



Playful learning as a powerful tool in Early Childhood Education and Care setting

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This thesis consists of a 10-week observation diary, where children between 2 and 5 years old got to play inside an Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. There were learning environment spaces specially designed for children, focused on the aims for the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood and Care, playing activities happened within daycare premises and surrounding areas.

The diary describes goals and activities considering the transversal competences as a base for planning them. A core idea for this work came after discussing the poor or lack of interaction and participation from educators and professionals during children's play at work and how these could be enhanced through playing. I aim to find out deeper answers and possible problem-solving solutions for my claim. Pedagogical documentation was one of the tools for this Diary thesis. Before starting the project, permissions to the working partner and families were asked to protect the identity of the people involved. At the end of each week, a small conclusion came after the activities were planned and executed, with a variety of results.

The conclusion of my study corroborates that to fill the gap of lack of interaction and participation from adults during children's play in daycare setting, staff should understand and work together with children to create child-oriented activities and play based learning areas. Play was enhanced and more joyful when learning together adults and kids.

Keywords: Playful learning, Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood and Care, learning environment, play, play based learning.

Table of Contents

<i>Table of Contents</i>	4
1. INTRODUCTION	6
2 AIMS OF THE THESIS	7
3 ACTIVATING PLAY MOOD FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATORS INSIDE DAY-CARE SETTING	8
3.1 INVOLVEMENT OF THE CHILDREN WHILE DESIGNING PLAYFUL AREAS	8
3.2 ENHANCED PLAYING STATIONS THAT PROMOTES PLAY	8
3.3 OPERATIONAL CULTURE THAT ENCOURAGE PLAY	8
3.4 ADULT INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN’S PLAY	9
4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	9
4.1 DEFINITION OF PLAY	10
4.2 CONCEPT OF PLAY	10
4.3 PLAY ACCORDING TO THE CURRICULUM	12
4.4 MEANING OF ADULT ROLE IN PLAY ACCORDING TO THE CURRICULUM.....	13
5 THEORIES OF PLAY	13
5.1 SCAFFOLDED PLAY	13
5.2 PLAY BASED LEARNING	13
5.3 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND PLAYING AREAS.....	14
5.4 TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES IN CURRICULUM.....	14
5.5 GUIDED AND INDEPENDENT PLAY AND TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES	15
5.6 EDUCARE.....	16
6 DIARY PROCESS	17
6.1 DIARY OBSERVATIONS FOR EACH WEEK	18
6.1.1 WEEK 1	18
<i>WEEK 1 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	20
6.1.2 WEEK 2	23
<i>WEEK 2 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	25
6.1.3 WEEK 3	27
<i>WEEK 3 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	29

6.1.4	WEEK 4	33
	<i>WEEK 4 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	34
6.1.5	WEEK 5	35
	<i>WEEK 5 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	36
6.1.6	WEEK 6	38
	<i>WEEK 6 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	39
6.1.7	WEEK 7-8	41
	<i>WEEK 7-8 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	52
6.1.8	WEEK 9	53
	<i>WEEK 9 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	54
5.1.9	WEEK 10	55
	<i>WEEK 10 IN A NUTSHELL</i>	62
7	PARTNER INVOLVEMENT AND WORKPLACE FEEDBACK	67
	FEEDBACK FROM WORKPLACE ACTIVITIES DONE AND DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE FROM MY REPORT PROCESS DUE WORK CHANGE PLACEMENT.	67
	MORE FEEDBACK FROM THE COLLEAGUES OF MY NEW PLACE:	68
8	CONCLUSION AND SELF-REFLECTION ABOUT MY THESIS	69
9	REFERENCES	71
	PRINTED	71
	ELECTRONIC.....	71
	FIGURES	72

1. Introduction

The choice of this topic concerning Play in the Early childhood in Education and Care setting has to do with the phenomenon of according to my experience, the educators often leave the children to have free play without an adult around, which surely children enjoy a lot, mainly when they choose for themselves where they want to play and select their favorite board games or toys. We enjoy watching them play during the playful time, also it's a moment when we observe the interaction with their peers inside the classroom and we can identify straight away some interests or problems, but at the same time we forget about the possibility of an enhanced guided play where they could probably learn more and explore more together with us. This has been a topic of discussion during the meetings at my workplace. We need to play more together with the kids. Our job consists of playing and learning together with the children. According to the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, hereinafter referred as NACCE (2022), it was noticed that staff from each group has the duty of promoting and creating these learning environments that eventually will encourage children to come and try to develop their inventiveness, creativity, personal expressions etc.

The main goal for this thesis is to find ways to enhance and increase participation and interaction of children and educators in play activities in day care settings. The quality framework for this Diary thesis and discussion is the NACCE (2022). As educators we need to think about the needs we have in the classroom, also which are our resources for example second hand furniture or carton boxes that could be reshaped and redesigned and then we need to let the children participate actively deciding where and how to organize such spaces to make it tempting to go to play. It was noticed that the learning and playing environment we are creating for the children plays a big role on how they will be participating, playing and more over learning together with us, the educators, with whom they spent even up to 8 hours a day or more (Wiser 2011).

For this 10-week Diary thesis the target working partner is my workplace and the observed group are young children aged between 2-5-year-old, they are the children with whom I work every day. This is an international kindergarten in the Metropolitan area. The goal is to find the problem of lack of interaction between adults and children during play time. The idea is to investigate and get it how to create play-based instruction and superior interaction between the teachers and children in play in childcare I will concentrate on the subject at my workplace for a ten-week viable investigate period. I will think about the concepts and hypotheses about play and attempt to create the working space interactive and attractive for the children and

adults for a better playful interaction. At the beginning of the week, a goal will be set for each activity, the assessment will be made during the observation time, and the conclusion of the achievements will be written down to evaluate it at the end of the 10-week period. During each week, the objectives will be set and execute together with children and colleagues. I will utilize the diary thesis-method for writing down my ideas and encounters each day to be able to assess the method within the end of the week and create my exercises and understanding assist. At the end of these 10-week period, feedback will be given from my ex-colleagues and actual workplace colleagues that will review my findings. This is due that the 10-week observation happened at my previous workplace, but during the summer I changed my workplace. Within the conclusion of the 10-week period I will analyse and conclude the full handle based on my day-by-day journals.

2 Aims of the thesis

As described in the introduction, the main goal of this thesis is to find ways to improve and increase the participation and interaction of children and educators in play activities in preschool settings, but also, is to find how to enhance that participation so children really learn while playing together with us.

The specific objectives and child-oriented activities are guided thru the curriculum (NACCE 2022). Staff in each group are responsible for promoting and creating learning environments that encourage children to come and try so they can develop their creativity, imagination, and self-expression. The way how I intend to do this analysis it is through observation and pedagogical documentation in a diary of 10 weeks, and to document the impact of the interaction of adult participation in play-based learning in a day-care in Finland. Here I will be able to evaluate the influence of adults within a play-based learning environment alongside the children of this specific international day-care located in metropolitan area in Finland.

3 Activating play mood for children and educators inside day-care setting

3.1 Involvement of the Children while designing playful areas

Usually, children have their point of view on how the space should look according to their imagination, for example during a house play, in my classroom where we have big cushions, that they usually use for many purposes. Sometimes, they are used like building blocks for walls, bridges, jumping mats, cars, beds etc. So, they always must be taken into consideration when designing and building the space to play. According to NACCE (2022) an operational culture that encourages children to play recognises the importance and significance of play for the child's well-being and learning. To provide the best possible space for them, we need to observe them while they play and ask for example, what it means when they use the objects, so we get to understand their perspective about certain spaces designed for them. I have learned with my group of children that from all the objects we have inside the classroom, the big pillows are their favourite items together with a simple dark blue fabric with golden stars I bought at a recycling centre to make them a huge house where at least 8 kids can play inside (Isgut & Vidal 2023).

3.2 Enhanced playing stations that promotes play

Simplicity is the way to success according to Wiser (2011) when planning playing environments. A young child's playthings should be as simple as possible, allowing her to express herself through the creation of her own childlike world. A child is limited by too much detail. The more adaptable and unspecialized the playthings, the more creative and engaging the play. Unit blocks, one of the most important pieces of preschool equipment, are perhaps the best example of "unstructured" toys. These allow a child to create freely, with the next step determined by him rather than by the structure of the play material. Blocks, construction sets, clay, sand, and paints are basic playthings that allow the imagination to run wild (Wiser 2011). Play-based learning according is where teachers can effectively coordinate both measurements by carrying out keen and flexible arranging and planning learning situations to welcome and empower children perky learning thru play (Rintakorpi 2021).

3.3 Operational culture that encourage play

Always operational culture is considered while thinking about the outcome playful experiences. According to the NACCE (2022), the educators and staff in general from each of the day-care groups, recognise the factors that set limits to play and develop approaches and learning environments that promote playing. Play equipment should provide enough space or quantity

to satisfy children's play goals. Children ages four and five enjoy playing housekeeping and want to bake pies and wash dishes. They require spacious ovens and dishpans large enough to hold soiled dishes, soap, and water. Children should be able to ride on some of your wheeled toys and transport large quantities of blocks or other things. Give the kids enough building blocks so they can finish the design he has in mind. The teacher can relax, and the kids can play together a when there is a plentiful quantity of equipment available (Wiser 2011). According to the NACCE (2022), playing will certainly be a powerful tool for learning experiences if we give room, peaceful time, quality of the play, and interesting settings, children's imagination will develop creating even time life memories. Both children and adults can have an opportunity to play, learn and enjoy together.

3.4 Adult involvement in Children's play

Giving children a voice includes aspects such as expressing opinions and being able to share these through verbal and nonverbal communication (Leinonen 2012). This is very important when considering which activities and games we will plan together with them. It is important to respect and acknowledge children`s voices and empower their ideas to impact their own lives. When we really participate as educators in children's play, engagement includes interactions between children and educators in the learning environment. During children's participation, educators play an important role as observers and facilitators of skill development. They learn from us and trust on what we are teaching them. Also, she mentions that Trust between children and educators is the foundation of engagement issues. How educators respect children and believe in their abilities in daily practice will influence their engagement (Leinonen 2012).

4 Theoretical background

To achieve a good interaction and quality of play between children and educators inside daycare setting facilities, participation and Involvement are crucial. This was an observation done at my workplace. We needed to find the reason why adults usually watch the kids playing but don't necessarily participate or interact with them during this time. Usually, educators we are more like facilitators of learning how to play and how to develop an active play among peers, we provide the toys, we set the rules, we assign the children in different playing corners or areas with different activities. We leave them play freely as it is also a chance for us to observe how they interact with other children; we can observe how they engage with the play and explore their imagination. This is the reason why I decided to work on this topic for this

10-week observation Diary thesis. Slowly we will start understanding the concepts that are around “Play” from different points of views, hypothesis, and theories.

4.1 Definition of play

By observing how the children from my group they usually play, I can see that play has to do with social aspects, as they must communicate somehow with the other children involved in that play. As we are and international Day care, not all the children have developed English as our common language in the group, so they still play in their own mother tongue. But little by little they develop their social skills.

Play includes a lot of imagination, it can be seen while children interact inside a group or when they play alone, if they play in small groups with other peers, they explain to each other where they are standing for example inside of a bus, or inside of a spaceship, or sleeping inside their home, or that certain object is food, or a pillow is their pet etc. According to the NACCE (2022), A culture of play that encourages play recognizes the importance of play for children`s health and learning. Staff recognize the factors that limit play and develop learning methods and environments that support play. Children and staff can experience the joy of doing things and playing together. Children and adults at play can focus on the game. Communities encourage children to actively interact and function as members of a group. A safe community intervenes in conflicts and children learn constructive solutions.

Sometimes they just bring a wooden block, and they say in their language that it is food for example, and by going to their own kitchen made by us the teachers, they play that they cook or wash that food. So, play is a creative way to communicate also.

Children in my group do not get bored if every single day of the week I install the house made by a simple fabric attached with tape to the closets so they think they are in their house or shelter and they can play there for long time sometimes even for an hour or more. Play can also have some challenges if they are also trying to build something out of nothing and they don`t know how to do it. Quite often as we are close to them, they come and ask for help to install something or build something together with them.

4.2 Concept of play

“The conception of playing is based on a view of the child’s active agency. Children are naturally curious and wish to learn new thigs and revise and repeat what they have learned.” When children are happy and they enjoy their activities, it is when they learn the most. This

would not be the same with a boring learning environment that does not invite the child to be curious or creative (Rintakorpi 2021).

Rintakorpi (2021) also mentions that:

- During play, children decide for themselves what to do by initiating and developing their own abilities.
- During play, children build their own play environment by collecting and arranging materials. Children are active agents in their play activities; They structure and explore their surroundings world, making social relationships and forming meaning based on their experiences.
- Imagination allows children to experiment with different roles and ideas, whether they cannot be achieved otherwise.
- Through play, children imitate, create new objects, and modify what they have.
- Children are immersed in the game.
- Play gives children a state of creative “flow”. A deliberately structured game-based learning environment that includes materials support developmentally appropriate learning standards and encourage creativity play.

On Vygotsky’s developmental psychology (1978), he mentions that children learn thru play. The more they play the same things, the more they repeat and add more from their own imagination enhancing it every single time. Children become more creative and critic about their own play time (Rintakorpi 2021). They can decide and modify it. As observed from Lev Vygotsky sociocultural theory (1978), he constructed the idea of a zone of proximal development, which are those tasks which are too difficult for a child to solve alone but certainly can be accomplished with the help of adults or more skilled peers. He also refers that “The conception of playing is based on a a view of the child’s active agency. Children are naturally curious and wish to learn new things and revise and repeat what they have learned” (Rintakorpi 2021).

Vygotsky’s developmental theory (1978) focuses on the role of culture in the development of mental abilities for example speech and reasoning in children. According to him adults in society foster children’s cognitive development by engaging them in challenging and meaningful activities. Adults convey to children the way their culture interprets and responds to the world (McLeod 2018).

They show the meaning they attach to objects, events, and experiences. They provide the child with what to think (the knowledge) and how to think (the processes, the tools to think with). The interaction with others significantly increases not only the quantity of information and the number of skills a child develops, but it also affects the development of higher order mental

functions such as formal reasoning. Vygotsky argued that higher mental abilities could only develop through the interaction with more advanced others. Vygotsky (1978) also proposed that children are born with elementary mental abilities such as memory and perception and that higher mental functions develop from these through the influence of social interactions (McLeod 2018).

According to Vygotsky (1978), much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skilful tutor. The tutor may model behaviour's and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. Vygotsky refers to this as cooperative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher) then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance. As the child becomes more competent, the father allows the child to work more independently. The social interaction mentioned also by Vygotsky (1978), gets enhanced when involving cooperative or collaborative dialogue that promotes cognitive development (McLeod 2018).

4.3 Play according to the curriculum

To understand the concept of play, the curriculum (NACCE 2022) has some concepts that must be always included while children play, this is because children will get opportunities to develop their abilities of interact with other children and adults if they feel comfortable on the settings they are. That is why it is very important to create quality playing corners and learning environments around the daycare settings.

Staff should support the development of a child's play with a systematic and focused approach, by directing the activity from the outside, or by participating in it. Staff should observe and record children's play. Observing play increases staff understanding of children's thoughts and preferences as well as feelings and experiences. When children play, they incorporate key elements that promote learning: in this case for example, enthusiasm for what they are doing, work together if they are playing in small group with other peers and an adult, but at the same time they will develop and test their individual abilities. Also, according to the curriculum (NACCE 2022) it is mentioned that play develops and takes on different forms as children gain more experience. Children observe, experiment, and learn the rules of the community through play. By playing in groups, children learn to regulate their own feelings and desires and consider the views of others. The game increases the feeling of creating a community, reinforces a positive emotional atmosphere.

4.4 Meaning of adult role in play according to the curriculum

First of all, it must be considered that in the target group of children, the youngest is 1 year old and the oldest is 4 years old, so I try to organize activities with my group in a harmonious way. It is not always possible to plan activities for everyone. Some children, because they do not have English as a first or second language, feel a bit out of place when watching other children perform certain activities. Some children don't even try to participate in the activity and get bored. In addition, we can often see the energy of the group doing some of these fun activities and how engaged they are when playing with other children or alone. They know their children best, so through personal discussions about early childhood education and care plans, we get a better understanding of what their children like to do while having fun. This will work as educators guide for activity child-oriented planning.

5 Theories of play

There are many different theories concerning play and how it develops thru early stages of life. But moreover, all of them conclude with the same idea that you can learn while you play no matter the stage of life you are in.

5.1 Scaffolded Play

Scaffolded Play according to Lev Vygotsky theory of Zone of Proximal Development (1978), means that children will learn more if one of the participants while playing together has more knowledge, making the child or children participating at that same time, to explore more and push more their learning development developing their self-confidence. For example, when we are playing a game and we already know who the winner will be as one of the participants that can be the educator, knows the result of the game, but still let the child think more to find a possible solution to be able to win the game. Educators need to focus on what the children already know and their skills and continue reinforce them positively about the goals they reach leading to let the children be independent at their own level (Rintakorpi 2021).

5.2 Play based Learning

According to Jean Piaget Play Based Learning theory (1936), the children play in different stages. These stages of play are:

- The sensorimotor stage where children learn by playing with their senses, this occurs in early stage of life, up to 2-year-old children. At this point, children are very attracted by things they can see, touch, smell, taste and listen.

- The preoperational stage where happens between the age 2-7-year-old. Here children like to play pretend play, for example role activities that happen inside the house, or they pretend to be a Dr or a policeman, or a cat, etc. Children in this stage can play next to other children but not together with them. For this thesis, this is my target group as they are on this age level. Between 2- and 5-year-old children.
- The operational stage that happens between 7- and 11-year-old children. Here already children can communicate logically. They are eager to participate on everyday situations and will try to solve things with their own thinking.
- The formal operational stage that will be between 11-year-old children to adulthood. Here children and young adults will develop more complex understanding and creative thinking (Piaget 1936).

5.3 Learning environment and playing areas

When educators facilitate the children with interesting playful areas around the classroom or even outdoors designed to develop their skills and imagination thru play alone or together with their peer fellows. The idea is to let imagination flow and encourage children to explore different activities and roles. For example, the fire brigade corner where children together with their educators create a fire station playful area with different activities and roles to take during play.

5.4 Transversal competences in curriculum

In early childhood education and care, we develop transition skills, such as cross-literacy, self-care, and everyday tasks. This also encompasses cultural, engagement, and digital skills, essential in a diverse world according to the curriculum (NACCE 2022) A good Early Childhood Education and Care plan, builds a strong foundation for developing skills and knowledge, these are the Transversal competences in brief:

- Thinking and learning as such are important skills for the future. There is indeed a lot of discussion about lifelong learning that requires courage, enthusiasm, trust, and openness to new things.
- Cultural competence, interaction and expression are emphasised in the diversifying world. An creates a foundation for respecting other people and learning interaction skills.
- Taking care of oneself and managing daily life are an essential part of the curriculum (NACCE 2022), activities. Children learn to take care of their own well-being and the well-being of others in safe interaction. The principles of a sustainable way of living are also implemented in all activities from the curriculum (NACCE 2022).

- Multiliteracy is a core competence from the viewpoint of interaction and understanding culturally diverse messages and the surrounding world.
- Digital competence is increasingly a part of children's life. It is needed in interaction between people, in operating in society and different digital environments, and in learning. Strengthening digital competence promotes children's educational equality.
- Participation and involvement skills strengthen when children can themselves have a say in what is done and how. It is important that the curriculum (NACCE 2022) provides children with the opportunity to participate and practice their own possibilities to influence.

5.5 Guided and Independent play and Transversal competences

It was observed that while children are playing, many of the transversal competences get activated for example, when thinking about playing together with children a board game. Here will happen the participation and involvement of the children together with us, their educators, there will be areas of learning such as respecting each of the players turn for example, how to go from right to left, it will also develop their thinking and language skills, also maybe their social skills, not getting angry if they lose on the board game, etc. Thru playing with adults inside the day-care settings, they learn mathematics also, like when we count the kids in the group, or the tomatoes on the plate or the windows we have in the classroom, also, they eventually will learn colours and shapes.

According to Isgut & Vidal (2023) they discussed and concluded in their research article about balancing a successful classroom which develops and enhance play. They mentioned that while high-performance evaluations frequently put pressure on teachers, they must keep in mind that meeting children's social, emotional, biological, and intellectual needs comes first. Giving kids the freedom and time to play is the best approach to achieve this. This does not imply that you should let complete chaos rule your classroom. A teacher can create modest scaffolding to steer the experience and ultimately produce more complicated play by paying close attention to how the play is developing. This will support and reinforce the various goals that kids must accomplish during their educational experience.

Also, they mention in their article that, play with a purpose can also take place in a constructing area where kids use blocks to build a structure while giving each room a name and assigning characters. Children can feel free to create within secure, teacher-directed bounds in a play environment like this, which gives them ownership over their play. It's crucial to keep in mind that time is one of the most valuable resources for playing (Isgut & Vidal 2023).

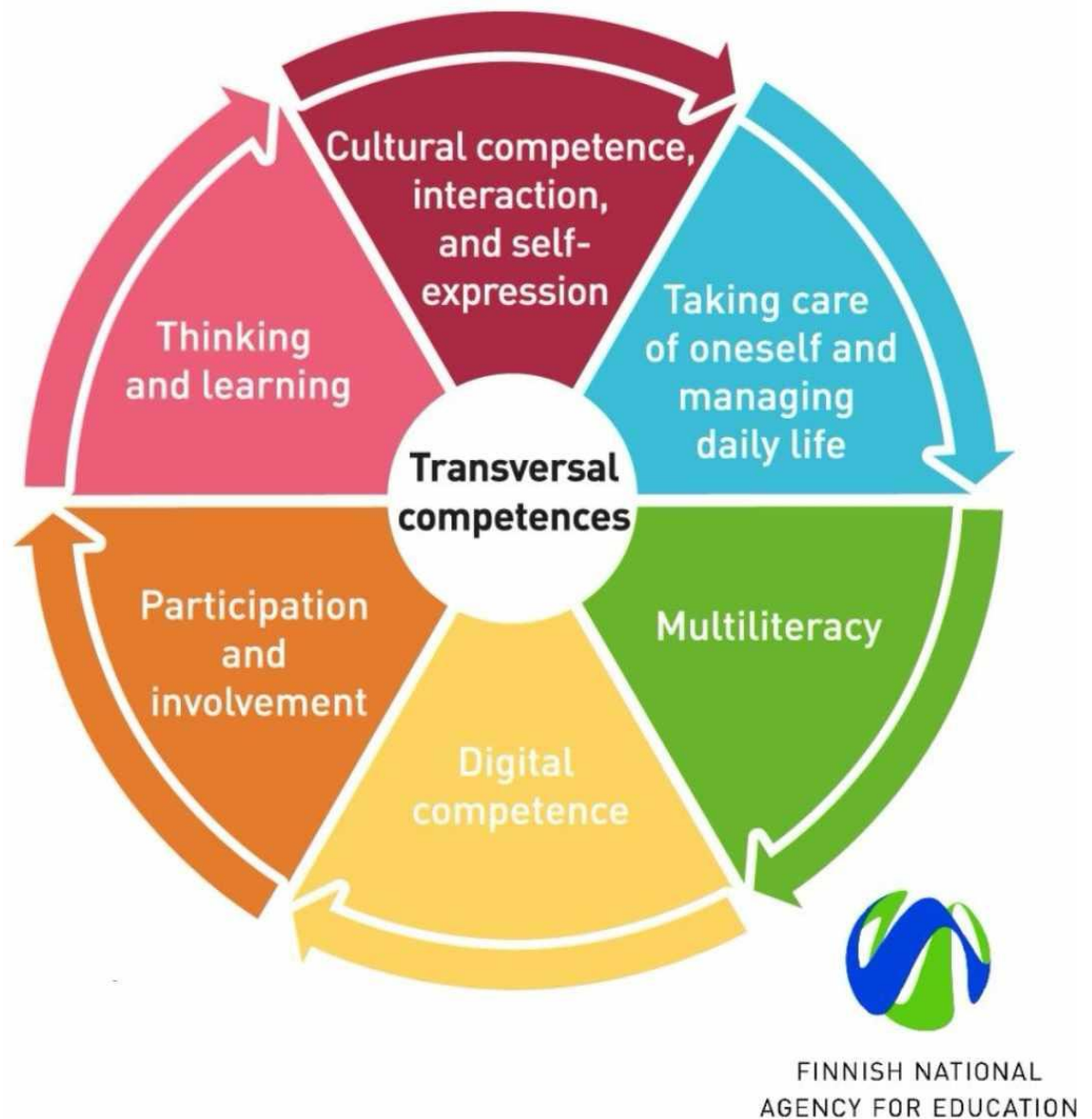


Figure 1: Transversal competences in the curriculum (NACCE 2022) in a nutshell

5.6 EDUCARE

According to the Finnish National agency for education NACCE (2022), EDUCARE is a Finnish educational concept emphasizing a holistic approach to early childhood education. In Finland, EDUCARE refers to the integration of care education and teaching in a preschool setting. It emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and nurturing environment in which

children can learn and grow socially, emotionally, cognitively, and physically. The Finnish concept of EDUCARE in early childhood education emphasizes the idea that learning takes place through playful exploration and meaningful interaction with adults and peers. It also emphasizes collaboration between educators, parents, and the community to provide a holistic foundation for children's growth and development (NACEE 2022).

The values: Whatever we decide to do, it will be influenced by the values according to Rintakorpi (2023) where it is mentioned also that the values are also connected with: What we think about children for example: are they our future, are they sweet, innocent, vulnerable, strenuous, annoying, small adults, equal with adults, powerful citizens, etc. And, will be influenced by previous experiences such as our own Childhood, teaching and learning experiences, for example: Personal experiences, subjective to my own childhood, societal childhood always present, historical childhood as a chain from one era to another, cultural, a way to face and treat children, political, children as weapons for future. As specified already, the EDUCARE demonstrate could be a combination of educating, instruction, and care. -It can happen in indeed little circumstances as for case washing hands or changing diapers or indeed get dress, too here we`ll consider child's sentiments and how to bargain and communicate with those, so teachers we must be there to direct them on how to specific themselves and being listened. Everything what happens on a child's day is consider learning and critical for their improvement. In EDUCARE, they use the concept of "learning by playing" (Rintakorpi 2023).

6 Diary process

For this Diary thesis it was important to take few things into account, the first encounter was at my workplace where I did the observations. There I got almost no support from my manager. Almost every time an observation or research or else was proposed, for this project, there were excuses not to give the permission. Constantly was denied, but I continued. It was thanks to my teachers from Laurea that I was able to accomplish and continue with this project till the end. After having the idea for this Diary, I needed to apply for permissions from work, colleagues, and most important the parents from the children from the group I was working with. 99 % of the families agreed and sign the permission form so I could include their children on my observations and pedagogical documentation. The diary writing process began with an initial observation of the group for which the paper was created. This diary was written over a period of 10 weeks. Different activities were planned for the children and with the children. A short daily description was written down and photographs of the children's work/activities were taken. Confidentiality regarding children, work partners, and workplaces was maintained

throughout the process. This was considered when setting goals for the following week. I did not want the children that were not allowed to participate on the documentation to feel excluded, so all the children from the group participated as all the activities were inclusive, but when taking the photographs then they were asked to find a toy or something, so it was not that obvious that they were not on the pictures.

6.1 Diary observations for each week

6.1.1 Week 1

6-12 February

Goals for this week, learn about recycling materials together with the kids, learn how to separate and dispose, learn how to re-use some materials after we go for a trip to the shop or local store.

For this week we will be working together with the children on the transversal competence of participation and involvement and taking care of oneself and managing daily life. What happens around us, at home, at the shop etc. According to the NACCE (2022) the errand of the curriculum is to reinforce children`s aptitudes related to well-being and security and to direct them in making choices in line with a sustainable way of life. Distinctive aptitudes, such as getting dressed, eating dinners, and taking care of personal cleanliness and belonging are polished with the children. Children are guided to act capably and securely within the curriculum (NACCE 2022), including all learning situations, counting the neighborhood nature, etc. Children are made a difference in communicating and directing their feelings.

We had been discussing a lot inside the classroom on what happens when we produce a lot of garbage in the world. Where children think it happens to it if we just don't put in the bins. How children imagine it will be a place full of tons of garbage around. So, hands in hands; our goal for this week was on learning about how we think to divide the garbage and how to separate and recycle materials inside our community, how the containers to separate the disposal material look like in the area where we live, and how to find them. The second goal for this week was to learn how to dispose the garbage in different containers. And third goal, if possible, how to reuse some of the things that look like garbage but eventually can be fun to use for other purposes. For all this, it takes to walk around our community building or living area. During this week we started talking to the children in our classroom about our community and how it is our surrounding near the daycare, slightly because the weather improved so we started to plan outdoor trips near the daycare.

So how to implement the recycling knowledge for the children to start at the young age at home already. The idea is to create inside our classroom a small play and learning environment

space that look like a home. Where they can test and enjoy and learn things. With some ideas in mind and the resources we had, we started adding some playful corners inside our classroom with recycled materials. I tried to implement the re-use and giving second chance to beautiful and colorful packages.

The experimental process together with the children.

The process went like this; from the storage I got some shelves, and I got some fabric from my house so in one morning together with another teacher from my group, we decided to create an easy shelter/home style for the kids, but that many of them could fit at the same time. In that corner we have two small kitchens for the kids, but also, we did not have that many things to play with. A second after, we install the roof from the house we did for the kids, already there were maybe five children inside of the "house" with their soft toys. Those children who arrived the first in the morning, had more chance to play undisturbed until the breakfast was served. I paid attention and noticed that they were mainly playing pretend sleeping and pretend cooking, but I felt bad as they did not have that many things to play with. So, I got some extra blankets from the storage and almost daily I brought empty colorful containers of cartoon and plastic that they used for playing in their kitchen. I noticed that immediately they found those mysterious items I brought and straight away they started to remove the lids from the containers and put whatever small they can inside of them as a pretend food. But it was a nice feeling to see how much they enjoy their play when they get these new recycled containers like cereal, tea, ice-cream boxes etc. We gave them a second chance to enhance the playful moments before going to the recycling containers.

With big pillows they like to divide their space and do windows and walls, so they invite us adults to their pretend home, feeling proud of their achievements.

What we learned and achieved this week.

As a conclusion for this week, children really loved to play home inside our classroom with the simple items and simple shelter/home we did for them. Here they had the chance to learn simple but everyday things together with us, they like to invite us to their new house and play that we are also part of their community or family. We learned a lot about how to divide the recycle materials, we went out and look around the buildings checking on how the containers look like, and which materials goes on which containers. We separate and fix the containers that we were going to use to play with. As the children were cooking for us the teachers, we needed to select the food from those packages and containers that got complemented with the toys they already had in the classroom. We learned with the Tietokapula booklet from Kiertokapula Oy. About which garbage goes where on how to dispose it. Also, there was some amazing material from Oppi & Ilo specifically for children, the booklet is called Kierrätys - Kaverit. Inside the booklet there was a poster about how to separate the garbage, even if the

material it is in Finnish some of the children were able to notice how to dispose some materials in the correct place. In the other hand the nicest containers, the ones with lovely colors, such as the ice-cream, cookies, were used at their home corner /shelter new home so this created a richer learning environment for them.

There was a campaign from Oppi & Ilo where they handle these recycle booklets for free upon request to all the schools that they required them, so I ordered exactly the amount for the children in my group.

Week 1 in a nutshell

- *Goals for this week, learn about recycling materials together with the kids, learn how to separate and dispose, learn how to re-use some materials after we go for a trip to the shop or local store.*
- *According to Jean Piaget Play Based Learning theory (1936), the children during the sensorimotor stage that is when they are about 2 year old, it will be when they get very attracted to things, they can see, like in this case the colorful nice packaging with photos of cookies or chocolates or fruits, the toys that look like real food, they will pretend it smell also or they might even try to open and smell the packages, for sure they will put them inside the mouth and I am sure they will say it tastes good, even if it's just a toy that looks like real food.*
- *Achievements, together with the educators, the children learned that we can reuse items that we have at home and together with our teachers we can create playing corners together, they learned that some containers can be still use to play, they learned how to separate recycle materials, they learned how those materials are separated and disposed, this was a lesson for all not just for the children and we shared many fun moments together.*



Figure 2: Selecting the recycle material that we needed to repair to play or dispose in the elected container.

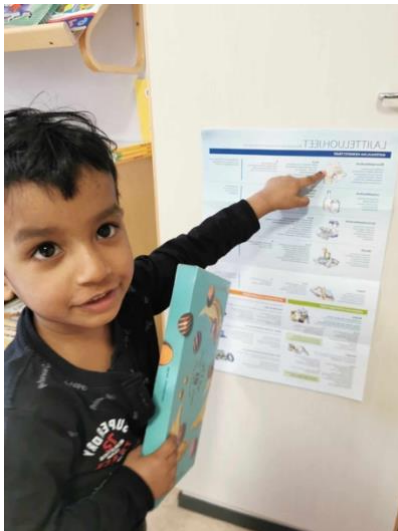


Figure 3: Learning how to separate recycle materials with a graphic chart together with the children.



Figure 4: Second chance for containers as new toys role



Figure 5: New life for colorful beautiful packages during play time.



Figure 6: Everyday food containers as new toys before disposing them.

6.1.2 Week 2

13-19 February

Goals for this week: How to react and understand emergency situations together with the children. How we can create playful environments that help children understand how to react upon an emergency. We continued reinforcing the transversal competence from taking care of oneself, thinking, and learning and participation and involvement.

This week for some reason we had gotten a lot of fire drills going on inside our daycare. The alarms were ringing all the time without prior notice, so children get use and learn how to evacuate in case of a real happening such as fire, danger or sheltering. As they are small children, they get quite scared, so we must use a lot of sensitivity when talking to them about the topic. Our goal was to know and react fast in case of an emergency. We had to design a plan on how to evacuate everyone safe as fast as possible without creating a chaos. Same time we were reading a lot of books about emergency situations to the children during the story time.

How we were learning to understand emergency signs, sirens, and situations together with the children in a holistic way to make them feel safe despite the danger of the situation. According to the curriculum (NACCE 2022) when planning the activities for the week, we needed to think about everyday situations that happen around us, in this case inside our daycare premises. The curriculum role is to support children's gradual development of participation and participatory abilities and encourage spontaneity. Treating children with respect, listening to their perspectives, and responding to their initiatives enhances children's ability to participate and engage. Children plan, carry out and evaluate activities together with staff. Through participation and engagement, children develop their self-image, boost their self-confidence, and develop the social skills they need in the community.

In the middle of the week, we got a real fire alarm and most of the children were asleep in their beds and were just wearing a diaper as we have the youngest children in the house. We had to wake them up abruptly after the alarm started ringing. This time we had no chance to dress up all the children with their winter clothes, but we were cooperating with other teachers and group members on how to evacuate all the children safe and still that they could keep warm outside where we had very wet and icy weather cold conditions. We took all the blankets from their beds, put rubber boots, and run outside; some other adults collected as many outdoor clothes as possible, so we started dressing the children outside so no one got cold. The ones that did not have enough of clothes, we gathered in groups, and we were hugging each other and jumping to keep us warm. This happening created and a play opportunity to do with the children from our group.

They have two small play doll houses that they enjoy a lot. But this time while they were asleep, I decided to add a twist and made some reusable fire that it could be installed all around their doll houses. So, children will still learn by playing. According to Vygotsky (1978), on his Social Learning hypothesis, it is recommended that play is a vital portion of social advancement in early childhood through play. While doing this, children can connect, interact, and learn together with others and this will lead to enhanced participation inside the peer group. As this was a joined activity and they were curious about the new fire inside the house, they also added a fire car and a fireman they have among their toys.

What we learned and achieve this week together with the children?

As a conclusion for this week, the children learned what happens when the emergency alarms ring. They also learned that inside their home it can happen an accident, so instead of panicking, what they must do? With the fake fire inside their doll house also they learn how the firetruck or emergency units they react when there is an emergency. This activity has been really approved and still weeks after children are playing.

Together with the children we found among all the emergency toys they could find in the classroom and, we borrowed from other classrooms to get enough toys for everyone to play with. Also, from colored paper and recycle material I made the fake fire and the older children from the classroom helped me to laminate it so also, they learned how some machines we have at the teacher's office they work. They were very eager and tried to help the teacher to do these activities.

Week 2 in a nutshell

- *Goals for this week: How to react and understand emergency situations together with the children.*
- *How we can create playful environments together that help children understand how to react upon a real emergency.*
- *We continued reinforcing the transversal competence from taking care of oneself, thinking, and learning and participation and involvement.*
- *Achievements, we learned together on how to act when there is a fire alarm without getting scared.*
- *Thru play together with the children, we learned how to evacuate the school without creating a chaos. I made some fake fire to be use inside the dollhouse to learn how it looks an emergency at home.*
- *We also learned to ask for help is we are in danger. This happened thru constant interaction with the children. They call police on a toy phone and police department answered and gave advice.*



Figure 7: Fire inside our doll house with disposal recycle materials.



Figure 8: Fire under control with emergency staff and units.

6.1.3 Week 3

20-26 February

Goals for this week:

Together with some students from this same Social Pedagogue program, during mid-February, we implemented and planned some child-oriented activity that included 3 goals to achieve within different activities with my group of children and had also some tasks to accomplish. During these pedagogical activities, the children aged 1-4 years old, participated freely with the tasks. The last day we implemented some Drama-game activity with the kids, they play and learn about first aid and how to take care of oneself that is part of the curriculum (NACCE 2022). Here I noticed that the children enjoyed so much this activity that the next Monday after we implemented this, they still wanted to play more and more. We concentrated on the transversal competences of participation and involvement, cultural competence, interaction,

and self-expression, thinking and learning, taking care of oneself and managing daily life, multiliteracy, digital competence. With one topic, or planned activity, we were able to gather different way of learning different things thru different activities combined as the transversal competences they are.

Thinking and learning transversal competence, according to the curriculum (NACCE 2022) role is to develop children's thinking and learning skills. Children develop thinking and learning through diverse and meaningful experiences. While playing, children can unleash their imagination and creativity, test ideas and explore the world together. The child's ability to analyze, name and describe elements in the environment is facilitated in a manner appropriate to the child's age and development. Children are encouraged to actively inquire and ask questions. Children are also encouraged to not be discouraged by failure, to persevere and to find solutions in a variety of situations. Adequate daily physical activity supports children's thinking and learning abilities, and brainstorming activities helps children monitor their learning and recognize their strengths. This will help children become more confident in their abilities (NACCE 2022).

How the week developed with these child oriented and planned activities:

This time the older children took some big cars that we have for the smallest kids from the classroom, and they decided that they wanted to drive the Ambulance again as we played during our implementation. This Monday we did not have full group as it was the week 8 or Ski holiday, but still there was a good number of children playing all together. Some of them wanted to learn how to put a cast on a broken arm or leg from their baby dolls. Some others were the Ambulance and this time they even added the taxi driver that will take them together with their injured babies to the hospital. I was sitting together with them playing to be a Dr, so I was able to teach them how to put a cast made of crepe paper. We were practicing how to make a bandage and put plasters again. Here it is important to mention that despite of the language barrier from some children that do not have English skills yet, by simple observation together with them, i was able to sit with them and explain also with signs how to put a plaster or a bandage so they could also participate on the play.

What we achieved and learned from this week's activities:

As a conclusion from our first aid theme activities that happened the whole week with the children, we learned that. Giles & Guild (2019) mention on their copying behavior theory that children always tend to follow and imitate what they see, in other words, children imitate and use the adult as a role model, in this case they will imitate what the teacher is trying to do together with them. If inside of the classroom we provide the children with tools and toys that they can use during their play time, they will feel eventually more familiar with the activities. This was one of the goals during our implementation from the Dr play with the kids. To build a

sense of understanding of what it means going to hospital and get familiar with the things that are happening.

Also, we achieved one of the specific areas of development, the one from expressive arts and design. This is because, during the visit to the vet to take their pets, once the pet got injured, it was important to make a get well greeting card but not all of them wanted to make a card, some of the children wanted to send a selfie photo to their pet and others wanted to send a voice message, so, with the help of the staff, I set the phone in portrait and children were able to take a photo from themselves to send to their pet that was at the imaginary emergency hospital. Each of the children who participated, felt confident to push the photo button from the phone by themselves. As a result, most of them got the same type of image. This was fun to see and for them to see themselves on the phone screen.

Week 3 in a nutshell

- *Goals for these weeks, together with the children, we concentrated on the transversal competences of participation and involvement, cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression, thinking and learning, taking care of oneself and managing daily life, multiliteracy, digital competence thru different child oriented planned activities that included all the children from the classroom.*
- *The interaction together with the children happened during different activities and play we had together with them. Starting from a trip to the library and learning how to walk together to the local library.*
- *The achievements for this week were many as we had multiple games and activities planned for the children. Then learning and playing about how to use digital devices to communicate with others.*
- *Playing different roles during drama game where teachers and children we shared different roles for the activities planned. Same time the pedagogical documentation happened.*
- *This week was so successful in many aspects that Friday when children left home, also there they try to play with their siblings and parents.*



Figure 9: Role playing during our take your pet to the vet play activity.



Figure 10: Our Vet/Hospital learning environment play activity.



Figure 11: Children select and gather their play material for the activity.



Figure 12: Ambulance and taxi driver extended hospital play activity.



Figure 13: Together we learned how to take care of small injuries on our pet.

6.1.4 Week 4

27-5 March

The goal for this week was to keep calm after all the alarm situations from the fire drills we got last week. Children are quite sensible about the loud sounds. We had been quite stressed children and adults. Moreover, when we think we have settled our group and constantly we have new comers to the classroom. This week it was observed that the children from the group were a bit divided while playing in the classroom. Many of them because they do not share a common language. Concerning the cultural competence, interaction, and self-expression transversal competence on the curriculum (NACCE 2022), it is mentioned that: Children interacting together in a common group, when share the same language, include the ability to listen, recognize and understand different perspectives and reflect on one`s own values and attitudes. Interaction skills and the ability to express oneself and understand others are critical to individual identity, performance, and well-being. The curriculum (NACCE 2022) mission is to develop children's cultural, interactive and self-expression skills. Children are encouraged to get to know other people, languages, and cultures. Staff provide children with an example of positive encounters with other people, diversity of languages, cultures, and worldviews. This strengthens children's social skills (NACCE 2022).

This week has been an exercise on how to communicate despite the language we speak and how to react on emergency situations, this leads to an opportunity for the children who are able to communicate in English that approach to the teachers and explain in their own words their thoughts about not climbing to the furniture. So, they had been playing more with fake injuries to their toys if they fall and what could happen. Some of the children were playing home inside the classroom and they pretend they were having a picnic and their baby fell from the kitchen and had to go to hospital. This action gave opportunity for other kids to participate, without explaining how an emergency central works, we have a corner in the classroom that is supposed to be the cabin from an airplane, but has some phones, microphones, and fake screens. Some of the children the older ones, went there and sit down with their own phones. Some old cell phones that they use for playing. So, they were answering at the emergency central. This time the airplane was used for something else. Children then started to use the baby cars the ones they can sit on and use them as taxi to transport injured people to the hospital or to their home. Sometimes I am a participant from the play, sometimes I am the one that is there ready to help them when they want to put some clothes on their dolls, or open the tools boxes etc.

In conclusion for our week activities, it has been noticed here the children have been influenced by the fact that quite many of them had been visiting the Neuvola and we had been reading books about going to the Doctor, for these activities the whole group participated, each of

them with a different role during their play. Usually, one of the adults from the classroom is with them to explain how the Dr. equipment is used or how you deal when you have an emergency, sometimes we even add some sound of an emergency unit, so it feels more real. Teacher sometimes became the patient or the Dr.

Week 4 in a nutshell

- *The goal for this week was to keep calm after all the alarm situations from the fire drills we got last week. And how to react upon emergency without getting scared.*
- *Also, children goal was to get familiar with the equipment they see when they go to Neuvola or Dentist, and to show they do not be scared.*
- *The achievements were drama emergency game together with the children where they could participate in different roles.*
- *Children were practicing with us on how to put bandages to their toys once they got injured. According to Isgut & Vidal (2023) scaffolding play will help children to get eager on participating more once they learn what they are doing while they play.*
- *All the children were able to see how the tools that they see when going to the Dr, and Neuvola they work.*
- *We had the chance to practice different ways to express our feelings even without a common language.*



Figure 14: Repairing the ambulance at the local garage service station.



Figure 15: Bandage made by the children together with the teacher.

6.1.5 Week 5

6-12 March

Already spring is here, and we have talked a lot about it with the children from the group. We had some goals for them as the weather improves, those included the understanding of what happens with the snow as it gets warmer. How we observe the changes around us. Why everyday our playground looks different etc. So, we had couple of experiments together with the children.

We have explained what happens when the snow melts and why they should not eat it, so we have done couple of science experiments with them. Such as grabbing some snow and how it melts but for some of them still is difficult to understand that it is not just white ice cream. On our playground we do not have good sewer, creating every single spring a big puddle. Water stays for some time. So, this week as the sun was really shining and melted a lot it created a cool lake with a layer of thin ice and underneath clear water.

Children have been so excited about it but same time they are so tempted to go a touch the under water. After seeing how frustrated teachers can get as we are tired to say, “do not go

into the water”, this is because not all the kids have good clothes or have not the rain gear clothes, so they get fast wet and cold. But I decided to break the rules and this time I asked the parents to bring extra warm clothes to change after the water activity play. So as a second goal, it was just to find simple things to enjoy while playing outside and have fun with the water that we found mysteriously on our yard. I thrive on bringing fun and creativity in all the activities we do for the children. In this case whether it is putting together exciting moments while playing outside sparking imagination, leading the children to enjoy the weather conditions. Together with the older kids from the group we decided to make a winter waterpark instead. I made sure it was safe for them so put some gravel on the running area as they continuously did this but, on the slide, area marked with a flag they needed to slide. It was fun day; I have not seen them enjoying as much as they did this week with the winter Olympic activities as they eldest kids were competing. According to the curriculum (NACCE 2022) playful activities can take place anywhere, in this case our waterpark activities took place on our daycare yard premises thanks to the weather conditions to create this fun week activities. I concentrate mainly in the Participation and involvement transversal competence and the taking care of oneself, so in each way children were able to participate and enjoy these outdoor fun activities.

What the children learned and enjoy most about this week.

The conclusion from these week winter activities was that the children enjoyed so much by sliding down and going on top of the thin ice for couple of meters splashing all the water away. I was able to document some of those moments, so it was shown also to their parents, so they understood why it was important to have extra dry and warm clothes with us to change after the activity. Here it was all about splashing water. And the feedback gotten from the children was that it was the best day ever. So yes, we achieve the goal of having fun and enjoying the water that appeared mysteriously after the snow started to reduce and melt.

As observed in the NACCE (2022) Play is a combination of elements that all together will develop children’s communication skills and participation together with better interaction with their teachers and peers. The interaction between players will help to develop a sense of cognitive and social progress among young children according to Syrjämäki (2018). Also, it was discussed that children with or without special needs will be able to participate in play and activities together with other kids, fomenting their capability to interact and communicate with others thru play. To achieve this, educators must really observe and document their findings.

Week 5 in a nutshell

- *Goals for this week were to concentrate mainly in the Participation and involvement transversal competences and the taking care of oneself, so in each way children were able to participate and enjoy these outdoor fun activities.*

- *We play together by creating a waterpark where children needed to understand the importance of listening to the instructions for safety to enjoy the activity.*
- *The achievements were that children really had fun, by simple safety rules to follow they enjoy while participating and interacting with other children, the children who were shy and were more cautious about the activity got empower to try with the help of the teachers as we show it was a safe outdoor game activity to do. The interaction between the children and us helped to develop a sense of cognitive and social progress among all who were participating and had fun at the same time.*



Figure 16: Water park and splashing activities during springtime.



Figure 17: Perfect splash during our splash competition game.

6.1.6 Week 6

13-19 March

This week we continue with the water play but this time was indoor, and, in the sandbox, area as started to get warm, so also was safe for the youngest children from the classroom, everyone could participate. The goal was to feel safe to play some water games with sensory activities. So, organizing our premises a hand in the water game and trying to use the best of what we had, we decided to use some child oriented playful activity, some fishing and diving play at the sinks with all sorts of floating toys and cups.

With youngest kids I divided the group in pairs so they could focus on what they were doing and could observe them and take care of them at the same time, as they must go on top of a step. Together with us they felt empower to start playing with the water. The children were just wearing a diaper so we could just dry them after and dress them back with warm clothes. The eldest ones they came in bigger groups of 4 children, including the ones that have common language and the ones that cannot communicate yet. But here I was able to observe that they started fighting after few minutes as we have some kids that have strong will about belonging from certain toys. They started pushing and taking roughly the toys from each other hands, so

I had to stop the activity and make a list of participants, so everyone had the chance. We have 4 sinks, so I separate the 4 kids and I noticed that the play it was not as fun as when they had another kid around them. The ones with better communication skills were the ones giving the commands to the others.

The play lasted about 5 minutes for the babies before they lost interest because they got quite wet and for the older ones it took about 10-15 minutes when they had a friend around and started to have a pretend game with toys they had there. Together we were playing and learning on how fun is to wash our toys. We were playing with the help of sponges that were there to help them washed better the toys that were quite dirty. Also, as mentioned on the curriculum (NACCE 2022) the quality of the learning environment will affect how they children play. This can engage them in joyful and quality activities or can make them hesitate and leave after few minutes.

It is suggested that educators ensure a safe playful environment that can be used by everyone so children can explore, here also educators can participate or just observe and can guide the children to avoid from the beginning any conflict according to the NACCE (2022). While observing, educators can immediately identify children's interests. And it is easy to understand when children want or not to continue playing that or want to change play.

In conclusion for this week, I observed that the level of participation from the children was high. They did not complain when they got wet as they were having fun and enjoying the child-oriented activity. This was a very nice way to keep the children engage for longer period in some activity that they really enjoyed together with other children. This type of activity can be used as a tool for parents to keep their kids busy and enjoying what they are doing inside their home or to be played outside during summer or warmer months. Children get some sort of responsibility on how to take care of their toys when they wash them and dry them. Eventually very easy cleaning tasks can be performed at home together with their parents.

Week 6 in a nutshell

- *This week goal was to continue with the water play but this time was indoor so also was safe for the youngest children from the classroom, that did not participate on the previous water park activity, on these hands in water game everyone could participate. The goal was to feel safe to play some water games with sensory activities.*
- *While children were playing, they needed to learn how to wait for their turn and not starting fighting for the toys as they were plenty of them to start playing all together.*
- *The achievements for this week were that the children who participated were observed so we could define the length of the game. For the youngest children was*

about 5-minute activity, but the older children wanted to continue playing longer and wanted to do it more often as it was fun to splash soap all around.

- *Certainly, everyone in the group participated. They did not complain when they got wet as they were having fun and enjoying the child-oriented activity.*
- *This was a very nice way to keep the children engaged for longer period in some activity that they really enjoyed together with other children. I saw how interaction can be smooth when children are doing an activity that they are focused and enjoying.*
- *When thinking about what we learned together with the children this week, remembers that the Finnish concept of EDUCARE in early childhood education emphasizes the idea that learning takes place through playful exploration and meaningful interaction with adults and peers, in this case while washing the toys together so we have better opportunity to learn how to do it in a correct way while having fun and playing at the same time.*



Figure 18: Hands in water for our water game activity.

6.1.7 Week 7-8

20 March -2 April

Bird Safari project

These last two weeks have been amazing, Spring is already here so together with the children we started preparing our Bird Safari, I decided to prepare child-oriented activities for them according to their age so all the group could participate somehow. According to the curriculum (NACCE 2022) when it mentions about participation, it says that an inclusive corporate culture fosters cooperation, equality, and appreciation in all that we do. Activities, opinions and expectations of children, workers and porters are considered. This requires consciously improving the structure and subtleties that facilitate support. Through support, children develop a better understanding of their communities, their rights, their responsibilities, and the consequences of their decisions. Support is enhanced when children experience empathically and participate in what they see and hear. Children's and legal guardians' associations facilitate cooperation in planning, conducting and supervising exercises. All staff are an important part of the educational community, so this makes them part of it and makes it equally participate (NACCE 2022).

So, for this week, we started learning some songs about spring, we also talked about which animals we can see when spring happens, how we distinguish the winter from the spring even if we have still snow. Our goals as a group were set on children participation, also to show that going outside and explore also is fun and you learn a lot of things, how to use the equipment that we had on our backpack to observe the nature, very important goal was to learn to listen to the instructions and learn how to walk together with other children, basic pedestrian rules such as checking if we can cross the street, not running in the street or parking area etc.

First, we started preparing our equipment that included, weather-appropriate clothing and shoes, our safety-first aid bag, we set some rules before leaving such as respecting the nature, don't touching any nest if we found one. But in the other hand we have set some other rules that were if we know it is safe, we can enjoy the wonders of nature by looking, listening, smelling, and touching when possible. We made beforehand the previous week some DIY binoculars, with our help we had some craft regarding how to make your own pair of binoculars, where with rolls of toilet paper cartoon, glue, paint and cord, children were able to paint and assemble their own binoculars. This was our most important equipment for the trip. We were three adults, and we took 14 children aged 1-5.



Figure 19: Toilet paper rolls production explained for little children with cartoons.



Figure 20: Bird Safari week exploration with DIY toilet paper rolls binoculars.



Figure 21: Checking equipment and safety before leaving for exploration game.



Figure 22: Children were really curious about all the equipment and didactic material I had prepared for them for this activity.



Figure 23: Didactic material prepared for each of the children after our exploration game activity.

Then, on the Bird Safari backpack I prepared some Birds cards with some information about the name, the size, where they live etc. So, children were able to recognize them in the nature while we were on our trip and then check them with the picture flash cards, I had for them. We got a magnifier, some small snack, a small notebook, a book with the sounds of the birds, a pen. And of course, some small snack for the children as they were patient and listen to all the instructions carefully.

Found online some resources. There is one Finnish association that made some amazing printable material for teachers and children regarding the spring birds together with spring insects and flowers that come back to Finland after the long winter. (Bird Life Suomi-Finland) (Luonto Litto), here I was able to print some cards with the Lintubingo that included all the possible birds we can already see in the forest. Children were super excited as they were not sure where we were going. As this was a real trip, they were happy and ready to enjoy having an activity outdoors. We are lucky to have just outside our daycare many areas with small forest and different types of trees.



Figure 24: Bird bingo game done during our exploration trip where together we marked down what we saw.

During the next week we were full of knowledge about birds, types of birds, sounds, colors, where they live, what they eat, how it looks a nest etc. So, I divided the group into two groups, with 3-4 children at a time. I set up the classroom with materials such as yarn, dry grass, we recycled the plastic from the easter eggs, colorful feathers, things we found on the ground in the nature etc. Together with glue, paint, colors, and then I set up on the table printable color sheets, so children were able to choose from there freely about the material.



Figure 25: Explanation of a trip to the forest to the children and what we can also find apart of birds.



Figure 26: Free your imagination with craft material to build a bird nest during our second week Bird Safari workshop.



Figure 27: Creative process from our Safari bird activities.

It was nice to see that they were quite motivated to do the craft activities. Together with other teachers' supervision for this activity, the children who were ready with their own designed nest, we continue playing with the Bird bingo and nature cards. While children were getting creative with their bird crafts, I had some background sounds of singing birds from different parts of the world, so they got more inspired and into the theme.



Figure 28: Hands on the crafts from each of the participants.



Figure 29: Practicing fine motor skills during creative process



Figure 30: Children enjoying the bird Safari craft workshop



Figure 27: Each of the children's artistic representations from the bird nests.

Children point of view of what they think about what birds use in their nests. Our exhibition was display at our classroom, so parents were able to see all what we did for these two weeks. Same time we had sounds of birds on the background and plants around the classroom for a museum feeling so families felt they went to an imaginary museum.



Figure 31: Real nest laid by birds and children were able to see close how the eggs and nest look like.



Figure 32: Diplomas and book gift given to each of the participants.

Figure 27: At the end of this child-oriented activity, children got a diploma as they accomplish all the tasks and games included in these two weeks activities. They also got a present, this book that explains with drawings about how to learn at an early age about recycle materials to take care of our environment.

As a conclusion from all these two weeks child-oriented activities. I was able to see how much children enjoyed from all what I had provided for them to learn about a topic as now they are really into birds. It melted my heart that even one of the children prepared a small bag of candies specially for me as a gift as he explained his mom that I made nice game activities with birds and he enjoyed so much, so in return he wanted to share his Saturday candies with me. To prepare these bird Safari took many weeks to plan and implement but it was worth it. Then I noticed that to plan for these long-term projects we need more staff, so you get the time to research about the topic and find all possible material for the children according to the age group.

Week 7-8 in a nutshell

- *The goals of this week include a lot about participation and learn about our environment and natural resources on the neighborhood. It was also very important to practice how to walk safely as a group outside the daycare premises. How to behave when we are outside. Learning about spending outside it is also part of the NACCE (2022).*
- *Also, it was important to learn about the equipment when we go out for a trip to the forest. Together with the kids we prepared the backpack with our equipment and each of the kids carried with them their own self-made binoculars.*
- *It was important to learn about natural environment and how to protect it and take care of it. Together with the children, we were playing some card games and bird bingo when we were at the forest to see how many of those things related to birds, we found during our exploration bird safari game.*
- *The achievements were amazing this week as the children had to participate in many games and activities together with us apart of being part of the safari game.*
- *Self-confidence got boosted as they were able to see with their own carton binoculars some birds, of course to get more details we were using the ones from our trip backpack.*
- *The children were so excited when they were able to point out which things we found together while we were walking towards the forest.*
- *At the end of the exploration all of them got a small reward so that made them even more motivated to continue with the nest building workshop.*
- *The idea was to transmit the children the joy of spending time outside playing, exploring, learning about natural things around them.*
- *Each of the children got a diploma of participation and a booklet about recycling as our binoculars were done with recycle material, they felt proud when I handled those two things, they felt the achievement and accomplishing reward moment as something very important. They felt quite proud at the end of the week.*
- *According to Vygotsky's developmental theory (1978) children will develop their mental abilities and reasoning more when they engage in challenging and meaningful activities like this workshop and games done during our bird safari activity together with us.*

6.1.8 Week 9

This week is all about the moves. Puppet show dance baby disco was our activity for this week. We had a big lack of staff, so we had to combine groups of different age children. To have the children in a safe environment and still be able to have fun despite of having almost full groups and almost no staff, we decided to organize together with other two colleagues, a puppet baby disco. Our goal was to keep the children engage, moving, and participating in some safe activity for everybody and to learn about the colors, something we are learning and practicing on the baby group. I know that not all the children like to dance or at least dance in front of other people, so for this reason I took a box full of hand puppets, rapidly the older children took the puppets and placed them in their hands.

I noticed that they were really motivated to play all together but to play safely as I had the babies with me from my group, we took the children to the story corner room where everywhere it is full of colorful pillows. Here the way how we organized the children so everyone could get the chance to dance was, by separating them according to the color of their clothes they were wearing that day. Teachers we were able to manipulate the number of children at the time on the dancing floor, the small children were paying attention to the color of their clothes to go and dance close to the big screen. They needed to stand up from their colorful pillow once the color from the clothing was called to the dance floor.

Older children were quite careful about having the smaller children around them. In some cases, they took the youngest children inside their dancing group, so they danced together with their puppets. It was nice and fun activity for everyone. In conclusion despite of the chaos, we got in the morning some indoor fun activity that made everyone in the room participate and express in their own way.



Figure 33: Warming up for the puppet disco together with the children.



Figure 34: Children enjoying the puppet disco game we prepared for them.

Week 9 in a nutshell

- As mentioned above, this week we got unexpected lack of staff, so our goal was to keep the children engage, moving, and participating in some safe activity for everybody and to learn about the colors, something we are learning and practicing on the baby group.
- We were practicing a lot with the children on how to participate in activities with certain order. This time it was time to learn it thru the colors.
- I know that not all the children like to dance or at least dance in front of other people, so for this reason I took a box full of hand puppets, rapidly the older children took the puppets and placed them in their hands, this helped the children that were slightly shy to also be able to participate in the dancing game.

- The achievements from this week were that children really learned about the colors as they even found those colors on their puppets.
- Older children felt responsible to take care while dancing about the youngest children, so they felt safe to participate also.
- Together with us the teachers, they needed to follow the movements from the screen as we were playing some game and to follow the flash cards and imitate what the card said.
- It was a lot of fun, so children learned that there is nothing wrong even if we don't know how to dance.

5.1.9 Week 10

This week has been all about different animals in the nature. I had been reading a lot of stories about which animals belong in each continent and environment. We also showed some videos about wild nature. We all sat down during circle time after we went to the local library and discussed about their favorite animals, they just learned about together with us, the educators, and there, they had to think how the sound of the animal was or the movements the animals do when they want to communicate. Some of the children were very close to know, others imitated their peers. So, the goal for this activity was for them to explore the feeling of pretended play and think on their own how it feels to be one of those animals.

Children brought to our daycare their favorite soft toy animals as we were learning about hairy animals, short hair animals, no hair animals, silky wet skin on other animals, feather animals, reptile animals, and animals that live inside of shells. Most of the children had similar animals with them that included, dogs, cats, octopus, lizard, parrot, snake, bear and one fish.



Figure 35: Children brought their favorite animal toy to start learning together with us.



Figure 36: Guessing game activity done outdoors with the children according to their favorite animals. Mine is the fox.



Figure 37: Bingo animal game played during these activities.

As we know on the classroom that they are crazy about running everywhere, we reserved they Gym classroom and prepare the setting for them. This included a big box filled with different types of hats that had the shape of certain animal, some were shorter, some had longer threads, some were puffier etc. Then the children needed to think and remember from what we read during the cycle time Which animals, jump, which others they run, etc. This week, the goal was to teach them in a fun way how to count by using a huge foam dice. I noticed that for the smaller children in the classroom, it was not that interesting, so they concentrated in other things at the beginning of the game.



Figure 38: Interesting to see how children played with the animals after the book we read.



Figure 39: Shadow theater show made by the children after we read about sounds of the animals, and which are daylight and nightlight animals.

To achieve effective learning, it must have certain characteristics so children will feel confident to participate according to Rintakorpi (2021). Children need to find the engagement with the planned activity, here it means the children must have some sort of interest in what we are doing, they need to feel confident to explore and use their senses to try and learn what it is around them. Also, they represent their experiences in play, take roles and interact with other peers during the same activity. Something that was very important during this game propose for the children, where they select by themselves the animal they wanted to represent and did the role of certain animal they chose when they needed to jump according to the animal they chose. To achieve active learning also children, need motivation, a very important subject during play. Always during this trial periods while playing, children need to feel the positive feedback so they can continue trying.

For the activity, I divided the children into smaller groups depending on their interests. So, with the older ones, they choose which of the animal costume hats they wanted to wear and once they were ready, we set the rules for the game. First, they needed to be on a line, the group consisted of 5 children so depending on the hat they had they needed to throw the dice and then if for example it showed 5 dots, the child who threw the dice needed to jump according to the animal hat he or she had and do the jumps as they thought that animal would do. Among the first group we had a cat, a rabbit, a cow, a wolf, and some child did not want to put anything on, but still wanted to do the jumps.



Figure 40: Mathematical thinking during the jumping animal game.

As a conclusion I noticed that maybe as we had full group of children in the same gym, the smaller ones were running or going to the climbing frame, so the jumping group lost a bit of concentration and focus on the activity. They were jumping but same time were checking what other peers were doing. But still they had a lot of fun as they needed to jump doing the animal sounds or movements, they thought belonged to the animal they were representing. Children needed to find the ways how to make the things, for example how they think the cow makes sounds, or the fox. They had their own ideas on how the animals talk to each other, also how they jump or walk, they found the way how to approach the task given of jumping like certain animal and they found out the solution by themselves, sometimes imitating their peers, some others straight from their imagination.



Figure 41: Children were encouraged to select the costumes and animal head looking by themselves to feel more comfortable.



Figure 42: Younger children also enjoyed the animal role activity.

Then the smaller children straight away ran towards the box and started to also wear some hats. So, all the children including the smaller ones came with several hats towards the educators, so they needed some help on trying the hats. We have a huge mirror in the gym, so they were curious and looking at each other so they were really laughing and enjoying that moment. It was nice to see them picking by themselves their favorite animals. In relation with the curriculum (NACCE 2022), it is mentioned that children are curious, eager learners who enjoy reviewing and consolidating their knowledge. Learning is all-encompassing and occurs everywhere. Learning involves knowledge, skills, actions, emotions, senses, physical experiences, language, and thinking. It occurs through observing and imitating others. Children learn through play, movement, exploration, tasks, self-expression, and artistic activities regarding the NACCE (2022). Their past experiences, interests, and abilities are the foundation for learning. Children learn best when new knowledge and skills align with their abilities, experiences, and cultural background, while also considering their health and safety, then is when the real fun began. They laugh at themselves when they thought they looked funny while wearing those hats. Maybe what I would have done different was to really divide the children in different rooms so the focus from the first group would have been greater than it was and to keep the smaller ones in the gym as they just love to run all over and climb (NACCE 2022).



Figure 43: Climbing like monkeys do

Week 10 in a nutshell

- *This week, the goal was to teach the children about mathematical thinking in a fun way. Together also we learned about textures, and we continue with colors as we talk about the out looking from the animals in books and from our bingo game, but also with the soft animals they brought from home.*
- *Children found their inner self when they picked their favorite animal.*
- *Learning happened in all what we do, and, in every place, we are, always there is opportunity to learn something new.*
- *They had a lot of fun while trying to find the head or ear animal looking of their favorite animal for the drama animal game, but the surprise came when we were ready, and we explained the rules from the next part of the game and that was to jump as they think that animal would do it in the nature.*
- *By rolling a dice and counting the number of dots was the number of jumps they had to perform to reach the other side of the gym area.*
- *The achievements for this week the older children had a lot of fun, but the smaller ones lost the interest very fast as they did not understand about how many jumps they needed to perform. For them it was just enough fun to jump all around with the head or ears they selected from the soft drama animal game. Some of the younger children felt a bit intimidated and did not feel comfortable if they needed to wear something in their head. That was also respected and still they participated in the animal movements game.*
- *I think this mathematical game activity could have been more successful if we could have been the possibility to divide the group in two. The youngest and the older children as it was a lot of happening inside the gym area and some of them lost focus on the activity.*
- *It was certainly still fun but not as it was planned to be. Usually when we have lack of staff, and you need to organize your activities in different way things can also be different as they were originally planned.*



Figure 44: Each child chose their own animal role for this game.

7 Conclusion from the 10-week Diary thesis

While doing this 10-week Diary, and by being together with the children from my group, planning observing, playing, writing, documenting, I realized how much they enjoy playing together with us educators, the people they learn how to trust after their family and, with whom they spend most of their day. I noticed that each of the goals that they independently achieved every single time they played together with us, it was important to be shared with an adult around them. That was when they started building their confidence and self-esteem.

Play-based learning is one of the most powerful tools when small children are developing as it impacts and provides everyday opportunities for learning while they are enjoying and sharing with other peers while playing together. When we enjoy something, we are doing, we tend to pay more attention and focus more so we learn more (Rintakorpi 2021).

As seen during my lessons it was mentioned that main thing from playing with kids is to build self-esteem instead of focusing on Academic skills. Learning should be fun. When we play together with the children, we create a supportive learning environment, here we give the chance for them to feel appreciated, being seen, being heard, and being considered when we are trying to plan child-oriented activities for them and with them. It was noticed that when we play together with them and we interact positively we help them also build a sense of better understanding other children or adults around them, developing social skills, we also help them build a feeling of accomplishment for example when they can build something from beginning till the end. That was why some of the weeks went further and beyond the original planned activity play. Like when it was the hospital child planned activity and the house play that lasted still for many weeks after that. I agree with the fact where Rintakorpi (2021) explains why it is important for adults to participate and consider children when planning child-oriented activities for them and with them. Some of the facts are these:

- The errand of early childhood instruction is to supply children with openings for diverse sorts of play and recreations. -
- The working culture (kindergarten reasoning, structures, rules, schedules) must energize play and interaction.
- Teachers must bolster improvement of children`s play with a holistic approach and goal-oriented development by either directing the play or from exterior or taking part in it and interact directly as a role member on the play.

While planning each of the weeks I had to base my planned activities with the curriculum (NACCE 2022), that is our quality handbook and tool. According to the NACCE (2022), Teaching activities that integrate and apply different fields of learning enable the examination and exploration of things and phenomena at scale. Staff are responsible for ensuring that educational activities promote the development and learning of children of different ages. So certainly, under our shoulders it is a big responsibility when thinking where and how the children will play so they can develop the learning areas established also by the National core curriculum. These areas are:

- Rich world of languages, where little by little they will start adding more vocabulary thru rhymes, songs, and sounds.

- Diverse forms of expression will help them develop better interaction while playing together with other peers. Can be thru music, mimic games, some crafts, videos, or photos that they can take with the help of devices supervised by adults, etc.
- Me and my community, here they learn about things they see at home, how we interact and participate in real life, they learn how to take care of things are around them such as nature for example. So thru play they can have pretend roles where they participate in a community and interact while playing.
- Exploring and interacting with my environment will help them to have a better understanding about things around them inside our daycare settings and when they participate and interact with their family and friends. While playing they can have a pretend trip around the forest where with the use of technology, we can help them understand more about things they see.
- I grow, move, and develop. This is my favorite point from curriculum (NACCE 2022), learning areas, every day I encourage the children to move around and explore new things, when we sit together and chat about things during circle time or morning talk, we encourage children to go out and try new things or even simple tasks like helping mom or dad in the kitchen, so they play and learn at the same time.

For this reason, the curriculum (NACCE 2022), helped me to plan activities for the target group of children that was going to be observed for this 10-week Diary research. This helped me to emphasize the guiding and fundamental importance of planning, implementing, and evaluating child-oriented activities, learning environment, and mainly the importance of enhanced and interactive play. In many of the activities I noticed that children see us adults as role models and try to imitate or try to do the same things as we are trying to do, they build that bond with us and trust us a bit more every day we spend together learning and playing. It was important during these observation weeks that we kept on with the cultural background from many of these kids, as I was doing the research inside an international daycare with many nationalities around. For many of the activities, we randomly asked them questions about the play and situations we had, and if they were having similar at home with their family or when they were travelling.

I really enjoyed the pedagogical documentation done for this thesis as I had to hide sometimes when taking the photo so children will be acting naturally during the playtime. Also, this was a nice experience for parents as sometimes at the beginning of the week, I explained the activities we were going to have and afterwards I also shared the photos from their own child with those parents who signed the permission of participation. They really appreciated the fact that somehow, they took part of it, as they were able to enjoy watching their children thru those images inside our daycare facilities, so, I got quite positive feedback from many of them. One family Mom was even in tears as she saw her child participating and interacting with other children happily as she is quite introverted around other children.

Also, it was important to make the children understand at their level, how important they are, I tried to promote the feeling of empowerment once they felt comfortable with the planned activities together with the educators and other peers. Little by little the confidence started to grow and develop in each of those little children. Some of them at the beginning of the project, did not wanted to participate actively but were close enough to see what we were doing. Then with constant positive feedback, I tried to promote a better sense of self-esteem encouraging them to participate, until they felt confident enough to go on their own, like for example the water park activities during early springtime, so emotional support was needed in many cases for many children that do not go out that often due to their cultural background. I realize also that many children during the winter or cold months they stay inside most of the time, so my idea was to show that despite of the weather conditions, with the correct clothes we can always enjoy spending time outdoors that is part of the curriculum (NACCE 2022). It is mentioned that “Play produces joy and pleasure for the children. Children are active agents when they play: they structure and explore the surrounding world, create social relations, and form meaning based on their experiences”. During these activities we enrich the play if for example we add a song about the theme we are playing, or after the activity we end up the activity with a craft like for example on the hospital activity week of taking our pet to the vet and doing a get-well card for our pet. So, we can still play, have fun, and enrich our play thru transversal competences and working methods used for these planned activities (NACCE 2022).



Figure 45: Happy children from my group, always playing together with us. This is part of how important we are for them when they are outside from their home and inside the day care settings.

7 PARTNER INVOLVEMENT AND WORKPLACE FEEDBACK

Feedback from workplace activities done and different perspective from my report process due work change placement.

Due to changes of placement my ex-colleagues and colleagues on my new workplace gave some feedback about this Diary thesis. One of them was the pedagogical manager and another was the special needs teacher, who also took part on some of these playing weeks together with me and the children. She was taking part of the observation as also for her own observation work and pedagogical documentation she needed to observe the children while interacting and playing with others.

At my previous workplace our Special needs teacher observed that, during autumn last year we got some evening workshop sessions about Play where we got a lot of hints on how to set and organize better our learning environments for the children in our classroom. All staff attended those evening workshops, and we had some homework to do before the next session. At one

point we had to re organize our classrooms to create with the things that we already had some playing corners with the children. For this, I interview the children and asked what they would like to play if we have some new settings inside our premises. I got some recycle material and create few areas with different topics where children from our group and even from other groups came to play with. Very simple but innovative for the children. Next time when I read the notes from the Pedagogical meeting there was a big “well done” mention for our group as she noticed we put a lot of effort to create not just one but several playing corners for the children in our classroom, she observed then and mention during that meeting, that she was able to see each of the adults in our classroom playing together with the children in those new areas that I created for them after the workshops. My boss was quite impressing and happy about the huge improvement as to be honest; we did not have so many toys, but I tried to extend the innovation as much as I could with what we had already. The special needs teacher also mentioned that she really appreciated that the activities were thought to be equal for all the children despite that we had few children with special needs in the classroom. She thought it was nice to have inclusive activities with children for example the one from hands in water that included all the children from the group. As seen on the Figure 42, I tried to illustrate the age gap between children in the group, but still this was not an impediment to enjoy the games and activities all together.

More feedback from the colleagues of my new place:

The pedagogical manager from my new workplace was really interested when I told her that I would need some new perspective on this Diary thesis as I just finished while being already in my new workplace. So, she read it, and her feedback was that she found a lot of nice and interesting ways to interact together with the children during this Diary thesis I wrote. As she has the older children in her group from this new daycare where we work, she loved the idea to plan for this Autumn some trips with the children in this new environment, but not just as a trip itself but with a meaning, like the Safari bird activities that were planned, and everybody enjoyed them. She mentioned that she would like to do something like enjoy the winter trips, if possible, with a snow and ice thematic together with the children. She found out that we need to have different approaches on how we plan those trips as we have some children with some special needs that require either an assistant or more staff which now, we do not have, this was the only inconvenience right now. She explained that when planning activities not always we remember to use all the transversal competences but even if they happened during the process, we don't give them a name. For example, like when parents pick up the children and later complain to our manager that the children just played that day, without understanding that while playing, children are also learning. We discuss that we will print for each classroom the chart of have you played together so parents will be able to understand that children learn thru playing with others.

Feedback from one of my ex- colleagues that observed me during the 10 weeks as we were working in the same classroom.

“I saw Viviana when she was taking her lessons and working at the same time in our classroom, sometimes while having her lessons , same time she was giving the snack time to the children who at the same time were crawling on top of her to see what she was doing in order to follow her studies, she uses to have big headphones to follow and participate on the lessons while being together with the children. Some other times, she was driving her car and continue listen while driving back home in order not to lose the lesson. In couple of occasions, I was also able to join quietly these interesting lessons, and we could not agree more with the topic they were touching. She was quite committed to the children from our group. Unfortunately, we could not continue working with this same group as we moved to a new workplace that has new challenges. I followed her and helped her to perform all the planned activities she had prepared for these 10-week Diary for the children in our group. One of the nicest activities was the hospital with pets as we took all the children from the group to the library and the children listen to a story about an injured cat. This helped later to feel more comfortable to go to the library at least once per week with our group, and this also helped children to felt familiar with the idea to have a weekly short trip to the library to read a book or two. Sometimes after reading the story, we went back to the classroom and children found toys to play as they remember the story we just read. So, with this I noticed that as Educators we don’t need to make a huge circus to create some engaging playing activities with the children, simple things make a huge impact on them. I know Viviana it is quite creative, and she will always have a plan B in case plan A cannot be achieved if some circumstances. So, I wish her all the best in her new adventure as now she is having a group with very young children, and I know that if she was able to plan activities that were inclusive, she will be able to also plan and design new projects and activities for the youngest ones in this new workplace”.

8 Conclusion and Self-reflection about my thesis

I really enjoyed this project a lot, mainly because from the beginning, the children involved were keen on pushing me to the limit to organize playful planned activities for them. Already while having small discussions with the children during lunch time, they noticed I just randomly brought a new item to the classroom and they were very curious about what it was, and what we were going to do with that, already there I could see that unconsciously they were already setting the scenario and the activity to be done together with and I was involved, in other words, an adult and children playing and learning together. Before all this happened, it was important to mention that for the children to start playing with me, they needed to trust me or trust the other adults they were also in the classroom. This was something I noticed during the take your pet to the vet week activity. My group staff was missing, and I just handled with

two students from Laurea that were there with me to set up and participate together with this group of children. The fact that we had unfamiliar faces was a bit of a challenge at the beginning, but once they trust them everything was on the right path. This was important as to learn and play, children need to feel comfortable with the adults that are in the group. For some of the planned activities, the children who did not share the same language as the rest of the group, had a bit more difficulties to communicate, but this was not an obstacle to join the play and planned activities. As I was documenting the activities sometimes it was challenging to be part of the game and to write down the notes of my observations at the same time, same with the pictures taken.

For some other situations, I noticed that first they needed someone who led by example, so they could follow, continue, and furthermore develop their own version of the game. As Educators and daycare professionals, we need to be aware of how important it is for a child to trust what we are saying to them. Children are so innocent that they believe whatever we could to them. As learned from my lessons, we are not just their teachers or guides, we are also facilitators of those joyful joint activities, we become their friends, and they built a sense of trust with us. Once they trust us, they follow us, they learn from us, and they enjoy a nice playful activity. When we are part of their games and activities, they enjoy more as we are there to help to communicate or share if they don't know how to ask for something among other peers instead of just pulling its own from their hands.

Certainly, after completing this process, I noticed that indeed, it is true that as educators we will enjoy much more our working time together with the children, when we listen to them and when we plan child-oriented activities, but more importantly, when we play together and we let them be part of their imaginary happy world inside the planned learning environments we design for them. Finally, one of the things I learned during this process is that we do not need to invest too much on material things to create a world full of possibilities for the children we are working with.

As a general conclusion I think that from the aims of this thesis that were mainly about finding the gap between children and adult interaction and participation in day care setting, and how to enhance that matter, these questions were answered during each of the 10-week activities and games we had together with the children. The aims and/goals for each week were answered after the child planned activities were implemented together with the adults that were also participating on them. It was important to mention that the curriculum (NACCE 2022) was important in each of the weeks. Transversal competences were ruling most of the child-oriented activities.

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Figures

Figure 1: Transversal competences in ECEC in a nutshell	16
Figure 2: Selecting the recycle material that we needed to repair to play or dispose in the elected container.	21
Figure 3: Learning how to separate recycle materials with a graphic chart together with the children.....	21
Figure 4: Second chance for containers as new toys role	22
Figure 5:New life for colorful beautiful packages during play time.....	22
Figure 6:Everyday food containers as new toys before disposing them.....	23
Figure 7:Fire inside our doll house with disposal recycle materials.....	26
Figure 8: Fire under control with emergency staff and units.	27
Figure 9: Role playing during our take your pet to the vet play activity.	30
Figure 10:Our Vet/Hospital learning environment play activity.	30
Figure 11:Children select and gather their play material for the activity.	31
Figure 12: Ambulance and taxi driver extended hospital play activity.	32
Figure 13:Together we learned how to take care of small injuries on our pet.	32
Figure 14: Repairing the ambulance at the local garage service station.	34
Figure 15: Bandage made by the children together with the teacher.	35
Figure 16: Water park and splashing activities during springtime.....	37
Figure 17: Perfect splash during our splash competition game.	38
Figure 18: Hands in water for our water game activity.	40
Figure 19: Toilet paper rolls production explained for little children with cartoons.	42
Figure 20: Bird Safari week exploration with DIY toilet paper rolls binoculars.	43
Figure 21: Checking equipment and safety before leaving for exploration game.	43
Figure 22: Children were really curious about all the equipment and didactic material I had prepared for them for this activity.	44
Figure 23: Didactic material prepared for each of the children after our exploration game activity.	44
Figure 24: Bird bingo game done during our exploration trip where together we marked down what we saw.	45
Figure 25: Explanation of a trip to the forest to the children and what we can also find apart of birds.	46
Figure 26: Free your imagination with craft material to build a bird nest during our second week Bird Safari workshop.....	47
Figure 27: Creative process from our Safari bird activities.	47
Figure 28: Hands on the crafts from each of the participants.	48
Figure 29: Practicing fine motor skills during creative process.....	49

Figure 30: Children enjoying the bird Safari craft workshop.	49
Figure 31: Real nest laid by birds and children were able to see close how the eggs and nest look like.	50
Figure 32: Diplomas and book gift given to each of the participants.	51
Figure 33: Warming up for the puppet disco together with the children.....	54
Figure 34: Children enjoying the puppet disco game we prepared for them.	54
Figure 35: Children brought their favorite animal toy to start learning together with us.	56
Figure 36: Guessing game activity done outdoors with the children according to their favorite animals. Mine is the fox.	56
Figure 37: Bingo animal game played during these activities.	57
Figure 38: Interesting to see how children played with the animals after the book we read. This was free play.....	57
Figure 39: Shadow theater show made by the children after we read about sounds of the animals, and which are daylight and nightlight animals.	58
Figure 40: Mathematical thinking during the jumping animal game.	59
Figure 41: Children were encourage to select the costumes and animal head looking by themselves to feel more comfortable.	60
Figure 42: Younger children also enjoyed the animal role activity.	60
Figure 43: Climbing like monkeys do	61
Figure 44: Each child chose their own animal role for this game.	63
Figure 45: Happy children from my group, always playing together with us. This is part of how important we are for them when they are outside from their home and inside the day care settings.	67