: _____</td>
<td>Hitting, Kicking, Tripping, Pushing, Obstructing the victim, Tearing clothes, Pinching, Throwing rocks and sand, Messing up playing, Chasing, Name-calling, Mocking, Teasing, Pointing and laughing, Commenting on hair, clothes, Threatening, Manipulating, Blackmailing, Making faces, grinning, Excluding, Changing the rules of a play, Ignoring, Talking behind one’s back</td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Bully</td>
<td>o Girl</td>
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<tr>
<td>○ Bully-victim</td>
<td>o Boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Need for special education</td>
<td>o Immigrant background</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
(b) Bystanders’ roles

There may be other roles within the group besides bullies, victims and bully-victims. There are bullying assistants, who take part in the bullying situations and support or aid the bully. Bullying reinforcers maintain the bullying by laughing or watching, in example. Defenders take the victim’s side and try to stop the bullying. An outsider doesn’t want or dare get involved, but will stand aside passively.

Now think of the children in your group. Are any of these roles found among them?

Assistants (yes/ no / I don’t know)
Reinforcers (yes/ no / I don’t know)
Defenders (yes/ no / I don’t know)
Outsiders (yes/ no / I don’t know)

(c) Intervening in bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying situations are handled well in your preschool.</td>
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<td>Your preschool has common agreements to solve bullying situations.</td>
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<td>If bullying situations have occurred and an intervention has been carried out, has the bullying stopped?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you feel that the victim has received help?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you feel that the bully has received help?</td>
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<td>Do you feel that you can handle bullying situations in the preschool?</td>
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<td>If needed, do you get support from your supervisor for solving bullying situations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If needed, do you get support from your colleagues for solving bullying situations?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(d) Consequences of bullying

Sometimes, a child’s behavior leads to sanctions or punishment—in example when the child has picked on others or misbehaved against others. What kinds of sanctions or forms of punishment have you encountered in your work?

- Discussions with the child
- Time-out
- Penalty bench
- Threats of moving the child to the toddlers’ group to learn how to behave
- Moving the child to the toddlers’ group
Apologizing
Other children are allowed to decide the penalty
Isolating the child from other children
Reprimanding
Leaving the child without dessert

Do children get punished in preschools? If you have encountered any forms of punishment, what have they been?

_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________________

(e) Bullying prevention climate
Please answer the following statements as applies to you entire preschool.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our preschool has a positive climate.</td>
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<td>There is enough time reserved for discussions related to education.</td>
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<td>Different pedagogical solutions are tested.</td>
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<td>Different approaches are assessed together.</td>
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<td>I believe that children feel safe in our preschool.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s individual needs are taken care of.</td>
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<td>The children are taken care of in a warm and loving manner.</td>
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<td>The parents are satisfied with the operation of the preschool.</td>
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<td>The director takes care of the flow of information within the preschool.</td>
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<td>The director is involved when pedagogical solutions are considered.</td>
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<td>The employees of the preschool have an opportunity to participate in training sessions.</td>
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</table>

Thank you for your time!

Once you’ve filled in all the answers, send them by clicking here.
Appendix 2. The interview frame of children, parents and preschool teachers and early childhood professionals

Children’s interviews

Let’s talk about you and your friends here in preschool for a moment. I would like to hear about it, but first I would like to know what do you like the most here in your preschool?

- What is your favorite play or activity?
- Well, what’s your favorite food here?
- Is there something that you do not like so much?
- Who do you play with? Do you think you have good friends here?
- Do you like to spend your time here in preschool?

However, some children are not necessarily friends to each other. Sometimes some can bully the other. What do you think happens then? What do you think bullying means?

- So you ever feel sad or bad here in preschool? What kinds of things can cause sadness?
- Do the other children cause you sadness ever?
- Have you noticed that some of your classmates do not have any friends at all? Can you tell why he/she does not have any friends?
- Have you noticed that some of your classmates bosses the others? What happens then?
- Have you been bullied by others? Have you seen bullying? Have you bullied others? Can you tell me more, what happened?
- If there has been bullying in your class and the adults sees that, what do the adults do then? What do the adult say? What happens after someone has bullied?

The employee’s interviews

- How would you define and/or described bullying among preschool children?
- Does it differ in some way from what you think bullying among older children means /school bullying.
- So you thinks bullying occur already here in preschool?
- At what age you think children become aware of doing wrong or that something causes bad feeling to others?
- Do you think we can talk about bullying when it comes to young children?
- How bullying and quarreling differs? How is it able to recognize the difference?
- What forms bullying gets among young children? Where children bully each other (outside, inside, during play)?
- Is it possible to answer a question that why children argue? (most commonly)
- Could you tell me about the child group you work with and the social network within it?
- Do you recognize differences in bullying between girls and boys?
Research about school bullying has identified that all children have some kind of role in bullying situations, like bully, victim, bully-victim, assistant, reinforcer, outsider or defender. Do you find these roles in your child group?

What would you need that you would be able to prevent bullying? (tools, education, books etc)

**Parent’s interviews**

Do you think your child enjoys being here in preschool? Is she/he happy to leave to preschool in mornings?
How old is your child?
For how long has he/she been in this same child group?
Do you feel that your child has friends here?
Have you ever felt she/he is alone/loneliness?
Do you think children in preschool age can bully each other?
What do you think bullying means? How would you define or describe bullying?
How bullying and quarreling differs? How is it able to recognize the difference?
What forms bullying gets among young children?
How can a parent know if there is something going on in the child group? For example your child is been bullied?
At what age you think children become aware of doing wrong or that something causes bad feeling to others?
Do you know if there is someone who has no friends in your child’s child group?
Do you feel that you are somehow under pressure to buy some certain toys or clothes, that your child would be better approved in the child group?
Have you talked about bullying with the staff? In general
Would you like to tell something that relates to bullying in preschool?