



Supporting the children's second language development in a functional bilingual day care

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The purpose of my thesis is to introduce various ways to support children's second language development through everyday activities in a functional bilingual day care. I will implement various activities into the day care's daily routine, in a way that would be beneficial in supporting the children's second language. I will also take the learning environment, group, inclusion, and co-operation with parents into consideration during the thesis period, and their effects on children's holistic learning and development. The work will be done in co-operation with Ankkalampi day care's unit situated in Lauttasaari, Helsinki. In co-operation with the day care workers, I will plan creative activities to suit the children's age group, which here is two years old, for their planned activity sessions as well as free play time. A personal aim for me during this thesis is also to better myself as a professional in the field of early childhood education and care and to develop better communication skills.

This thesis will be done with a diary-based method, also known as PONT. This will include week reports done, based mainly on the planned activities implemented at the day care, important aspects that effect children's overall learning and care, as well as of theoretical framework to support the activities and other themes. The theoretical framework will consist of theories on national curriculum for early childhood education and care, legislation, language learning, functional methods as well as games and plays. For theoretical work, I will be using printed books as well as electronic sources in both Finnish and English language.

The aim of this thesis will be reached with continuous reflection on the work from the point of view of a day care teacher as well as feedback gotten from children, co-workers, and parents. Lastly by reflecting on the impact of the planned and unplanned activities in their second language development. This thesis will provide some examples of functional ways to support the children's overall language development and highlight the factors that influence it.

Keywords: Early childhood education and care, functional language teaching, bilingualism, supporting language development.

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1 Introduction

Mäkinen (2020, 96-108) states that in today's world, it is important to remember that it is more common for people to be bilingual or multilingual than it is to speak only one language, to which Finnish day cares are no exception. In the book, she states that the key role of language is in the formation of a child's self-identity and self-examination, which is visible for example when the child uses a pronoun to talk about themselves. She also talks about the two tasks of language: it is a sign and a tool. Firstly, language helps create a connection between activities and environment and secondly, it is a tool to give meaning to observations, experiences and ideas and sharing them with others and oneself.

Majority of children all over the world learn to speak one or more languages during their early childhood (Lindon 2021, 134). Children begin to communicate ever since they are babies, and their language development can be seen in different stages according to their age during their growth. For example, a 7-12-month-old child mainly uses gestures and facial expressions to communicate, 1-2-year-olds begin to produce their first words, their vocabulary expands and can follow simple instructions, while a 2-3-year-old child can already communicate using small sentences, rapidly learns new words and begins to use grammar (Nurmi, Ahonen, Lyytinen, Lyytinen, Pulkkinen and Ruoppila 2015, 49).

Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care also recognises the importance of language diversity in today's world. The staff in the field understands that language is the key to children's development, interaction, collaboration, learning, identity construction and participation in society. Multilingualism in the field of early childhood education widely supports children's development in today's culturally diverse world. (Helsinki 2019, 27.) Learning a second language can happen either naturally by being born into a family where both parents speak different languages with the child or learning of the second language can happen after the first language has been learnt (Nurmi et al. 2015, 54).

Playing is a way of learning for children. A child's experiences and observations are reflected as they play and through plays and games, a child learns to explore the world, learns skills she/he will need in life, learns social skills, and builds friendships (Helenius and Lummelahti 2013, 14-15.) As children learn by playing, for my PONT, I will also be focusing on various methods of pedagogical playing activities and other aspects seen around the day care environment to support the children's second language development, in a functional bilingual day care, which here is English. For my PONT, I will be working with children of two-years of age.

The topic of my PONT comes from my interest in languages and multilingualism as I come from a multilingual background myself. My interest in this topic got stronger as I worked as an English-speaking teacher to the children in a day care where most children in my group spoke languages other than English as their first language. As I worked in a functional bilingual day care, it meant that I had to communicate in English with the young children, throughout the daily routine and during every activity. Thus, I had to look for different methods of communication and ways to guide them in the everyday activities of the day care life which supported the development of their English language.

1.1 Working life partner

The day care company I will be doing my thesis with is a private one called Ankkalampi-Ankdammen OY and has over twenty-day care units around the city area of Helsinki, Kauniainen, Espoo, and Turku. Ankkalampi day care company supports my interest in the linguistic area being a functional bilingual day care company with either Finnish-English units or Finnish-Swedish units. Each children's group in the said company's day care unit has at least 1 English/Swedish speaking and 1 Finnish speaking adult. The company believes in functional bilingualism as a method of language teaching which is achieved in the day care's everyday life and during everyday activities.

I will be doing my thesis in the Lahnelahti day care unit situated in Lauttasaari, Helsinki where I have been working in since the beginning of 2021. It is a small Finnish-English day care with a homely environment and has a total of one manager, one day-care assistant, three teachers, two nurses and eighteen children divided in two groups: 1-year-olds' group and 2-year-olds' group. I will continue to work there as an English-speaking teacher in the group of eight 2-year-old children during this PONT. The group of 1-year-olds are named as the Seahorses' group and the group of 2-year-olds are the Dolphins' group, which is the one I will be working with. Most children in the day care speak/ understand Finnish as their mother tongue and do not hear English as much on a daily as Finnish except from me at the day care.

The Lahnelahti day care unit is made up of two different units, Lahnelahti 1 and Lahnelahti 2. Lahnelahti 1 unit only has children over three years old and Lahnelahti 2 unit, the one I am working in, only has children under the age of three. The two units do a lot of co-operation on a daily and share the same outdoor park for the children to play in and for the parents to pick their children up from in the evenings. In addition, the two units share the manager and the day-care assistant and both units participate in the weekly house meetings together.

1.2 PONT

To write this thesis, I will be following the PONT-method, which is a diary-based thesis. Diary-based thesis is an alternative to functional thesis. This will take place in the span of

approximately 12-15 weeks, during which I will submit a weekly report for 10 weeks to the teachers while working in a day care. The 10-week diary reporting period will be from 23rd August to 29th October, and I will submit my final thesis by the end of November. Diary-based thesis is structured to be especially suitable for students whose work involves development or for students starting a new work. In PONT, the work is divided into smaller parts during which the student receives feedbacks and guidance on a regular basis. (Laurea PONT guidelines n.d.)

This PONT will consist of theoretical base, weekly reports, planned activities, free play time reports, daily routines, observations, representation of everyday life in the day care group, children's, and my work partner's reflections as well as my own experiences and reflections on the activities.

1.3 Language learning in early childhood education

Language, whether it is a spoken language or a non-verbal one, is both an object and a tool for learning. Language allows children to understand different situations and things, interact with others, learn problem solving skills and express themselves. In early years, encouragement, positive feedbacks provided by the adults and an adult's desire to be interactively present, supports the children's language and interaction skills. Language learning in early childhood education is supported by a diverse language environment and activities, which the teachers are responsible for in co-operation with the parents. (Opetushallitus 2018, 40-42.)

It is important for the early childhood educators to be aware that children of same age can be on many different stages in the linguistic area for a number of reasons. A balanced linguistic development during early years happens by guiding and supporting the linguistic skills and competences through various activities and everyday routine. Children are able to learn several languages at the same time already at a young age, use and development of which can vary according to the situations. Early childhood education providers are to take the child's linguistic background and the way they may learn at home into account. It is also early childhood education provider's task in co-operation with the parents, to ensure that linguistic and cultural diversity is made visible in the day care environment, which also contributes to the development of the children's self-identity. (Opetushallitus 2018, 40-42.)

Information or language cannot be directly taught to the children merely through spoken language, as learning during early years requires the child to take actions and their insights through those activities. When learning a new language, the child excitedly observes the linguistic environment around them and accordingly begins to produce speech. The development in linguistic area also has a strong connection with the child's emotions and their desire to connect with people that are important to them. (Nurmi et al. 2015, 42.)

1.4 Learning through games and plays

Playing games and plays ensures that each participant is active and a part of the group in some role. Plays and games encourages co-operation through the shared experience of the group which usually betters the environment as the children get to know one another better. Plays and games have a positive effect in children's versatility of thinking, broader way of observation as well as their empathy towards others and themselves. Movements during games and plays also strengthen the child's self-identity as during these activities, the child focuses on their body control, their own activity and are present in the moment. In addition, learning through games and plays strengthens the children's skills to work as a part of the group, as an individual and their understanding of being able to influence their own activities. In addition to activities that encourage movement, also board games, card games and memory games are effective tools in language learning. (Maunu and Airaksinen 2020, 9-10.)

As the day care I am work in is a functional bilingual one, the children hear English language from me and Finnish language from my work partner on the daily during everyday routine tasks. I will be using different activities as a helping tool to enhance their understanding and use of the second language during everyday activities. In this case the children's second language is English. I will also focus on bettering my way of using English on the daily and making the learning environment more approachable and beneficial to language development. Although, I have highlighted the importance of learning through activities, hearing the language in the environment during the everyday life is just as important and a way of learning in a functional bilingual day care and goes hand in hand with kinaesthetic learning. As Lindon (2012), argues that children that are exposed to an environment where they hear plenty of language might develop their vocabulary slightly faster compared to those who grow up in a surrounding with limited experience of language.

1.5 Ethics considered in this PONT

Ethical guidelines made by Arene (2020) for thesis writing, were taken into consideration and followed when writing this PONT. The children's', parents', day care workers' and other people mentioned in this work's personal information and identity were covered in many ways in the texts and the figures added to protect their anonymity. Required permissions from the day care personnel were also taken before beginning my work with them, as my PONT involved reviewing and reflecting on the activities planned and done at the day care with the children and co-operation with the parents. Furthermore, to avoid plagiarism, all the sources used in this PONT were cited and authors were given recognition to, according to Laurea guidelines.

1.6 Key professional concepts

In this chapter, I will discuss the professional concepts of early childhood education and care. I will talk about the main laws of early childhood education as well as the related secrecy law and national core curriculum of early childhood education and care. The chapter will also include a description of what pedagogy means in early childhood education and the early childhood education and care plan in the form of pedagogical documentation. Further, I will open the topic of bilingualism in early childhood education and functional language learning.

Early childhood education and care curriculum in Finland (ECEC)

The ECEC is guided according to the Act on Early childhood education and care (2018/540) and the National core curriculum for ECEC 2018, which is now also a national norm. The ECEC curriculum is made up of 3 tiers, which consists of the National core curriculum for ECEC, local ECEC curriculum and the child's individual ECEC plan. The ECEC providers are to prepare a local curriculum based on the National core curriculum for ECEC and each child has a right to an individual ECEC plan, which is prepared by the ECEC teacher of the group. The purpose of the national steering of ECEC is to ensure an equal requirement for the holistic growth, development and learning of every child participating in ECEC. (Opetushallitus n.d.)

The Act on Early childhood education and care (2018/540), describes early childhood education as a child's purposeful and goal-oriented holistic upbringing, which emphasizes especially on pedagogy. The law states that there are 3 kinds of early childhood education facilities organized in Finland 1. Day care, which is provided in a day care centre 2. Family day care, which is provided in a family day care centre and 3. Open early childhood education, which is provided in a place suitable for activities for example, a playground. It is also said that a child's day at early childhood education, for example at a day care, may only last for a maximum of 10 hours at a time, except in cases of parent's shift work. (Finland 2018.)

According to the Ministry of education and culture (n.d.), the local municipality is responsible for finding a day care for a child suitable to the family's needs and the family is to apply for an early childhood education place at least 4 months prior to starting a day care. It is also stated that all children are entitled to equal and full-time early childhood education, regardless of the parent's employment situation.

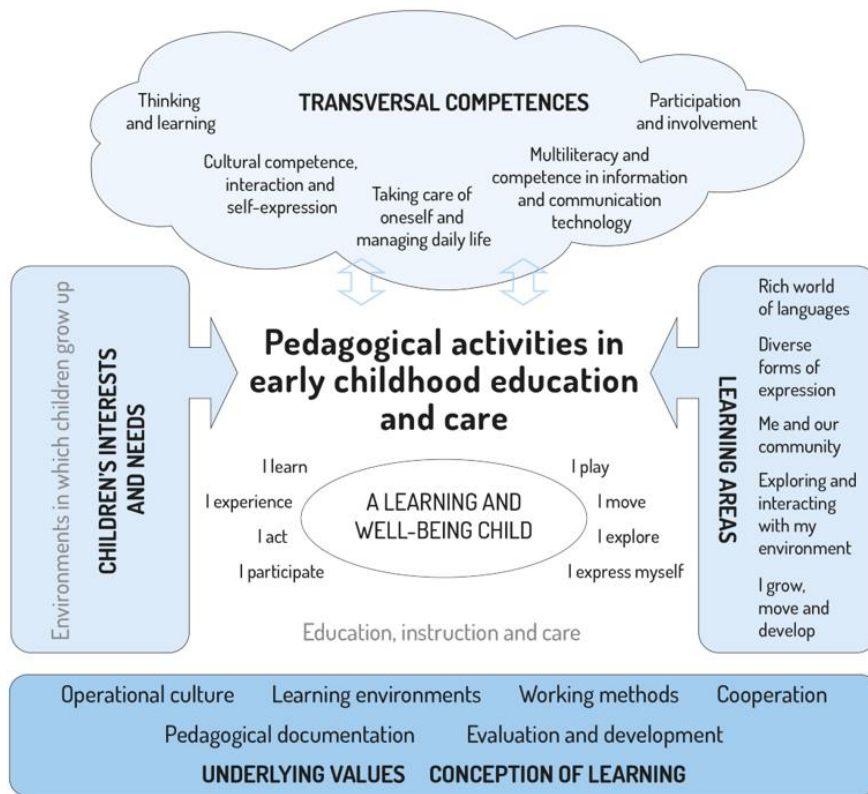


Figure 1: Framework for pedagogical activities in ECEC (European commission 2021).

The framework for pedagogical activities of ECEC according to the national curriculum for ECEC is explained above in Figure 1. The framework is made up of various areas and shows learning in ECEC and its implementation as a holistic process, in which child's own interest and needs play a major role. The framework further consists of transversal competences, learning areas, underlying values, and conception of learning. All of which aim to promote the children's learning and well-being. (Opetushallitus 2018, 36.)

Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care

ECEC is part of Helsinki's care and education system, which is an important steppingstone on a child's path towards learning and holistic growth. Helsinki's local curriculum for ECEC is made based on the Act on ECEC (2018/540), the national core curriculum for ECEC 2018 and the values of City of Helsinki, such as honesty, fairness, equal treatment, and openness. Each unit that provides ECEC is to create an annual action plan based on Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC, which must explain the pedagogical principles of the unit's operations. Also, children and guardians are to take part in planning these operations. Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC provides an organised structure for ECEC pedagogy and guidelines on continuous evaluation. The curricula also emphasises on the high-quality ECEC to promote parity and prevent social exclusion. (Helsinki 2019, 3-6.)

The pedagogical activities of ECEC in Helsinki are guided by the 5 transversal areas, 1. Thinking and learning, 2. Cultural competence, interaction, and expression, 3. Self-care and everyday skills, 4. Multi-literacy and ICT competence and 5. Participation and advocacy. These competences are a combination of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. Having these competences means having the ability to apply the learnt knowledge and skills to grow according to the changes in the surrounding world. Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC pays extra attention to the high quality of interaction as well as warm and sensitive approach and encounter with children. Children are seen as active agents in learning and the staff is responsible for ensuring that each child is an equal member of the group. (Helsinki 2019, 11-14.)

Early childhood education pedagogy

Early childhood education pedagogy is defined as a multidisciplinary, especial early childhood education-based education targeted towards the well-being and learning of the children. This is carried out by the professionals of early childhood education and is professionally managed through planned and goal-oriented activities. Pedagogy can be seen in the activities done in early childhood education, in the learning areas of the day care, as well as in the teaching, care giving and upbringing of the children in a holistic way. To emphasis on the pedagogy in early childhood, it requires pedagogical expertise and the day care teachers' common understanding on promoting children's learning and well-being. Upbringing, teaching, and care taking are implemented in different ways by using different methods in early childhood education mainly depending on the children's age group. (Opetushallitus 2018, 76-77.) Pedagogy can be seen in anything, and everything done at the day care, as each step, activity, routine, learning areas, and playtime is planned by taking the children's wellbeing, interests, and age-related growth into account.

Early childhood education and care plan

Each child that is in early childhood education system has the right to an individual pedagogically planned and goal-oriented upbringing, which is implemented in the day care by drawing up an early childhood education plan, also known as the ECEC plan. This plan is one of the most important pedagogical documentation done by the early childhood education teacher of the child group in co-operation with the child's parents/ guardians. The plan is drawn to keep track of and support the child's pedagogical growth, needs and development and give them the best possible care. Areas and topics that are important to be considered while planning are the following: child's own areas of interest, competence, strengths, individual needs and child's linguistic, cultural and visual background. The plans must also include goals that support the child's development, learning and well-being and a plan on how to achieve these goals, any support the child might need as well as matters agreed between the child, day

care professionals and the parents. The child's early childhood plan is first drawn after they have started in the day care, which is then updated regularly based on their needs and the day care's guidelines, at least once a year. It is also possible to reflect on the child's previous early childhood education plans and other possible pedagogical documentations when drawing up new and updated plans. (Opetushallitus 2018, 9-11.) According to the law on Early childhood education and care (2018/540), the ECEC plan falls into the act of secrecy (1999/621), which states that official papers and personal information related to the child's identity and the child's needs cannot be handed over to a third person, excluding exceptional situations such as, day care transfer or situations related to child's health and safety (Finland 2018).

Learning areas in early childhood education and care curriculum

Early childhood education and care curriculum has a holistic approach towards a child's healthy development. It divides the children's learning areas into five entities: 1. a diverse world of languages, 2. various forms of expression, 3. our community and I, 4. I explore and act in my environment 5. I grow, move, and develop. These learning areas describe the main goals of the pedagogical activities of early childhood education and guide the day care workers in planning and implementing a diverse set of pedagogical activities in their work with children. The five learning areas are not separate from each other but rather combined while implementing with children according to their interests and competences. A combination of pedagogical activities with different learning areas makes it possible to explore and study the growth of a child better. Ways to achieve the goals of these learning areas may vary according to the chosen topics, situations, and the learning methods of children. It is the day care worker's role to ensure that the variety of pedagogical activities promote the development and learning in children of different ages. (Opetushallitus 2018, 40-48.)

Functional language teaching

The aim of functional bilingualism is that a child can actively understand, use, and think in two languages and is able to switch to both languages automatically, even if the child has not achieved the same level of learning in both languages. (Hassinen 2005, cited in Kivijärvi 2020, 263).

In the book 'Toiminnallinen kielenoppiminen' functional language learning is described to mean learning vocabulary, concepts, and structures of a language through creative, interactive, collaborative, and kinesthetic methods. Through these methods, language awareness is made more visible and practical, and teaching and learning are based on a learner-centered way of working and exploring together. Functional learning, which is an experimental, physical, and holistic way of learning, is also connected to the strengthening of the memory trace. As a person is a psychophysical entity, physical activity creates a positive self-identity as the body gets to participate in the activities and through that learn. Functional methods of learning also create

new experiences for the learners and those experiences in connection with their emotions and memories, strengthen their self-image in a positive manner. (Maunu and Airaksinen 2020, 6-14.)

Maunu and Airaksinen (2020, 6-14) divide functional language learning methods into five areas: 1. games and plays, 2. movement, 3. drama, 4. story related and visual methods and 5. functional evaluation. The authors also highlight the teacher's most important role in this method of teaching to be able to create a safe learning environment. Also, to create a relaxing and accepting atmosphere, which is stated to have a positive effect on learning. Through functional learning methods, different kind of learners get the space and acceptance in their own way of learning, and they get the possibility to value the various ways of learning.

Bilingual early childhood education

Bilingual early childhood education's goal is to utilize the sensitivity period of children's early language learning by offering them diverse language education. In bilingual early childhood education, children are offered opportunities to learn language through functional and playful activities. The aim of bilingualism in early years is also for multilingual environment to encourage children's curiosity towards exploring and experimenting. In such day cares, activities are introduced and implemented in both languages and the languages are actively present in the children's daily routine at the day care. Children are encouraged to use both languages they are taught in and provided with support in situations where needed. (Opeutshallitus 2018, 51.)

In an extensive bilingual ECEC, at least one quarter of the activities that are done in the day care are implemented in a language other than Finnish. Activities are planned and implemented in a way that allows for both provided languages to be used systematically and according to plan. Children's linguistic development is supported taking their individual needs into account. The aim of extensive bilingualism is for the children's skills in both languages to continuously develop through the linguistic model provided by the staff and by the active participation of children. (Helsinki 2019, 31.)

2 Work life

2.1 Current work and working skills

I am currently working as a teacher in a group of multicultural two-year-olds. I have about a year of experience of working in the field of early childhood education and care. I have gathered my experiences working in the same day care company in the past mainly as a student, observer, and as a nurse in different children's group and different day care units around

Helsinki. Since the beginning of this year, I have had the chance to have more responsibilities of a teacher, of pedagogical planning and as a team member of the day care unit, all of which has helped me grow as a professional and as a person. As I like to reflect on myself as a professional, I have noticed positive changes in my way of planning pedagogical activities and covering all learning areas through activities. Things I felt that I had to think about a lot while planning pedagogical activities in the beginning of my work life in the field of early childhood education, seem to have become more natural and clearer to me now.

I will be doing my PONT from the point of view of a day care teacher, while still learning to be one. As I am now working in the role of a teacher in the group, which means that I am responsible for a lot of the children's pedagogical planning. During this year's spring season, I had the opportunity to orientate myself on the early childhood education plans and hold my first plan meetings with the parents of my group at the time.

I would also like to point out that I have started my PONT journey during the Covid-19 pandemic, effect of which can also be seen around the day care, mostly regarding safety distance. A few rules as I began working in this day care unit because of the ongoing pandemic have been for example, the parents have not been allowed inside the day care and they have mostly had to hand their children over at the entrance, use of a face mask when in interaction with parents, parents not allowed inside the evening park and there have been no events organized for the family members to visit inside the day care in a big crowd.

2.2 Communication skills

Although, I have had a chance to work in different age groups and with different team members, one thing that has remained constant in my day care work life is being an English-speaking adult in the children's group who do not speak English as their first or even second language in some cases. This has meant that I have actively had to think of and experiment new ways to become easily approachable to the children and get my message through to them in their second language.

During my work life in the day care unit in question, there have been many possibilities and situations where I have had a chance to say my opinions out loud in front of the whole team. In addition to this, I have also been speaking with the parents more actively in a professional setting for example, when the parents fetch their child from the day care or during the ECEC meetings. I have however faced challenges in communicating my views on difficult matters with the parents as well as my team several times. Also, it is very difficult for me to express my opinions if I have a different view than others or disagree with people I work with, whether they are the day care team or the children's parents.

2.3 Development of working skills

Ankkalampi has a background theme for the season called 'The world of stories' in each day care unit and all age groups. During this season, we as early childhood education and care providers, will introduce the children to the wonderful world of stories in both languages, be it fairy tales, real life stories, drama stories, role play or any and every kind of innovative ideas of including stories into the day care activities. The day care professionals are also responsible for implementing the theme into the children's pedagogical plans and activities according to their age, which in my case is a group of two-year-olds. The theme is to be included in all learning areas and is encouraged to do in co-operation with parents. There have also been a lot of thought and a few conversations during the beginning of the season about how to bring the season's theme more into the activities of such young children. Is it enough that we read to them every day? How do we make the theme more appropriate for the children of this particular age?

The influence and importance of storytelling, taking turns during conversations, unrushed talking, reading, language play, singing games, poems and naming of things in the children's linguistic memory and vocabulary development has also been emphasised in Helsinki's curriculum of ECEC (Helsinki 2019, 30). I have taken implementing this theme into our day care routine in a holistic way as part of development of my working skills. I will also be taking the learning environment into account to make the theme more visible around the day care, as well as find ways to be in co-operation with parents. Along with my work partner, I will be bringing the theme into practice during the PONT weeks, with Dolphins group by developing games and playing activities related to stories, all the while keeping their age in mind. This theme is not only beneficial to children's linguistic development but also to their holistic pedagogical development, as well as challenges the day care staff to get more creative and innovative while applying the theme into practice. In addition, the theme has also challenged the staff to become more creative with implementing it into the day care's activities.

According to research done in 2017, only 25% of the parents read stories to their children, which the researchers find worrisome, as reading books to children have several positive effects on a child's development. Hearing literary language and only 15 minutes of story reading already has positive effects on a child's linguistic development. Stories and tales majorly enhance children's vocabulary, which helps improve the child's communications skills and further helps their emotional and social skills. Stories provide children an opportunity to escape the real world and develop their imagination. Through the world of stories, a child may also process their own feelings better, mirror their daily lives and further develop their problem-solving skills. In addition, interactive stories are also important, as the child gets their turn to discuss about the story and ask questions. These kinds of discussions not only help the child's communication and emotional skills but also better the relationship between the child and the

adult. Discussion a variety of themes through stories and tales help better children's imagination, emotional, social, and linguistic skills, which accordingly helps develop the child's holistic growth. (Karvonen, Kähkönen, Kotila and Karjalainen 2018.)

We started by introducing the children to the theme by reading books to them and looking through picture books during the morning circle as well as free play time. During the season, we have played a lot of role plays and drama plays as a form of language teaching, storytelling activities with the help of picture cards and other visual aids, made book reading a part of our daily routine, done puppet theatre shows as well as physical exercise using animal related stories. In addition, we have covered the arts and crafts area with the theme as well by painting story characters, letting children create art and draw using imagination while an adult tells them a story, and created the most liked farmhouse with them from the song Old MacDonald's. Adults of the day care have also painted the windows of the day care with known story characters such as, Moomin world, Peppa pig and Winnie the pooh. We have also included parents to the theme, by talking about their favourite stories, dedicated a wall for the theme by hanging stories made by children for parents to read and by asking them to bring children's favourite story books from home, which children got to present to the group with the help of an adult.

2.4 Goals for this PONT

My goal for this thesis is to understand and find ways to support/ enhance the children's language development in their second language during everyday activities and through various planned and unplanned activities. In this case, English language is mostly a second, or in a couple cases a third language for all the children in my group at the day care. During the thesis period, I will be actively reflecting on my own development throughout the weeks as an ECEC teacher. I am also keen to focus on the importance of smaller group activities and on active presence of an adult in the group during this period.

As I mentioned in the paragraphs in topics above, during my work life I have faced challenges in communicating about difficult topics or expressing myself when I disagree with certain things as a professional. My personal goal during the period of writing this PONT is also to improve my communication skills. I hope to better my way of communicating about topics that I find important and gaining more professional confidence when in co-operation with the parents as well as with co-workers.

3 Week reports

As I have mentioned earlier in this PONT, I will be writing weekly reports for the coming 10 weeks for this PONT. The reports will include texts from pedagogical planned and unplanned

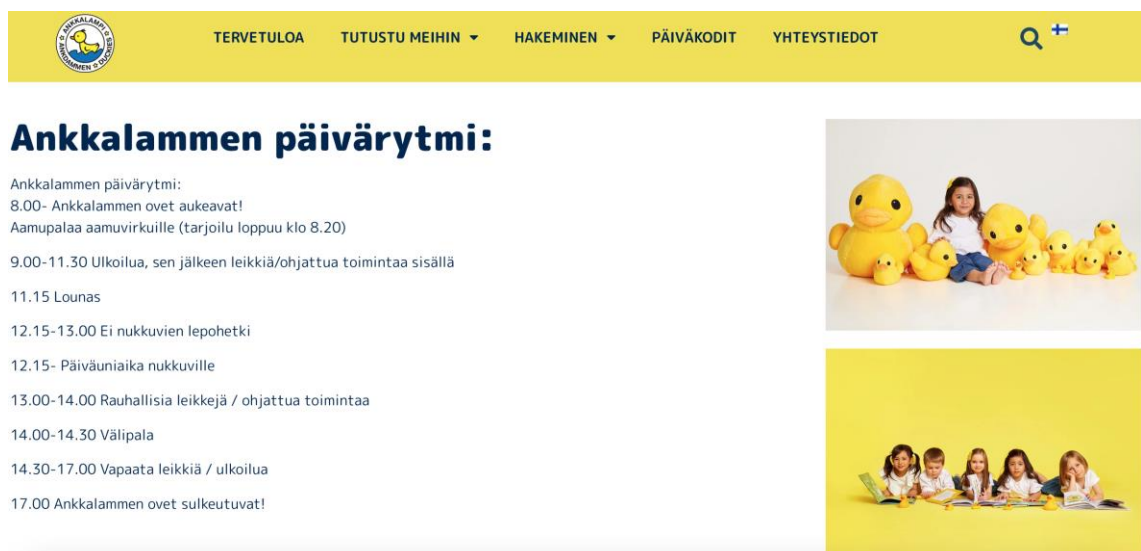
activities done with children, the day care unit's daily routine, and other activities regarding the children's education around the day care unit that I will be working in. I will be writing reports from at least three to five days each week. In addition to functional activities, the reports will also consist of theoretical base to support the texts.

I will also be including planned games and plays into planning the daily activities as a supporting tool in the children's second language development in a functional bilingual day care, as I go along during each weekly report. Although, each week has its own different areas of focus, planned activities, free play time, observations and reflections towards the themes supporting the children's language development will also play a huge role.

I will lead my report weeks with a weekly letter that is posted on Ankkalampi website from each group of every Ankkalampi day care unit. The weekly letter is simply a summary of activities that the children have participated in during the week, for the parents to read, which will open the coming week's activities to the reader. The week reports will be followed by an introduction text for the week, where I will tell a little about what the week will consist of in connection with my PONT topic and the week's theme. This will be followed by the weekday's reports and finally a conclusion text at the end of every week's report, where I will reflect on the main observations of the week.

Throughout the week reports, I will also be adding pictures of our activities, learning environments and other day care related things. I will, however colour over the parts that may include any details about the children, parents, or staff members to ensure their anonymity.

3.1 Week 1 Introduction to the day care routine and work roles



Ankkalammen päivärytmi:

Ankkalammen päivärytmi:
 8.00- Ankkalammen ovet aukeavat!
 Aamupalaa aamuvirkuille (tarjoilu loppuu klo 8.20)
 9.00-11.30 Ulkoilua, sen jälkeen leikkiä/ohjattua toimintaa sisällä
 11.15 Lounas
 12.15-13.00 Ei nukkuvien lepoa
 12.15- Päiväuniaika nukkuville
 13.00-14.00 Rauhallisia leikkejä / ohjattua toimintaa
 14.00-14.30 Välipala
 14.30-17.00 Vapaata leikkiä / ulkoilua
 17.00 Ankkalammen ovet sulkeutuvat!

Figure 2: Ankkalampi's daily routine (Ankkalampi-Ankdammen).

The picture above is taken from the Ankkalampi website about the daily routine base that each unit follows, adjusting the routine according to their groups. In addition to the website, the details about the daily routines are also visible in the day care hallways for the parents and new costumers to see.

This week, I will be talking about the day care routine overall, Dolphin group's routine, work schedules of the day care staff and the work roles that each work shift has. Routines and work roles are equally important for the children at the day care, for the staff and to the parents to understand what is happening and what everyone is supposed to do during the day. In addition, it is important to stick to these routines, keeping in mind that a structured routine help children figure out their daily lives better.

Ankkalampi day care has a base routine that each unit follows less or more according to their groups and children's age, which is shown in Figure 2. In addition, the company has their daily routine also posted in their webpage for the parents to see and new costumers to familiarize themselves with. In our day care unit, we follow this routine quite a lot with all children of age one to two years in both seahorses' group and dolphins' group, from which I will mostly talk about my group Dolphin's everyday routine.

At our day care, we have five staff that work in the children's group apart from the house assistant and the unit's manager. Figure 3 shows the five different work shifts of our day care unit, which is divided between all five staff members. Also, the day care assistant has their own work hours and the unit's manager is available twice a week at our day care unit, as they are also manager of couple other units. The day care assistant is mainly responsible for keeping the unit clean and the kitchen work, while the day care manager manages the unit, guides us in our works on many levels, while also updating us of the important events and tasks that needs to be done.

First shift	Second shift	Third shift	Fourth shift	Fifth shift	Day care assistant
7.45 am -	8.15 am -	8.30 am -	9.10 am -	9.30 am -	7.00 am -
15.05 pm	15.55 pm	16.30 pm	16.50 pm	17.10 pm	14.40 pm

Figure 3: Timetable of day care's each shift.

Morning

The morning shift starts at 7.45 am and by this time, the house assistant is already at the day care doing some cleaning up. Morning shift then starts by making breakfast porridge for the children, opening the house phones to check for possible messages, and take out the children's attendance list where we mark which children are available for the day, as these need to be

done before opening the day care for the day. We open the day care gate at 8 am and let the first children in for breakfast. Our breakfast time is from 8.00-8.30 am and being strict with this timetable is very important to keep up with the morning activities.

By this time our second and third shift have started their work. The second shift takes the first group of children to the toilet and then to playroom for morning free play whereas the third shift stays between the breakfast area and playroom to take the ready children to the toilet and send them towards the playroom. During the first couple hours in the morning, both children's groups of the day care have the same routine and play in huge groups until heading to the park for outdoor play.

After the fourth shift arrives, two of the adults, which is usually me and my work partner, then take the Dolphin group's children to the day care park for outdoor activities, while the rest of the smaller children stay indoors. We usually try to hold the outdoor activities for about an hour on days that we have planned activities and stay outdoors longer on free play days. We come back inside the day care in 2 smaller groups to make sure the hallway is not too crowded, and the children have their own space to change clothes and go to the toilet. We then have planned small group activities with the dolphins, which is followed by a morning circle at 10.45 am either in English or Finnish. Daily morning circles are the most important part of our morning routine as this is one time of the day when the whole group surely sits down together, calmly look at everyone present, share thoughts, and have conversations. This is also a perfect moment to learn about important events and sing songs together.

Noon

After the morning circle is over, we have a toilet break and have our lunch right away in our home room, while the Seahorses and other adults have lunch in the room right next to ours. We begin lunch at 11.15 am with the dolphins' children, 15 minutes later than the smaller children's group to maintain a calm flow in the toilet and hallway as there is only one toilet in use for all eighteen children. This routine is followed by nap time / resting time from 12 pm - 14 pm for all the children, during which all five adults are present in the nap room to help children feel safe and fall asleep. As the children are all still very young and require rest during daytime, every child mostly falls asleep during this hour.

During the time all children and the five staff members are in the nap room, the house-assistant is responsible for the cleaning up of both lunch areas and the rest of the unit. They are also responsible for breakfast clean up and preparing the lunch. The shift of the house-assistant however finishes in our day care unit at 13 pm and the responsibility of preparing the snacks and cleaning up after snack time shifts to the morning shift.

Further ensuring that all children have fallen asleep, only 1 person stays in the nap room to guard the children while other staff members go for a coffee break. After the break, the 4 staff members prepare for the upcoming activities or do other tasks that they are responsible for around the day care for example, shop orders, checking emails, updating calendars for future events, crafting children's birthday cards, updating the children's growth files, etc.

There might however be some confusion on who would stay in the nap room sometimes. I would also like to develop a visual chart during my PONT as a timetable for adults for the nap room, which will make it easier to keep track of whose turn it is to guard the sleeping children.

The first morning shift then starts to prepare for the children's snacks at around 13.30, as the house assistant has ended their shift by this time and the children have their snack at 14.00. The first children then usually start waking up at around 13.15 and until snack time, they get to practice their fine motor skills and have calm/ quite table games for example, puzzles, pins in the board and plus-plus block games. During this period, all Seahorses' and Dolphins' children play together in one room with adults present.

Evening

As I mentioned in the paragraph above, both children's group start their snack at 14. For snack time they go to their own rooms with their own group's adults. After snack, Seahorses have activities in their home room and Dolphins' children go to the toilet and have a relaxing daily story reading time where I or my work partner read a book to them either in English or Finnish. The first morning shift is also responsible for cleaning up the dishes and the dining areas after snack time before their shift ends at 15.05.

Four of the group's adults go to the evening park with the children where the parents come to pick their children. We have a timetable chart system that we use at the day care to separate the children between all adults into four smaller groups. The chart tells us which children are in whose group, the adult's shifts, and timetables of going outside on time. The closing shift is responsible for setting the chart for the day and for this, all Seahorse and Dolphin group children are mixed. Each adult then takes their own small group to a separate space to play a different play until it is their turn to go to the park to maintain a good flow in the toilet and the dressing space.

Each adult leaves the day care park in the evening when their shifts end and the last two shifts remain in the park between 16.30-17.00. Last children are picked up from the park at 17.00 by the latest as the day care closes at 17.00. The last shift is then responsible for taking everything back inside the day care, closing all electronics, and locking the main doors before ending their shift.

Weekly and monthly routines

In addition to the work shifts and roles of the day care workers, we have a few other weekly, daily, and monthly routines at the day care. Both the group's adults must write one weekly letter each as a summary of what was done during the week, which then is posted on the company website for the parents to read. I have also used these weekly summaries in my PONT's weekly reports. We also have a weekly staff meeting with the unit's manager to go through upcoming events, where all five-day care workers and our partner unit participate in. Both group's adults also get planning time weekly, when they get to reflect on past week and plan activities for upcoming week. Lastly, we have an area for each month at the day care that we focus on during our work, for example co-operation with parents or motor skills. The day care teachers are then to write a summary text turn by turn about what was done regarding this area during the month, which again is sent to the parents to read as a way of co-operating with them and keeping them updated.

Conclusion

Defining team's each person's work role, their responsibilities and talking about their successes within the team are very important to create a positive and healthy working environment and a motivated staff. Defining roles in the workplace can help to ensure that there are less conflicts, people co-operate more effectively, everyone knows what they are doing, everything gets done, and communication is improved. (Lennon-Smith 2019.) When the day care staffs each have main work roles, it is easier to keep track of what needs to be done and this way, everyone shares the responsibilities of work together. Having shared responsibilities helps create a more open, positive, and trusting environment between staff members, which also results in less stress on only one person to do everything. Having a manager in the unit is a very important thing, as this way the manager keeps track of everyone having equal workload and everyone doing their part of the work responsibilities.

Routine in staff's days is just as important as in children's days to maintain a good flow at the day care. In her article Scivicque (2019), talks about the benefits of workplace routines, and states workplace routines to be like 'rituals' as they are specific and pre-established of doing things on a regular basis. A few benefits of workplace routines that she talks about are that it creates consistent results, reduces stress, builds habits, and saves time of the staff. When the adults in the day care know, what is happening during the day, they can only then guide the children to do the same. For this, a base routine is good to have which can be modified and flexible according to the day's plans and number of staff members. Having a visible routine with timetable around the day care is also something that should be thought of as this makes it easier in case there is a substitute worker in the day care, which can happen for a number of reasons.

3.2 Week 2 Importance of routine

Weekly letter:

Dolphin's week has been full of new activities, and we have been able to familiarize ourselves to the world of stories. We began our week with a story telling session, where we discussed about farm animals and colours. On Tuesday, we practiced going on a walking trip with only the help of a rope for the first time, which went very well for the Dolphins. We went to the Casino beach for our trip, there we collected some sand for week's another activity. On Wednesday, we had our season's first music school, which was a lot of fun. On Thursday, we had a multisensory painting session. For this, we mixed the sand we had collected into finer paint and the children got to do fun and colourful finger painting with sand-paint. On Friday, we ended our week with calm Yoga session, where everyone got to relax and practice Yoga movements.

Introduction

The first whole week after the summer holiday when all the children in the group were present was very important for everyone involved, the staff, children, and the parents. This meant getting back to the day care routine after a relaxing holiday for some or why not an active holiday for others. As the children are very young, importance of routine in everyday activities becomes even more significant. Since I am familiar with the children and their parents, as I have been working with them for a few months, it was easier to lay a routine and already start the weeks with simple activities.

In the coming week, I will be focusing on the importance of a routine in the children's everyday life at the day care. This week, I will be laying a routine base for the children's daily life at the day care and in the new group. At the day care, we have a weekly planning system where the adults of each child group get planning time for the upcoming week. We planned the first week with my group's work partner with a lot of thought and tried to keep it as simple as possible while also setting a daily and weekly routine base for the season. We set one planned activity per day for the children, which meant that the rest of the day could be about no rushed activities and routines.

Routines are important not only for adults, but especially also for children during their early years. Routines allow children to understand the challenges of continuously learning new things through the safe and comforting boundaries created by routines. Children learn what to expect during the day as they begin to participate according to the set routines. This allows them to experience a sense of control and feeling of success by being able to perform the simple tasks related to routines. With the help of routines, children also learn some very important skills such as, self-control, positive behaviour, and social skill. In addition, routines help children

prepare for changes emotionally, give them a feeling of safety and a sense of control over their surroundings. (Higgins and Gregory 2012.)

Monday

We started the day with outdoor play in our playground right outside the day care. Some children from the group start their day early and some a little later, which makes it easier for everyone from my group to start their day with some active outdoor play time in fresh air. After about 1-1.5h of outdoor time, we headed inside the day care in two small groups to ensure that moving from one place to another goes calmly and without rush. After this, we settled in our home room for the small group activity of the day.

The day care's theme of the season being the 'world of stories', we started the week with an introduction to the world of stories. This, in a way also supported my thesis topic as this can relate to simple table board games. I divided the group in half and only took four children at a time for the activity, emphasizing the importance of small group activities, and held a story telling session for the first time for said group. For this activity, I gathered a few picture cards including different animals, colours, and a few random picture cards from the morning circle song cards.

The idea of the activity was for the children to talk about what they see in the picture cards with a few guiding questions and help from me to create their own story. In moments of silence, I would ask questions regarding the cards and the conversation began. After a few minutes into the activity, I noticed that the children were doing all the talking and were communicating verbally and non-verbally by laughing, giggling, and pointing towards each other and the cards as well as answering to each other's questions. I had a pen and paper throughout the activity and wrote everything the children said about the picture cards, which in the end made out to be a first story of their own. After the activity, I printed the story as shown below in the picture and hung it outside our home room door, so that the parents could also read it and enjoy the stories that their children had made. As also stated in Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC, children are told stories, poems and other verbal messages and are encouraged to think of stories and poems of their own, which is further documented as part of pedagogical documentation (Helsinki 2019, 30).

One of the children's stories in story-telling activities can be seen in the picture in Figure 4 and the picture cards used for the said activity can be seen in Figure 5. There, I have hidden the parts of the text that had names of children to protect their anonymity. The name that I did not however hide from the text was 'Nika', which is a name the children call me.

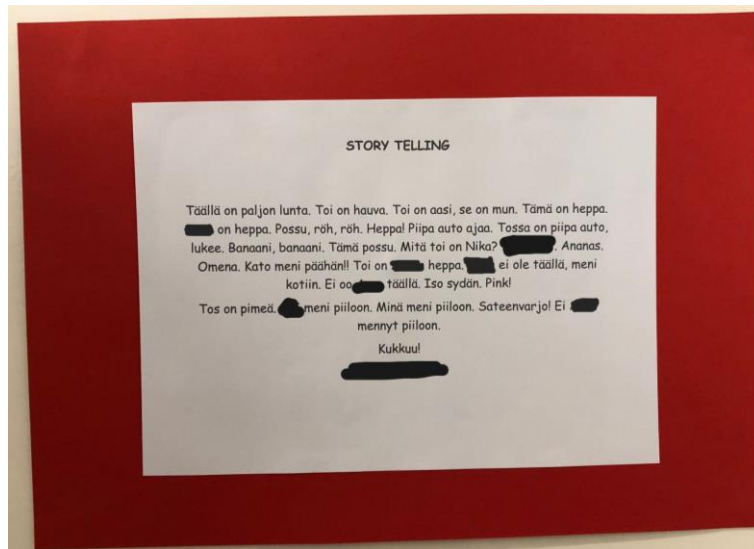


Figure 4: Story made by children during story telling activity.



Figure 5: The picture cards used for the story-telling activity.

Afterwards during the day, we were discussion about how the day's story telling activity went with my work partner. At that time, we realized that maybe we could have used less variety of picture cards as at times the children seemed to get confused on what to talk about because some cards seemed to be a distraction rather than help. A few children kept changing their picture cards before talking about the one that was already in their hands. For similar activities in the future, I will be using less picture cards to keep it simpler and less distracting.

Later in the same week, we got some positive feedbacks from the parents about this activity and comments saying how much they enjoyed reading the stories.

Tuesday

For this day, the main activity plan was to go on a trip to the nearby beach. We began our beach trip from our day care park in the morning after the whole group had arrived in the day care park. On this day, we practiced walking the whole way there and back with the use of a long rope and no prams for the first time for some children, which for the group and us workers was a big change. The main reason to go specifically to the beach with the children was for them to collect some sand themselves for another small group activity of the week.

At the beach, I gathered the children in a circle and gave them instructions to collect sand from there into a bag which we would use later in the week. First, I gave the instructions in English and to make sure that they understood, my work partner translated the instructions into Finnish for them. I had also instructed them that they can run far to get the sand as the beach is open and there weren't many people at the time. The excitement in their face was very visible as we often ask them not to run far and this was an exception to that rule. Most of them instantly ran to different directions to get hands full of sand giggling and laughing saying "*minulla on hiekkaa*", "*kädessä hiekkaa*", "*xyz laittaa hiekka pussiin*". Some children waited to observe what their friends are doing which may have encouraged them to also follow. Some even came to show me what they collected saying "*Nika kato minulla paljon hiekkaa*". After that, we had a little extra time for free play and climbing in the playground at the beach.

Wednesday

Our Wednesdays are reserved for the music school the children have with a different music teacher who comes to the day care once a week. On this day, the children had their first music class of the season. After they came out of the music school room, we heard one of the children from our group humming some songs that they had sang there. Seeing this started a conversation in the staff's coffee break and we talked about how important music really is for the children from such a young age and how it helps them relax and learn.

Music is an important form of expression and a very good way of getting to know different cultures, to which early childhood education is no exception. Introducing children to music during their earlier childhood years is very important. Early childhood education is to familiarize the children with and support their musical, verbal, visual and bodily expression as well as introduce them to various areas of art forms and cultures (Opetushallitus 2018, 42-43). Furthermore, Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC (Helsinki 2019, 33) explains that musical expression in ECEC aims to provide the children with musical experiences, support their interest in music and enhance their relationship with music. By using a combination of creative methods such as singing with the children in different language and getting to know different rhythms and cultures through music can be beneficial in supporting their second language development and expanding their vocabulary.

Thursday

According to Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC, various artistic experiences and expressions is said to promote children's abilities to learn, improve their social skills, help with positive self-image, and ability to explore and analyse the surrounding world (Helsinki 2019, 33). We had a unique sensory arts and crafts idea as the day's activity for Thursday. We began the day with some outdoor play and came indoors earlier than usual, as our group activity required more time. We firstly sat the children down around the table and asked them if anyone remembered what we collected earlier that week at the beach, to which one child whispered "*hiekkaa*". We gave him encouraging comments for remembering saying "Very good! You remembered what we collected!" and saw him get a very big smile then repeat a little louder "*retkellä hiekkaa!*".

We had set some finger paints, small containers, mixing spoon, plain white cardboard papers and the sand on the table. We then explained the activity to the children, and they got to mix the sand into paint and do some finger painting. The children seemed to enjoy the process even though touching the rough paint was strange for some in the beginning. We then put the paintings done by children up on the wall of our home room, so the children can see their art and enjoy them, as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Multisensory finger paintings of sand-paint made by children.

Friday

We started the day with an hour of outdoor games in the park and came inside the day care for the day's activity. On Fridays, our routine is to have physical activities and for this day, we had some relaxing animal yoga planned. The idea of this activity was to practice new moves and positions that resembles the one of different animals, for example sitting like a cobra or moving like a bird. Followed by the activity, we had our daily morning circle where we looked at some more animal photos and imitated the animals' sounds. After this, our day continued as every other day's routine with the lunch time, nap time, snack time and outdoor activities.

Conclusion

During the week, importance of non-verbal communication combined with verbal communication with children during their early childhood became clearer to me, whether it is

with a familiar language or to teach a new one. Being aware of sign and nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and the tone of voice when working with young children becomes more important. It makes a huge difference in their understanding when given instructions or spoken to, especially if they are being talked to in a language that they don't primarily understand as the case is in my group. During the week, I have had to focus on my facial expressions and gestures a lot as I have tried to only speak in English when guiding the children, which has been a challenge. Lindon (2021, 134) talks about non-verbal communication's coexistence with the verbal ones. She also states in her book that gestures support communication combined with spoken words, which is one of the better styles for visual learning for children in their early years. Similarly, Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC (Helsinki 2019, 30), highlights that it is important for the child to feel heard during conversations and their verbal and nonverbal communications are received and responded to, in order to develop children's linguistic skills. It further guides, that ECEC providers use images, other visual aids, and signing to explain activities to improve communication whenever necessary.

Routines help young children get an understanding of everyday events and make their environment predictable for them. A predictable and effective daily routine can also help young children trust the adults around them better. Routines not only help children's 'positive' emotions, but it is also said to reduce challenging behaviours such as tantrums, hitting, pushing, or biting. Daily routines are also good teaching and learning opportunities. Routines can be used as opportunities to communicate with children, which further helps children's interaction skills and linguistic skills. (Kaplan n.d.)

Routines are important for the children to have space to learn more and new. If they would have had to memorize a new routine every day or even every week, it could already be too exhausting for them to learn anything new in addition. Furthermore, routines help adults and more importantly children have an idea of what the day will include and supports their pedagogical growth and independence. For example, having a routine during the week of going to the toilet after certain activities helped children practicing being without a diaper and unable to yet express their need to go to the toilet on time predict when they could use the toilet.

3.3 Week 3 Introduction to table games and board games

Weekly letter

The dolphins have been spending a lot of time outdoors this week and been enjoying the beginning of autumn weather. Our week started with some free indoor and outdoor play, and we got familiarized with new board games, from which Choco was our favourite. The music

school went well as usual, and the children enjoyed getting back to the weekly music school routine. On Thursday, the dolphins took a very long trip to the nearby forest where we also had our morning circle and learned about colours. Our week ended with some physical exercise activities and the children had a lot of fun running through the obstacle course and learning to balance on various surfaces as well as walking sideways and backwards.

Introduction

This week, I will be familiarizing the children with table games for the first time at the day care. The table games will be done as part of the planned activities of the week, while also keeping up with our weekly routine such as trip days and music school day. Even though, we have been playing a lot of puzzle games as table games with the children, usually after their nap times, we have not before introduced them to table games that would also contain a few rules. As this week will be about introducing the children to the table and board games, it will be more about learning to listen to and follow rules as well as taking other children into account while waiting for their own turn. The games will however contain a certain theme, such as vocabulary of colours in English. Playing table games will further better the children's concentration skills and their social skills while playing together in small groups.

Monday

Our week started with outdoor games as usual, and after a while we headed indoors with smaller groups. On this day I had planned to familiarize the children with some table games and had made my own set of memory cards with the theme of colours as shown in the picture below (Figure 7). We started our activity before our morning circle with one group of three children and later changed the group so everyone in the Dolphins' group get a chance to participate. When starting the activity, I first asked the children to listen to my instructions on how to play the game and pointed out that it is important to wait for our own turns and that everyone would get a turn. In the beginning, I found myself explaining in both English and in Finnish at the same time, and instantly began to focus on speaking only in English to the children.

When we began the memory game, in the beginning, the children did not understand the concept of waiting for their turn and that we are supposed to turn only 2 cards, as this was their first time playing such game. After a couple rounds, most of them started understanding the rules and eagerly kept saying "*minun vuoro*", "*minun turn*", "*yes, on sama väri*" and one of the children shouted out "*jei minä sain red*" when they got the matching card. I would ask children to repeat the colours that would appear in the cards they turn and slowly by the end, they started to remember a couple simple colour words without my help, for example red and pink. The goal of this game was to introduce the children to the idea of rule games and table games while also teaching them colours in English in the same process.

As the theme of board games as very new to the children, my engagement in the game to guide the children and encourage them to participate was very important. Similarly, the national core curriculum for ECEC (Opetushallitus 2018, 38-39), explains that the staff is responsible for guiding the play in an appropriate manner, securing the conditions for playing, and ensuring that each child has an opportunity to participate in group play according to their own abilities. It further states that the staff's physical presence and psychological engagement in the game supports interaction between children and prevent conflicts and misunderstandings.



Figure 7: Colour memory game cards.

Tuesday

On Tuesday, we continued with the theme of introduction to board games as part of our daily planned activity. We began by dividing the group into two smaller groups and asking them if they had played the game before. I took my small group to a different room for some privacy and my co-worker stayed with the other group in our home room playing the same game.

Today we played the game Choco, which at the end of the day when talking with the parents, turned out to be a familiar game to a few children in the group. The game is also similar to earlier played memory game. I started by explaining the game rules in both English and in Finnish and, also participated in the game with the children. In the beginning, I faced challenges in getting my message and instructions through to the children and had to use a lot of Finnish. Few children began to understand the concept of the game faster than others, which also turned out to be a help as they took examples from each other on how to play and how to wait. Throughout the whole game, I found it very difficult to get the children to wait for their own turn and realized that this is something that might need more practice for them. During the

game, I also noticed children sometimes repeating the words that they heard from me about the game's characters such as cherry and peanuts.

Adult's active presence is needed to teach children the rules and vocabulary related to the play. Also, teaching them to wait for their turns and moving from a place to another during the play are important in order to support their language development. Plays that include waiting for turns or overall waiting are excellent to support and improve children's sense of self-control. (Pedagogiikkaa netissä n.d.)

Friday

Our Friday activity, as before was a physical exercise session. On this day's session, we had built an obstacle course indoors with different surfaces, benches, tunnel where the children got to practice balancing. I took my small group of children and showed them an example of the way through the course while giving instructions in English, which visibly made it easier for them to understand and follow. Here again, the importance of gestures and nonverbal communication when guiding children for activities for better understanding was emphasised. We then also tried to go through the course sideways and backwards, where it was about learning to balance but more about ending the very active week having fun.

Conclusion

Picture cards and pictures as a visual support are a big part of our day care activities and learning environment. Pictures are present in almost anything and everything in the children's everyday life at our day care unit. I noticed during the week, that using pictures to explain and give instructions could also help me get my message through to children and that I should be using pictures to do this on a daily.

Introducing children to the vocabulary in English language through activities and different creative methods is what functional bilingualism is about. Also, it is important that the adults in the group speak the one language with children, for example, I speak only in English to them and my work partner in Finnish. As also mentioned in the national curriculum for early childhood education and care, in bilingual day cares, activities are planned and implemented in both languages while the day care workers actively use only one of the two languages whenever possible (Opetushallitus 2018, 52).

While teaching something new to children of such young age, the teacher should be very patient and open to the idea of repetition. As I was playing table games for the first time, even though it was in smaller groups, in the beginning I had to be very patient while explaining the rules repeatedly, keeping in mind that they are just started to learn about rules. As I mentioned in the introduction of this week, table games proved to be an excellent way of teaching the

children new vocabulary of colours as well as teaching them to wait for their turn. During the games, the children seemed to also enjoy following each other's games and taking into account how others were playing, cheering when their friends got the right card and learning from one another's way of playing. Though, children didn't understand the concept of the games and learning to wait for their turn right away, after a couple times of playing this had visibly improved in their way of playing.

3.4 Week 4 Small group activities

Weekly letter:

Dolphins' week started with outdoor play, and they have been really enjoying the autumn weather. In the beginning of the week, the children got to play with the farmhouse that the group crafted together and familiarize themselves with the different animals that can be found in a farmhouse. On Tuesday, we did some fun arts and crafts and made handprints with autumn colours for our friendship tree. We also talked about day care and friendship rules in the morning circle, where children participated in thinking about the rules. Wednesday's music school went very well as usual. On Thursday, we played some table games and practiced playing memory games and learning colours names in English. We ended our week with a very active walking trip to Kotkavuori, where we also had our morning circle and had a little PE session and practiced new exercise moves. The trip to Kotkavuori was the highlight of our week, and we enjoyed looking at autumn trees with so many beautiful colours. During the week, we have also had a daily story reading time, which we will also be continuing next week.

Introduction

Although, I have tried and will continue to focus on small group activities during the whole PONT period, I wanted to dedicate one week to getting into the benefits of smaller groups in early childhood education. During past weeks, as we have focused on smaller groups more than before, we have noticed that it has been clearer for the children about what to do next and they have had more space to be vocal with each other and with adults and express themselves.

Smaller groups also allow the adults to be able to focus on each child individually better and ensure that the child will be seen and heard. Smalls groups also makes the adult's work easier. This way they do not need to focus on many children at once, which goes hand in hand in giving children good care and support their pedagogical development better. (Raittila 2013, 84-94.)

This week, I will try to work in smaller groups as much as possible with my work partner. We will try to do everything in smaller groups including moving from one room to other, dressing up, changing clothes, going to the toilet, planned activities, free play time, going to the park, and coming in the day care from outdoor play. Through the week, I hope to get a better

understanding of the importance of smaller groups in the children's daily life at the day care and the effect of it in their learning.

Monday

We started our week with a very active outdoor activities like usual after a rested weekend. I played 'tag' with a few children of my group that wanted to participate and this week the temperature had dropped a little which made running outdoors even more refreshing. The children kept running saying "*'ota kiinni*" or "*Nika here kiinni*" and giggling whenever I said "I'm going to catch you now" and it was a perfect way to start our very active week ahead. Our morning was cold and windy and started to feel like autumn, which meant the children had their warmer autumn clothes and gloves on.

For Monday's activity I had planned to have table games as our small group activity of the day. For this activity, our theme was animals and we got to play with the farmhouse (Figure 8) that we had made together with children earlier in the season. I tried to teach the small group the names of farm animals in English, but the big farmhouse and animals seemed to be a distraction already. The children couldn't focus on repeating the names in English with me or even listening to different instructions that I was trying to give. Even though the children kept getting distracted and kept wanting to play with the animals, I tried to keep the activity as I had planned for the first few minutes. I then realized that they could not focus and that the activity doesn't necessarily have to go as I had in mind, but it is important also for the teachers to improvise accordingly. The activity then quickly turned into a free play which the children seemed to enjoy a lot more.



Figure 8: The farmhouse game with animals that we built together with children.

When reflecting to this activity later, I noticed that maybe the activity could have been planned a little better. As the farmhouse was still such a new thing for the children, which may have been the reason they kept getting distracted. Maybe if the children had had the chance to play with and explore the farmhouse on their own first and then have a planned activity, they could have been able to focus better. This is a good lesson to keep in mind for future activities. National curriculum for ECEC (Opetushallitus 2018, 39), states that as staff actively observes the play, they gain better understanding of children's thinking, interests, feelings, and experiences. These observations can be utilized when planning and guiding other activities. In addition, the ECEC staff must be sensitive and professional to respond appropriately to children's initiatives towards plays.

Thursday

Our Thursday's planned activity was mainly to play memory games from the themes that we were already familiar with from past weeks. We had already practiced playing colour themed memory games a couple times earlier and I wanted to continue with the colours and expand their vocabulary in colours a little more. We then took the same colour memory games and I sat four children down around the table. When I spread the cards upside down on the table and we started to play the game, I noticed that the children were waiting for their own turn much more patiently than compared to when I introduced table games to them. They also began to understand the rules about only turning two cards at once, saying the colour's name and seeing if the cards are a match. The small group played the game very calmly and helped each other understand the game a little better while most of them were able to answer correctly when I asked "are the two cards the same colour?" by saying "no" or "yes" or by nodding and shaking their head indicating their answer. Children begin to understand the vocabulary before they can produce the words themselves, also communication done by movements, gestures and facial expressions are seen as a bridge between understanding and producing a language (Nurmi et al. 2015, 43).

Every time the children turned a card, they were supposed to say the name of the colour and they would most of the time say it in Finnish. At this point I said the name of the colour in English and asked them to repeat it after me. When playing the game, some children also very excitingly pointed out to other colourful cards that we have on the walls of our home room. If they turned a card that was for example blue, they would point to the picture card on the wall that had blue bags and shout "*tossa blue sininen reppu*".

Our end of the game was full of disturbance as one of our staff members from Seahorses' group was not at work on this day. This meant that we had to help the other group out, especially when moving from one room to another. When we were ending the game, another smaller group joined us in the Dolphin's home room and even though, they were playing a different game,

their presence had a distracting effect on the table group. I then had to end our game in the middle and decided to continue it in the morning circle with the whole group of eight, by asking if they could recognize certain colours when asked in English, which many of them could.

Friday

As autumn season had started, the tree leaves had started to change colours and we wanted to explore the changing of the season with the group as well as practice walking in different ground levels. According to Helsinki (2017, 37), each child should practice basic exercise skills and adopt physical activities in their routine. The aim of this is to better the children's body awareness and control, basic fine and gross motor skills, balance, movement, and equipment handling skills, which the ECEC staff is responsible for by planning and implementing inspiring activities indoor and outdoor.

Therefore, me and my work partner decided to end our week with a long walking trip to a nearby forest on Friday. We also had our morning circle and our Friday's physical exercise session in our trip as we found the perfect spot for it in the forest hill. There, we first sat down in a circle and sang some songs in English and after that I held an exercise activity for the whole group with my work partner. I first gave them instructions of what we were going to do in English, and to make sure they understood, my work partner translated the instructions into Finnish. We practiced new moves with them, such as, jumping from different positions, turning, rising hands up, down and sides and twirling. I gave instructions by saying for example, "jump up", "sit down" or "put your hands to the side and twirl" while doing it myself, which made it visibly more understandable for the children to follow. The group got to then explore the place by themselves, collect sticks, cones and climb on huge rocks, while me and my work partner kept a watch on them for a while before returning to the day care for lunch.

Conclusion

During the week's activities repetition has proved to play an important role while teaching the children about table games this week and I imagine the same goes when teaching children of two-years of age anything new at all. Importance of repetition was present during this week's planned memory game activity as the children's understanding of the game and rules of it got better and better with each time we played. In an article in (Nemours reading brightstart n.d.), importance of repetition for learning is explained by giving an example of learning to ride a bike, as we practice the essential skills again and again until we increase our confidence, improve speed, and become skilled in it. The article further says that repetition of activities is good as it provides children with practice that they need to master new skills. When reflecting on the week's activities, I also realized that there may however be a few children that are oldest in the group that may have a better grasp of the routines and rules than the youngest of the group.

Being in smaller groups as much as possible throughout the week resulted in the week being much more relaxing for the Dolphin's children and less stressful for the adults. As also mentioned by Raittila (2013, 69-94), smaller groups bring calmer atmosphere to the group and activities can be focused on individual support in addition to the group as a whole. As we were in smaller groups, the difference compared to when we do everything in bigger groups and the benefits of smaller groups was clearly visible. Tasks were clearer for the children and adults, children had more space to think, and the children seemed to feel more comfortable speaking out loud in smaller groups with less confusion than they do when the whole group is together. Certain routines also seemed to take less time with smaller groups, for example going to the toilet or taking outdoor clothes off after outdoor play time.

Kyyjärvi's local early childhood education curriculum highlights the importance and goals of smaller group activities. Pedagogical small group activities' goals emphasize the wellbeing of the children as well as the group's adults and enables the adult to be more present in a no rushed atmosphere. Small groups make it possible for each child to be seen and heard as an individual and not just as a part of the bigger group. It also helps create a safe growth and learning environment for a child to practice communication skills, friendship skills as well as social skills. This curriculum also argues that the planning of pedagogical small group activities is the responsibility of an early childhood education teacher, which they carry out with their work partners. (Opintopolku, 2017.)

3.5 Week 5 Significance of an adult's presence in the children's group

Weekly letter

We started the week with some fun Moomin characters arts & crafts while listening to Moomin songs. On Monday's morning circle we continued with the theme and read a Moomin book that we had borrowed from the library together. On Tuesday, we had table games and got to play with animals on the big farmhouse while learning more about farm animals, which was a lot of fun! Our Wednesday's music school went very well, and the children enjoyed singing and playing different instruments. For our trip on Thursday, we went to a nearby park and had a lot of fun exploring and collecting colourful autumn leaves. We also had our morning circle in the park that day and organized leaves according to their colour. We ended our week with an active colour run physical exercise in smaller groups and practiced numbers.

Introduction

Originally, I had planned and started the week with the season's theme 'world of stories', during which I would have gotten deeper into the theme and connected my topic, games and plays with it. However, when I started my work shift on Tuesday, I found out that my work

partner would be away for the rest of the week and the importance of an adult's presence in the group became more significant and I changed the focus and topic for the week. During the week, I will be focusing on an adult's presence in the children's group. I would also like to emphasize on enough adults being present in order to be able to move forward with the planned activities, to maintain calmness in the children's group and a good routine during the day as a whole.

The importance of adult's physical and psychological presence in children's play, well-being and holistic learning has been emphasized in the national curriculum for ECEC and Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC multiple times. Presence of an adult is essential in providing a goal-oriented pedagogical learning and healthy lifestyle at the day care. Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC (Helsinki 2019, 19), talks about the four cornerstones of inclusion that adult's actions are based on, which is not possible without the active presence of an adult. First is to create a suitable condition and atmosphere for inclusion, second is to collect information about children, their interests and gain access to their world, third is the ability to utilize the received information to create shared activities and fourth is the willingness to develop inclusive approach at work.

Monday

Our Monday's planned activity was arts and crafts, which we held right after our outdoor play time and before our morning circle as usual. For this, we had decided to continue with the 'world of stories' theme, which was the theme of the company for the season. Our arts and crafts were about Moomin, and we had set two different craft stations in two rooms with background Moomin music playing, which the children got very excited about. We had already printed out different characters from the stories of Moomin and glued the characters on colourful cardboards. On the first table, we had colourful wax crayons with which the children could draw on the printed papers. On the second table, I was continuing with smaller group of children who were ready with their crayon drawings. In the second station, the children got to paint with water colours on the paper over the crayon marks. The idea of this was that the wax crayons would reject the water colour, which would make the crayon colours pop out of the paper.

To stay on the theme of Moomin, my work partner read the children a book about Moomin in Finnish during the morning circle. Later, on the same day, we hung all the art works of children on the wall of our home room as can be seen in the following picture in Figure 9. Afterwards, we saw that children were happily pointing towards the wall and saying the characters' names or saying for example '*minä maalasin haisulin*'. One of the children even wanted to show it to their parent the next morning when they were dropping their child off to the day care. We

then gave the parent a tour of the Dolphin's home room and the child very excitedly, even though slightly shyly, showed the character they had painted to their parent.



Figure 9: The arts and craft wall in the Dolphin's room with the story character crafts.

Tuesday

On Tuesday when I got to work, I found out that my work partner will be away for the rest of the week and a few children are away because of flu from the day care. For this day, our plan was originally to play new table board games and have a theatre show while reading a story. However, since there were so many changes happening shifting workers between groups and not getting a substitute, I found it challenging to continue with our original plan by myself. Even though a couple children were missing from the Dolphin's group, and I got help from other workers every now and then, it was still a very busy and confusing situation, and I was alone with the whole group multiple times during the day. As stated by Raittila (2013, 69-94), another adult's absence brings confusion to the routine, which effects the main goal of smaller groups that is individual care in the child's upbringing and calmness during activities, since adults as well as children have to face sudden changes in the routine.

I decided to play one of the games with the whole group that they were already familiar with. We had some free play on the big farmhouse with animals and sang the Old Mac Donald's song together with the children in English and in Finnish. The children seemed to really enjoy getting to finally play freely on the farmhouse and with the animals without my interruption, as this time I did not try to teach them anything but just explore the play, the characters and have

fun with them. I played with the children while pretending to play different animals, making animal sounds, and naming the animals, during which I tried to speak only in English.

This unplanned activity turned out to be much better than the one that we originally planned probably had been. Playing together with the children and being physically present in the play made me realize the importance of an adult's presence even more during free play, as a few children found it easier to focus in playing freely, the play was more inclusive and peaceful. I did not however get a substitute partner for the whole day, which made it very challenging to stay on track with the routine, keep a calm environment, or ensure that moving from one place to another goes smoothly.

Thursday

I had a substitute work partner from the Seahorse's group for the whole day on Thursday, which for me was a very big help. By getting a substitute partner for the day, I could move forward with the day as we had planned and did not need to cancel our very important trip. Now that autumn was here and we had a trip planned for the day, we went to a nearby park with a lot of trees with the Dolphins. I had taken a few different autumn leaves' colour cards with me on the trip and sat the children down in a circle. We then talked about the signs of autumn, how trees change colours during the season and a lot of leaves fall on the ground, as we could see in the park at the time. We then looked through the leaf picture cards, and I gave them instructions in English to freely run and collect as many colourful leaves as they want to and play in the crunchy ground, while me and my work partner for the day kept a watch and collected leaves with them.

After they had collected for a few minutes, we went back to sit in a circle and tried to organize the leaves according to the cards that I had, as shown in the picture below (Figure 10). We also took a few of the collected leaves back to the day care to complete one of our other projects for our home room's learning environment. I will be talking about said leaves project during the end of weekly reports of PONT. The importance of children's relationship with nature is also highlighted in Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC (Helsinki 2019, 36) and is supported from three angles, learning in the environment, learning about it, and taking actions for the environment. The curricula also guide nearby natural areas to be actively used as objects of learning and playing environments. In addition, children's interest to use different senses to make observations about changing seasons and natural phenomena is supported, which encourages them to learn to enjoy nature.



Figure 10: Autumn coloured leaf activity with picture cards.

Friday

Our Friday's activity stayed as we had planned, and we did a colour run physical exercise session with just a couple children at a time. Originally, we were supposed to have this activity outdoors, but because of bad weather this day, we had to make some changes in the activity and hold it indoors. My work partner had returned to work on this day, and we took turns in doing the activity in both languages. The main idea of this activity was for the group to get some fun physical exercise and to creatively join learning about colours through the play mainly in English language. First, I took two children to the middle of the colour run circle and gave them instructions to run to the colour that I will say out loud. We took several rounds with each child and most of them understood the idea of the game well and seemed to enjoy it and were very active. As also the curriculum for ECEC guides ECEC staff to plan a wide range of physical activities, both indoors and outdoors, to avoid sitting in a place for a longer period of time at once (Helsinki 2019, 12). I realized that they already understood a lot of the colours in English, as we had been learning colour names during several activities done during previous weeks.

Conclusion

Children learn to play better together and learn to play the games better if there is an adult present and engaged in the play with them. This ensures less conflicts between children, and they get more courage to participate with the others. An adult's active presence might also help children get a structure in the play so they could sit down and focus on the play and not just run around with a toy in their hands. Through this, they learn playing skills, friendship skills, emotional skills, and communicating skills. The adult can guide them through the plays by talking with them and giving them tools to speak by asking questions about the play, having conversations with them and with their non-verbal communication.

A co-worker's absence and not getting a substitute in the group had a huge effect on the group and on our original plans with the group, as one adult is not enough to look after the whole group meant for two by themselves. A couple children were also away this week, which made it a tiny bit easier for me to be responsible for the group almost by myself for most parts of the week. This week made me even more aware of the importance an adult's presence holds to maintain a good flow in the children's group. This week was also stressful and confusing on the children, as the number of children that I was responsible for this week was more than the recommended amount by law. My stress directly reflected on the children's behaviour, which could be seen in the restlessness in the children and their ability to follow instructions and wait for their turn had decreased this week compared to previous weeks. Due to this, I found myself having a lot of physical and mental stress during this week.

I also realized that I hadn't had a chance to engage in the children's free play time or have unrushed conversations with them, as I was more focused on keeping up with the schedule. I had also not spoken to the children in English as much as I usually do, even when giving instructions, as I had found it easier to switch to Finnish language to guide them through daily routines because of the rush to make it through the routine. This also affected my plans for this week's PONT goals, which was to do story and imagination related plays, as I had not anticipated on this situation arriving.

Not having enough staff, or not getting a substitute in the absence of a staff or having bigger children's groups are ongoing issues in the sector of ECEC. In these situations, the ECEC staff doesn't have enough time to give children individual attention, and the rushed routines decrease the adult's presence in the group, as could also be seen this week. Children develop notably a lot during their first years, which is why presence of adult is something that should be especially considered in their upbringing. In order to ensure a child's holistic learning as well as cognitive, social, and emotional development, active presence of an adult and the interaction that follows with it is very important. Absence of an adult in the group may also have negative effects in the child's and adult's attachment and their self-image. Adult's presence also brings a feeling of safety to the children, which is the kind of environment they need to observe their surroundings, practice and learn new things. A child experiences the presence of an adult through daily routines and communication during them, which creates a base for the development of a child's communication skill. (Niskanen, Oikarainen, Ollila and Penttilä 2019.)

3.6 Week 6 Morning circle

Weekly letter

September's last week was spent very happily in the Dolphin's group. In the beginning of the week, we crafted autumn themed umbrellas from paper plates, which we painted in autumn

colours. The week also included many more fun activities. On Wednesday, it was the very awaited and familiar music school's turn. On Thursday, the Dolphins took a trip to the Lauttasaari library, where we got to borrow everyone's favourite books and more new books for our evening story times. The trip went amazingly, and everyone walked all the way to the library and back to the day care very well. On Friday, we had outdoor play as well as table games in smaller groups and with pairs.

Introduction

The theme for this week came up, as I was going through the earlier weeks' reflections. I realized how important our daily morning circles really are for the children individually, as a group and for the adults of Dolphins' group. Morning circles can be an excellent opportunity for the adults of the group to see and listen to each child, give each child a chance to talk and encourage an equal communication from the whole group. One of the challenges that professionals might face in group activities is to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to interact with one another and get the adult's support, as some children are naturally more skilled in being vocal and getting attention than others (Merikoski and Pihlaja 2019, 203). My focus during this week will be on our morning circles and on the topics that we go through during the morning circles. In this week's report, I would like to bring out the importance of this circle time for adults and for the children even though, it is the more simple and short part of our day.

Monday

Morning circles are times, when I especially try to focus on only speaking in English while holding the session and try to see that everyone gets to participate equally according to their ability. This is also a place, where I try to also work as a listener to the children and not take their participation in the morning circle as interruption to my instructions. I would definitely like to use this time to improve myself as an ECEC provider and improve inclusion and equality in the group.

Today's morning circle was short, and I held the morning circle, so it was in English. As it was flu season at our day care, a few children were away this week as well. To begin our morning circle, I sat everyone down in a half circle in front of our morning circle wall after our planned activity of the day and sat in the middle of the circle myself, so the children could see me, the circle wall and each other well. During every morning circle, we sit on the floor and ask the children to 'Criss cross' their legs, as we find this position of sitting more comfortable for everyone. Firstly, we went through who was present using duck pictures, picture of pond and house (Figure 11) with the children's names on them and a picture of an animal that every child has for their morning circle ducks during which everyone participated well. At this point, the whole group recognizes their own and each other's assigned animals well.



Figure 11: Dolphin's morning circle attendance wall.

After this we looked at the weather and what day it was with the help of picture cards as shown in Figure 12, and everyone got to tell the whole group one thing that they did during the weekend. Some were able to tell themselves and others with a little help and encouragement from the adult. Singing and repeating songs in both language is one of the more important part of our daily morning circles, which everyone enjoys and participates in very well. As stated in the book *Varhaiskasvatuksen käsikirja*, music and songs are one of the best speech teaching methods, in which repetition is also significant (Ruokonen 2020, 121-135). The book also points out that music provides each child with a possibility to participate in the activity and be a part of the group. Thus, we sang a couple songs in English chosen by the children from the song cards bag that we often use. It was a very nice experience to see that while I was acting the song with my hands and facial expressions, the children tried to repeat the words and copy my gestures. Finally, we ended our morning circle on the day by learning numbers in two different forms: by counting from one to ten in English and counting "first, second, third, fourth..." with the help of animal toys.



Figure 12: Morning circle wall with the picture cards of weekdays, weather and four seasons.

Thursday

On this day when we had our weekly planning for the upcoming week, we had a very interesting conversation with my work partner. While planning, we began to wonder and discuss about what kind of topics and vocabulary would be important or even relevant for children of the age in question to hear in their daily life at the day care or to learn in their second language. We were also trying to reflect on the week's morning circles, as I had held all the morning circles of the week for my week's PONT report. I wanted to also hear my work partner's suggestions on how I could improve my way of holding the circles or what kind of vocabularies I could focus on overall, as they have much more experience in the field. I think that this conversation gave me a lot of clarity in my work, and I have a better understanding of how to be a better early childhood education teacher on my daily work life. This in a way also helped me in my personal life, because sometimes I felt that the stress and thought of not knowing if I am doing a good enough work as a teacher of the group effected my personal life stressfully.

On this day, I was on the closing shift, which mean that I was responsible for talking to the parents and sending the children home. For the day's activity, we had gone to the local library with the children to borrow some books for each child of the group to read. When sending the children home, I had a very interesting conversation with one of the parents of a child in my group about the child's understanding of English language. I remember asking the child "Do you still have stone in your mouth?" while the parent watched us, as there was sand around their mouth and the child answered "*'ei enään'*". Right after this I had asked the child to tell the parent themselves where we went on our trip on the day, to which the child replied "*'kirjasto'*". The parent was watching the whole conversation and was surprised by how much the child understood what I asked and asked me if they really understand that much English and expressed that she was very happy to witness this. This conversation was one of the highlights of any conversations that I have had with parents during my work life.

Friday

Keeping this week's Thursday's conversation in mind, I held the most simple and basic morning circle without any stress of a new theme. I started the morning circle saying "Good Morning everyone!", to which I always get a very loud and cheerful answer back from the whole group saying "Good Morning!" and this morning was no exception. After this, we checked who was present in our group today, also went through which adults were present in the room. There were only four children present this day from the whole group, which also meant that it was much calmer in the room and more space for each child to speak. After this, we looked at how each one of us was feeling with the help of picture cards, including me, and at the picture cards telling us different weathers. Finally, we looked at the cards about what weekday it is,

and I asked the whole group, “Can anyone tell me what day it is?” while pointing at the card of ‘Fox Friday’. One of the children said “Monkey Monday”, and even though it was a wrong answer, me and my work partner were very happy about the answer and gave the child positive feedbacks for remembering. An adult’s sensitive approach towards younger children, especially of age one to three-year-olds, requires that they listen to the children, respond to them, empathise with the child, and compliments their successes, as well as have a positive attitude towards the child and have the ability to interpret the child’s verbal and nonverbal messages (Hännikäinen 2013, 51-52). This was the first time any child in the group remembered a weekday in English by themselves. This answer came from a child, who usually is very quiet and isn’t very vocal during any group activity. A good reason for this could also have been that there were less children present and the child may have felt more focused and comfortable to speak in a smaller group. Lastly, before starting our lunch, we ended out morning circle with a requested song by one of the children, which was ‘head, shoulders, knees and toes’.



Figure 13: Picture cards of colours on our morning circle wall.

Our activity for the day was familiar memory games and other table games done in pairs this time and was held during evening time. The options for table game themes that children got to choose from were memory games themed clothes, colours, and animals or practicing fine motor skills by weaving pearls into small pin boards. Me and my work partner engaged with the pairs during the play and at this point it was good to experience that the children already had quite a good understanding of how the memory games were played and had begun to say a few of the simpler words such as ‘monkey’ or the colour ‘black’ in English.

Conclusion

Even though, our morning circles may last merely from 10 minutes to 20 minutes, this week has made the importance of our circle times clear. The time length of our morning circles may vary depending on the theme of the circle, other planned activities in the morning, children's ability to focus, and the adult's time management. In order to make sure that we have longer and well-planned morning circle, we had to also plan our morning activities accordingly during the week. Having a theme for each morning circle this week had an impact on children's ability to focus as well as less stressful for me as the teacher. The themes for our morning circles could be simple, such as counting numbers, shapes, songs, poems, book reading, colours, emotions, friendship skills, and so on, as are shown in Figure 11, Figure 12 and Figure 13. Reflecting on this week's schedule, especially morning time schedules have made me realize that by focusing on bettering our time management skills as the adults of the group and by planning a theme for each morning circle, we will be able to have better planned morning circles and the children would be able to focus as a group better.

To support children's interest, understanding of languages, and development of linguistic skills, morning circles are a good way to make the day's activities visual. Using pictures, things, and other characters can bring children joy and increase their ability to focus and observe. When a child knows what is happening and what is being talked about, it brings them a sense of safety and encourages them to act better. (Pedagogiikkaa netissä n.d.) This is a reason, we should also use our morning circle times to talk about past, present and future activities and make it more visual to help the children understand what is going on.

We have been singing quite a lot of songs during this week's morning circles and it has been something that children and adults have enjoyed a lot. We should definitely think about taking more time to sing with the children and make an effort to learn new songs for our morning circles. By the end of the week, the group had begun to catch a lot of words from the English songs, as we had been repeating few of the same songs throughout the week. Something as simple as focusing on singing a variety of songs with the children on a daily can be beneficial for their second language development and learning new words. According to Helsinki's curriculum for ECEC (2019, 33), sharing experiences of playing music, shared beat and tempo as well as taking turns and practicing listening support language development and overall interaction skills of children extensively. Children get these experiences by moving to the music, body language and basic beats.

3.7 Week 7 Picture games and role play

Weekly letter:

Having less children at the day care this week, the seahorses and the dolphins have done a lot of activities together. The children started their week with some free indoor and outdoor play after the weekend. On Tuesday, the Seahorses played with play dough and practiced shapes,

while the Dolphins got to play shop play and learn food vocabulary in English. Wednesday's music school went very well as usual, and the children enjoyed learning autumn songs and playing different instruments. On Thursday, the Dolphins were amazingly active and took a long walking trip to Veijarivuori park. The Seahorses then ended their week with an autumn trip and had a lot of fun collecting colourful leaves. Dolphins enjoyed ending their week learning body parts in their physical exercise session. Trips were the highlight of both group's week.

Introduction

Playing supervised or free games and plays are children's way of learning weather at home, at the day care or any other environment. This week's theme will be to focus on role plays and picture games. Even though we have often played picture games and role play as free plays this season, this week we will have planned activities regarding the two themes. Role plays allow children to use their imagination and sparks conversation. Role plays are one of the effective plays to support linguistic development and teach new vocabulary, for example of different occupational roles that we may see in our everyday life. Picture games are also as effective in children's language development. Picture games are especially effective when used as a supportive tool in teaching a second language or giving instructions or having conversations in second language.

Pictures during play not only help children with linguistic difficulties but can also excite and encourage children to participate in the activity and sparks conversation. Pictures and picture games offer children the opportunity to express themselves and their messages, as pictures are easy to interpret. With the help of pictures, ECEC staff can organize and guide activities, dressing situations, plays, conversations, and daily routine. Pictures can also encourage each child to participate in the play, which supports their equality, development of confidence and self-image. (Pedagogiikkaa netissä n.d.)

Monday

During the free play times in the evening, we were playing role play and building block buildings with a smaller group of the Dolphin's children. I noticed one of the children crawling and pretending to bark around the building they had built from the blocks. I had a very surprising conversation with the child, as the child said that he was pretending to be a dog and that the block building was a farmhouse which is shown in Figure 14. I imagine him getting this idea for the play from our past few weeks' activity with the farmhouse and farm animals even though, we had not played the farm game the week before this. The child also listed all the animals that can be found in a farm, which was an impressive addition to the game. It is important for children to have the space to get to know the games and plays on their own terms and develop it further, as this supports their creativity and strengthens their problem-solving skills (Maunu and Airaksinen 2020, 7-12).



Figure 14: Farmhouse made by a child from blocks during free play time.

Tuesday

For Tuesday, we took a shop play as our planned activity and me and three children went 'food shopping'. We had spread some play food items on the floor and went to 'buy' food items with the children. Children got to decide on their own turn, what they would like to buy from the shop and every now and then they added what they buy with their parents for example one child said "*'xyz ostaa maitoa isin kanssa kaupasta'*" or "*'minä haluan patukan bag'*". After we had filled our grocery bag, the children got to try to remember what we had bought with the help of picture menu cards that I had made for this game (Figure 15). The children seemed to enjoy this game very much and even requested to go back to the shop to buy more items.

We further developed the game, where children could freely put items, they would like to buy into a bag and come to the cash register, where I was the shop keeper. I then named each item out loud while I scanned them with a pretend scanner and put them back into their bags. They also got to pay for the items with play coins and play visa-cards in return for the items. In the end, we talked with the children about what they could cook from the items they had bought, where some said soup and others ice-cream. As said in *Pedagogiikkaa netissä* (n.d.), linguistic development can also be supported with plays and games, during which adult's active presence and engagement in the game is necessary to name the words, repeat them as well as guide and set an example of how to play.



Figure 15: Picture menus on the wall of kitchen playroom.

Thursday

After this day's main activity, which was a very long walking trip around the neighbourhood we had another planned activity. Inspired by the Monday's play done by one child this week, we also had an animal role play exercise on this day. I had different animal toys with me and pretended to be the Old MacDonald from the song 'Old MacDonald's had a farm'. I sat the group down and told them the idea of the activity. The group already got very excited and couldn't wait to start playing, as I was telling them that they can pretend to be frogs and hop around the room or crawl like a worm or run like dogs and so on. The children got to pretend to be the farm animals and act as the animal that I showed them. In addition to acting, they also got to make the sound the particular animal I was showing them makes, which they seemed to experience as a fun play.

Friday

On this day, we repeated our before done exercise session's idea and practiced learning about body parts through play. We started by dancing to songs such as 'head, shoulders, knees and toes' and 'the superman song'. I then gave each child a small soft exercise ball and gave them instructions to follow as I was doing by naming the body part and touching the said body part with the ball. I also revised some body part names in Finnish, when it seemed that they were not understanding. This game already was a familiar one for the children, which made it that much easier for them to follow given instructions.

Conclusion

Development of children's language and communication skills can be supported with functional and barrier-free methods. Barrier-free communication can mean body language, sign language, pictures, drawing, and various communicative programmes. With the help of barrier-free communication, the adults in ECEC can promote equal understanding of instructions, and help

children understand better. (Merikoski and Pihlaja 2019, 202.) As I have mentioned a few times before, pictures are almost a mandatory tool in early childhood education and it benefits children's language learning in a huge way. Pictures around the day care to guide the children and help adults give instructions can have positive effects on language teaching and keep a good flow between activities. The group had a very active learning week and enjoyed the new planned shop play, role plays, and picture plays. Thinking of creative methods to combine different ways of learning has been a very good way of teaching, for example during the shop play activity, visual learning, kinaesthetic learning as well as auditory learning ways were present.

Playing is initially about interaction between an adult and the child and afterwards, the child starts to develop interest in the surrounding world. Through role play, the child's play further develops towards imaginary play, which is expressive, and characterized. (Helsinki 2019, 25.) Role plays in smaller group was also a good environment to support the children's conversation and an adult's engagement in the play is very important for this. During the week, a lot of planned activities went better than I had expected as they were the first time that we had such activities. As the activities were planned where details were focused on it was easier for the adults to hold them and the children seemed to enjoy them as well.

Connecting plays with each other as we did with the farm animals, block castle that children made themselves and role play, was a very good method to keep the play suitably challenging and more importantly interesting for the children. This way, their focus remained in the play, and they could listen to and follow instructions better.

3.8 Pedagogical documentation and co-operation with parents

Weekly letter:

Dolphins have been very active this week. They started their week with role play and puppet show, which was a really fun way to start the week. On Tuesday, they had arts and crafts in the most unique style by painting with real fruits and vegetables, making their own food jars. We also had a yoga session at the end of the day. Wednesday's music school went very well as usual, and the children enjoyed learning new songs. On Thursday's colder weather, we took a very active and long walk around the harbour during which all the Dolphins walked incredibly well. We ended out week with outdoor play and collected leaves at the playground to keep ourselves warm in the cold and windy autumn weather.

Introduction

Pedagogical documentation and co-operation with parents go hand in hand with one another. According to the ECEC national core curriculum, pedagogical documentation is the core method

of planning, implementing, evaluating, and developing the ECEC. Pedagogical documentation makes it possible for the day care professionals and the parents to participate in evaluating, planning, and developing of the activities. It provides information about the child's life, areas of interests, their development, their strengths, way of thinking and learning as well as their individual needs and needs as part of the group. Skills and knowledge that the child has acquired must also be made visible through documentation and used as a base while planning and modifying activities. Ways of documentation are for example, ECEC plan, photographs, portfolio, crafts, and the day care worker's observations. Pedagogical documentation not only helps in evaluating the child's growth but also helps the day care professionals evaluate their own work and pedagogical activities. (Opetushallitus 2018, 37-38.) A child's holistic documentation is a mandatory part of an early childhood education teacher's responsibility. Documentation helps keep up with the child's overall growth and development over the years, lets the next group teacher know the child a little better and allows a possibility to reflect on the past years for a better-quality care.

I would also like to list a few ways that our day care unit uses on a regular basis to document the children, work together with parents and to involve them in our day care activities. Firstly, each group from every Ankkalampi day care unit writes a weekly letter at the end of the week, which is posted on Ankkalampi website for the parents and interested customers to read. The weekly letter consists of a short description of the activities done during the week and plans for the coming week. During this season, we have also started to write a monthly letter, which is sent to the parents. The monthly letter on the other hand is a written text about the month's pedagogical focus, for example, positive pedagogy.

Our day care unit also uses an application called 'google photos' and have a photo album for each individual child, which is then shared only with the parents of that child. This has been a good way of documenting the child via photos and videos. We add photos of each child on a weekly basis for the parents to see, which has been highly valued and appreciated by every parent. In addition, each child also has their personal file at the day care which will continue throughout their life at our day care unit. This file mainly includes crafts the children have done over the years, teacher's written documentation of the season or overall development of the child, and other papers to document the child's growth in all five previously mentioned learning areas.

As I mentioned before as my personal goals for this PONT, in addition to different ways of documentation at our day care unit, this week I will also focus on bettering my professional communication with the parents. For me, this meant that this week I will try to step forward in speaking with the parents also on the topics that I used to find uncomfortable and finding professional and constructive ways to communicate my opinions.

Monday

I began the week by taking into action one of the requests made by a parent earlier, which was to get to see the day care from inside. Coming inside the day care rooms was restricted from the parents for the safety of everyone's health due to the ongoing pandemic. Last week however, the rules at our unit had changed and the parents were allowed to come inside the day care in a normal manner.

On Monday, we gave a few parents a tour of the Dolphins' home room when they brought their children to the day care while the children also got to tell a bit about the crafts that we had on the walls of our room. The parents appreciated the tour, and this also provided an opportunity to make friendly conversation with the parents a little better, as often we only tell the parents about their child's day and there isn't always much time to talk about else for instance, regarding the child's life at home or their behaviour at home. Some parents were also glad to see their child having a conversation with me, or rather following the instructions given by me in English. This also sparked up a conversation with the parents about how the children have begun to understand a lot of English in just a couple months period. I explained to them, that a reason for this is Ankkalampi's way of teaching language as part of functional learning. This means that, in addition to the activities that I have held for them in English, the language is also present in every moment that the children are at the day care. I also got some positive feedbacks about the same matter from a few parents, which to me meant that I am doing my part well in teaching them the second language using different methods.

Our Monday's activity was a puppet show, again with the theme of animals. This time in addition to farm animals, we talked about wild animals too. We used different finger puppet animals, smaller toy animals and the earlier during this PONT mentioned farmhouse for our activity. The activity was a part of our morning circle and not a separate activity, which meant that it lasted only about 10 minutes. The idea of this activity was to make learning fun for the children by adding the 'Old MacDonald' song in English to our puppet show. The children got to sing the song themselves and each time a different animal was mentioned in the song that animal would peek from the farm window or door. The children got very excited every time the animals appeared on the farm and happily shouted "katso baa baa lammas tuli!" or "oli duck ikkunassa". After the activity, me and my work partner spoke about how much the children seemed to enjoy the play and learned new vocabulary from it. We also realized that maybe we should have held it as a separate and longer activity and not only a part of our morning circle.

Tuesday

Since every child in the Dolphin's group has been at our day care unit from at least the beginning of the year, we had all their old ECEC conversation documents and their starting conversation documents at the day care. On this day during the nap time, me and my work partner wanted

to go back to each child's previously set goals and refresh our memory of what each child needs support in individually or as part of the group, what we had set as goals for the child in co-operation with the parents and remind ourselves what areas we need to focus on. As I mentioned in the beginning of this week's report, documentations make it possible for us to go back to the previously held conversations or previously set goals and improve ourselves. While doing this, I realized that this was actually a very good thing to do and something we should do more often to better ourselves as day care teachers and understand the children better. In the rush of daily routine and trying to keep up with the activities, we may forget to think about the children's individual goals sometimes, which we should keep a better track of. Although, there may not always be enough time to do this extra task during the everyday life between the daily routine and planned activities, we could try to develop some other ways to do so.

Today's activity was arts and crafts, which included learning about fruits and vegetables with real food and their names. The idea of this game was to practice unique way of doing arts and crafts, recognize real fruits / vegetables and learn about colours at the same time. The children used real food that were cut in half to press colour onto a paper shaped as a jar. The food items were cut, so that when pressed can show the real shape of it as shown in the pictures below. The children seemed very excited to use real food and were very happy to pick which colour they wanted their certain food item to be.

Children talked about the food jar craft that we had made, all week while pointing towards the wall, with everyone's craft on it as shown in the Figure 16 below. They were very happy to talk about it saying for example, "minä maalaisin sininen apple" and "Nika tossa on minun porkkana".



Figure 16: Real fruits and vegetables crafts made children hanging on the Dolphin's room craft wall.

We often forget to tell the parents something good that had happened during the day or something that the child was happy about, as our focus might often be in telling what routinely needs to be told about eating and sleeping or on the more 'negative' or constructive news of the day. Today's focus was on the conversation with the parents at the end of the day when they are picking the children from the evening park. When we had a staff break during the children's nap time, I had asked the staff members of the Seahorses' group to write positive feedbacks about each child's day on our attendance list that we read off of. I did the same thing for the Dolphins' children and tried to focus on each child individually during the day. For example, if the child had enjoyed playing some specific play with their friends or done something good during the day or was happy about something out of the ordinary and wrote it in the list to tell the parents.

As I was the closing shift on this day and it was my responsibility to send the children home, I could focus on the conversation with parents. I focused on telling good things about the children that had happened during the day to the parents and be extra cautious on the constructive news rather than saying in a 'negative way'. This day made me realize how important end of the day conversations with parents really are. These conversations help us understand the child better, as the parents may tell the staff about how the child is at home, if they are moving forward with the set goals at home the day way as day care, the child's development that parents have noticed at home, we may learn what the child's favourite game is at home or we may just get feedbacks from them. As opposed to the mornings when the parents drop off their children to the day care in hurry to get to work, evening time gives a better opportunity for open and no rushed conversations with the parents.

Friday

After our outdoor activity, our activity for the day was table games and we played some picture games focusing on food items. I first tried to play a picture game of simple fruit items with the children by explaining to them what I wanted them to guess without showing them the photo. For example, if I had a picture of apple, I would describe the fruit's shape and colour and when we usually eat it at the day care. This activity did not work out as planned and turned out that only one child from the group understood the game. I imagine that the children may be still too young to play such game, or I might need to find a way to simplify the game a bit. As I was describing the words in English, understanding the language could have been a challenge and maybe I could have used other picture cards for support.

However, we ended up playing memory games of fruit and vegetable items, which the children seemed to understand better and enjoy more. By this week, the children seemed to understand the basic rules of memory games very well without my guidance, as we have taken such games as a regular part of our routine. As I may have mentioned before during my PONT, repetition is

very important in early childhood education. After the game, we also practiced motor skills on this day by weaving beads while listening to relaxing music, which was part of the table activity.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this week's report, our unit uses Google photos as a tool to keep parents included in their child's day care activities. Staying in the topic of documentation and including the parents, I tried something new. Today, I updated some videos without sounds of the children during their free play time indoors and outdoors into the children's' Google photos albums. The parents gave very good feedbacks about this and were happy to see their children playing and enjoying with their friends in the videos and a video of our morning circle session and appreciated our work with the videos, instead of only hearing about their day or seeing photographs.

Conclusion

The new rule regarding the parent's entry in the day care rooms has brought a few other changes with it this week. This new rule has helped the day care workers in a number of ways, as we were now able to give the very awaited tour of our learning areas to the parents, which the parents have appreciated a lot. During the week, I also asked a few parents if they have noticed any development of English language in their children's linguistic development at home. I was happily surprised by some answers we got, as we got feedback that many children that are not very vocal at the day care have been counting, singing, saying colour words and other regular words in English at home. As also stated in the book by Maunu and Airaksinen (2020, 7-8), functional methods of language teaching make it possible for the more shy and less vocal children to participate by following to the activities and listening to them from the side and still learn well from it.

When working as an early childhood education teacher, the importance of saving all the documents related to the childrens development in a whole can not be stressed enough. Also, the importance of writing the important things on the attendance list as a method of documenting the day is a very important one. In the hustle of the day, we may forget to tell some important things to the parents without this reminder on the list. This also helped me during the week in communicating with parents better, as this way I had something interesting and new to tell the parents about their child's day. As co-operation with parents go hand in hand with pedagogical documentation, one of my personal goals for this PONT was to better my professional communication skills, during the week, I tried to take as much initiative as possible in speaking with the parents and tried to step up in giving and receiving constructive feedback to and from the parents. I believe that during this week, I gained more self confidence in professional communication with the parents of children.

The Figure 17 below, explains the five key methods and process of plan-based pedagogical documentation. The aim of this porcess if for ECEC staff to get a better understanding of

children individually and the relationship between children and staff. The purpose of pedagogical documentation is to be able to provide a child-centered ECEC. Planned pedagogical documentation is also needed to make children's learning visible, evaluate their development, their needs for learning support as well as evaluate our own work. (Helsinki 2019, 42.)

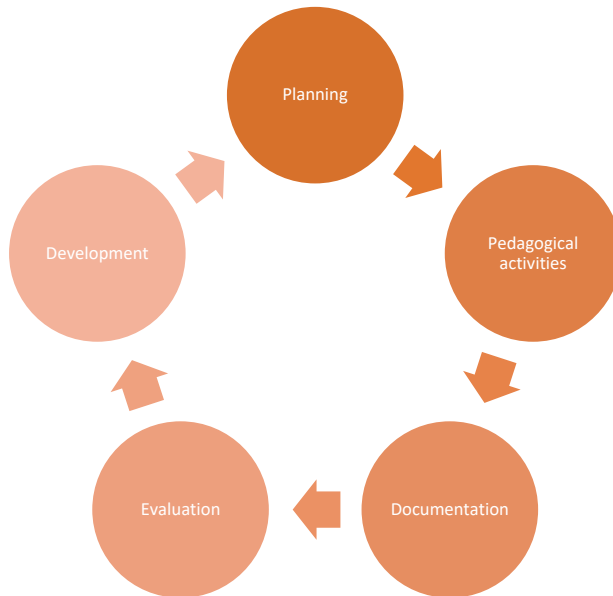


Figure 17: Key methods of pedagogical documentation (Helsinki 2019, 42).

3.9 Week 9 Positive pedagogy

Weekly letter:

This week, we have gotten to get to know the Dolphin's own favourite books. In the beginning of the week, the children got to bring their favourite books from home to the day care, which we have read together during our morning circles and evening story time. We have also been preparing for our next week's Halloween party by doing Halloween crafts. We shaped pumpkins from salt dough, which we then painted with Halloween themed colours. The music school was on holiday this week, therefore we had our own open mic session, where children got to perform their songs on the stage either alone or in pairs. It was wonderful to see how bravely children performed, sang and the audience cheered the performers beautifully. At the end of the week, we took a trip with the Seahorses and did a story painting while listening to Winnie the Pooh story in English.

Introduction

Positive pedagogy for children aged two to three years old may mean various things. According to Vuorinen (2021), positive pedagogy is an approach, that emphasizes on the core value of warm contact with each other and each child by supporting them in trouble and focusing on

seeing the good. She also writes about focusing on teaching and appreciating the children's character strengths and their socio-emotional skills being the heart of positive pedagogy.

Inclusion of children, parents as well as ECEC staff is a major part of positive pedagogy, which the ECEC staff are responsible for at the day care. In an inclusive operating culture, each member of the day care is included and treated equally in all activities, which doesn't however mean similarity. The ECEC staff is to promote positive and encouraging interaction with the children, as it supports the development of their identity and self-esteem. This requires conscious evaluation and development of inclusive structures done by the staff. (Opetushallitus 2018, 30.)

One very important area that I have focused on during this PONT week has been celebrating the smallest of successes and finding different ways to encourage the children. Throughout this week, I will also be focusing on and practicing different methods to encourage positive as well as inclusive pedagogy in our workstyle. This week, we will also focus on inclusion on every step of the way and during every planned and unplanned activity. We will also be focusing on the children that might go unintentionally unnoticed by their friends during play time because of their shyness or other qualities. Smaller groups and adults' presence is important to ensure inclusion of everyone and to encourage positive pedagogy on a daily.

Monday

In the beginning of this week, on Monday we established a positivity board for the children on our morning circle wall. The idea of this board is to encourage the children to participate, learn to try themselves and to celebrate the smallest of their successes as a group. During the morning circle on this day, we talked about how the whole group came in after outdoor playtime very well and everyone took their outdoor clothes off themselves. We talked with the children about what the positivity board means and what they had done very well that morning. The children then got their first smiley sticker on Monday's morning circle.

Monday was also our own book day and the children got to bring their favourite books from home. This was also a part of the day care's season theme, the wonderful world of stories. Each child got to present their books to everyone, either by standing in the front of the morning circle or from their own seats if they wanted to and we looked through everyone's book with them. The children got very excited whenever it was their book that was being presented. Throughout the week, an adult would read those books during our evening story reading time and during that the child whose book was being read could come sit with the adult if wanted to.

Tuesday

As it is almost the end of October month, we had Halloween themed arts and crafts planned for the day. Sensory activities are a good practice for children to explore their surroundings, thus we had a multisensory craft of pumpkins. I had made a lot of salt dough in the morning when I started work, as the Dolphins' and Seahorses' children are to do a similar craft. First, we sat all our group's children down at our home room tables and talked a little about Halloween. We then told them what craft we are about to do and showed them a photo example of it. Everyone was to make their own pumpkin, so firstly, we asked them to make a ball from the salt dough and showed them how to shape the balls to look more like pumpkins. Secondly, we put the balls into the oven to harden it and then let it cool down. Lastly, we painted them to look more real and put them up in front of our room windows, where children could touch, see them and enjoy them, as showed in Figure 18.



Figure 18: Halloween pumpkins made from salt dough.

On this day's morning circle, as part of positive pedagogy we also practiced learning to express our feelings. I started by showing from the picture cards how I was feeling and describing to them why I was feeling that way. After that, each child got to tell how they were feeling that morning through the picture cards. Some were also able to express why they were feeling that way for example by saying that they miss their parents if they were feeling sad. We ended this circle with a song about feelings called, "if you're happy", which each child likes to participate in and enjoy a lot as it includes making different facial expressions and movements. Helsinki (2019, 12) talks about creating a safe atmosphere for showing emotions, where staff encourages and helps children to express and control their feelings.

Wednesday

Our Wednesday's activity was one of the most unique one. The music teacher, who holds the music class for the whole unit's children, was unavailable this week. The adults of the unit still

felt that having a musical activity this day would be good for the children to stay in the weekly routine. I suggested having Open Mic for the whole unit's children and everyone agreed. There we had set up a stage resembling a 'real-life' Open Mic and one of my colleagues had crafted 2 microphones for the children to hold during the activity. The children got to then come up to the stage either alone or with a friend and choose a song that they wanted to perform. Some children already could tell what song they would like for example, paw patrol song or bus song, and some chose from the suggestions from an adult. We then played the requested song in the background and the children sang the songs on the stage or just swayed and danced a little and some were a little shy but still wanted to go stand on the stage and hold the microphones. There was no pressure for the children to sing or perform, they could also show a trick by jumping or twirling or however they felt comfortable. It was surprising to see how eagerly the children were waiting for their turns and how much they were enjoying themselves.

The idea of this activity was to encourage the children, learn how to encourage each other, and give them an opportunity to do something different and fun. As some children would perform, the audience would practice encouragement by clapping, smiling, singing along, and cheering for the performers. In the end of every performance, we would all give positive comments such as 'well done', 'that was great, you performed very well', 'amazing', and so on. The children seemed to get happy to hear these comments regardless of whether they performed or just gathered their courage to stand in front of everyone. Knowing the importance that positive emotions and warm interactions hold for a healthy growth of a child and their good learning is the key to positive pedagogy (Vuorinen 2021).

As this was our first time with this activity, not all children wanted to go up on the stage, they all however participated as cheerful and encouraging audience. Then again, some children felt shy going on the stage by themselves but when suggested if they wanted to take a friend with them or sing with an adult, they felt more comfortable going to perform. We also wrote down each child's performance song to tell their parents at the end of the day.

Friday

During Friday's free play time in the evening, I took my small group of four children to the house playroom. I had put up some food picture menus on the wall a couple weeks ago and noticed children pointing at those pictures. I asked them if they would like to play shop play which they agreed to, and I then spread out all the toys on the floor so that the children could access them. The small group then got instruction to bring me the item I asked for to put in the shopping bag and that everyone gets a turn to pick an item. Whenever the children didn't understand what item, I was asking for, I used the picture menu as support, and they would instantly say the name of it in Finnish language. The children also helped each other out during the play by pointing at the item that I was asking for if someone couldn't spot it.

Using effective verbal and non-verbal communication in early childhood education is the responsibility of the professionals in the day care. A child cannot learn to use barrier-free communication without an example or guidance, which again is the responsibility of a day care professional to teach. Barrier-free communication in this situation can for example mean use of pictures and gestures as a supporting tool while communicating. (Merikoski and Pihlaja 2019, 205-209.)

My inclusion in the play helped the children play more together and calmly and they had a better understanding of what was happening. Before we started the shop play, the children were mostly playing individually and not as a group and the play was without any structure. The importance of an adult's presence in the play and role of pictures as a support during plays was present during this free play time. The adult's presence as opposed to an outsider only following the play has more benefits as this way, the children learn to play better together, adult can ensure that each child is included in the play and there are less conflict situations between them. Also, Vuorinen (2021) states that a child develops through encounter with other people as their self-identity and social skills are built through contact with others and experienced during early years.

Conclusion

This week's focus being on positive pedagogy, I focused on including and encouraging the children in every activity who are less vocal or may not get as much attention from adults or other children in the group. Inclusive early childhood education is seen to have positive effects on children, especially on children that may need any kind of extra support during early years. Through inclusive approach, children learn social and playing skills, and it is also beneficial for children's linguistic and cognitive development (Viitala 2019, 55). Open mic session was a very effective way to encourage children that are more shy than others to participate more either by performing or even by cheering in the audience. Also, positive feedbacks and encouragement helped some children gain courage to go on the stage. Agreeably, Savunen (2019) states, things we say to the children in their early years, are things they will say to themselves as they grow.

Me and my work partner also focused in engaging in not only the planned activities with the small group but engaged with the children during free play time too. The adult's presence during play helps ensure that each child is included in the play, the children get the needed support and during the week there had been less conflict situations.

In conversation with some parents, they told us that some of the children have been very excitedly talking at home about the positivity board and the smiley faces that they have been getting as a way of encouragement. Parents have also shown their appreciation towards the day care staff for being creative with the children. In addition, they have given positive

feedbacks on the open mic activity and one of the parents' shared that they had noticed their child pretending to perform and sing with a pretend microphone at home as well.

To promote and maintain a positive and inclusive atmosphere, the adult must be considerate of their own behaviour. A teacher knowingly and unknowingly transfers their attitude and values into the children, which influences the child's attitude and their behaviour towards others. This is why a teacher must reflect and understand that their values have a direct effect on the child's attitude, behaviour, self-identity, and learning. (Eerola-Pennanen 2020, 252.) For example, speaking of the child using their name and speaking negatively of them while the child can hear us, can have a negative effect in their self-esteem and development and might give the child a feeling of failure. This is something a day care worker should always keep in mind and reflect on, and instead improve themselves by using constructive comments to teach and support the child when there is a need. A few things to consider in such situations are whether the communication is child-oriented or led by an adult, how the social roles are visible during group plays, and what kind of language the adult is using while speaking with the child and how the questions are presented to them (Merikoski and Pihlaja 2019, 203-204).

3.10 Week 10 Learning environment

Weekly letter:

Our week started with calm domino games, where we learned about animals as well as familiarized ourselves with rule games. We then had a relaxing yoga session with the Dolphins followed by a unique massage. On Tuesday, we went on a trip to a nearby park with the seahorses, where the children enjoyed practicing climbing. On Wednesday, we had an open mic from the children's wish, where everyone got to perform songs and show tricks on the stage while others practiced encouraging. Everyone enjoyed dressing up for Thursday's Halloween party with some fun face paints and disco. We ended our Thursday's Halloween day with Paw Patrol Halloween movie and popcorns! We ended our very active week with outdoor play and learning to sort out colours.

Introduction

The last week's report's focus will be on bettering the learning environment for the children of the unit as well as for the day care workers. Each area, that children go to during the time they are at the day care can be counted as learning area, the home room, the entrance, the toilet, lunch area, playing rooms and walls. As children at the young age of two are good visual learners, each area should be taken into consideration. During the week, I will be talking about the already existing learning areas while also trying to better it.

Monday

In the morning, I played animal dominos with the whole group, which was the first time we played this. I explained and showed an example of how the game is to be played and the children followed. I then asked them to sit in a half circle and everyone got a turn to add a piece of domino. The children understood most part of the game and remembered names of animals in English surprisingly well and happily took part in the game. The idea of this was to learn animal names as well as learn to follow simple rules such as waiting for your own turn and giving our friends space when it is their turn. They seemed to love this game so in the end I asked the group to give feedback about the game and asked if they would play this again, to which everyone cheerfully replied yes saying “Joo uudestaan!”.

In the morning circle this day, we talked about some signs of autumn as it was still autumn season. I had made a picture board for this as seen in the picture below (Figure 19), and we looked through each picture as I explained what was in the picture and how it is related to the autumn season. The children also got to tell us, what things from the board they have seen or used during the season. This board included the autumn rainy seasons animals, food, weather, clothing and in addition we also talked about the importance of a safety reflector on the dark days. We then hung the board on the entrance wall, within the children’s reach, so they can look through them during dressing times.



Figure 19: ‘Sign of autumn’ picture cards board on the Dolphin’s room door.

Wednesday

On this week’s Wednesday, we had an Open mic for the children the same way as I have written on last week’s report. Each child from the unit participated this week. Even the children who didn’t feel comfortable going in front of everyone last week were excited to get their turn. This has been a very good practice at encouraging the children and as we repeat the activity even the shy children felt more and more comfortable after getting to know the activity first.

Our morning circle wall is a very important one as it consists of so many topics that we regularly go through with the group, weather, colours, emotions, weekdays, list of who is present and who isn't, songs and the new addition positivity board. We have also crafted a big model to practice body parts as well as the season clothing. This day's morning circle consisted of talking about feelings and looking through what kind of clothing we use now that the weather is rainy and colder. The children got to 'dress' the model themselves and at the same time, familiarized themselves with new clothing vocabulary, as I named each clothing item and they excitedly repeated after me. We also looked through, in which order it is easiest to dress, first socks, then shoes and gloves in the end.

Thursday

This week, we have a very Halloween themed week and Thursday was Halloween party day, thus we decorated our unit accordingly. In addition, I painted some Halloween pumpkins and other related crafts on our hallway window with a co-worker to match the theme of the day. This Halloween party day was full of activities to which the children had dressed up in different costumes from home and the day included activities at the day care such as face painting, disco, fashion show, and Paw patrol Halloween movie with popcorns. This day was the highlight of everyone's week, and everyone had a lot of fun. The parents appreciated the decorations around the unit and children seemed to enjoy them as well by pointing at them and saying "tossa hämähäkki" or "paljon kurpitsaa".

As the parents have before said that they would like to read the stories that the children have made up during our story telling time, I set up a 'world of stories' wall in the main entrance as in Figure 20. There we would put up all the stories made by the children during the season and any craft done by them regarding the theme for example, story painting that we did last week. The parents could read the stories there, as they came to drop their children off to the day care. We received good comments from the parents for the wall, and they said that they enjoyed reading these stories, not only one their own child had been a part of but other stories too. Putting up craft and other work that the children have made in places that the children can see is very important as this makes them feel included, helps their confidence, and they would be able to happily show their works to others. According to Helsinki (2019, 10-12), ideas, games, arts, and other thing created by children should be visible in the learning environment around the day care. Also, guardians take part in planning and developing of the ECEC activities and environments to achieve the goals together.



Figure 20: 'World of stories' wall in the main entrance.

Friday

Our planned activity for the day was a colour sorting game that we played in smaller groups of four children. I had 4 different coloured cups and 4 different coloured small pin like objects to play the activity. I sat children down and their task was only to sort the pins into the same-coloured cup, for instance blue pins only go in the blue cup. The activity was simple, and each child got one cup at a time, which we rotated four times between the group every couple minute, so they get familiarized with each colour.

The main idea of this was sort of a test to see whether the children can separate the colours from each other. Although, some children could not name the colours in either language, they were able to recognize the colours during the game and sort them out correctly into the cups. We as early childhood teachers should not judge the children by their ability to learn but find more creative ways of teaching and understand their way of learning, as some may learn by following instructions, some learn better by following example and some are more visual learners, just like adults too.

Also, during the game, one of the children would pass out the pin to his friend if he found one of different colour and the friend had that coloured cup saying for example, "tämä sininen sinulle". This kind of sympathy in children may often get overlooked by the adults and the child may also be instructed to focus on their own work, which may not always be in the best interest in supporting the child's emotional and social skills.

During the morning circle today, we went through some friendship rules of the day care as well as the group's children's pedagogical goals. This included for example, using indoor voice when inside the day care, learning toilet manners, learning dining manners, sharing our toys, including everyone in the play, practicing dressing by themselves and so on, which was also a

good visual reminder for us adults about the group’s pedagogical goals for the season as I mentioned on week eight’s Tuesday’s report. Later that day, we made a tree on our home room wall (Figure 21) and each colourful bush on the tree represented one rule that we had talked about in the morning circle as well as some pedagogical goals for the group. I used the leaves that we had collected with the children during week five’s trip to the park to surround the tree with, to enrich their learning environment.



Figure 21: Dolphins’ friendship and rules’ tree.

Getting back to a schedule that I talked about during my first report week. During the week, I also created a preliminary schedule for the adults to take turn to stay in the nap room when the children are sleeping. The schedule can be seen in the Figure 22, below this text. This is only a base schedule and can be as flexible as needed. The schedule is made up for after all the children have fallen asleep, and it is enough for only one adult to be present in the room to guard the children.

As part of my personal aim during the thesis, I asked for a short house meeting on Friday during nap time. There I took charge and explained the need for schedule in the nap room and how it is also important to ensure the children’s safety. We all agreed that after all the children have fallen asleep, one of the staff members should stay in the nap room to guard the children and take turns in doing this. I then introduced everyone to the schedule that I had made, as explained in Figure 22, and asked that we all try this for coming couple weeks and see if it works, which everyone agreed to do. Our manager commented saying that this was a great initiative from me and that she could notice growth in my professional confidence over the past few weeks.



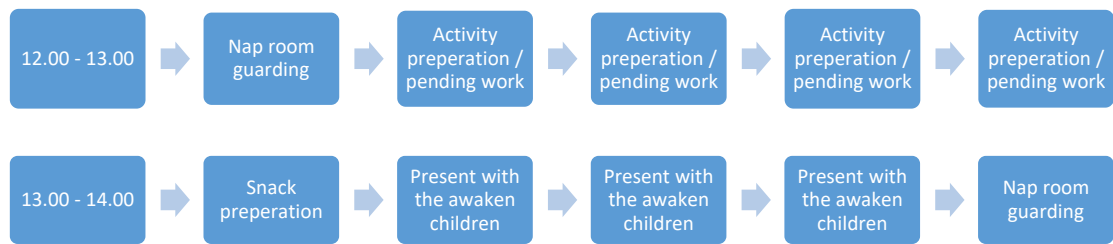


Figure 22: Nap room guarding schedule.

Conclusion

Having clear learning areas is not only important for the children but also for adults in the day care. For example, having a basket of books outside of the toilet that children use has been very helpful in situations where children have a hard time in waiting for their turn in the toilet or when my work partner has not been at work, and I have been responsible for the whole group at times. This way, it is easier to guide the children to calmly read a book while they wait for their turn. During the week, we also created some space for board game boxes in the Dolphins' homeroom, for them to be able to easily see their game options and reach them. We also brought some building games, such as train tracks and Legos into the Dolphins' room, for their free play time activities. As the national curriculum for ECEC (Opetushallitus 2018, 33), highlights, children must have easy access to a wide range of safe playing equipment and games in their learning environment, taking the children's interests and individual needs into account when necessary.

Having separate learning and playing areas is also good when children are playing in smaller groups, as this way there might be less confusion about the children's groups for adults, children can focus on their own plays, and it ensures more relaxing playtime. Their learning areas can be separated by furniture, carpets, walls, and tables. One of the core elements to consider for group activities in ECEC is how the physical learning environment is organized, and how the environment supports the children's communication and their activity, for example, nobody disturbs each other during group play time, everyone is included, everyone has an opportunity to communicate, and everyone has enough space to play (Merikoski and Pihalaja 2019, 202-203).

Having visible schedules for different tasks at the day care has also helped adults keep track of what they are supposed to do. Schedules and shift related work roles written on the walls as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 22, can also be beneficial in situations where there is a lot of confusion due to lack of workers present or in case there is a substitute worker or a new worker in the unit.

4 Conclusion and reflection

Throughout the 10 report weeks of this PONT, I have faced new challenges, overcome a few challenges I had been struggling with, learned a lot of new things and ways of working in the field, achieved goals I set for myself in the beginning of the PONT and have also developed as an early childhood education professional and as a human. As writing this PONT has required constant reflection on each activity done and each action I have taken as an early childhood education professional, I have become more aware of the core aspects and learning areas there are to be considered to ensure a good care, and education for children, in addition to supporting the children's language development. I have also learned different methods to implement the pedagogical learning areas according to the children's age into the planned and unplanned activities done at the day care.

Reflecting each week's activities according to their topic has given me a better understanding of early childhood education and the importance these topics hold in the children's holistic development. Non-verbal communication, that is gestures, body language, voice tone, facial expressions and sitting or standing position of an adult plays a very big role in being easily approachable and understandable for children. For example, sitting down with the children to engage in their play opposed to just standing on the side and following their play, gives children a sense of safety and this way they might be able to approach the adult easier. Also, the way that adults talk to the children has a huge impact on the children's understanding of the instructions, their learning attitude, their self-identity, and their self-confidence. The adult's attitude reflects directly on children's behaviour, which is why a sensitive approach is important in ECEC.

I achieved success in understanding how various creative methods and activities can support children's language and vocabulary development in addition to them hearing the language in everyday routine. I also gained better understanding of the importance of an adult's presence and its effects on the children's learning. During this PONT, I have worked in smaller groups of children a lot, which has its own impacts on the children's learning and eventually on their language development. Although, I succeeded in gaining more confidence in my professional work and in professional communication, this is an area that still needs more development and experience in the field.

Repetition, adult's active presence in the activity and small groups have played a huge role in the result of the activities that I have held for the children's group during these weeks. In the beginning, it is very important that an adult is actively present during play time to guide the children through the activity and rules and to introduce the necessary vocabulary related to them. The more we repeated certain activities or plays, the more the children understood the rules and I needed to instruct them less and less on the games after each time. These plays not

only supported their second language learning but also their holistic pedagogical growth, as they learned to concentrate for longer period at a time, follow simple rules and instructions, strengthen their social skills as well as problem solving skills. We have made memory games and story reading a part of our daily lives with the group, especially during evening free play time or after nap time, which the children have seemed to enjoy and for this we have also received positive feedbacks from the parents. The impact of book reading can also be seen in the children's language development, as their vocabulary expanded accordingly, and they began to remember things that we had read earlier. Picture games, board games, and memory games have been hugely supporting their vocabulary development and seeing their interest in the game, we have made memory cards of many different themes, for example, food, clothes, animals, body parts and vehicles.

Children learn by playing, through movements, by exploring the environment, which is why coming up with creative methods to implement plays and games into their activities that supported their language development and consider different ways of learning was something I had to actively do while planning. This was a challenge at times, as the children are still so young and a few activities that I initially thought of were too complicated for children of age two, which means I had to simplify the activities. This was also not an easy thing to do, as in addition to planning and implementing activities, I was also responsible for other work shift related roles at the day care. My work partner was very supportive in helping me modify the activities to be more suitable for the age group and was very understanding overall through my PONT period.

During this period, I also learned to listen more actively, be more present during group activities, and learned to manage my time better for example, to plan better morning circles. Impact of the planned activities that I had done throughout the PONT could be seen in the children's language development, especially in their understanding of English language. Activities that we had done related to colours, for example, could be seen during dressing situation when I asked children to get a certain coloured vest from the basket. In addition, by the end of PONT period, I noticed that the children barely needed my guidance anymore in playing the table games that we had repeated many times such as memory games and dominos.

One of the challenges I have faced during the period of my PONT has been sticking with only speaking English with the children, which is very important in a bilingual day care. I often easily switch languages and start explaining my instructions to children in Finnish, as they understand Finnish language naturally much better. This is something I will keep trying to better as a professional in a bilingual day care. Also, I learned the importance that learning areas and smaller groups have in maintaining calmness and ensuring the children's healthy development as an individual and as a part of the group. This is an area, which will demand continuous work from the day care staff and something that needs to be focused on even more.

The topic of my PONT and the whole process has been an amazing experience where I have gotten to know the children group better, learned to communicate with the parents and co-workers better and understood myself better as an early childhood education professional. With the topic of my PONT, I learned to pedagogically support the children's second language learning through the wide variety of activities while also covering the pedagogical learning areas. Also, my workplace benefitted from this PONT, as they learned new and creative ways to bring activities into the daily routine to support the children's second language development and about the important aspects that help create a better environment for children's wellbeing and overall learning.

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