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“And If Something, Antiracism Is a Pedagogical Matter” - Finnish Early Childhood Education Teachers’ Understanding and Experiences of Antiracism and White Normativity

Saara Loukola

Majoring in Education and Social Studies of Gender
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Supervisor: Jan-Olof Nilsson, Department of Sociology, University of Lund,
Sweden

Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) builds the base for a child's learning and socialization. Studies prove that racism and unequal treatment are present already in early childhood education, affecting negatively on an individual's wellbeing. Antiracism is seen as a way to act against racism and lessen inequality. Via interviews of six ECE teachers working in Finland, this study analyzes if they recognize the need for an antiracist approach in their work. Further, their understanding and experiences of racism, antiracism, and white normativity in early childhood education and in their work are analyzed from the interviews with content analysis. This study presents descriptions how racism appearances in different forms in ECE, such as direct racist acts or speech, denial of racism, ignorance and indifference and colorblind approaches. Racism is clear in structures and as an overarching white normativity. Many respondents have adopted an active role as developing antiracists and mention courage, an active stance against racism and self-reflection crucial. They name different ways of adapting an antiracist approach in their education such as choosing material that challenges white normativity in its themes, pedagogical choices and treating each family as unique. The lack of support from the work community is seen as a preventing factor for adopting an antiracist approach, and the respondents emphasize the importance of the whole work community and the director committing to the antiracist principles. Thus, more studies focusing especially on the collaborative work among education teams and educators' ability to recognize racism, especially in the peer relation of children, are needed.

Keywords: early childhood education, critical pedagogy, antiracism, racism, white normativity

Popular science summary

In this study, teachers working in early childhood education (ECE) institutions in Finland observe racism appearing in many forms in daycares. It is apparent not only as direct racist acts or speech, but also as denying, ignorant or indifferent attitudes towards racism. Racism can also appear as colorblind attitudes (such as: “I don’t see color, just people”) or in structures, i.e., families of the children attending to the daycare falling between the services like daycare and child health centers. When education renews inequality and racism in society, an antiracist approach is needed. It can be described as an active stance against racism, aiming to lessen inequality. An antiracist approach is linked to dismantling white normativity. White normativity can be described as how some people are categorized as white and some as non-white (or, i.e., black or brown) and whiteness serves as a norm that everything else is compared against to.

In this study I analyze if ECE teachers observe the need for antiracism, how they define it and what are their experiences of applying antiracist education approaches in their work. The analysis is done from the interviews of six Finnish early childhood education (ECE) teachers, who participated in a 2-hour training ordered by the municipality of Helsinki and executed by the Peace Education Institute during Autumn 2020.

All the interviewees see the need for antiracism in ECE. They think that equality and equity are important in their work and see antiracism as a way to promote them. Many of the interviewees see themselves as developing antiracists and aim to adopt a braver and a more active and reflexive stance against racism. Many of them do concrete actions forwarding antiracism in their work. These actions can be pedagogical choices, selecting material and treating all families as unique. However, the whole work community seems not to be always committed to antiracism. The participation of the whole work community and the support from the supervisor are needed to adopt an antiracist approach successfully.

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1. Introduction and the research problem

In the field of education cultural values are forwarded, and students are socialized to them but this process often remains unacknowledged. As educator and philosopher Paulo Freire writes, education can never be neutral (1996, 16). On the contrary, it reflects societal and hegemonic ideals and functions as a field of power and norms. In this study, I analyze teachers' understanding of racism, antiracism, and white normativity in early childhood education. This study focuses on early childhood education (ECE) teachers, since the base for socialization is built in early childhood education, as well as the base for each child's individual growth and learning. Educators often see themselves as fair and treating children in their class equally, but recent research of equality in Finnish education proves that this might not be the reality their students experience. Instead, they have experiences of inequality, discrimination and eurocentrism (i.e., ETNO 2020, Juva 2019, Souto 2011, Zacheus 2020, introduced further on).

EU-survey” Being Black in the EU” studies experiences of racism of people of African descent living in 12 different EU countries (Finland, Luxembourg, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Austria, France, Portugal, Great Britain, Malta). The results show that 63% of participants in Finland experienced racist harassment within a time period of the previous five years. Furthermore, the percentage of participants perceiving racist violence (14%) is one of the highest and that being so, the results place Finland as the most racist country among the researched EU countries (2018.) Another report on discrimination experienced by people of African descent living in Finland, by the Finnish Non-discrimination Ombudsman, shows that every fifth of the respondents faced racial discrimination already while attending an early childhood education institution (2020). In addition to these, in a study for the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, Shadia Rask and Anu Castaneda research how experiences of discrimination connect to the well-being and acculturation of the population of foreign background in Finland. 40% of the respondents had

experienced some kind of discrimination within a year, and for those who have moved to Finland from Africa (excluding North-Africa) the number is as high as 56% percent. Further, the research shows a clear connection between experiences of discrimination and psychic stress in all groups (2019, 239–241). Psychic stress is also apparent in an earlier study by Rask et al., where the result show that people with Russian, Somalian or Kurdish origin, living in Finland, tend to more commonly have experiences of subtle discrimination rather than overt discrimination. However, all experiences of discrimination increased the likelihood of experiencing poor self-reported health, limiting long-term illness or disability and mental health symptoms (2018).

Thus, from research it is clear that racism impacts negatively both physical and mental wellbeing of an individual and thus, racism in education is a threat to the wellbeing of an individual learner. This seems contrary to the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, where article 2 particularly demands state parties to “take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination...” (1989). Finland is committed to the Rights of the Child, and therefore if racism and unequal treatment in education institutions continue, these rights are violated. Similarly, at the core of the binding curriculum provided for early childhood education by the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, is the importance of the child's feeling of safety and of being seen and heard. Racism or other forms of discrimination (i.e., bullying) are not accepted by anyone or in any form (EDUFI, 2016.) In addition to these, all legally binding documents, Helsinki’s Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care demands educators to actively work against discrimination, inequality and inequity. It clearly states that “ECEC prevents and identifies racist and discriminatory activities and makes interventions. No form of bullying, racism or violence is tolerated from anyone” (2019, 6). Hence, in Helsinki’s curriculum the demand and commitment for antiracist education and action are clear. Thus, the urgency of adopting an antiracist approach to education can be observed in these alarming studies and legal obligations. Antiracism can be

described as a way to dismantle racism, acknowledge norms built around whiteness and promote equality and equity. Minna Seikkula writes in her dissertation about antiracism in activist and NGO discussions in Finland, that there might be different understandings, ways of use and points of view on antiracism (2020, 2–5). However, one of the common principles of an antiracist approach is that it demands an active stance against racism. Non-acceptance towards racism is merely retaining the racial status quo, whereas an antiracist approach demands actions. Ibram X. Kendi, founding director of the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, summarizes how there is no in-between safe space between racist and non-racist. The opposite of racist is not “not racist” but an antiracist committing to acts lessening inequality and racism (2019.)

This study focuses on the experiences of adopting an antiracist approach by early childhood education (ECE) teachers, who participated in a 2-hour antiracist training during Autumn 2020. The training was organized by the Peace Education Institute (RKI) and ordered by the municipality of Helsinki. The aim of the training was to develop personnel’s ability to recognize and intervene in racism. Participants were encouraged to continue and develop antiracist work in their institutions after the training with the learning material provided to them. The training was targeted at whole ECE work communities, not only those who personally found the topic important or work as teachers. In Finland, a team of professionals working together in ECE institutions typically consists of three people, either a childcare nurse and two teachers or two teachers and a childcare nurse. Childcare nurses usually qualify from a vocational school in social work or health care. Teachers are obliged to have a higher education degree (Bachelor of Early Childhood Education from university, or Bachelor of Social Services from university of applied sciences), and are the ones with the main pedagogical responsibility in the groups. Researchers of teacher leadership, Leena Halttunen, Manjula Waniganayake & Johanna Heikka, conclude that in early childhood education teams, the pedagogical responsibility is at the core of the teacher’s

position and teachers are recognized in the teams as the team leaders (2019, 144). In addition to this, planning, evaluating and developing pedagogical choices is part of ECE teachers' work duties (Trade Union of Education, OAJ, 2019). For these reasons, teachers are supposed to have more possibilities and power to reflect the pedagogical choices in their team, as well as in their personal position as teachers, and hence are the main targets of this study.

In conclusion, due to racism the legal obligations for democracy and equality in education are not met and children's rights and wellbeing are compromised. There is no research done on ECE teachers' approach towards antiracism in a Finnish context, even though racism is apparent in ECE, thus this study aims to fill a knowledge gap. ECE teachers are in a crucial role in the adoption of new pedagogical choices in their teams, and I study teachers' ideas about and actions of antiracism, following Kendi's idea of the intertwining nature of actions and ideas: "An antiracist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy by their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (2019, 22–23). Research questions aim to link praxis reflectively to the conceptual understanding of the terms and analyze how they intertwine and are concretized. Therefore, the research questions of this study are:

- 1. Do ECE teachers observe the need for antiracism in the ECE institutions?*
- 2. How do ECE teachers understand and define an antiracist approach and white normativity?*
- 3. What are the experiences of ECE teachers of applying antiracist education approaches in their work?*

2. Research overview

2.1 Critical pedagogy and racism

The key concepts for the antiracism training for the education personnel of Helsinki are i.e., white normativity and hegemonic power, denaturalizing representations of whiteness, racism/antiracism at the structural level, the difference between multicultural and antiracist approaches and racial normativity in the Finnish education context. These concepts are used in this study as well, thus, the key concepts for my thesis and the antiracist training are similar, and I introduce these theoretical concepts in the following chapters. The topic will be further introduced via concepts of critical pedagogy, neo-racism, post-racism, multiculturalism, Nordic exceptionalism (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012), and "colorblindness" (Bonilla-Silva 2014). Due to the violent history of racism in the USA, research focusing on racism is frequently based in the USA and the questions of racism might appear in a different light in the Nordic countries. However, the mechanics of racism, racialization and oppression remain similar in different contexts. Even so, I have connected some theories from the USA to research done in Finland in order to analyze racism more specifically in different contexts.

Even though meritorious researchers have committed academic studies on racism in Finland, there is only little research done particularly on racism/antiracism per se in the Finnish education system. In his dissertation "Is There Such a Thing...? A Study of Antiracism Education in Finland" Aminkeng Atabong Alemanji contextualizes neo-racism and post-racism in Finnish education, presents Finnish exceptionalism, and highlights the importance of understanding the differences and similarities between antiracism and multiculturalism (2016). Finnish sociologist Anna Rastas has studied racism and antiracism from many different angles, such as her own role as a white researcher doing antiracist research (2004), experiences of children with transnational roots (2009), and the

emergence of race as a social category in northern Europe (2019). However, even if these and other authors on the topic occasionally refer to young children and early childhood education institutions, the overall focus is on either more general education and/or primary school or high school. Generally, research and conversation about “race” and racism in education is often hidden within blurry terms such as multiculturalism or diversity, whiteness remaining unacknowledged – as an example, much of the research focusing on ECE focuses on the multicultural viewpoint, with assimilation at its core. In addition to this, research on education and equality/equity, especially in ECE, is usually focusing on the equality of genders. Thus, there is very little research done on early childhood education and racism/antiracism in particular, and most of the available material is thesis studies.

However, there are studies made in Finland that show that especially students whose appearance differs from the white norm, face racism and discrimination in multiple different forms. Ina Juva describes in her dissertation about constructions of normality and exclusion in Finnish schools that teachers considered students, with an immigrant background who succeed in schools to be exceptions. Further, the image of immigrant students and students with an immigrant background is seen as a group sharing negative features and teachers see problematic behavior originating in their cultural backgrounds (2019). Tuomas Zacheus describes in his article about young people’s descriptions of racism. He reports that some school students see students with a foreign background as representatives of their culture and vocalize how they do not fit together with “Finnish culture” (2020.) These multiple mechanisms of racism, to which Zacheus refers to as well, are also described in the study of Anne-Mari Souto. In her dissertation, an ethnographic study of everyday racism in schools, Souto observes how school staff and students minimize racism, and racism is excluded only to racist subcultures, such as skinheads. Racism is acknowledged only as physical violence, and biased attitudes or abusive words are not recognized as forms of racism (2011). In much of the research about racism in schools, teachers understand racism as a problem

or a conflict between individual students, rather than seeing it as a societal structure that is reinforced in all the aspects of society and legitimized over centuries.

Legitimizing structures of racism and “race” studies have a long, intertwined history. Once "race" was researched as biological differences between groups of people, an idea that has since been proven false (i.e. Ranta & Kanninen 2019), whereas current, critical studies recognize "race" as a cultural construct. Many researchers, such as antiracist race critical scholar Alana Lentin, sum this shift of the perspective as what race *does* rather than what it *is* (2015). Alemanji describes this idea further: in racism, devaluation is the bottom line, and skin color is used as a weapon to devalue. Racism is not merely about skin color, but how skin color is used to build hierarchies and dehumanization (2016, 16.) In their article about critical multicultural education, Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy conclude how a socially dominant group is given the privilege to see themselves as individuals acting individually instead of seeing themselves as socialized members of a group (2010, 101). Thus, racialization is a mechanism where individuals are separated into different groups by their assumed features or appearance and treated primarily as the stereotypical representatives of their group. By creating imaginary social hierarchies, those individuals who are seen to represent a certain group, are treated unequally either consciously or unconsciously. This process of racialization leads to racist and discriminative actions. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes how there is very little disagreement formally in the field of social sciences about how race is a social and historical, changing category instead of an eternal and essential definition. He writes that even if race is a constructed category, it has a social reality, producing real effects on people racialized as i.e.,” black” or” white.” The social structure is formed to give systemic privileges for those racialized as” white” and labeled as Europeans, over those racialized as” nonwhite” and labeled as non-Europeans (2014, 9.) The systemic privileges might be, for example, easier access to wealth, healthcare, education/work and housing. This formation of giving systemic privileges for

those racialized as white is called white privilege. As a result, racial hierarchy is built, and whiteness becomes the unspeakable and unacknowledged norm. This racial hierarchy and the normative system of practices, ideas, and structures are called white normativity. And when the white body becomes the naturalized presumption, it then leads all other bodies categorized as "other than..." (Hill Collins 1986, 18). Thus, white normativity is a power position upheld with different mechanisms in different societies on all levels of society and in different societies. Acknowledging and dismantling white normativity is one of the cornerstones of an antiracist approach.

Sirma Bilge, a sociologist, writes how racism cannot be treated in a vacuum because racial oppression is always linked to other types of oppression as well (2013, 419). Hence, to be able to analyze racism, other power structures and hierarchies making oppressions possible have to be considered as well. These can be combined in an intersectional approach. Bilge and Patricia Hill Collins describe intersectionality as an analytical tool, a tool constructed by Black feminist activists and later academically established by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1990s, for recognizing a better framework for multiple oppressions black women face (2018, 12). Seikkula writes how skin tone, eye shape, and hair texture need to be acknowledged in academic analyses because they contribute to ideas of respectability and entitlement, and "race" is linked to other categories, such as sexuality and class, as well. Further, religious symbols, clothing and spoken languages are equally meaningful and "if these attributes are to be ignored, there is a risk of reproducing a pseudo-biology of race of its own" (2020, 28–31). Thus, using intersectional approach to analyze material and bodily reality is crucial for observing the reflections of the ideologies and mechanics of oppression. Intersectionality is needed to discuss whiteness as "an assemblage of multiple qualities that point to ruling hegemonic positions in racial hierarchies and can also be labeled the problem instead of racism" (Ibid, 28). Further, intersectionality has potential for change, since it is oriented towards social justice and transformative knowledge production in pedagogy as well (Bilge 2013, 405).

2.2 Nordic and Finnish exceptionalism

As mentioned earlier, studies of racism made in the USA can be seen as difficult to apply to studies made in Finland and other Nordic countries due to the different contexts and history of racism. However, even though the context and history of racism differ, the basic processes of racism and racialization remain similar. Thus, stressing the different histories might just be an excuse to deny racism in Northern countries. Nordic exceptionalism is a strategy of ...” placing racism *elsewhere*” (Rastas 2019, 358). Similarly, Kristín Loftsdóttir & Lars Jensen describe Nordic exceptionalism as an image where Nordic countries were not and are not involved in colonialism and racism (2012). In his research, Alemanji differentiates Nordic exceptionalism from the more specific *Finnish exceptionalism*. In his definition, Finnish exceptionalism differs from Nordic exceptionalism by claims of how Finland’s peripheral status historically distances it from the broader European colonialism. This created self-image differentiates Finland from many other European countries, leading Finland to adopt an active role as a” good global citizen” solving conflicts and civilizing other countries (2016, 24.) Elina Lahelma, scholar of sociology of education, writes how the position of” good global citizen” is strengthened by other myths connected to equality in Finland, for example, the myth of Finland as a country with exceptional gender equality (2012). This myth is further supported by educational material presenting Finland as an already equal country (Lahelma & Gordon, 2003). The myth of Finland as an exemplary country of equality and as a good global citizen overshadows the lived realities and historical structures of racism and colonialism of national minorities, for example, downplaying the oppression of the Sámi people continuing systematically for centuries. On the page of their website regarding Finland’s national culture- and language minorities, the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) lists national minorities as Sámi people, Roma people, Finnish Jewry, Tatar minority, Russian-speaking minority, Swedish-speaking Finns, and Karelian-speaking Karelians (n.d.). Kukka Ranta

and Jaana Kanninen have written a book about the forced assimilation of the Sámi people in Finland. They describe how the national narrative has portrayed Finland as a victim, underdog and united, and the idea of both the oppressors and oppressed within the nation-state did not fit into this picture, thus i.e., Sámi people have been excluded from the national narrative (2019, 25.) Later, the appearance of racism has been connected to a” turning point in the 1990’s”, when more migrants started to arrive in Finland and racism emerged as a research theme also within academia, with an attempt to build a narrative of Finland suddenly becoming multicultural/diverse or racist (Seikkula 2020, 11). In addition to national minorities, this image ignores, for example, Finns of African descent. In 2020 a square in Tampere, Finland was named after Rosa Clay (1875–1959), who was the first known black person to receive Finnish citizenship. The square is an important token for Finns of African descent as a way of showing that they are not” immigrants” but that they have a history in Finland (Rastas, 2019.)

In general, when compared to many other countries, the conversation around racism in Finland is fairly young. Rastas writes how the neo-racist strategy of avoiding discussing” race” and racism has led to a situation where languages lack the vocabulary to discuss racialized social relations (2019, 357). Further, in their critical book about multiculturalism in Finland, Laura Huttunen, Olli Löytty and Anna Rastas write how many of the terms relating to “multiculturalism” are brought to the Finnish conversation from elsewhere and retain historical and social traces of their previous use (2005, 18). For example, the abbreviation BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) does not have an established version in Finnish yet, and public conversation is often had with vague terms such as” immigrant-backgrounded” in comparison to “kantasuomalainen” in Finnish, translating perhaps to” the root Finn”, referring to a (white, non-minority) person with family roots and ancestry in Finland. Seikkula describes how the current Finnish language translation to the word racialized, “rodullistettu”, is being used as a synonym for a person of color. This way of using the word suggests that whiteness, then, is *not* a product of a racialization process (2020, 33.) Similar

observations apply to many other terms in Finnish, whiteness remaining unacknowledged. Tuuli Kurki, researcher of social justice and equality in education, analyzes in her dissertation the word "immigrant" and how it is used with othering intentions. The word, immigrant, does not necessarily link with an actual background of immigration, but is rather a synonym for "the Other." According to Kurki, the majority population does not consider the term insulting, but rather a term describing people from "other cultures." However, the people labeled as immigrants interpret this label as stigmatizing and minimizing, meaning to be worth "less than." Further, the term hides a range of different nationalities, backgrounds, languages, and religions and reasons for migration under one label. It also ignores the intersecting hierarchies between the groups (2018, 61.) Similarly, in Seikkula's research, the stereotype of "the immigrant" is often applied in Finland to everyone who is categorized as non-white (2020). The categories of "the root Finns" versus "the immigrants" serve as markers for people who belong and for those who remain excluded. Nandita Sharma, a sociologist, writes that the idea of people who "are seen to belong" is heavily naturalized and ideological practices of racism and nationalism cross-section and constitute the society from micro- to macro-level. She describes how even after gaining access to citizenship, social categories such as "second- (or third- or fourth- or fifth-) generation migrant" or "people with a migration background" are created to emphasize the role of "nativeness" in the nation and to exclude those wrong-typed "migrant" groups from the nation (2015, 110.) The word "immigrant" is a powerful rhetorical barrier. It prevents those who differ from the white norm and might have ancestors in another nation, no matter how many centuries away, from ever becoming full citizens but always staying fundamentally as the other, the immigrant. Sharma explains how racism is essential in creating the "others" in citizenship:

..." Ideas of 'race' closely and easily articulate with ideas of 'nationhood'. While ideas of 'race' tell us that each of us belongs to one discrete 'type' of people who are inherently unlike those in other groups, ideas of

‘nationhood’ tell us that each of us has a unique place in the world that is ours and ours alone. The ideological practices of racism and nationalism carve the world into separate state territories within which some people are seen to belong while others are not” (2015, 98.)

Therefore, the category of the immigrant is excluded, or at least hierarchically remarkably different, from the category of citizen. Rastas presents that one of the reasons for the blurred line between the term “immigrant” and people with descent elsewhere than Finland, might originate from that Nordic countries do not collect statistics based on race. Children whose parents have a background in another country can be observed in the statistics according to their parents’ country, but this does not provide sufficient information of racialized minorities (2019, 365.) Instead, this classification might enforce Sharma’s idea of “second- (or third- or fourth- or fifth-) generation migrant” (2015, 110).

3. Theoretical background

Freire argues that education is not neutral but instead repeats the oppressive structures of society, especially if the education itself is organized as a “banking model”, where students passively learn by repetition and memorizing without true connections. He also presents the idea of *the hidden curriculum*, of the cultural values, perspectives, and ways of learning that are also transferred in education but not formally taught. Freire suggests that education can either function as the practice of freedom or as the practice of domination; education always either socializes the next generation to the present system and hegemony or it can become a practice of freedom, when individuals critically reflect on the world and consider their possibilities of transforming it (1996.) Even though Freire’s focus is on learners considered to be adults, youth or older children, his concepts can be applied to early childhood education as well. Schools and early childhood education institutions are not value-free from the hegemonic, though sometimes invisible, norms of the society. As described earlier, whiteness serves as the

unacknowledged norm. In addition to this, even the pedagogical literature often has white males as a norm, and white people tend to be presented as the educational experts (Perlow 2018, 5). Therefore, the hidden curriculum is strongly linked to white normativity and racial hierarchies. Together they create an oppressive social structure renewing itself. The oppressive structures influence education institutions within those structures, and therefore homes and schools, starting from nurseries, exist in those structures, functioning as agencies preparing the oppressors of the next generation (Freire 1996, 135).

In this study concepts of colorblindness, post/neo-racism, antiracism and white normativity are connected to critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is non-normative and aims towards social change, and the concept has been presented and developed over the years. Contemporary critical pedagogy has several branches, such as emancipatory education, anti-oppressive education, transformative pedagogy (hooks, 1994), liberatory education and anti-bias curriculum. Well-known feminist and activist bell hooks criticizes Freire's approach to critical pedagogy as phallogocentric (1994) and scholar of critical pedagogy and critical studies of race, Ricky Lee Allen, criticizes it for focusing mainly on class (2004). To be able to apply Freire's theory despite these imperfections, hooks suggest taking "threads" of Freire's work and weaving it into her understanding of feminist pedagogy (1994, 52). Allen suggests that Freire's theory of oppressors must be connected to critique of whiteness (2004, 126). In this study, I adopt Freire's theory as a critique towards the idea of a neutral education process and as an understanding of power and possibilities of education as freeing from oppressors and structures upholding them, i.e., white supremacy. In this understanding, I view it similarly as one of the editors of the book "Black Women's Liberatory Pedagogies," Olivia N. Perlow, describing liberatory pedagogies as transmitting oppositional knowledge on white supremacist and patriarchal hegemony (2018, 2).

If critical reflection can be seen as a mode of action, as Freire suggests (1996, 109), then this study aims to both reflect the current antiracist conversation in the

context of Finnish early childhood education, and to escort respondents to reflect on their role as antiracist educators, as well as for me as a researcher to critically reflect my own position as a (white) researcher. I base this thesis on the feminist, critical stance where power structures are made visible and challenged, thus this study aims to approach education via a critical, feminist lens. Feminist philosopher, Sandra Harding writes that feminist standpoint theory is both explanatory and normative with the aims of social justice towards ideal society (2004, 2). Feminist research aims for social change, and standpoint theory challenges the idea that knowledge production is objective, and it should not be political. It has been assumed that education should be "neutral" and not political, while simultaneously via a hidden curriculum it promotes certain values – but those are hegemonically accepted, thus invisible. Feminist research has been criticizing similar claims to knowledge production. It is noteworthy how Harding demands to take everyday life as problematic (2004, 50). Education and racism intertwining is a matter of everyday life and praxis, and it has to be denaturalized to be able to face a critical gaze. In this light, one could argue that critical education stands with the same grounding as standpoint theory, aiming towards social justice and equal society. Therefore, this study is deeply grounded in the traditions of critical pedagogy and feminist theories challenging the power structures of society.

3.1 Post-racism and neo-racism

Cheryl Matias and Janiece Mackey, whose areas of expertise are critical whiteness in antiracist teaching, state how in order to apply antiracist approaches, one must learn to understand racism first (2016, 34). Discussions of race have changed from "biological" racism, where racial hierarchies were built by measurement and estimation of physical features, to current, more nuanced and subtle versions. Kendi describes this as the result of the Nazi holocaust and its eugenics, leading to cultural racism replacing biological racism in society. In cultural racism, cultural hierarchy is established by creation of a cultural standard, to which other cultures are measured against. This cultural standard is defined by the dominant group

(2018, 83–84.) Philomena Essed, the writer of the well-known book about everyday racism, defines this process: “to proceed from ‘race’ to ‘culture’ as the key organizing concept of oppression, the ‘other’ must be culturalized. In that process the concept of ‘culture’ is reduced to (perceptions of) tradition as cultural constraints. Cultural hierarchies are constructed and sustained, but the dominant culture is never made explicit” (Essed 1991, 171.) Thus, in cultural racism, the cultural standard is determined by the superior group for its benefits, and it is deploying similar, essentialist claims as “biological” racism.

Even the language of racism has changed. Rastas argues how due to the word’s history and negative connotations, “race” and “racialized minorities,” they are often replaced with “ethnic groups” or “immigrants.” This avoidance of words, accompanied by normative whiteness and the idea of exceptionalism, leads to denial of racism (2019, 357). Researcher of sociology and gender studies, Salla Tuori, states how in the Finnish context, both in academic and public conversations, the term “culture” is most preferred, “ethnicity” is used, but “race” tends to be avoided (2009, 72). “Ethnicity” has been portrayed as an innocent term, but it has been contested, i.e., at the latest by the usage of “ethnic cleansing” (Huttunen 2005, 123) Un-naming is a powerful strategy for denial: what cannot be named, cannot be discussed, and the chosen words themselves carry power in them. Seikkula writes that words related to the violent history of racism might be uncomfortable, especially since in Finland there has not been a history of antiracist activism contesting and re-naming the racial and hierarchical language. Further, she writes, Finnish language faces a struggle with the word “race”: “In the Finnish language, a breed of dog or cat or cow is called ‘race’. This becomes particularly problematic with English terms like ‘multiracial’ or ‘mixed race’, which sound like ‘mixed breed’ when translated directly” (2009, 73 –75).

The harmful vocabulary of “race” and “breeds” is a vivid memory from the age of eugenics. Hence, historically built bases for biological racism and cultural racism are deeply intertwined and still reinforce one another today. Thus, status quo of racial power is justified not by direct biological racism but in more subtle ways,

by referring to “cultural” superiority instead of “biological” superiority. Racial hierarchy is maintained, and the superior group keeps the superior position. This is called neo-racism. As can be observed from presented definitions above, the negative, historical connotations of “race” might be hidden by more subtle choices of words, retaining the same racial hierarchies behind smokescreens by words such as “multiculturalism” and “assimilation.” Increasing preference for multiculturalism is observed in a large number of studies and research focusing on the different sides of multiculturalism during the past decades. Lentin describes, how replacing “race” with “culture” has led to the essentialization of “cultures,” and it has been carried through into multicultural approach in different branches, including education. Multiculturalism presents societies as “race-free” and culturally rich. However, it simultaneously describes non-European cultural groups as internally homogenous and static, and dominant culture is accepted as the norm. Lentin criticizes how replacing “race” by “culture” does not challenge the idea of humanity being organized hierarchically, and thus it masks racist hierarchies and their maintenance. Further, the discourse of multiculturalism can function as a strategy to avoid charges of racism (2005.) Freire describes that cultural invasion demands and reinforces the superiority of the oppressive group and the inferiority of the oppressed (1996, 141). Similar logic can be implemented to this neo-racist model as well, where the rhetoric of “race” is replaced with rhetoric of “culture.”

Cultural racism is defined by Bonilla-Silva as a form of colorblind racism (2014). The colorblind approach might manifest i.e., as sentences such as “I don’t see color, only people” as a racial ideology. Kendi writes how colorblind language actually serves as a mask hiding racism. He describes this as: “terms and saying like ‘I’m not racist’ and ‘race neutral’ and ‘post-racial’ and ‘color-blind’ and ‘only one race, the human race’ and ‘only racists speak about race’ ... are bound to fail in identifying and eliminating racist power and policy” (2019, 202.) The colorblind strategy might claim that talking about racism creates and reinforces racism, but this is just a strategy to maintain the current, racial status quo. Bonilla-

Silva defines colorblindness as “new racism”; colorblindness is at its core just a new form of keeping up the historically built, current racial structure. Explanations are developed to exempt the people benefiting from racial structures causing inequality of responsibilities (2014). Scholars in racism, Gabrielle Berman & Yin Paradies write about the mechanisms of essentialization of differences in multiculturalism, and thus there is necessity of combining antiracism to multiculturalism (2010).

Seikkula presents how antiracism is often tied to childhood and justified by children’s best interests. The way of portraying racism as attacks towards innocent children, creates a picture of racism as condemned, evil acts (2020, 71). Framing racism as evil acts committed by ill-willed people, a smokescreen is created to distance “those bad racists” from “us good non-racists.” Seikkula continues on to explain how this exceptionalism is formed through class separation. The “underclass” is created by connecting attributes such as uneducated and uncivilized to this class. By creating this class separation, membership of the upper- and middle-class serves as a protective shield from being even considered a racist or committing racist acts (2020, 71–72.) The strategy of placing racism on malevolent individuals or denying its whole existence is called post-racism. In the post-racist model, racial power remains unacknowledged, and/or society is seen as post-racist: racism is seen as a thing far in the past, but simultaneously without anyone or anything ever being racist or racism having any influence on today (Perlow 2018, 106 –108). The view of racism located in the past, with the outdated vocabulary, is a powerful strategy of avoiding recognizing racism in the present day. Post-racism and neo-racism also mix and intertwine, and the neo-racist approach is often used together with the colorblind approach.

3.2 Antiracism and white normativity

In this study, it is essential to consider how an antiracist approach can be analyzed and discussed without reinforcing, generalizing, and creating the very same

categories it is trying to dismantle. In some instances, the word "race" is framed with quotation marks to emphasize the socially constructed nature of it, as many critical race theorists before me have chosen to, but in some instances, the term is framed in such a way that a critical stance towards the word should be clear. Rastas presents how racial reality is repeated and reproduced by using the color-coded terms, and they need a critical stance if used in research. Researchers should ask themselves how the concepts are linked to the different discourses of race and if they serve as legitimizing or oppositional acts. Further, she continues: "but when a 'race' needs to be seen, critical stance towards color-talk is the only way to avoid a fatal leaning on the racist ideas embedded in these terms" (2004, 96; 106.) As an example, postmodernist philosopher Judith Butler describes the paradox of representativity in women's political activism. On the other hand, representation is wanted and needed to extend the visibility and legitimacy of women as political subjects, but on the other hand, the very same representations serve the normative function of language and even shape the truths about the category of "women" (1999, 3.) So, Butler's critique can be seen aimed towards the regulatory consequences of the construction of categories, in her example, women as a category, even when it is trying to serve the emancipatory purposes (1999, 7). The same dilemma of construction of categories can be observed in antiracism as well. This paradox is defined by Kendi: "It is one of the ironies of antiracism that we must identify racially in order to identify the racial privileges and dangers of being in our bodies" (2019, 38). Therefore, one could ask: if antiracist, liberatory education aims towards social justice, how can this goal be achieved without reinforcing the very same categories and representations it aims to emancipate from? Rastas describes the usage of racial vocabularies, referring to i.e., "color:" "We can never totally escape the risk of essentialism or the racist ideas embedded in them. The meanings of words referring to races need to be negotiated repeatedly because words always carry traces of their earlier meanings and because our societies transform both socially and culturally" (2019, 374). Therefore, to study and write about antiracism, one must familiarize herself with the current categories but also the missing vocabulary in the margins; as hooks

describes, margins might serve as space where the counter-hegemonic discourse can be created (1989).

Antiracism has several descriptions that might compete or even conflict (Lentin 2004, 3). Despite these inner differences, Seikkula describes that antiracism always inevitably coexists with racism, but antiracism should not be confused with attempts to deny, silence, or conceal racism (2020, 2–4.) Further, Alemanji suggests that concepts such as multiculturalism and interculturalism are inevitably linked to antiracism because they all have an element of bounding up otherness, sameness, and diversity to human interaction (2016, 20). Even though they are linked, they do not necessarily serve as synonyms. Bonilla-Silva writes that the roots for antiracism are in the understanding of how racial matters are institutional in nature, thus the racial structure affects both materially and ideologically all the actors in society. He demands taking responsibility for willing or unwilling participation in these unequal structures (2014, 15). The recognition of participation in unequal structures functions at the core of my understanding of antiracism and as a foundational idea in this study. If everyone in society partakes in the racial system, regardless of their acknowledgment of it, the idea of being “not racist” is not enough. Kendi writes, that there is no neutrality in the racism struggle, and the idea of the continuum from more racist to less racist to not racist is false (2019, 9; 204) The base of society is unequal, and an antiracist approach demands active participation: either one commits to antiracist acts, aims to promote and improve equity and equality, or commits to racism by letting unequal structures exist unquestioned.

Societies are built on hegemonically accepted norms that might be very concrete or more like ideological assumptions. Whiteness serves as a naturalized norm in many societies. Further, Seikkula presents that whiteness is a (embodied) mark of the position of power and privilege and eventually a social structure and serves as a norm that everything else is measured against. But instead of describing it as” an invisible norm”, Nordic whiteness should be acknowledged as a position and

structure of hegemonic power, constructed and reproduced actively. Thus, whiteness should be understood not only as an invisible norm and a natural state, but as a hegemonic power structure actively reproduced through human actions and in human actions (2020, 32 –35). Tuori describes racism not only as direct discrimination but also Finnishness as a norm (2009, 165). This norm consists of whiteness and Finnish as a mother language. White normativity is internalized from a very young age: Tatum describes in her book appearances of this internalized norm of whiteness to be observed already at the age of three (2017, 115). Thus, it is crucial to recognize white normativity and its cross-sections in ECE institutions.

3.3 Racism and colorblindness in early childhood education

Even though research on early childhood education and racism in Finland is near absent, there has been research about the topic in the USA and other countries. In general, "race" and racism are not widely researched or even recognized in the field of early childhood education, and this might originate from an idea where young children are seen as innocent and even incapable of racial discrimination. Debra Van Ausdale & Joe R. Feagin observe how children younger than five are rarely studied, perhaps because of the assumption that younger children could only have naïve or shifting views of social concepts. However, in their own research that focuses especially on younger children, they note how young children could command both racial and ethnic concepts and understand the power of racialization. Children are aware of the authority and the power related to whiteness and those racialized as white, and "race" serves as a tool for social interaction. Adults, both parents and professionals, have an urge to deny that children could use racial and ethnic concepts and terms. Adults control children's use of the concepts interpreted as racial, ethnic or prejudice-defined (1996, 786–789.) Also, the idea of colorblindness is taught to children from a young age as a synonym for non-discrimination. This idea of colorblindness is summarized in her critical book about white supremacy by Layla F Saad: colorblindness is an

illusion, where a person pretends that by not seeing color, he would not do anything racist or will not benefit from racism. But in reality, this is only creating the possibility to pretend white privilege is fictitious. Saad describes how young children might not use the socially constructed terms adults use, but they might describe themselves and their peers with colors matching up with crayon pens, such as “brown” or “peach” (2020, 78.) Terry Husband, whose area of expertise are connections of early childhood and (anti)racism, writes how studies show early childhood education staff relies on the colorblind approach in their work and consider it as a” neutral” approach, even though in reality it is quite contrary (2011, 265). Similar conclusions are made by Beverly Christine Tatum, researching particularly racism, colorblindness and effects of racializing mechanics in school environments (2017).

In the Finnish context, Rastas describes that children learn even before school how “race” can be used as a weapon in attack. In fights between children racial slurs are used, but adults might not see racism since they will not recognize racializing categories children use (2009, 36.) Thus, even when adults would like to think the contrary, children are aware of different skin colors and the effects of belonging to different racialized groups. Hence, an antiracist approach is crucial in early childhood education. Husband suggests that an antiracist approach in early childhood education equips children with tools needed to identify, reconstruct and counter racially biased information they face in and out of school, as well as preparing children to respond to racial inequalities surrounding them instead of growing into them, thus not recognizing them any longer (2011, 367 –368). Gloria Swindler Boutte, Julia Lopez-Robertson and Elizabeth Powers-Costello study the process of children’s learning of racial understanding and teacher’s role. They write that teachers’ possible reluctance to discuss race and racism in their classroom is not based on their unwillingness but rather on their unfamiliarity with the topic: many white teachers were raised in racially secluded, segregated neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the authors state, once the teachers understand that remaining silent about racism contributes to the problem, they might start to take a

more active stance against racism (2011, 355). Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, researching multiculturalism in education critically from viewpoints of teachers and pedagogy, write how “teachers are also the products of educational systems that have a history of racism, exclusion and debilitating pedagogy” (2010, *xxix*). Similarly, Robin Diangelo & Özlem Sensoy write in their article about critical multicultural education, how structural inequities are apparent in schooling, teacher education and the whole educational system (2010). Thus, dismantling white normativity is a process that needs to be started by early childhood education and ECE teachers. I would like to add to these observations, that universities and teacher training in Finland have remained extremely white throughout the years, and it has been challenged only very recently – for example, students at Helsinki University established a student organization SOCO (Students of Colour ry) only in 2019.

In the instruction regarding work time of ECE teachers by the Trade Union of Education (OAJ), ECE teachers are justified to use 13% of their work time for the tasks of planning, evaluation, and development of pedagogical choices in their work (2019, 10). In addition to this, teachers might partake to distributed leadership with the directors. Halttunen writes that ECE directors previously led only one daycare unit and worked simultaneously in a child group, but currently directors can run several units and thus they must focus fully on leadership and might not be involved in the everyday decision-making and actions. This leads to a distribution of the leadership and sharing responsibilities between the staff and the director. Distribution might lead to teams having more autonomy over their own pedagogical choices, and since teachers are the ones with acknowledged pedagogical leadership in their group, their role is central in creating new work cultures and adopting new ideas in practice. Therefore, the absence of directors in ECE units leads to distribution of leadership from directors to teachers (2016). Heikka, Halttunen & Waniganayake conclude how the absence of a director leads to the role of teacher leadership being emphasized, since teachers are pedagogically the most qualified in ECE units. Both childcare nurses and teachers

acknowledge the importance of teacher leadership in ensuring pedagogical quality. However, the leadership position is also seen as unclear, since the ways and reflections on how to ensure pedagogical quality vary (2018.) As the reflections and understanding of pedagogical responsibility and its appearance in action differ, this might have its impact on the adoption process of an antiracist approach in their work as well. Halttunen, Waniganayake & Heikka conclude that several studies show teacher's pedagogical expertise influencing the other members of the team (2019, 144.) Since teachers are considered as team leaders, they are in a key role in the adoption or rejection of an antiracist approach.

4. Methods and empirical data

4.1 Interview as a method

Contemporary feminist research sees interviews as a field of power, since the interview situation is established by the interviewer with a special purpose in mind. Andrea Doucet and Natasha S. Mauthner, focusing on reflexivity in feminist research, describe this as a change from considering whether there is a power difference to *how* the power influences knowledge production (2007, 40). Donna Haraway uses a concept called a “god-trick”, where a researcher claims objectivity to know and see everything without himself being situated or tied to anything (1988, 581). Many feminist authors suggest avoiding god-trick by reflexivity and acknowledging partial, situated knowledge. Rastas sees as crucial that she, as a white researcher, analyzes whiteness and its meanings in the everyday life experiences of people researched, but also in the researcher's own personal life and lived reality. This needs to be done to understand the researcher's own situated position and the racialized positions and practices (2004, 96.) As a researcher aiming to commit to principles of antiracism and recognizing that by living in a society built on racist structures, we all partake in those structures, I aim to actively reflect my positionality as a researcher with white privilege and prejudices. I have attended regular meetings of an antiracist affinity group for white people, aiming to unpack racist attitudes with the support of the book “Me and White Supremacy” by Saad (2020). As a white person and a Finnish citizen, I have the privilege of not being racially discriminated against, and I do not claim to understand the experiences of those who do. My point of view is partial and colored by the whiteness and white dominance in the society. However, as a white researcher I might receive access to information helping me to challenge white normativity. As Rastas observes, when she is considered “white”, she is granted access to disclosures, racist rhetoric, jokes and comments only shared within other people who are also considered white (2004, 104).

4.2 Collecting and sampling data

In his book about qualitative interviews, Steinar Kvale describes the semi-structured interviews as a method that “...seeks to obtain descriptions of the interviewees' lived world with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena “(2007, 11). The semi-structured interviews are used in this study, since I want participants to be able to express their reflections on the topic quite widely, but still make sure that we stay on the topic of antiracism. I conducted a pilot interview to confirm the understandability of my interview guide and to test the practicalities. The interviews are conducted online, since during the Spring 2021 the COVID-19 situation is still serious and many other forms of methods are not recommended. In his book Steve Mann describes how in interviews, how seeing oneself on the screen in online interviews gives a possibility of observing oneself from the outside, as the viewed and the viewer, and this might help to maintain professionalism. On the other hand, this might shift the focus of the interview from the dialogue and questions to the presentation, and one needs to consider as well how self-awareness might affect the participant as well. He also describes how notetaking might appear as not looking to the camera (2016, 89). I pay attention to Mann's observations while interviewing.

Participants of the study should give informed consent to ensure they are aware of the main features of the research (Kvale 2007, 27). With the invitation to participate, I offer a short description of the research. Before the interviews, the participant signs a consent form, providing i.e., participants the right to withdraw from the study at any point of it. Interviews are arranged in a safe online platform, such as Microsoft Teams-meeting, and they are recorded for transcribing. The recorded data and their copies are saved to an external hard drive kept safe in a drawer that can be locked. After the acceptance of the thesis, the interviews and their copies will be destroyed. Transcribing and translating of the data is done only by the researcher, and for the analysis all the attendees' names and other

information endangering their anonymity will be removed or changed to pseudonyms. This study has gained approval from the municipality of Helsinki.

During Autumn 2020 the antiracist training reached 52 early childhood education units and 371 employees in Helsinki, and to ensure concepts of an antiracist approach are to some extent familiar to respondents, participants are sampled from this group. Sampling is conducted by leaving out private childminders, since the staff structures and possibilities of developing an antiracist approach collegially differ in those. I worked as a trainer in some of the training during Autumn 2020, and I exclude those units from my sample, since this might increase power differences in the interview situation. I contacted the directors of the remaining units for the consent of their unit to partake in the study, and 13 directors granted permission. Directors forwarded an invitation letter for the ECE teachers working in their units and the participants contacted me directly via e-mail. It can be assumed that participants, willing to devote their time and energy to the study, might have in advance a positive or interested attitude towards antiracism.

I aimed to reach eight to ten participants, but the final amount is six. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shortage of substitute teachers, it was challenging to find participants. From understanding this reality, I agreed with one of the directors of ECE institutions that I would substitute in the unit for a day. By the end of the day, I would interview the director, since then there would be no need for separate scheduling for the interview. I was not working directly together with the director or the other respondents when I was substituting, so I do not see my presence affecting the participants' opinions or the interview situation considerably. My physical presence in the ECE institution might have increased the trust of the participants towards me as a researcher and I was able to set interview schedule with some respondents in person. However, in my only non-online interview, with the director, I followed my interview guide, but I noticed afterward I was giving probes significantly more than in online interviews, which

might have affected the interview. Yet, it can also be just a sign of participating in different social customs where the physical cues and probing of communication vary. Interviews were conducted in March 2021, and their length varied from 40 minutes to one hour 15 minutes, so they could be classified as deep interviews. The antiracist training was in Finnish; thus, the interviews are in Finnish as well. After transcribing the interviews, I translated the most crucial parts into English. I needed to develop ways to be able to translate some of the expressions related to racism from Finnish to English without losing their original tone. Mann warns, how the process of interviewing in one language and then presenting the final version in English might not be as unproblematic as one could think, and the researcher needs to think about what is lost in the transcription and later in the translation (2016). However, it could be argued that transcribing and analyzing interviews are *always* a reflective of the researcher's interpretation, and thus translation is just one of the factors that the researcher needs to consider and reflect on.

Distribution of the results of the study is done ethically by ensuring that the results are shared with the actors contributing to the project. The ECE directors of the units and the individual participants are sent a final version of the research. As instructed in the academic publications within academia, I share the study with my university. I also share the results with the education and training department of the municipality of Helsinki, and the Peace Education Institute.

4.3 Content analysis

Collected data is analyzed via data-deductive content analysis. Mann describes phases of thematic analysis as follows: familiarization with the data, coding and searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally writing up (2016, 212). Similarly, in their book about qualitative research and content analysis, Jouni Tuomi and Anneli Sarajärvi describe how content analysis is formed from different phases. They describe how in reduction the data is

simplified. Written material is divided into parts or categories and summarized, aiming to code the data to simplified expressions, guided by the research questions. After simplification, data is grouped, meaning the researcher forms upper categories and sub-categories based on the differences and resemblances found in the material (2009, 109–110). In my analysis I follow their guidance on how phases are divided into reduction, grouping and abstracting. I read the transcriptions several times, and by reflecting them with research questions, I mark occurring themes, such as racism, antiracism and white normativity, with different color codes. After re-reading color-coded parts and by contrasting the data into theory, I divide them into different sub-categories. In content analysis, by organizing and summarizing the data, the informational value is increased, aiming to create a clear, written description of the researched phenomenon (Ibid 95; 108).

5. Analysis

In the analysis, the responses are categorized into three main themes. The main categories of analysis are 1) racism and white normativity in ECE, 2) antiracism, 3) towards an antiracist approach and dismantling white normativity. All six participants have their professional background as early childhood education teachers, but their further education and current role differ: three work as early childhood education teachers, two as special education teachers, and one as a director. The work experience varies from seven to 30 years, and most respondents have been working in the field for around 10 years. Due to the small number of participants and the risk of endangering their identity, the current work role is not connected to the names of the respondents. The names of the respondents have been changed to pseudonyms, and they are named as Leena, Elli, Hannele, Kerttu, Eija and Katariina.

5.1 Racism and white normativity in early childhood education

Alemanji warns how the majority in Finland, white people, tend to interpret and analyze racism as an individual or personal acts (2016, 63). In the analysis of the responses, I aim to avoid this individualization by encouraging the reader to see the descriptions from the respondents as manifestations of how racism and antiracism appear in early childhood education institutions, functioning inside an oppressive society aiming to renew its hegemonic norms. In addition to this, I analyze racism, antiracism and white normativity similarly to Rastas: not only as intentional discrimination but as a broader concept, also referring to ideologies, discourses and practices of racism and their possible consequences (2009, 31). Recognition of white normativity is at the very core of an antiracist approach, and thus I particularly analyze how notions of white normativity appear in respondents' definitions. These observations are linked to the hidden curriculum, which can be affected by the cultural values, work approaches and reflections respondents have adopted as teachers. Researching respondents' views link ideas of antiracism and white normativity to praxis: resources available for antiracist

work reflects the impacts of the hidden curriculum and how high is the need for antiracism recognized. Appearances of racism were recognized in different forms and ways, and they are divided into the categories presented below.

5.1.1 Racism towards children and families

All six respondents recognize racism and discriminating practices in ECE institutions, but none of them mention racism between children. In Finnish Ombudsman's survey, racism experienced in the school environment was most often in such situations, where an adult supervisor was not present (2020). Even if an adult supervisor would be present, the idea of an innocent child might affect the recognition of racist behavior between children (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). Rastas writes, how the idea of an innocent child is strong even among professionals of education, but there might be a significant amount of racism in children's everyday lived experiences. Adults and educators might not see it, since they do not want to recognize and admit it (2009, 36). Studies conclude that children recognize racist structures surrounding them in society and use them as power mechanisms in their peer relations. Hence, ability to recognize racism between children might be incomplete. Additionally, when asked directly, most of the respondents strongly deny that children would be treated in racist ways in the ECE institutions. However, some respondents state, how unequal treatment towards children does not derive from an aim to treat children differently, but from lack of understanding or lack of time. When looking more closely at the responses, there are possibilities of unequal treatment towards children to be read between the lines, as in Kerttu's example.

If I see an educator from another group saying something to a child, that is in another group, and I come to the situation as an outsider, what are the ways and words to intervene? And is it better to intervene in that situation or afterward, when the children are not present, as: 'what did you say again, it troubles me a bit, what kind of words did you use again?'" (Kerttu)

Some interviewees observe direct racist speech within the staff aimed towards some parents and families. This racist speech is often masked behind neo-racist discourses: it is not aimed directly towards assumed ethnicity. Instead, it is aimed towards ways of acting associated with “culture,” and thus justifying the judgment of families. Racism can be seen as reinforcing Finnishness as a norm (Tuori 2009, 165). In the interviews the Finnish white norm appears as superior in ECE institutions. Hence, racist speech could appear in the form of negative stereotypes, but also as judgments or critiques of the habits that were seen to differ from the expected norm. Katariina and Leena describe direct racist rhetoric:

Every day, so-called hidden racism, is present very strongly in adult speech ... I think in all groups, in all daycares, it is there. It is linked to children, linked to parents, linked in general.... As an example, when there was Corona last Spring and parents were asked to stay home with children if they could, and if parents had an immigrant background, then such speech would occur as ‘why are those (kids) here, their parents will not work anyway.’ So, there are a lot of these kinds of examples. And in my opinion, it is clearly aimed precisely towards these people with different cultural backgrounds. (Katariina)

ECE staff would need training about that how not all people know, how Finnish winter is like. It will not make them inferior as parents, it will not make them more inferior as people than anyone else, they just have not learned how to prepare and dress their children to the Finnish winter. So, what they need is calm and appropriate information, as ‘hello, welcome to the Finnish winter’-material that could be given in any language to parents. That might lessen the cliques between parents and daycare staff, since some judge according to ‘how children are taken care of’ (L does quotation marks with fingers). And according to it, their respect towards parents increases or decreases. (Leena)

Racism or unequal treatment of the families is observed from the interviews in many different ways. Some of the interviewees recognize that it might be easier to be in contact with children and families who share a similar cultural background and language. Lack of a common language for communication is emphasized as

causing difficulties, but interviewees also articulate how different languages served as just an excuse to avoid certain families. In addition to this, access to the services of interpreters is limited and interpreters are not accessible for short, everyday meetings. An interpreter has to be reserved earlier for special occasions, such as forming the child's development plan. Thus, the interviewees recognize that communication with the parents, with whom there was no shared language, requires extra effort from the staff. This willingness to pay extra effort varies, and some of the respondents recognize in both, in their own actions and with their co-workers, a tendency to avoid communication with those parents with no shared language:

(Staff) won't encounter or tell, or such things, or will not go to talk to parents. When they come, won't talk about a child's day, perhaps when thinking 'oh they won't understand anyway' or experiencing it difficult to go and talk. (Eija)

Rastas describes how an assumption of a person belonging to (another) group, hence being different, might remain unquestionable, causing avoidance of certain people in fear of language struggles or cultural differences. That can lead to different treatment and thus renews inequality and racism (Rastas, 2005, 93). In light of this, the consequences of the behavior described in Eija's extract might renew racist inequalities.

5.1.2 Denial of racism

To dismantle racism, it must be first recognized and acknowledged. Freire demands that the situation of oppression and its causes must be first recognized (1996, 29). All six respondents describe current or previous racist occurrences from other staff members, but even so, different strategies for denial from co-workers are portrayed in the following extracts. Tatum describes how social pressure not to notice racism can be powerful (2017, 196). In Leena's response, the social pressure seems clear:

At the very start of the (antiracist) training, in the common space where we were following the training, there was very strongly: 'well, not in our daycare' and 'but we are not racists.' But in the conversations during the training, I wanted to facepalm and bang my head against the wall and so on, when these Karen-styled comments appeared: 'but who cares about us white people?' (L mimics a gesture of head exploding) (Leena)

How much there is racism people do not recognize in themselves. When everyone of course thinks that: 'I am not', 'not in us', and 'not in our daycare', but they are that kind of, small things you do and things you don't do, small words... (Eija)

As mentioned earlier in this study, many teachers consider equality and equity as baselines for their work, and they are at the core of the written curriculum – thus perhaps the hidden curriculum as well. These principles might be seen to automatically exclude even the idea of being racist. Alemanji describes, how being considered or labeled as racist is one of the worst identity markers one can have (2016, 58). In this light, instant denial of racism can be seen as a defense strategy. However, Kendi suggests that the claims of “I’m not racist” are tied to the lack of identifying racist structures and therefore eliminating power and policy (2019, 202).

You start seeing things a bit differently, and not only like 'well not me' and 'but I'm not a racist' and so, but how you can really work for it that there wouldn't be racism. ... At least when we were making the equity plan, we went through a bit. Quite much there came these thoughts, 'but we don't have any problems with it here', and then sort of: 'let's rewind back a bit.' (Elli)

As presented earlier, Seikkula writes how the uncivilized, racist “underclass” is created to direct racism originating only from certain groups in the margins of society (2020, 71 –72). Further, Bonilla-Silva suggests how claims of “they are the racist ones” might serve as a hiding mechanism through segregation (2014, 111). The projection and the direct denials of racism, “not in our daycare,” and “I am not racist” exclude possibilities to discuss racism and racist structures.

Following the post-racist model, if racism is seen as nonexistent from the beginning, it cannot be recognized or acted against. Denial of racism leaves no space for antiracist work but maintains the status quo.

5.1.3 Direct racist acts and speech

Descriptions of direct, recognizable racism are observed in the interviews. However, analyzing direct racism has its dangers. Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed presents a “bad apple”-model, where the focus is on racist individuals who suffer from a false set of beliefs. Thus, racism can be individualized, reduced and projected to a person who presents “not us.” By underestimating the scope of racism and its reproduction, institutions can keep their racist structures, if they just eliminate those who are identified as racists (2012, 44; 150.) Lentin describes that idea of working-class, ignorant racist who “knows no better” is founded in in-built stereotypes of class. This individualization prevents analyzing racism as political components of modern nation-states (2005, 388). However, individualized examples presented in this study show how racist attitudes or comments manifest and might remain unchallenged by others in the work community. Further, they show a strict contradiction between the legal obligations about equality and equity in ECE institutions and the reality. Bonilla-Silva presents, that many white people tend to avoid using direct racial expressions when expressing their racial views (2014, 102). This can be observed from some descriptions as well. It is also noteworthy, how in Finnish the term “immigrant” is often used as a generalizing term (Kurki 2018, 1) As can be seen from Katariina’s extract, there are several mechanisms for racist assumptions:

If a co-worker is often on a sick leave, and she has an immigrant background, then making it as: ‘okay, now there are so many minus degrees outside, so perhaps she won’t come to work.’ Whereas, if it would be similarly a Finnish co-worker, people would not pay attention the same way. ... Some staff members

have been replaced, and now we have a few workers with immigrant backgrounds, and I think it is visible in the work community, how people are not making contact with them similarly as they do with the other co-workers. Or they are not ready to take them to the same level as part of the work community, with the language barrier or the different ways of working. (Katariina)

Some of the respondents describe experiences of direct racist language in their work communities. Furthermore, some of the respondents have even more distinct examples of racism or racist language used in the work community among the co-workers, but to maintain the anonymity of the respondents, some of the detailed descriptions are left out from the analysis. Racism could be disguised behind racist cartoons or racist jokes. In Leena's extract below, "hairy hands", in Finnish "karvakäsi," is a racist expression usually aimed towards people with assumed Middle Eastern origin.

For example, using a racist term, and then masking it by claiming it was a joke, like: 'not really, I don't really think like that, just joking.' Those have been things that are not visible for kids, but in a work community. And then we had to discuss, how would this joke feel, if we would have a substitute teacher, who would be dark-skinned and they would see on the table of the coffee room a 'funny' (E does quotation marks with fingers) thing, a cartoon that has a n-word in it. (Elli)

And if someone says to me something about hairy hands, I say: 'excuse me, but that is not a correct term, we work here, and it does not go like that, that you could use a term like that in here.'... And when one follows, how people from another culture are talked to, and 'why did you leave that country' and 'why did you leave your child there, did you come alone?' All this kind of conversation during the coffee breaks, and then you are like 'hey, excuse me...' and in the team meetings and so on. (Leena)

Racism of staff members is visible especially in the less formal settings, for example in the recreational space. Nieto & Bode describe how teachers' place for socialization, the teachers' room, can include negative talk about children and

their families. Therefore, some teachers might start avoiding these places, which might result to the lack of critical voices in certain public discourses, leading up to the isolation of them (2010, 396). In the context of Finnish ECE, teachers' room is replaced by a recreational space, where the whole staff can gather to have a break (in Finnish "coffee room"), and the recreational room is mentioned in the several responses as a space for racist speech. Thus, the observation of Nieto & Bode can be applied to this study as well.

5.1.4 Ignorance, indifference and lack of self-reflection

The interviewees could notify clear obstacles in their work community from absorbing and applying an antiracist approach. As presented in the earlier chapters, ECE teachers most typically work in teams, and the antiracist training was directed to the whole staff, not only teachers. However, one of the clearest obstacles from applying an antiracist approach, is a lack of support or follow-ups from the work community. Co-workers' attitudes of ignorance or indifference towards antiracist education are observed from the descriptions. Further, lack of self-reflection is seen as one of the factors maintaining white normativity and not responding to the need for antiracist principles at work.

This does not connect only to equality, equity, and antiracism, it connects to pedagogical skills as well, and professionalism.... It is very difficult to work reflectively. And it always goes to personal experience, if one has not learned to divide that this is reflecting my work, not a reflection of the personal things. And the reflection of your know-how does not mean that you are bad or that you would do your work badly, but how you can develop. (Leena)

If most educators lack the capability to reflect their own actions or speech, so then. Or then like 'it has always been made like this' and not willing to receive feedback and evaluate one's own actions critically. ... So, then there is no change

happening. Things will not develop forward if one is not ready to think one's own actions critically. (Kerttu)

Several respondents highlight the difficulty of adopting new pedagogical concepts, such as antiracism, in diverse teams. ECE teams include people with different educational backgrounds and ages. Some of the respondents see this as a challenge, since the skills or willingness for self-reflection vary. Two of the respondents mention a generational gap and feel that an antiracist approach is more difficult for some older co-workers to adopt. Bonilla-Silva suggests, how people from different generations might have similar ideologies about colorblindness, but the rhetoric between young and old people might be different (2014, 305). Perhaps the noticed observations about the generational gap might be explained with this logic. Some of the interviewee's also mention that it might be difficult for some educators to divide professional self from personal self, since one's personality is in a crucial role when working with young children.

So that kind of antiracist approach is based on you, you can't change anyone's way of thinking. Of course, you can try, to challenge them to think otherwise, but it starts from everyone's individual aspiration of an antiracist approach being visible in the work. So, if there is no personal desire, one does not see it necessary that one would work in an antiracist way, it might be challenging to change things, if one does not consider it as a problem. (Katariina)

Many of the interviewees highlight the importance of self-realization and self-reflection, which will be analyzed further in chapter 5.4.2: "courage, active stance and self-reflection". The lack of support from the teams is named as one of the most preventing factors in applying new pedagogical concepts. In some cases, principles of action were agreed upon within the teams but in reality, different educators did not commit to them or executed them differently than agreed. There are descriptions of co-workers' attitude of wanting to do things similarly as they have been always done and not seeing the need for changing them. This attitude

can prevent adoption of any new pedagogical skills, unless a ready-thought, easy-implementing practical material is provided, as one respondent concluded.

5.1.5 Multiculturalism and colorblindness

The multicultural approach has been dominant and commonly accepted in Finnish ECE for quite a long, and it can be said that principles of multiculturalism have been implemented in both formal and hidden curriculum of the Finnish education system. Kurki states how education in Finland officially promotes multiculturalism and tolerance, but in reality, it does take part in creating racial segregation (2018). Berman & Paradies write that multiculturalism, with an aim to address diversity within modern liberal democracies, has been applied in policies and legislation without critically estimating it. The multicultural policies avoiding addressing racism directly might essentialize difference and even deny the existence of racism (2010, 214; 220). Criticism towards the multicultural approach is often aimed the demand for assimilation hidden in multiculturalism and the rhetoric of tolerance. Essed writes how the idea of “tolerance” is problematic when used in the context of dominance (1991, 6). Similarly, Kurki writes how liberal multiculturalism can seem to celebrate cultural diversity, but in reality, the idea of “other cultures” coming to “our space” is reinforced (2018, 9). Therefore, multiculturalism can have a demand of “them” assimilating to “our” culture, and thus it can be a form of neo-racism. Alemanji describes how the absence of antiracism education in Finnish schools can lead to weaker practices and discourse of antiracism (2016, 57). Further, Rastas writes that questions of racism are often directed towards to matters of cultural difference (2009.) Avoidance of talking about racism and antiracism, and instead replacing these terms with vague explanations of multiculturalism, can prevent recognizing and acting against racism. As Kendi puts it, denial functions as the heartbeat of racism (2019, 9).

For so long, all the time multiculturalism and that kind of thing were discussed, but this was perhaps the first time to stop and to think what an antiracist approach means. Multiculturalism is highlighted everywhere, how to include everyone, but perhaps the thoughts should be aimed more towards antiracism. (Katariina)

Ahmed analyzes the rhetoric of diversity in institutions. Institutions might be built around whiteness, and thus even those bodies appearing non-white need to inhabit whiteness. People of color are welcomed only conditionally: in return for this hospitality, they must either integrate into the common organizational culture or let the institution celebrate their diversity publicly. Statements like “we are diverse” or “we embrace diversity” might be reduced to plain buzzwords. Further, the discourses of diversity can be used in defense of an organization and the reputation of it (2012.) Thus, whiteness is the norm but diversity, which might be also described with the word multiculturalism, can be seen as a proof of the institution not being racist. This raises questions of how multiculturalism actualizes in education, and what kind of actions and assimilation it does demand. Nieto & Bode describe that teachers might experience facing and discussing racism difficult, thus inclusive and comprehensive framework of multiculturalism seems easier. They emphasize how many people think, that the multiculturalist approach automatically means taking care of racism as well (2010, xxvii; 347) Similarly in their research, Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Powers-Costello emphasize, how simply being in a racially diverse classroom is not enough to interrupt the development of children’s racist attitudes (2011, 341). So, a child simply attending a “multicultural” school does not erase the possibility of adopting racist concepts and ideas. Colorblind approach is recognized in some of the descriptions in the interviews. Sentences like “I’m not a racist, but...” are described by Bonilla-Silva as a semantic move, expressing racist views with “yes and no”-strategy (2014, 109). Description of this semantic move and colorblind strategy can be observed from Leena’s quote:

People can fully think 'I'm not a racist, but...' and do not understand that there could be something harmful about that. That tires, that hurts, that is exhausting. Yeah, and then we always move on to discuss: 'But we always look... I don't see color, I have this, I see a person as a person, BUT...' (Leena)

The false assumption of Finland's previous homogeneity is reinforced by systematically excluding minorities from the educational material. For example, in primary education textbooks, the Sámi people are excluded, and Finnish students receive more information on indigenous populations of other countries than Finland (Ranta & Kanninen 2019, 388). Interestingly, these discourses of the supposed absence of racism earlier in Finland can be observed from the extract below.

That world where I grew up, was very homogenous. So, in that word, such thing as racism, it was not there. Because it wasn't, the color of the skin was not such a thing, that people would be put in order according to it. So, it wasn't in that world, there were some other things. (Hannele)

Even though some of the respondents describe their ECE institutions as multicultural and mention their units having children from different backgrounds and speaking several different languages in the group, none of them mention talking about racism per se with children in their groups. One perspective for this can be how by Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Powers-Costello suggest how the colorblind approach might also be supported by an idea that children are too young and innocent to understand the complexity of racism (2011, 335 –336). In their research, Van Ausdale & Feagin observe and analyze kindergarten-aged children and their results show the contrary: children are aware of racial power and words, and able to apply them in the right contexts to gain power in their peer relations (2001). Forwarding a colorblind approach to children might be also a sign of white privilege. For example, Rastas (2009), Alemanji (2016) and Tatum (2017) all describe how as parents of non-white children they needed to have conversations with their children from a very young age about “race” and its

effects. Saad sums that most often the children with white privilege are taught the idea of colorblindness (2020, 78).

5.2 Racism in structures

Essed criticizes the segregation of institutional and individual racism. She writes that by placing the individual outside the institutions, it distances the idea of how rules, regulations and procedures maintaining the racist positions are also made by individuals (1991, 36). In this study, structural racism is defined as the systematic racially discriminating practices in the institutions and the services. The descriptions of racism in structures are especially evident in the responses of both, the special education teachers and the director of the ECE institution. This might originate from the role of the professions: from the staff of the ECE institutions, the special education teachers and the directors work most closely with other public service providers, such as child health centers and child welfare. Racism in structures is recognized as families falling in between the services due to their language skills, or capability to act within the structures of different institutions. Bonilla-Silva states how understanding the institutional nature of racial matters is the beginning of becoming an antiracist (2014, 82). Katariina and Hannele both describe the gaps in structures, where children and families are at risk of falling, and how equal or unequal treatment is left on the shoulders of the single actors.

Mostly because of the language barrier, families fall off from the services and support. Since they necessarily cannot, or know how to, apply for the needed support. And I think that in my own work it is really important that I fight for them, that they would receive the support they need. ... I think that if this would be only up to the parents, they might not necessarily have the skills or the knowledge to get help for that child, and then the child would fall by the wayside ... If in different institutions they make the effort to explain to the parents, what are their options. Are they treated as equally as a family born in Finland, with whom it might be easier to explain? So, it is multifaceted and there are risks in many parts

of the process. And then they might fall off, and precisely because of unequal treatment. (Katariina)

Nieto and Bode describe that teachers might be at the mercy of decisions made far away from the classrooms, since they often have only little to do with developing those policies and practices that affect the education institutions (2010, xxix). However, from the responses it seems how a single teacher's effort might be in a crucial role in receiving help for a child. Additionally, from the interviews the differences in the amount of support offered between municipalities or even between groups in the same ECE institutions seem to vary. It seems that the access to the support might be based on a single adult's ability to use time, effort and skills, to "push" to receive the help needed.

I am not sure if all our customers are receiving similar services from the child health center or the child welfare. Is everyone taken care of as well? It seems to me awfully like that, that the world works in such a way that if there is a parent with skills and knowledge to take care of things, their children's issues are taken care of. Better than with those children, whose parent themselves don't know how to operate in the system and how much you need to push it with your own effort. (Hannele)

It is apparent, with a child or a family how their things are not taken care of as well as some other families' things. Or they are not directed onwards to examinations, or the concerns are not brought up to everyone, but it is thought: 'Well they just are like that, and they are meant to be like that.' ... And also, how support is given to a child, is the support given immediately when the need is recognized or is it thought 'well she doesn't understand since she doesn't know this language, and that is why she can't finish these tests', or other things. (Eija)

As can be seen from Eija's extract, the needed support is sometimes denied by pleading to the language skills and thus ignoring the actual need for support. In Freire's thinking, the language used by educators and politicians can be both alienated and alienating, thus it might not be understood by those people in

concrete situations (1996, 77). Therefore, the structural gap might not be only a matter of actual Finnish language skills. Instead, the demand for skills and the language is a language-specific to educators or politicians or policymakers, and one must command this contextual rhetoric to “push” through the system and avoid falling into the gaps.

5.3 White normativity

All of the respondents are assumably women, and none of them articulate their identity otherwise. They could be identified as white or white-passing. However, one of the respondents has experienced discrimination due to her assumed ethnicity based on her name and her religion. Still, most of the respondents have not experienced racism and many of them articulate and recognize their whiteness in the interviews. The Finnish norm is not limited only to the white privilege but also to the norm of speaking Finnish as a mother language and belonging to the Lutheran church. This norm of Finnishness as a native language is only connected to certain bodies as can also be seen in Kerttu’s extract.

How easy it is for me to speak... Since I do not experience that I would have faced racism in my life due to my skin color, since I am a white Finnish teacher, so how I could step into someone else’s shoes and position. And also, to see those things self-evident to me but not to someone else, how in the same situation we are expected totally different things, and the active consideration of that. ... Since I present the majority in Finland, where I live at the moment, and then ‘oh yeah right’ how in every single thing and in every single place some people are judged and reflected against for being a different color, or speaking a different language, or then speaking perfect Finnish even if a skin tone could let one assume something else. (Kerttu)

Many of the interviewees recognize and acknowledge their whiteness and start reflecting on their position in society as people with white privilege. Matias and

Mackey write how acknowledging white privilege and understanding how that creates harmful conditions for those people not carrying the same privilege, is one of the first acknowledgements an antiracist teacher must make (2016). The respondents consider the recognition of white normativity surprising, since the respondents consider it difficult to recognize in how many different ways it is apparent. They emphasize the importance of self-reflection in recognizing white normativity.

When in Finland we have so strong, 'we are already equal'-attitude, and behind it most people will not recognize racism minorities face, or minorities have to deal with, what kind of problems people face all the time. People are in such a privileged position and won't see the struggles of others. It is not recognized how Christian, white, and homogenous our whole system is. (Leena)

Some of the respondents confirm the idea of Finnishness being equivalent to whiteness and monoculture, as can be seen from extracts below. Othering discourses can be observed: Finnishness is seen through norms of Finnish as a native language and white skin color. In some of the answers, multiculturalism is seen as contrary to whiteness and Finnishness.

Well, a human is a child of her time and environment, so that kind of colorful multiculturalism is not a very old thing in Finland. ... Well, surely that kind of old Finnish monoculture is visible. Of course, it is. (Hannele)

And we have a multicultural work community, but the majority of us are white and Finnish. Also the majority is women, so in a way, it is pretty one-sided... But not only, so it is very multicultural here. (Eija)

The respondents recognize the presence of white normativity in early childhood education as in the material representations, such as book characters, color pencils, brochures and toys. After antiracist training, many of the respondents mention that the ECE units recognized how all the dolls, board games and other toys only have white-skinned characters. Tatum describes reinforcing the cultural

superiority of whiteness as “the smog in the air” (2017, 86). Leena describes it as “the mist of white normativity”:

It is apparent in daycares, in materials, in assumptions... It is visible in how we communicate with families, about how child's day went, and so on. It sets families to unequal positions and it sets children to unequal positions... And starting even from the pencils, we don't have the pencils that could present all the children's skin colors in our group. ... The learning material, the books in general, are so terribly white. ... Starting from the board games, there is no material. There is not to support that kind of work approach, so I understand that it is easy to just go by the mist of white normativity. (Leena)

However, the visibleness of white normativity is not only limited to these practical representations, but also to the representation of different people working in early childhood education institutions. As mentioned earlier in this study, teacher position is very homogenous and white in Finland. Eija recognizes the need of children to find diverse real-life representations:

We have always had employers from different countries and cultures. But I'm thinking of the children, the mirroring in general, when at this age they admire teachers and so... So, to whom do they mirror against to. Quite often, when we have students here, they mirror to them, because they can identify to them more. Especially practical nurse students are a more heterogenous group, whereas those teacher students that I have supervised, they are pretty much more homogenous group in a way, comparing to the practical nurses. (Eija)

Rastas recognizes representations as part of normative whiteness. These representations of people and cultures considered to differ from the white norm labeled non-white, non-European and non-Western and they are reinforced in both institutional settings, such as daycares, and in non-formal settings (2004, 100). As in the extract above, the need of children to find diverse representations from adults working in their everyday environment appears.

5.4 Antiracism

The second part focuses firstly on the respondents' understanding of equality, equity and antiracism, and the respondents' development as antiracists. The latter part emphasizes the preventing and enabling factors of the work community and

the work culture in adopting an antiracist approach. Kendi describes how antiracism is not about “good” people and “bad” people, but instead people either committing to acts promoting antiracism or committing to acts maintaining racism (2019). Therefore, in this part the extracts of antiracism describe learning to recognize racism and one’s possibilities to actively resist it. There are three main themes emphasized: courage, an active stance and self-reflection, and through that recognition of the racist biases. They could also be portrayed to be in the core of an antiracist approach:

5.4.1 Developing as antiracist

All interviewees consider equality and equity extremely important. They see ECE as a possibility to balance the differences and inequities in society by ensuring all children similar possibilities from the start, despite coming from different backgrounds or families. Interviewees see ECE’s role in equality and equity as offering the needed support: not necessarily the same to everyone, but according to a child’s needs. The respondents emphasize every child’s right to feel valuable, important and accepted members of the group. They consider the antiracist training important and necessary, and many of the descriptions of equity in ECE also include the antiracist aspect. As Elli says:

...I think we have a golden opportunity here in early childhood education to do antiracist work. (Elli)

However, many of the respondents also vocalize their incompleteness as antiracists and/or describe it as a journey they were just starting. Antiracism is seen as a path where the respondents start to learn, find words to name things and constantly develop. The recognition of one’s lack of knowledge or problematic ways of acting can be seen as a crucial component of developing an antiracist approach. Matias & Mackey emphasize the importance of those teachers who

acknowledge the emotional discomfort of antiracist work but still refuse to give up (2016, 35). Leena describes this emotional discomfort:

I am never ready enough in this (antiracism). Even though I do know that I am more aware than others, it will not make me better, it will not make me competent, I will not make myself, well, ready. This is a path of constant learning and observation, that is of course interesting and educating, but also enormously heavy and tiring sometimes. (Leena)

Diangelo and Sensoy write about teacher students and critical multicultural education, but their observations can be seen to arch to the teachers in the working life as well, aiming to adopt an antiracist approach in their education. Diangelo and Sensoy state that critical multicultural teaching requires learning “the rules of the game” (2010, 98.) One needs to gather an understanding of how power relations work in society, and one’s own position within those power relations, as can be seen from Eija’s extract.

To go outside from the square of what one thinks. It is such a small circle or square, where the thoughts are in the comfort zone, to go outside from that zone and look at things through the perspective of the other. How it might feel when I have this, my own little life and then the other one comes and sees it from another perspective. And discussing those opinions confidently and freely, not by arguing or quarreling, but by talking and opening up, what does the other person think, and how does it look like, for example, white normativity, from the other staff member’s point of view? ... And then those attitudes can be changed as well. And seeing things from the other person’s perspective, not always just from your own. (Eija)

Further, one needs to understand what kind of social, political and historic structures there are, and what are their roles in upkeeping them. Diangelo and Sensoy write that if a student does not have first-hand experiences of belonging to a socially marginalized group, it will take longer to acquire all this information

“second hand” (2010, 100.) The practical ways of achieving the “second hand” information can vary, but as Eija suggests, it requires a change of perspective and leaving one’s comfort zone.

5.4.2 Courage, an active stance and self-reflection

Many of the respondents long for more courage, strength and stamina to defend values they consider important and to intervene in racist situations, even though if the situation would seem like a minor thing. Intervening is considered difficult for different reasons: some interviewees tell they could not be certain if their co-workers share the same knowledge and ideology about equality and equity, or they feel like “getting mixed up to someone else’s business.” Diangelo and Sensoy demand developing courage and stamina to raise and discuss issues that one and her similarly racialized peers have been socialized not to talk about (2010, 100).

And what was the biggest to me, to work in myself, is to have the courage to intervene in the speech, for example. So, when a co-worker says these kinds of comments or judges a parent or stuff. So, I would have the courage to intervene directly, and wake them up a bit, like ‘are you sure, what do you mean by that’ or ‘do you understand that is not right kind of talk?’ So that might be the biggest thing, how can you intervene every day. (Katariina)

As Kendi writes, antiracism demands concrete actions and an active stance against racism (2019). Further, concrete actions can be described, in the spirit of Freire, as resistance. Intervening to the racist situations, speech or acts could be defined as resistance and actions against racism. Many of the described ways of resistance are very concrete and direct: for example, one of the respondents tells, how she throws away the books in the ECE institution including racist descriptions. If reflecting critically is also action, as Freire writes (1996, 109), then an active stance can be also seen as self-evaluation, being aware of the representations used in material and actively considering pedagogical choices and stereotypes. As can

be seen from Katariina's response, transforming consideration into actions might be a long process:

Since we use, for example, a lot of pictures in our group, we have tried to choose that kind of pictures that wouldn't all have a white child or a white person doing something, but a person who could be interpreted as from coming from a different cultural background. ... But so, one must pay attention to it, because I have also been thinking about that, for many years went by without me giving a single thought, or much time to it. So sometimes it has crossed my mind, but to do something, that is a different thing. (Katariina)

Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Powers-Costello emphasize that addressing racism with young children is both an educational and an ethical necessity (2011, 225). The educators' awareness of their own example can be one way of presenting the antiracist example. Imitating is the first ways how young children learn, and some of the respondents highlighted the importance of it. These observations are interesting especially if reflected in the earlier descriptions of direct racism and exclusion among the staff.

Of course, adults' relations to children, how adults treat kids and talk to them, how adults speak to one another... If I teach something to children but then I act differently, for example, if I teach children that you must always speak nicely but then I speak rudely to my co-workers, kids will sense and notice that. So, it is hard to teach something else than how you act yourself, it is at least as important, how the adults speak to one another and treat one another. (Kerttu)

Antiracism demands the ability to critically reflect one's own internalized prejudices and assumptions. Nieto & Bode describe that most teachers have good intentions, and they deeply care about their students. However, they have their own limited experiences and education, which might result in forming superior assumptions and stereotypes of some of the students. Therefore, teachers are products of educational systems having their own history of racism and exclusion, and teacher practices may reflect the experiences adopted from this educational

system. Thus, the teachers need to carefully consider and reflect the biases they carry (2010; xxix; 400.)

Before you even meet a child, and you see her name, for example, of a child who comes to your group as a new child, and well... I don't know, it always halts you to think, when you notice that from the name of the child you assumed it would be a dark-skinned child, and then you notice that it isn't so... I think it is a crucial part of this job to think and consider how you are with a child, how to be sensitive, find out about things and such. (Elli)

Rauna Kuokkanen, professor of Arctic Indigenous Studies of University of Lapland, Finland, writes in afterword of Ranta & Kanninen, how knowledge alone will not make a change, if racist, unequal and unrespectful attitudes and values of one's own and others are not recognized (2019). Hence, unlearning and self-reflection are crucial in antiracism.

But if there is no consideration in the actions, then it goes by gut-feeling, and if self-reflection is not involved, I think then you can't even say that you would act in an antiracist way or supporting equality and equity if you go by your gut feeling and won't reflect. (Leena)

Alemanji names self-reflection as one of the crucial elements teachers need to adopt to understand antiracist education (2016, 61). The importance of self-reflection can be also seen in the light of category 5.1.4 about ignorance, indifference and lack of self-reflection. If respondents considered lack of self-reflection as one of the crucial preventing factors in adopting an antiracist approach, similarly the active self-reflection can be named as one of the preconditions of adopting the approach.

5.4.3 Antiracism in work culture and attitudes

As can be observed in the previous parts, many of the respondents are committed to antiracist principles. However, the commitment of individual teachers might not be enough. Ahmed describes in the world of diversity management, how individual commitment could be transferred to collective commitment (2012, 134). Due to the structure of ECE institutions, where work and decisions are made in teams, the individual commitment might not be enough to form a collective commitment and thus change the operational culture. In this part I present possible preventing and enabling factors in adopting an antiracist approach within the work community. All six respondents stress the importance of the whole work community being on the same understanding about terms, and drafting agreements together how an antiracist approach is implemented. Developing a work community, recognizing and agreeing about the need for development and then forming common agreements and policies, such as safe space, is seen as crucial. Some interviewees describe their team as communicating and open, whereas some have experiences of setting agreements in teams, but in reality, team members not committing to those agreements. Freire states how no one can unveil the world for another, thus everyone needs to do this realization independently but dialogically (1996, 71; 150). If the critical thinking towards the current racist system is not reached by most of the members of the work community, dialogue remains partial. Nieto & Bode emphasize that teachers need to work together to develop approaches for affirming their students. This is not solely the responsibility of teachers, but also demands the support from administrators (2010, 396.) The role of the director and internal conversations and development within teams are emphasized in the interviews:

Information should be available, and I think that the role of a director is quite important. And the whole work community should be on the same page and agree with the whole work community to be an important matter... Like all the other things in the work community. That you point it out to the person herself, and if she doesn't change her way of acting, then there would be an easy way to say about it to the director, and the director would discuss it with the person. So that

could be also discussed generally in our daycare, if you see someone acting like that, what can you do. So, more policies to that as well. (Katarina)

The external training can be fine as well. They bring things one wouldn't realize alone. So not just by ourselves, but as a good combination. And then, this work is done pretty much in teams, teams working together, so how the conversations within them could be affected more. So how there, in the internal conversations, things are noticed. Because that is where the biggest decisions about the activities are done and children and families are discussed. (Hannele)

When conducting interviews in March 2021, the COVID-19 has many practical effects in ECE institutions, for example abolishing the possibility of having development evenings or meetings, where all the staff members participate. Several respondents mention missing pedagogical evenings and development days as a place to discuss policies with the whole work community present. The respondents describe how the pandemic affects the possibilities of creating close communication and co-operation with parents and families, but the pandemic is mostly seen as temporary disturbance. However, practical challenges of having pedagogical conversations during the restrictions from the pandemic are clear in many of the interviews, and many respondents emphasize the importance of sharing knowledge and practices adopted from the trainings with the whole work community.

However, hectic reality and limited resources of ECE institutions are observed as preventing factors for attending to the trainings and for sharing the information within teams afterwards. Several respondents describe the difficultness of attending to any trainings in general, due to the practical arrangements. While simultaneously commitment of the whole work community is seen crucial, the challenges of participating to trainings prevent sharing the practices and continuing the work within units. There are a lot of trainings, deadlines and “hurry and hustle” in ECE institutions, and even if educators have a motivation to

continue the antiracist work, in some responses it is clear how it might get trampled over by other things. However, as can be seen from Eija's extract, continuing the work after the training is seen important.

And of course, such training is a good thing, but one training doesn't help much. So, it must be constantly in the speech, and take it to the world of daycare, to open it up somewhere for conversation... To have them, what is it, is it a pedagogical evening or what, to speak confidently and with one's work community. (Eija)

The training was targeted the whole work community, but as can be seen from Katariina's extract, in some ECE institutions the question of attendance was left to be made by the staff. It seems to have only attracted educators who had a previous interest to the questions of equality and equity.

In a training like that, the whole work community should be involved, and not to be asked who would like to join. Because then I noticed immediately who did participate to the training. They are, how to say, like-minded as myself, who did participate to the training. So then, it should be a duty for everyone to participate, and not a matter of choice. (Katariina)

Participation of the whole work community to a training during the daytime is considered difficult mostly due to the practical reasons: children are present in ECE units throughout the day and cannot be left unsupervised, and thus it might be challenging to arrange educators a chance to exit from the child group. This is not connected to the size of the unit, since many of the respondents mention that from large units, too, only a few of the staff members participated in the antiracist training. From the responses it seems that it demanded special interest from individuals to partake in antiracist training, and by appealing to practicalities, some chose not to participate.

5.5 Towards an antiracist approach: challenging white normativity

The last part of the analysis shows respondents' current, concrete actions of antiracism and dismantling white normativity in their work. Choices of material and the importance of representations are described first. Then, the pedagogical choices the respondents are implementing in their work are described. Lastly, the cruciality of the full participation of all children and the process of unlearning racial assumptions about families is presented.

5.5.1 Material

Education institutions might be seen as an oasis of sensitivity in the middle of unequal society, and the knowledge forwarded to the students by the teachers and schools can be seen as neutral or apolitical. However, these ideas are unrealistic (Nieto & Bode 2010, 348; 357.) Rastas writes how in institutional settings, such as daycares, as well as in free time, our environment is full of normative whiteness and representations of those who are excluded from whiteness (2004, 100). As Boutte, Lopez-Robertson and Powers-Costello present, young children learn racism in many covert and overt ways, such as through interaction with adults, television and children's books. For example, many people with Sámi-background still have vivid memories of racist Sámi representations in textbooks of primary education (Ranta & Kanninen 2019, 192). Thus, homes, schools nor society are free from racist overtones and they cannot be considered neutral. If these racial stereotypes and misconceptions children adopt are left uninterrupted, it is probable that children will magnify them (2011, 336 –337.) Therefore, awareness of material and representations offered in them are in a central role of antiracist education. As can be seen from Hannele's extract, material representations might not represent the lived realities of the children, let alone wider representations of the society.

When you look around here, what kind of toys the children have, and games, what kind of characters, very... mmh! (H sneers) In that kind of thing, it (white normativity) is visible. And when you look at the children in our daycare, they present every color of the world. So, it should be more visible, starting from the toys. The kids' toys and the games and such. (Hannele)

If antiracism is seen as acknowledgment of the institutional nature of racial structures, as Bonilla-Silva presents (2014, 15), then concrete materials and pedagogical choices made in the institutions can be said to be in the core of antiracism. Learning material – toys, brochures, books, songs and poems, color pens – are a very concrete, material base for representations available in the institutions.

When we did the pedagogical plan for our group, we thought about, for example, songs and books and everything, to be chosen in a wide spectrum, like... So, to simplify, that the main characters would be children of different colors, the stories would be different, they would tell about different cultures. ... Maybe, so not only white-skinned children are in the pictures. And also, that the children can greet in their own language during the morning circle and bring their own songs. (Kerttu)

Two respondents mention outdated books, and one respondent throws away books with racist descriptions. Some ECE institutions seem to have libraries with old books including racist and stereotyping descriptions, or in other ways they are not up to date with their presentations. Lack of resources is named as preventing factor, and due to the limitations of the budgets, the daycare library remains outdated. Interviewees mention that recently published material often has more diverse representations, but access to this material demands teacher's own activity and effort. Some books enter ECE institutions by their easy access, for example via training and their appealing appearance. Easy access is seen as effective in adding diverse representations in ECE institutions, for example via online videos, audiobooks or material available for printing.

5.5.2 Pedagogical choices

Pedagogy can be seen as not only the practical solutions and tools to enable the learning and growth of children and their skills. Instead, in the spirit of critical pedagogy, it can be seen as an understanding of the role of (critical) learning and socialization. Nieto and Bode describe how pedagogy can also refer to teachers' understanding of the nature of learning and creating conditions for their students to become critical thinkers (2010, 107). Therefore, teachers' understanding of antiracism is a deeply pedagogical process, and all the respondents emphasize the importance of having space to develop an antiracist approach in both pedagogical self-reflection and conversations within the work community or team, such as in pedagogical meetings. Leena describes antiracism as a fixed part of pedagogical thinking and planning:

You cannot be pedagogic if you are not an antiracist. ... And if something, antiracism is a pedagogical matter. (Leena)

Husband writes how antiracist education equips children to identify and reconstruct racially-based information and to respond to racial inequalities surrounding them (2011, 367 –368). In addition to the importance of choosing material offering diverse representations and pedagogical conversation within the work community, the interviewees describe two main things as their pedagogical choices in dismantling white normativity and forwarding antiracism. They emphasize treating children as individuals, and teaching them needed social skills to interact, play and co-operate with all children in their groups. In half of the interviews, respondents describe mixing up children's playgroups as a pedagogical tool. They see this frequent "raffle" (which appears as a raffle for children but is considered in advance by the educators), as a way to teach children to play together.

We make those playgroups, as a 'raffle' (E makes quotation marks with fingers)

and playmates, so we put a bit different kids, who won't usually play together, to play or to work together, to get familiar. Then they might notice, that hey, this is a nice friend to have, and... New friendships may emerge, and not always being with that, with whom it goes, the games and playing go the best, so to learn to act with others as well. And it is an important skill from a young age, an important skill that will follow to school, and work, and society.... (Eija)

However, it is not described how children are observed and supported during these playtimes. Van Ausdale and Feagin observe children aged 3-5 years old about their understanding and usage of ethnic and racial concepts and power. They conclude that adults might emphasize, how well children from different gender, racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds get along together, but when observed more closely, there are strict segregations done among children. Further, they observe that children are skilled in avoiding and creating spaces away from the gaze of “sanctioning adult,” and in most cases the instances where the race was used as a tool to gain power or authority in the play, they occurred away from adult supervision (2001, 169-173.) Thus, as a starting idea mixing the playgroups to create more spaces for common actions seems recommendable but analyzing the reality would demand closer observation. Interviewees see the playmate raffles as a pedagogical choice for preventing discrimination from emerging among the children, accepting and respecting differences, and supporting peer relations. On the other hand, especially adult's role and effort of ensuring the participation of children, who have linguistic challenges, is emphasized. The equal participation of all children is apparent in Leena's extract:

There should be clear observation sheets for teachers and teams. I constantly notice, how the term 'antiracism' makes some people rise up on their hinder legs really badly, so maybe that. I would integrate it to many other things and to observation sheets I would add: are children from different cultures playing together? Is the playtime as long for all children? Does every child have proper

material to make their own picture? Is there your own culture, your own language visible as it is, and not only in the culture wall? Is there communication with parents, about their own cultures? ... These kinds of questions can be tied to every day. Do parents understand how the child's day has been, is it easier to communicate with some families? And if the answer is yes, then to think about how to improve the communication with those others, then. Are there, for example, pictures used when communicating with parents? (Leena)

Leena summarizes many of the aspects an antiracist educator might need to consider, one of the suggestions named as an observation sheet. The municipality of Helsinki provides forms for observing equality in the ECE institutions as a practical, pedagogical solution to support equality and equity. Since the sheets are now only shared to preschool classes (6-year-olds), one of the respondents uses it with her team to map equality in their group, i.e., by going through what kind of toys and books they have and if adult behavior seems equal and all the children are treated equally. Other age groups could also use it beneficially as a practical solution of observing equality in the pedagogical planning and implementation.

5.5.3 Treating families as unique: dismantling assumptions

In their antiracist work, respondents see it crucial to treat children's families as individual family units with unique needs, hopes and expectations instead of seeing them through racialized assumptions. This pedagogical choice can be analyzed from the viewpoint presented by Freire: when true communication is established and the myth of a teacher, who knows everything, is set aside and teacher co-learns in dialogue with and from their students, liberation can be achieved (1996). One could suggest that Freire's idea of co-learning in dialogue can be reached with families of young learners as well, since the younger the child, the bigger is the role of the family and education at home. Co-operation

with parents, in general, is inevitable and crucial in ECE, and thus it is remarkable how parents are treated and that they are met without racialized expectations.

I am trying to unlearn from assuming things ... Well, a good example is that if the religion is Islam, for example, there are as many people with Islam as religion, as there are people, there is no shared self. Or kind of, more than to just assume, to ask. And just like that, what this means in your family, what do you hope and want, and what do you think about early childhood education. (Kerttu)

I myself fall on these too once in a while, I can admit that, so certain kinds of assumptions on how people act in some cultures. Like, to have very strongly, somehow 'well but they don't ever...' like, 'children can't participate to church' kind of, so. But we have discussed this a lot, these are that kind of things we go through in the conversation where we make child's development plan with each and every family. So precisely not go into this, 'how it is like in your culture' but 'how it is like in your family' with all things. (Elli)

To achieve equal treatment, the respondents try to ensure all families receiving as much time and attention from the educators, even if it demands extra effort by requesting an interpreter or using pictures. It is clearly observed from interviews that respondents actively try to dismantle and break their generalizing assumptions and treat children and their families as unique, not as representers of a certain, homogenous culture. Further, as DiAngelo & Sensoy state, if only the dominant group receives the privilege of being treated as individuals (2010, 101), treating also people who do not belong to the dominant group as individuals can be a tool of destabilizing this privilege.

Parents sent me Youtube links and links to stories and songs, and we composed them together as each child's own day. And the funniest thing was, when the Finnish families were like 'we don't have a culture, we don't have anything from that' and I was like, when you were a child, what kind of books did you read, what

kind of songs did you listen, and then they started to appear... All kind of Finnish children's culture and each family had their own kind. (Leena)

Tatum describes how white people, who have grown and lived in predominantly white surroundings, might be unaware of socialization processes. They might think of racial identity as something that “other people” have (2017, 186 –188.) As can be seen from Leena’s extract above, some respondents bring up experiences of helping the families to recognize white normativity and to challenge the idea of Finland as a homogenous country.

6 Conclusions and discussions

Recent studies conclude that racism is apparent already in ECE institutions. This study confirms those conclusions, since in the interviews of ECE teachers, racism is described in many forms. It is not only visible as direct racist attitudes, stereotypes and rhetoric towards co-workers and families, but also as ignorance and denial of racism, as well as multicultural and neo-racist rhetoric and colorblind approaches. Further, structural racism and inequality in receiving help for children are observed from the interviews. White normativity appears piercing in both, materials and assumptions. However, equality, equity and antiracism are considered important and necessary in all the interviews. Many interviewees consider themselves as developing antiracists and aim to adopt brave, self-reflecting and active stance against racism. The work culture appears as both, a preventing and an enabling factor in applying an antiracist approach. Practical resources, arrangements and also practical influences of the COVID-19 are preventing attending to the training and sharing the information received from them. Interviewees emphasize the importance of the whole work community discussing and committing to antiracist principles together, and the role of a director is seen as crucial. Current, concrete actions of dismantling white normativity and forwarding antiracism are in pedagogical choices, ensuring diverse representations in the material used in ECE institutions. Since co-operation with parents is central in ECE, recognizing and unlearning stereotypic assumptions of children's families. Many of the interviewees seem to have competently adopted antiracist strategies in their work. However, there are echoes of the multiculturalist "them and us"-approach and rhetoric to be observed. Some of these observations might be explained by the lack of vocabulary of racialization in Finnish, and as presented in theory, the word "immigrant" seems to be used as a general term for people with diverse backgrounds, skin colors and language skills. The knowledge gained from the training would have served as an interesting place to study how the respondents' understanding of antiracism has changed before and after attending the training, but due to practical limitations, this idea must be left

to future research. As described in part 4.2. “collecting and sampling data”, the respondents assumably had a positive attitude towards antiracism before participating in this study. It would be important, but possibly practically complicated, to interview those people who are *not* convinced of the urgency of antiracism and analyze their motivations behind that idea.

As can be seen from the research overview, connections between antiracism and ECE in Finland have not been researched widely. Studies of collaborative work among educator teams to promote antiracism are fully absent. This would need further research, since from the analyzed data it is clear that implementation of an antiracist approach to ECE demands a participation and cooperation of the whole work community. ECE teacher’s position drastically differs, i.e., from elementary school teacher’s position. The elementary school teachers most often work alone in their classrooms and thus the pedagogical approaches in their class are not done in teams. Even though ECE teachers have the pedagogical responsibility in their groups, ECE teachers work in teams and they need to discuss, share and implement their pedagogical choices with the whole team.

As part of their pedagogical choices to apply antiracism in their child group, many of the respondents emphasize the importance of teaching children to interact and play with all children in the group. However, for example in Van Ausdale & Feagin, it is clear that children use “race” as a crucial tool in their internal power dynamics. Educators and parents tend to avoid recognizing racial power among children (2001.) Thus, it would be important to observe and analyze the peer relations of children to see if the pedagogical aim is fulfilled, or if these attempts to create peer relations serve as battlefields for subtle (racial) power. And further, do these peer relations only occur under the supervising eye of adults? According to the result of the Finnish Ombudsman where every fifth child has experienced discrimination in early childhood education already (2020). Rastas describes, if a child is aware that other children do not want to be with her, but adults refuse to see or understand the situation, a child realizes it is useless to report it to the

adults (2009, 39). Are (white) adults capable to recognize and intervene usage of racial power among the children? Thus, antiracism, racism and white normativity in ECE need further research. Education has been researched from different angles during the years, but since both education and racial constructions of society are always contextual and changing, it is important to continue studying connections of education and (anti)racism with different approaches and through a critical lens. As Matias & Mackey write: “However, until we, as teachers, are willing to break down whiteness, the hope of racial justice and antiracism become a faint balloon rising beyond the horizon and drifting away from reality” (2016, 48).

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

If a question feels uncomfortable or for other reasons you do not wish to answer it, you can skip the question. You can answer as shortly or widely as you wish.

Background:

- Would you tell me a bit of your career background your current work?
- What is most important to you in your work?
- The national curriculum states how ECE should advance equality and equity. How important do you consider this? Does it realize in your work?

Antiracism:

- How racism, discrimination or inequality might appear in the ECE environment? Do you have examples of it?
- What do you recall most clearly from the antiracist training of Autumn 2020?
- What do you think antiracist education means? How important do you consider it?
- Is there something in an antiracist approach that seems difficult for you to understand or apply?
- How are you using an antiracist approach in your work?
- Have you discussed antiracism in your teams?
- In what kind of themes or topics is the antiracist education the most needed?
- What are the biggest preventing factors of using an antiracist approach in your work?
- And what could enable applying an antiracist approach?

White normativity:

- White normativity can be described as a power relation, a social and invisible norm and assumption that everything else is compared against to. Are you familiar with this term? What does it mean in your work?
- How is white normativity apparent in ECE?
- How could white normativity in ECE be dissembled?

Appendix 2: Invitation letter to participate in the research

Hello,

The staff from your ECE unit has participated during Autumn 2020 to an antiracist training by municipality of Helsinki and the Peace Education Institute. I am an early childhood education teacher, trainer of that antiracist project and currently also a thesis-writer.

As part of my thesis, I interview teachers who participated to the training about their understanding and experiences of adopting an antiracist approach in their work. My aim is to research, how meaningful do teachers consider the approach and possibilities and preventing factors of adopting the approach. You do not have to be actively adopted an antiracist approach in your work to participate to the study. Once completed, the study will give valuable information on the meaning, connections and development of antiracism in early childhood education. The study is first of its kind in Finland.

If you have the possibility to participate to gather knowledge on an important topic, I am aiming to find 8-12 ECE teachers to participate to the study. I ask interested teachers to send an e-mail to the address saara.loukola@gmail.com and agree on a suitable time. Due to the COVID-19, the interviews will be held online during February-March, and the estimated length of the interview is approximately 30-45 minutes.

I will handle the information gathered from the participants safely in such a way that individuals, their personal information or the units where they work will not be recognized. Participation is fully voluntary, and the participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any point by informing me about that. Withdrawing can also be done to me by e-mail at any point of the study without having any negative consequences on the participants.

The estimated time for finishing the study is in June 2021, and it will be published in the data base of Lund University and forwarded to municipality of Helsinki, the Peace Education Institute and to all the early childhood education units that granted permissions for interviews for developmental purposes. If you have any further questions, it is easiest to contact me by e-mail, saara.loukola@gmail.com

With kind regards,

Saara Loukola, Master student (Social Studies of Gender & Education, Lund University, Sweden)