Author(s): Hautakangas, Merja; Uusitalo, Lotta; Kumpulainen, Kristiina

Title: How Do Children Describe Learning Self-Regulation Skills in the Kids' Skills Intervention?

Year: 2022

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Please cite the original version:

Hautakangas, M., Uusitalo, L., & Kumpulainen, K. (2022). How Do Children Describe Learning Self-Regulation Skills in the Kids' Skills Intervention?. In H. Harju-Luukkainen, N. Bahdanovich Hanssen, & C. Sundqvist (Eds.), Special Education in the Early Years : Perspectives on Policy and Practice in the Nordic Countries (pp. 119-134). Springer. International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development, 36. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-91297-0_9

CHAPTER 10. How Do Children Describe Learning Self-regulation Skills in the Kids' Skills Intervention?

Merja Hautakangas, Lotta Uusitalo and Kristiina Kumpulainen

Abstract

In this chapter, 26 Finnish children between 4 and 14 years old described how they learned self-regulation skills after participating in the Kids' Skills programme in an early childhood education (ECE) setting. Kids' Skills is a programme aimed at developing children's self-regulation skills in a solution-focused and narrative way (Furman, 2016). The participating children were diagnosed as having difficulties in their self-regulation. Following the Kids' Skills intervention, the children described their learning in the form of narratives and drawings. The data were analysed using a thematic content analysis framed by Hicks' (1996) sociocultural model. The findings show how the children described how learning self-regulation skills created new opportunities to have playmates. The children described learning as regulating their behaviour so that their previous challenging behaviour could turn into a strength, such as their bullying behaviour turning into friendship. In addition, the children described a change in their group membership when they were accepted to participate in joint action, and they learned to express themselves more courageously. The results indicate that learning self-regulation skills is relevant to the child, and interventions to promote the child's self-regulation skills are recommended.

Introduction

Difficulties in self-regulation and social interaction are among the more common concerns in early childhood education (Koivula & Huttunen, 2018). Self-regulation is supportive of the conditions for learning (Boekaerts, 2011), but for many children, self-regulation produces difficulties (Kurki et al., 2016; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). In developing self-regulation skills, which is mentioned as an important goal of the teacher in National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (EDUFI, 2019) and in preprimary education (EDUFI, 2016), a child needs the support and help of a teacher.

Support for preprimary child growth and learning is defined in the Finnish Basic Education Act (2010/642). The levels of support for child growth and learning include general, intensified and special support. The same principles are used in early childhood education (Eskelinen & Hjelt, 2017), even though this is not required by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018). The support received by the child must be flexible, long term and variable, as needed. The role of the early identification and support for growth and learning is to prevent learning difficulties and the diversification and deepening of problems (EDUFI, 2016).

In the current study, we investigated the learning of self-regulation skills from the children's perspective in the Kids' Skills intervention. The children who participated in the intervention received general, intensified or special support to promote self-regulation skills. The principles of the Kids' Skills programme are based on solution-focused and narrative therapy (Furman, 2016), as well as positive psychology theory of focusing on positive emotions and a child's strengths. The children narrated and drew pictures about how they learned self-regulation skills. This study produces new research data on the effectiveness of the Kids' Skills programme in promoting children's self-regulation skills from a children's perspective. The children's narratives and drawings were analysed through a thematic content analysis framed by Hicks' (1996) sociocultural model, which draws attention to several levels, including the personal, activity and context levels. At a personal level, our analysis investigated how children describe their own learning. At the activity level, we examined the children's accounts of the intervention and measures assigned to them. At the context level, our analysis focused on how the children described their group in relation to learning self-regulation skills.

The importance of self-regulation skills for a child's learning

In this study, self-regulation is understood as a set of processes by which children can control their own cognition, emotions and actions (McClelland & Cameron, 2012). Self-regulation is seen as goal-oriented behaviour that requires multiple cognitive and social skills (Baumeister & Vohs, 2004). Learning self-regulation skills is an important developmental goal for a child (Boekaerts, 2011); the development of self-regulation skills affects relationships, social competence, cohesion, academic competence, interactions with adults, school readiness and the ability to focus on tasks (e.g., Blair & Raver, 2015; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Kjøbli & Ogden, 2014; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Thus, it is particularly important to promote self-regulation skills in children during early childhood education.

Self-regulation develops in social interactions. Through coregulation by teachers or guardians, a child internalises strategies, that is, the thinking, action and emotions about the values and expectations of a particular context, hence learning self-regulation (e.g., Kurki et al., 2016). The positive, sensitive and high-quality interactions of the teacher are related to the child's self-regulation and cognitive skills (e.g., Kurki et al., 2016; Lerkkanen et al., 2016). In addition, the timely support provided by the teacher strengthens the child's competence and relatedness and increases the child's autonomy (see Ryan & Deci, 2009).

For children, peer relationships and social cohesion are particularly important. Studies have shown that rejection experienced by children among their peers makes them sensitive to new experiences of rejection or social exclusion (van Lier & Deater-Deckard, 2016). Negative emotionality and low regulation predict behavioural problems in peer relationships (Lengua, 2003), and aggressive behaviour and a lack of self-control constitute the risks of exclusion from the child group (Laine, 2002). Thus, emotions have a significant impact on learning and sense of ability; for example, successful self-regulation leads to positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001; Pekrun et al., 2002).

Despite several studies, researchers do not agree on the definitions or effective interventions that would support the development of children's self-regulation skills (see, e.g., Alijoki et al., 2013; Kjøbli & Ogden, 2014). According to Määttä et al. (2017), who conducted research on socioemotional skills, blind spots are related to children–teacher interactions, children's group dynamics and interventions. The current study brings new insights into the intervention and group dynamics in children. There have been several studies of the Kids' Skills programme (e.g., Pernand & Rogner, 2019), but further research is needed on its functioning. This study can bring new research data on the effectiveness of the Kids' Skills programme in promoting children's self-regulation skills from children's perspectives.

The Kids' Skills programme

The Kids' Skills intervention is based on the Kids' Skills programme developed by Ben Furman, in which a child's developmental problems are approached in a solution-focused and narrative manner (Furman, 2016). Kids' Skills is suitable for supporting self-regulation skills and has been widely used in Finland and other countries since the 1990s (Furman, 2016);

however, there is still a lack of research (Bentner, 2014; Perband, 2016; Perband & Rogner, 2019). According to Kids' Skills, children have no problems; instead, they need to develop the skills in which they need training (Furman, 2016). The Kids' Skills programme is based on the children's strengths and self-esteem being supported at different stages of skill learning (Furman, 2003). Thus, its theoretical basis rests on a positive psychology that emphasises an individual's strengths, positive emotions, well-being and growth attitude (Seligman, 2000; Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Vuorinen, 2016).

The Kids' Skills programme was inspired by psychiatrist Milton H. Erickson and solution-focused thinking. which looks at a child's problem from a learning perspective. The starting point for the skill training is the question of what the child should learn to improve the situation. As the practice progresses, the focus is on progress and success. Kids' Skills is a flexible programme that can be applied to the needs of both an individual child and an entire group of children as part of early childhood education pedagogy. When children practice self-regulation skills and ask for supporters, it is possible for there to be a positive effect on the child's entire system (Furman, 2016). Kids' Skills has small skill goals that give the child experiences of success and learning. Kids' Skills has been developed to help with a variety of psychosocial problem,s such as fears, behavioural disorders, impaired concentration and eating problems (Furman, 2003).

There have been a few international studies on Kids' Skills. In Germany, two surveys were conducted to survey the opinions of trainers. Based on the results, Kids' Skills was perceived as a useful method to increase children's skills (Becker, 2014; Stephan, 2014). German kindergarten teachers (N = 10) were trained to use the Kids' Skills programme for six weeks, after which they applied it to one child in their group (Perband & Rogner, 2019). The results showed that children's behavioural challenges had improved significantly in six out of ten children. In addition, positive changes in children's self-esteem, ability and interaction between the teacher and child were observed.

Research Questions

Our aim was to understand how children describe learning self-regulation skills through the Kids' Skills intervention and programme. The following questions were specified as research questions:

1. What changes do children describe regarding the development of self-regulation skills on a personal level?
2. How do children describe the changes of the activity level on the development of self-regulation skills?
3. What benefits do children describe in learning self-regulation skills?

Research Methods

Kids' Skills intervention

The Kids' Skills intervention was conducted over a 10-week period in autumn 2017. The children drew pictures and told the researcher about learning self-regulation skills in April 2018.

First, the teacher agreed with the child's guardians about the child's skill training. Second, the teacher and child agreed on learning the skill in practice. For example, if the child was to practice the so-called 'friend skill', then the teacher could design pedagogical play situations for her/him and peers in which the child practices that skill. The child's motivation to learn a skill is aroused by mapping the benefits of the skill, for example, aggressive behaviour towards peers as a 'friend skill'. Here, the benefits of the skill were mapped through comic strip conversations. Cause-and-effect relationships were drawn for the child to see what happens when the child behaves aggressively and, accordingly, how the child makes friends. The child chooses a power creature (e.g., Superman), encouragers (e.g., the teacher) and a celebration of skill learning. How children will practice the skill and how they will be reminded if they forget the skill is agreed upon with the children. Once the children have learned the skill, the next skill may be agreed on with they (Furman, 2016).

In this intervention, the teachers used comic strips in addition to the Kids' Skills programme to motivate the child to practise self-regulation skills. The comic strips are based on Carol Gray's (1994) the Comic Strip Conversation, which has been expanded to describe the visual clarification of everyday things through drawings or images (see Peltola, 2009). The comic strips support the children's socioemotional skills and action management by supporting independent action and teaching understanding and internal processing of social situations. For example, if a child learns a friend skill, then the teacher will draw a comic strip for him or her about what happens when he or she is aggressive. The teacher draws the first picture depicting a challenging situation, for example, a dispute. The teacher and child then discuss the situation

and what then happened to the child and peers. They then agree that the child will not behave that way and draw a cross over it on the picture. Next, the teacher and child discuss how the child gets playmates and plays games without disputes. Of these, the teacher draws a comic strip. The teacher draws the child's desired behaviour, that is, how to play in harmony with peers and agree on the games together. In challenging situations, the teacher can draw the desired behaviour for the child, or he or she can remind the child of a behavioural strategy previously drawn.

In the current study, it was agreed that the children would concentrate on learning friendship skills, patience skills and courage skills. Friendship skills are the social skills that require the ability to adjust one's behaviour according to the situation. The children themselves had renamed these skills. For example, the skill of friendship became the 'princess skill' and the skill of courage became the 'knight skill'.

Study participants

The study was conducted in four groups at two day care centres in Finnish ECE or preprimary education institutions. The study involved 26 children aged 4 to 14 years (15 boys and 11 girls). Of the children, 16 were in early childhood education, nine were in preprimary education and one child was in primary education. During the interview, the child was at school for an internship in the day care centre and wanted to tell the researcher about his own experiences; he was a former child of the day care centre and had practised self-regulation skills at the age of 5 or 6 in the Kids' Skills intervention.

Nine children had special or intensified support for learning or social skills. All children had a higher than normal need for support in regulating emotions or behaviour. For two children, Finnish was their second language. Table 1 describes the ages and genders of the children.

Age	Girls	Boys	Levels of support
4	2	5	3 intensified support, 4 general support, but children practised self-regulation skills intensively
5	4	5	2 intensified support, 2 general support, but children practised self-regulation skills intensively, 5 general support

6	2	5	7 general support, but children practised self-regulation skills intensively
7	1	1	2 general support, but children practised self-regulation skills intensively
14	-	1	one special support

Table 10. 1. Descriptive information of the participants

Data collection

The first researcher collected the data from children in the day care centres and preschool. During the intervention, teachers were responsible for implementing the Kids' Skills programme, and the researcher observed children for four days in each group, so she became a person familiar to the children. Similarly, the researcher was familiar with the children's self-regulation skills based on the observations.

The children's teacher and researcher told the children about the interview (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). In small groups around the table, the researcher and three to five children discussed learning self-regulation skills. They discussed practising the children's self-regulation skills in the intervention. During the discussion, the children drew the learning of their chosen skill. There were 62 minutes of group interviews with the children. The joint discussions lasted from 10 to 15 minutes each. After a joint discussion and drawing, each child told the researcher alone about learning self-regulation skills and about their own drawing. All situations were videotaped. The duration of the children's interviews ranged from 4 to 21 minutes, here depending on the child's willingness to speak. The total time of the individual child interviews was 161 minutes. The children had the right to change their minds during the interview (Viljamaa, 2012). Two children drew pictures and then refused to tell the researcher anything.

Interview studies of children have been criticised for their introductory and questioning nature (Karlsson, 2016). When interviewing the children in the current study, the aim was to avoid questions in which the child would answer according to the adult's wishes. Most of the questions were formulated as open questions: *'tell me something / tell me more'* (Ruusuvuori & Tiittula, 2009). The course of the interviews varied considerably, and a common understanding was built throughout (Roos & Rutanen, 2014). The aim was to end the interviews so that the child would have had a positive experience (Gollop, 2000).

Data analysis

The children's narratives were transcribed, resulting in 57 pages of text (Arial, 12, 1.15 spacing). The children's drawings were investigated alongside the narratives and used to support the interview (Yuen, 2004). The interview data were reduced to texts dealing with the children's skills learning process. In looking for common themes, the resulting data were approached with a thematic content analysis. The analysis was framed by Hicks' (1996) sociocultural model with a focus on the individual children and how they described the learning of self-regulation skills at the personal, activity and context levels. At the personal level, our analysis investigated how children describe their own learning. At the activity level, we examined the children's accounts of the intervention and what changes in activities they described. At the context level, our analysis focused on how the children described their group in relation to learning self-regulation skills and how the children considered they had benefitted from learning self-regulation skills. Three themes emerged in the analysis: *changes from challenges to child strengths*, *change in child behaviour* and *changes in child group roles and dynamics*. These describe the results at the personal, activity and context levels.

Trustworthiness and ethical solutions

The research proceeded in accordance with ethical standards. Through ethical reflection, a research method was developed in which the children were seen as valuable sources of information and participants in research at every stage of the process (Kumpulainen et al., 2015). Undertaking research on children can bring about many challenges (Karlsson, 2012), which may be because adults often underestimate children's ability to participate (Lansdown, 2010). The specificity and diversity of children can challenge researchers to interpret the children's experiences of learning truthfully (Karlsson, 2016). In the current study, researcher triangulation was used to critically assess the challenges related to children's research and the researcher's position (see Mustola et al., 2017).

Permission to conduct the study was sought orally from the children, and they had the opportunity to refuse at several stages. Written permission was obtained from the children's guardians, the leaders of the day care centres and the city's early childhood education services.

The trustworthiness of the study was assessed throughout the research process by the three authors. The first author wrote the analysis, having considered the instructions and comments

of the other two authors. Based on the results, we assessed the effects of the research on supporting children's self-regulation skills in early childhood education.

Results

In this section, we discuss our results in accordance with the research questions. First, we illustrate the effects children describe on the development of self-regulation skills at a personal level. Next, we discuss how the children described the effects of activity level on the development of self-regulation skills. We then discuss the benefits the children saw in learning self-regulation skills at the context level and how this contributed to their learning. The material citations are marked as follows: the alphabet describes the codes (A–E) and the number is the age of the child (4–14).

Learning friendship, patience, courage and tasting skills

Children were able to share their learning of self-regulation skills in a variety of ways, especially the preprimary-age children. The task allowed the children to be narrated (Einarsdottir et. al., 2009), and the topic produced successful experiences for the children. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked the children *what skill you were learning*, after which the researcher used the child's name for the skill, for example, knight skill, courage skill or patience skill.

The children explained how their *challenges* had turned into their *strengths*. The difficulty of learning through experimentation and perseverance had turned into regulatory competence and learning. The children's restlessness had turned into good manners, such as waiting their turn. Bullying other children had turned into self-regulation through compassion. The child's selfishness had turned into considering another through empathy. The child's inhibited regulation had turned into courage and autonomy. The difficulty of stopping play had turned into regulating one's actions. One child had understood the importance of his activity, and he said that the teachers had helped him understand it. The transformation of the challenge into a strength was probably related to the child's desire for success in learning the skill, as described by one child (C6).

Changes in learning was an important goal at the personal level. As the children learned self-regulation skills, the children's own self-image changed, for example, with courage: 'no longer

having to hesitate, as tension is a part of life' (B7). This development is illustrated by a child's description of his over-regulation and inhibited behaviour, which, with the skill of courage, he used to overcome his fears and was encouraged to act: to talk to peers, to play and to participate in joint activities.
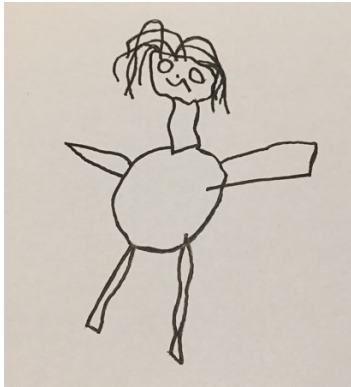

Figure 10.1. Courage skill

Researcher: can you tell me what skill you are learning?
Child: chivalry, kind of courage
Researcher: what does it mean, can you tell me more?
Child: being brave in some things, not daring to do. being able to do things and not just think when I am a little scared.
Researcher: why is it important to learn the skill of courage?
Child: that can help friends, if someone is in trouble, then try to help
Researcher: what has it been like to learn the skill of courage?
Child: even if it is exciting at first, nothing, that's the kind of courage it is (B7)

This child described how learning the skill of courage would also help his peers, thereby affecting group dynamics between the children. Another child described how she had previously laughed at her peers and pushed them. Afterwards, she regulated her emotions and behaviour and did not bully her peers (D7). As the children learned to regulate their feelings and behaviours while playing and interacting with peers, peer relationships relevant to the child also improved. Learning likely affects a child's perceived well-being and happiness (see Seligman, 2000) and sense of ability (Paananen, 2019).

In the current study, some children had difficulty producing and understanding speech, which challenged both understanding the child and interpreting the results from the children's interviews. In some narratives, the question arose as to whether the child had understood the importance of practising self-regulation skills because the joy brought by the development of self-regulation skills itself was not the focus. For one child, it was important only to get stickers as a reward:

Figure 10.2. Princess skill

Researcher: can you tell me what skill you are learning?

Child: princess skills

Researcher: can you tell me more about what that means?

Child: charity for all… helping… hugging

Researcher: what are the benefits of that skill?

Child: it makes stickers

Researcher: why is it important to learn the skill of charity?

*Child: well, otherwise you wouldn't get those stickers*

Researcher: can you tell us more about learning a skill?

Child: if it is boring, then it can be done. if there is no playmate…
then the food tastes good too. it also becomes hunger. (E6)

In this example, the child had renamed the friend skill to 'princess skill', which could describe the six-year-old girl's interest in princesses. In turn, the name also evokes gendered thinking, defining girls in particular as calm and kind. The question that arose was whether the princess name was of the girl's own choosing and how the influence of teachers or guardians is reflected in it. Overall, understanding a child's perspective is challenging because children are not always willing or do not find participation in research meaningfully. Thus, the children's ability to understand what self-regulation skills are and what motivated them to learn is challenging.

Changes in children's behaviour as a benefit of activity level

The children described how their *behaviour had changed* as they were learning self-regulation skills. The children had been taught self-regulation skills through comic strip conversations and teaching cause-and-effect relationships. The children reported that their peers benefitted when their behaviour had changed, especially when regarding peer-to-peer playing skills or working together. The children also described which of their peers had learned self-regulation skills. One child drew himself as enraged and then drew a cross over this. He said he could only go on the rampage if they agreed together.
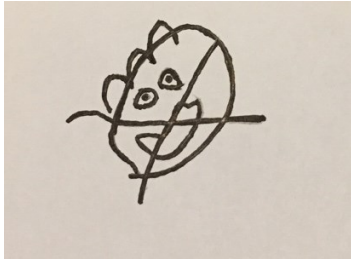
Researcher: what skill you were learning?

Child: must not rampage

Researcher: can you tell me more about it?

Child: I can't explain… not to rage and whisper to others, but if agreed, then you can rage (C6)

Figure 10.3. Friendship skill

In this case, the rules of the game had been jointly agreed upon. In addition, the child described how he no longer lost his temper in shops, amusement parks or day care centres.

Most of the children described a strong motivation to learn. Ten of the children mentioned positive emotions, for example, that learning self-regulation skills felt good. For three children, learning was difficult or boring. The goals set for learning self-regulation skills were generally clear to the children. Four of the children appeared to have difficulties in understanding what self-regulation skills were about, and in the interviews, they talked about other things, such as a hurricane. Two children drew a picture but did not want to say anything about it. Two children said they were motivated to learn self-regulation skills because of the rewards. Another child was motivated to learn self-regulation skills because she considered that they increased her confidence, making her take responsibility and affording 'nice' play (D7).

Changes in child group roles and dynamics

Changes in the role in a group of children are a significant result, both for the child personally and for the group's activities in general. It is important because the community plays a significant role in the development of a child's identity and growth into a member of society (Koivula, 2010). The children reported that other children had not played with them before, but after learning self-regulation skills, they had been accepted into play. A child with poor self-regulation skills often finds him- or herself in a negative circle and stigmatised (Laine, 2002). For a child who has received negative feedback, learning self-regulation skills and succeeding in interactions are relevant.

Some of the older children described learning self-regulation as *a new opportunity* (A14). A few children also mentioned how they could influence the learning of self-regulation skills, especially the problems that had arisen in peer relationships. One child described this as follows:
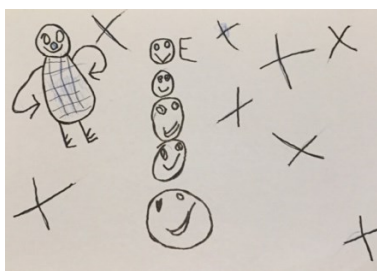
Figure 10.4. Patience skill

Researcher: what skill you were learning?

Child: patience, e.g., room when you are in the queue, as here, and I'm here on the last train, so I wait there, and I do not push others or skip others in the queue just because I want to always be first.

Researcher: yes

Child: that's not what I did. Of course, in ECE centre I did.

Researcher: have you learned that skill now?

Child: it still needs to be practised. (D7)

The child in question also said that she had learned to restrain herself in situations in which she had previously laughed at another child's failure, had quarrels with peers and in which they had not played with her. As the child learned the patience skill, the other children wanted to play with her, she felt comfortable, and she gained more confidence and responsibility with her peers. The children reported that their peers benefitted when they learned self-regulation skills, especially when it came to peer-to-peer playing skills or working together. The children also described which of their peers had learned self-regulation skills.

Changes in the in-group dynamic are related to changes in trust, responsibility, helpfulness and kindness reported by children. The children had learned that their own actions had a bearing on the kind of interactions they had with their loved ones. Helping other people had produced better games and well-being. A child's understanding of increased responsibility and confidence is significant and necessary as the child transitions to primary education, where expectations for self-direction are higher than in preprimary education (see Ryan & Deci, 2009).

The children also described how their *understanding of social relationships had developed*. The understanding of change in a child's behaviour was manifested by considering another child and the effects of one's own behaviour for oneself and peers, for example. One child described how practising skills helped him learn that other children are similar and do not think only selfishly (A14). The children also said that teachers benefit as they learn self-regulation skills.

Discussion

In the current study, we looked at children's self-regulation skill learning as narrated by the children themselves. Children's participation in matters affecting the child is important in the Nordic countries (Bennett, 2005), and they are valuable sources of information in research about the children themselves (Kumpulainen et al., 2015). Unfortunately, there are few studies giving the children's own descriptions of learning self-regulation skills (e.g., Booth, et al., 2019). The current study brings valuable information to this research area.

The practices constructed in this intervention appear to be forms of support, such as achieving the goals set in the National Core Curriculum for ECEC (EDUFI, 2019) and in preprimary education (EDUFI, 2016) for learning self-regulation skills. What is significant is the transformation of the children's challenges into strengths and the learning of self-regulation skills, which supports previous research on the Kids' Skills programme (see Bentner, 2014; Perband, 2016; Perband & Rogner, 2019). Thus, support for the child was individual and inclusive (see Basic Education Act, 2010/642; EDUFI, 2016). As the children leveraged their own strengths, their well-being increased (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Vuorinen, 2016).

The teacher's commitment to developing the children's self-regulation skills is particularly important. One explanation for the relationships between children and changes in the group membership was that learning children's self-regulation skills was considered in the group of children. Considering learning and the development of the child's self-regulation skills and building community learning processes affect peer relationships and, thus, group dynamics (see Määttä et al., 2017). Changes in the role of children when it comes to in-group membership are a significant result, both for the child and group as a whole. This result supports previous research on the importance of positive, sensitive and timely teacher support for the development of a child's self-regulation skills (see Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Kjøbli & Ogden, 2014; Kurki et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2009).

Critically assessing whether a child practising self-regulation skills with the help of the Kids' Skills programme is an object of teacher education and, thus, connected to the behaviourist paradigm. In addition, do adults build learning environments for children where the children's self-regulation skills are constantly challenged? An important principle in the Kids' Skills programme is that children do not have problems but are instead developing skills for which they need adult support and help. Although child participation is also offered a significant role,

a child practising self-regulation skills is the target of teacher education. Depending on the pedagogical skills of the teachers, they enable the participation of the children in building a supportive learning environment for children. Kids' Skills could be further developed in such a way that children's participation is also possible during the practice of self-regulation skills and does not depend on the pedagogical competence of teachers.

The teacher's positivity, compassion, solution orientation and sensitivity form the basis of positive group dynamics in a group of children (see Rajala et al., 2019). Especially when children have often received negative feedback about their behaviour, it is important to note the child's progress in development and provide encouraging positive feedback (see Laine, 2002; Lengua, 2003). It is likely that the child's development will also have a positive effect on family relationships (see Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). In conclusion, the current study shows how children can view their learning of self-regulation as creating new opportunities for themselves, their peers and their communities. The present study also provides hands-on methods for teachers on how they can support children's self-regulation skills and influence children's group dynamics and operational culture, especially children who need support for self-regulation in early years.

In this chapter, Finnish children explained how they learned self-regulation skills after participating in a Kids' Skills intervention. The Kids' Skills programme has been designed to enhance children's self-regulation skills in a solution-focused way. Early childhood education in Finland and the other Nordic countries emphasises children's agency and active participation in learning. Teacher's agency in pedagogical decision making is also highly valued. The Kids' Skills programme is committed to these principles and offers a flexible programme that can be applied to a range of the self-regulatory needs of a child or group of children. It has no strictly structured formula, but it encourages teachers and children to agree jointly on common plans and goals for learning. The programme also underscores the importance of teachers' professional competence in creating learning opportunities for children in contextually sensitive and meaningful ways. The principles of child and teacher agency align well with the Nordic notions of childhood and role of education and adults in supporting children's holistic learning and development.

References

Alijoki, A., Suhonen, E., Nislin, M., Kontu, E., & Sajaniemi, N. (2013). Pedagogiset toiminnat erityisryhmissä ja oppimisympäristön laatu [Pedagogical activities in special groups and the quality of the learning environment]. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, *2*(1), 24-47.

Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2004). *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory, and applications*. The Guilford Press.

Bennett, J. (2005). Curriculum issues in national policy-making. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 13*(2), 5. doi.org/10.1080/13502930585209641.

Blair, C., & Raver, C. C. (2015). School readiness and self-regulation: a developmental psychobiological approach. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *66*, 711–731. https:/doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010814-015221

Boekaerts, M. (2011), Emotions, emotion regulation, and self-regulation of learning. In B. Zimmerman & D. Schunk (Eds.) *Handbook of self-regulation of learning and performance* (pp. 408–425). Routledge.

Booth, A., O'Farrelly, C., Hennessy, E., & Doyle, O. (2019). 'Be good, know the rules': Children's perspectives on starting school and self-regulation. *Childhood*, *26*(4), 509–524, https:/doi.org/10.1177/0907568219840397

Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science, 16*, 939–944. https:/doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2005.01641.x

EDUFI. (2016). *National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education 2014.* Finnish National Agency for Education, Regulations and Guidelines 6.

EDUFI. (2019). *National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2018.* Finnish National Agency for Education, Regulations and Guidelines 3c.

Einarsdottir, J., Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2009). Making meaning: Children's perspectives expressed through drawings. *Early Childhood Development and Care, 179*(2), 217–232. https:/doi.org/10.1080/03004430802666999

Eskelinen, M., & Hjelt, H. (2017). *Varhaiskasvatuksen henkilöstö ja lapsen tuen toteuttaminen* [Early childhood education staff and implementation of child support]. Valtakunnallinen selvitys 2017. Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön julkaisuja 2017:39. Ministry of Education and Culture.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology. The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *The American Psychologist*, *56*(3), 218–226. https:/doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.56.3.218

Furman, B. (2016*). Muksuopin lumous. Luova tapa valita lapsia voittaa psyykkiset ongelmat*. [The enchantment of the Kids' Skills. A creative way to choose children to overcome mental problems]. Lyhytterapiainstituutti.

Gollop, M. M. (2000). Interviewing children: A research perspective. In A. B. Smith, N. J. Taylor, & M. M. Gollop (Eds.) *Children's voices. Research, policy and practice* (pp. 18–36). Pearson Education New Zealand Limited.

Gray, C. (1994). *Comic strip conversations.* Future Horizons.

Hicks, D. (1996). Contextual inquires: A discourse-oriented study of classroom learning. In D. Hicks (Ed.) *Discourse, learning and schooling* (pp. 104–141). Cambridge University Press.

Karlsson, L. (2012). Lapsinäkökulmaisen tutkimuksen ja toiminnan poluilla [On the paths of child-centered research and action]. In L. Karlsson & R. Karimäki (Eds.) *Sukelluksia lapsinäkökulmaiseen tutkimukseen ja toimintaan* [Dives for child-centered research and activities] (pp. 17–66). Suomen kasvatustieteellinen seura.

Karlsson, L. (2016). Lapsinäkökulmainen tutkimus ja aineiston tuottaminen [Child-centred research and production of material]. In K. P. Kallio, A. Ritala-Koskinen, & N. Rutanen (Eds.), *Missä lapsuutta tehdään?* [Where is childhood done?] (pp. 106, 121–141). Nuorisotutkimusseura. Verkkojulkaisuja.

Kjøbli, J., & Ogden, T. (2014). A randomized effectiveness trial of individual child social skills training: Six-month follow-up. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, *8*(1), 31. https:/doi.org/10.1186/s13034-014-0031-6

Koivula, M. (2010). *Lasten yhteisöllisyys ja yhteisöllinen oppiminen päiväkodissa* [Children's community and community learning in kindergarten] [Doctoral dissertation]. Jyväskylä University. https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/23627/9789513938925.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Koivula, M., & Huttunen, K. (2018). Children's social-emotional development and its support. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research, 7*(2), 177–183.

Kumpulainen, K., Mikkola, A., & Salmi, S. (2015). Osallistava visuaalinen tutkimus ja lapsen äänen tavoittaminen [Participatory visual exploration and reaching for a child's voice]. In M. Mustola, J. Mykkänen, M. L. Böök, & A-V. Kärjä (Eds.), *Visuaaliset menetelmät lapsuuden- ja nuorisotutkimuksessa* [Visual methods in childhood and adolescent research] (pp. 136–144). Nuorisotutkimusseura, julkaisuja 170.

Kurki, K., Järvenoja, H., Järvelä, S., & Mykkänen, A. (2016). How teachers co-regulate children's emotions and behaviour in socio-emotionally challenging situations in day care settings. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *76*, 76–88. https:/doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2016.02.002

Laine, K. (2002). Vertaisryhmä ja syrjäytyminen [Peer group and exclusion]. In K. Laine & M. Neitola (Eds.), *Lasten syrjäytyminen päiväkodin vertaisryhmästä* [Exclusion of children from the kindergarten peer group] (pp. 13-37). Suomen Kasvatustieteellinen Seura.

Lansdown, G. (2010). The realisation of children's participation rights: Critical reflections. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation: Perspectives from theory and practice* (pp. 11–23). Routledge.

Lengua, J. (2003). Associations among emotionality, self-regulation, adjustment problems, and positive adjustment in middle childhood. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *24*(5), 595–618. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2003.08.002

Lerkkanen, M.-K., Kiuru, N., Pakarinen, E., Poikkeus, A.-M., Rasku-Puttonen, H., Siekkinen, M., & Nurmi, J.-E. (2016). Child-centered versus teacher-directed teaching practices: Associations with the development of academic skills in the first grade at school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *36*(3), 145–156. https:/doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2015.12.023

McClelland, M. M., & Cameron, C. E. (2012). Self-regulation in early childhood: Improving conceptual clarity and developing ecologically valid measures. *Child Development Perspectives, 6*(2), 136–142. https:/doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2011.00191.x

Mustola, M., Kärjä, A-V., Böök, M. L., & Mykkänen, J. (2017). *Visuaaliset menetelmät lapsuuden- ja nuorisotutkimuksessa* [Visual methods in childhood and adolescent research]. Nuorisotutkimusverkosto/Nuorisotutkimusseura. Verkkojulkaisuja, 123, 11-23.

Määttä, S., Koivula, M., Huttunen, K., Paananen, M., Närhi, V., Savolainen, H., & Laakso, M.-L. (2017). *Lasten sosioemotionaalisten taitojen tukeminen varhaiskasvatuksessa* [Supporting children's socioemotional skills in early childhood education]. Opetushallitus. Raportit ja selvitykset, 17/2017.

Paananen, M. (2019). *Mastering learning situations: self-regulation, executive functions and self-regulatory efficacy among elementary school pupils* [Doctoral dissertation]. https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/66126/978-951-39-7928-7_vaitos16112019.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Pekrun, R., Goetz, T., Titz, W., & Perry, R. (2002). Academic emotions in students' self-regulated learning and achievement: A program of quantitative and qualitative research. *Educational Psychologist, 37*, 91–106.

Peltola, E-L. (2009). Sarjakuvittaminen [To use comic strip conversations]. In P. Karvonen (Ed.), *Tarinan kertojat. Iloa ja leikkiä. Kieleen, liikkumiseen ja laskemiseen* [Storytellers. Joy and play. For language, movement and calculation]. Gummerus.

Perband, A., & Rogner, J. (2019). 'Kids' Skills'—Implementation and evaluation of the systemic solution-focused program. *Universität Osnabrück: repOSitorium*.

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification.* Oxford University Press.

Rajala, A., Kontiola, H., Hilppö, J., & Lipponen, L. (2019). Lohdutustilanteet ja myötätuntokulttuuri alle kolmivuotiaiden päiväkotiryhmässä [Consolation situations and a culture of compassion in the day care centre group of children under three years of age]. *Kasvatus, 50*(4), 314–326.

Rimm-Kaufman, S., Pianta, R., & Cox, M. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(2), 147–166. https:/doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(00)00049-1

Roos, P., & Rutanen, N. (2014). Metodologisia haasteita ja kysymyksiä lasten tutkimushaastattelussa [Methodological challenges and questions in a children's research interview]. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, *3*(2), 27–47.

Ruusuvuori, J. & Tiittula, L. (Eds.) *Haastattelu. Tutkimus, tilanteet ja vuorovaikutus* [Interview. Research, situations and interaction]. Vastapaino.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2009). Promoting self-determined school engagement. Motivation, learning and well-being. In K. R. Wentzel & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation at school* (pp. 171–195). Routledge.

Seligman, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 5–14. https:/doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.

Uusitalo-Malmivaara, L., & Vuorinen, K. (2016). *Huomaa hyvä! Näin ohjaat lasta ja nuorta löytämään luonteenvahvuutensa* [See good! This is how you guide your child and young example by their character strength]. PS-kustannus.

van Lier, P. A. C., & Deater-Deckard, K. (2016). Children's elementary school social experience and executive functions development: Introduction to a special section. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, *44*(1), 1–6. https:/doi.org/10.1007/s10802-015-0113-9

Viljamaa, E. (2012). *Lasten tiedon äärellä. Äidin ja lasten kerronnallisia kohtaamisia kotona* [By the children's knowledge. Narrative encounters between mother and children at home] [Doctoral dissertation].

Yuen, F. C. (2004). 'It was fun… I liked drawing my thought': Using drawings as a part of the focus group process with children. *Journal of Leisure Research*, *36*(4), 461–482.