



# Developing the Early Childhood Learning Environment

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2023 Laurea



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Social Services  
Diary Thesis  
May,2023

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Year	2022-2023	Number of pages	62
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This is a Diary thesis on Developing a Learning Environment in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) facility. The aim of the thesis is to identify, understand and modify the components of a learning environment in the ECEC group and to develop a holistic learning environment for the group. The thesis work is done in an English day care centre while working with a group of four-year-old children. Before starting the thesis, the process is discussed with the work life partner(employer) and the pedagogical manager who is the workplace supervisor representing the work life partner from the day care. Suggestions from the workplace co-worker are also taken into consideration during the process of thesis work.

The thesis is in a form of a diary. The thesis starts with a description of the learning environments and the theories and concepts that are involved in the process. Following the description is a diary which is written for a period of ten weeks. At the start of each week a goal is set depending on the observations made from the learning environments in the group and activities that can be carried out to achieve this goal are briefly mentioned. During each week a short description of each day, activities done, and/or any specific incidents happening during the day are written down. Work is documented using pictures taking care of confidentiality while using the pictures. A short conclusion from each week is written at the end of each week reflecting on the week's activities. Supervising teacher's feedback is taken at the end of the week to evaluate the week's work.

Along with the short conclusion written after each week, the thesis ends with an overall conclusion of the work and how the theory is involved in practice. Then in the following chapter, situations related to each of the learning environment, physical, psychological and social, from the 10-weeks duration are selected. An observation from the situation, steps taken to handle the particular situation, how did those steps help and the learning environment that was involved is explained. The thesis ends with a self-reflection of the work along with feedback from the work life partner, day care's pedagogical manager. All the three learning environments are diverse with many factors contributing to each of the environments. In the thesis, the environments are described with respect to the ways they were implemented in the place of work and the needs of the children in the group.

Keywords: Learning Environment, National Core Curriculum for ECEC, Zone of proximal development, Vygotsky's theory, scaffolding

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## 1 Introduction

The goal of early childhood education and care (ECEC), according to the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care (NACCE) 2022, is to ascertain that children are provided with a development-oriented, healthy, safe, accessible learning environment that promotes and supports the development of children's healthy self-esteem along with their learning and social skills (NACCE 2022). During my work in a day care I observed that even with a little change in the physical arrangement of the room brought a noticeable change in the children behaviour. The way children's work is displayed makes difference to the ambience of the room. Children are interested to see their work being displayed and also get motivated seeing their friend's work on the wall. In my opinion a learning environment forms the basis of a good quality Early childhood education and care (ECEC) practice.

I have observed that, the way in which adults handle situations from the daily routine makes a significant impact on the children's emotions. Children pick up emotions from adults in their close vicinity. Children's behaviour changes for example, when adults are stressed or are in a hurry, children become more sensitive; but if the adults are calm and composed, children are feeling safe and remain relaxed during their daily routine. The group dynamics, how the children play with each other, how the adults support the play and guide children to play fairly also has an impact on the children's holistic development. Therefore, I have chosen this topic for the thesis to understand and learn more on the different learning environments, how the different learning environments are interconnected and their influence on children's day to day learning in ECEC centre and the theories that contribute in developing these learning environments. Knowing and understanding the learning environments better will help me to have a more clear and pedagogically appropriate approach to my work, to analyse a situation better and to suggest or make changes accordingly, if needed, that will be beneficial for the children.

The thesis work is done in a private English day care in Espoo, with a group of 4-5 year old children. The thesis is in a form of a diary. Before starting the diary, the process is discussed with the work life partner, the pedagogical manager, who is also the workplace guide. A diary is written for a period of ten weeks, where the target areas are set at the start of each week and then implemented in practice. Suggestions from workplace co-worker are also taken into consideration while setting the target areas. The week's work is evaluated and written as conclusion at the end of each week. Work is documented with the help of pictures, taking care of the confidentiality policies of the workplace. A more detailed description of the Diary is given in chapter 4.

## 2 Different Learning Environments

A Learning Environment means a place that supports children's learning, growth, and interaction taking the child's age and development into consideration thus, supporting the development of positive self-esteem in them. These include facilities, communities, methods used while working with children, and availability of resources. Learning environments are designed in a way that the children feel safe, heard, and motivated to participate in the learning process. While working as an educator/care giver in an ECEC facility, it is beneficial to be acquainted with the different learning environments as they are based on promoting a child oriented approach towards ECEC. Thus, the importance of learning environments in accordance with the child's rights as mentioned in Finnish Education Evaluation Centre(FINEEC 2019,18) and ECEC curriculum (NACCE 2018) can be summarised in form of bullet points as learning environments that:

- Provide pedagogically appropriate ECEC facility where children can enjoy doing things in a versatile, play oriented and peaceful setting.
- Develop independence in children.
- Encourage child-oriented planning.
- Ensure children's active participation.
- Develop communication and interaction skills amongst children.
- Identify children's needs for support.
- Promote children's language development.
- Bring awareness about different cultures.
- Develop healthy self-esteem in children.
- Make children aware of their surroundings.
- Develop good social skills.
- Promote holistic growth that supports life-long learning in children.

There are three types of learning environments, physical, social and psychological (NACEE 2022). Next, I will discuss the characteristics and purposes of these three different types of learning environments.

### 2.1 Physical Learning Environment

*''THERE ARE THREE TEACHERS OF CHILDREN: ADULTS, OTHER CHILDREN AND THEIR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: LORIS MALAGUZZI.''*

Children are constantly learning from their surroundings (Rintakorpi 2021, 14). So, a physical learning environment is not restricted only to the indoor environment but also includes the outdoor learning environment. In this section I have tried to give a description of the different physical learning environments, their meaning and the components that contribute to building or that are a part of these physical environment.

### 2.1.1 Indoor Physical Learning Environment

Indoor learning environment means the facility like a school/day care. In an indoor learning environment, it is important to take care of the aesthetics, set up of the place which facilitates easy and safe movement of the children and motivates them to explore the different areas of the classroom set up. An indoor environment that is well-lit, easy and safe to move around in, and allows flexible arrangements is encouraging for children's active participation (Berris and Miller, 2011). The noise level in the room has an effect on children's cognitive development, when the noise levels in the room are constantly high, children cannot focus, and they start losing interest, become emotional and get easily annoyed (Parks 2018). A chart which shows the maximum number of children in a particular play area makes play easier for the children as it avoids conflict situations (Rintakorpi, 2021). With this type of chart will also help to manage the noise levels as children are distributed in different play areas evenly and children feel comfortable in their space with clear picture demarcations of different areas in the classroom that are easy for them to understand.

Children develop a feeling of belonging when they see their artwork (which they are working on or have completed), their pictures with their family, or pictures of them accomplishing a challenging task are displayed in the classroom (Wardle 2010). Children can be active participants in enhancing the indoor physical learning environment, when they are involved in planning how and where to display their work, their needs, ideas and suggestions are taken into consideration while changing the setup of play areas, and when they are given the responsibility to keep the play areas tidy after playing. This also helps them to be responsible and independent.

Along with the above mentioned factors in indoor physical environment, NACEE (2022) also describes the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) as one of the competences which is connected to different learning areas. This makes ICT one of the integral parts of an indoor learning environment. Use of ICT shall be practiced depending on the age of the children and the place. In an ECEC facility where adults introduce children with the use different devices connected to technology, allowing them to be familiar to the process of producing different forms of media and messages, children develop their literacy, critical thinking, teamwork skills along with experimental and inquiry based approach to education(NACEE 2022).

### 2.1.2 Outdoor Physical learning Environment

Outdoor learning environment includes places like yards, local parks, trip to the forest, museums, libraries, theatre visits or even parents' work pace (NACEE 2022). Therefore, an outdoor learning environment is an environment where children learn from their experiences that are unique and unscripted, for example in a forest children learn through different

senses like touch, smell, taste. Spending time in nature is found to have a calming down effect, give a feeling of positivity, and has other health benefits too. (Lindfors et al.2021). Children also learn to respect and take care of the nature around us. Visit to different community places, children experience how to behave in different situations and interact with different people which helps to develop their social skills.

According to Merewether (2015), an outdoor learning environment, offers places for socialising, pretending, observing and moving. Merewether (2015) uses children's perspectives to describe these different places in his study. Places for socialising are places that children chose because they had a chance to play with their friend in those places while outside. Pretend play can be made available in outdoor environment just like indoor environment by adding elements from the nature to the park like, an area with pieces of bark, or planting bushes. Pretend play in outside environment allows imaginary and open ended play to children as the imagination can be limitless. Places for observing are usually places that are at some height above ground level such as climbing towers, slides, swings, bridges or any place in the outside environment from where the children can get a larger view of the surrounding. The way children move around in the outside environment, for example in parks is largely dependent on the rules, educator's attitudes, the number of children in the park and the size of the park. So, an outdoor learning environment does not mean only a place that is outside the day care classroom, but it is a place with appropriate space for children to move, play and explore their surroundings.

## 2.2 Social Learning environment

Social learning environment encompasses interaction between the children, interaction between the children and the adults in an ECEC facility, interaction between the parents and the care givers and interaction between the ECEC staff. In a healthy social environment children get equal chances to participate, learn to build friendships, develop trust through positive interactions with peers and adults, learn to listen to and respect different opinions/views which helps to build a positive self-esteem and good social skills which are a part of the lifelong learning process (NACCE, 2018). Size of the group, ways of planning activities, resources available contribute to building a supportive social learning environment (Social Environment-IRIS Centre 2015, 3).

Size of the group—Activities can be carried out in a big group, all the children together where the children practise/learn skills related to facing a bigger audience, presenting their ideas. Whereas when activities are carried out in smaller groups children get more chances to negotiate their ideas with each other. Adults can give more attention to the children's language skills and facilitate communication.



Children can be put into smaller groups depending on their skills, competences. When children with different skills and competence are grouped together, with proper adult guidance, they learn how to help and accept each other.

Ways of planning activities—Planning can be adult centred or child oriented. A positive social learning environment is built on child-oriented planning where the children’s ideas, interests are heard and taken into consideration while planning. Children are more interactive and motivated when they feel ensured that their thoughts are taken seriously by the adults and that they get a chance to learn what interests them.

Resources available—Resources in an ECEC facility like the toys, board games, puzzles, role play areas, sensory paly areas are as much a part of the social learning environment as they are of the physical learning environment. While playing children use all these different resources and are learning social skills like interaction, taking turns, and sharing. They are also learning to express their feelings to their peers which also supports the emotional growth in children. Playing with friends gives children a sense of belonging which is an essential for the children’s self-esteem.

### **2.3 Psychological Learning Environment**

Cognitive and emotional development of children contribute to the psychological learning environment in an Early childhood Education and Care facility (Aksovaara & Maunonen-Eskelinen, ‘n.d.’). This is practised by creating a safe and welcoming environment where the children’s abilities and needs of support are taken into consideration and addressed in a pedagogically appropriate manner. Children’s well-being, individually and as a group, is most important and children are provided with a flexible learning environment by practicing scaffolding. A safe psychological learning environment also means that there is open communication between the adults working together in an ECEC facility, which means the teachers are well informed about the children and there is good interaction amongst them and with the parents (Rintakorpi 2021, 20).

Developmental psychologist Eric Erikson suggests that three out eight stages of human socialization development occurred in early childhood. These three stages are where the child developed trust, autonomy, and initiative (Mcilroy ‘n.d.’). Educators can help children achieve these by providing good psychological learning environment. In my opinion, children feel safe when they get similar responses from the adults around them, when everyone follows same rules, and they have fair and clear boundaries. It is important that the rules are discussed and agreed along with the children. This makes them feel involved in the process rather than feel that the rules are imposed upon them. It makes it easier for them to accept and follow the rules. When children get the emotional support, they start expressing their

feelings, learn to convey their worries in appropriate ways, build good peer relations, show empathy towards others and are less anxious in new situations/surroundings.

In a same age group, children grow at different levels of development. Supporting cognitive development is an essential part of a psychological learning environment. Adults should be able to observe and recognise the individual needs of the children in the group. They shall plan activities taking into consideration the children's interests, their needs for support and be flexible in executing the plan. Children shall be offered a psychological learning environment where their strengths are appreciated, they receive positive feedback and encouragement for their efforts and their areas of support are handled sensitively, and the necessary support is made available for the children's holistic growth.

### **3 Theories and Concepts**

During the thesis process, which was to develop and/or create a better learning environment four main concepts influenced my work. These concepts were: Educare model, Lev Vygotsky's theories about the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding and using a sociogram to develop the social behaviour in the child group. These concepts are presented shortly in the following chapter in the above order.

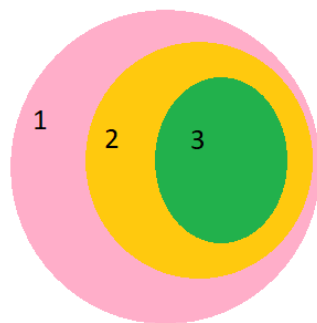
#### **3.1 EDUCARE**

According to the Finnish National Agency for Education "The Finnish ECEC is based on an integrated approach to care, education, and teaching, the so-called "educare" model, with particular emphasis on pedagogy." The ECEC curriculum which is based on the conception of learning (NACEE 2018, 22) that combines knowledge, skills, actions, emotions, and experiences children come across in their daily life. Children learn from observing others and their surroundings. They learn through play, through exploring their environment, expressing through arts. Positive environment, emotional security, good interaction with adults and peers promotes learning. The three learning environments are the means to accomplish such holistic learning in an ECEC facility.

#### **3.2 Lev Vygotsky's theory**

According to Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural cognitive development (Gowrie NSW 'n.d.') learning is a social process than an independent process. Children are learning from their surroundings, from their interactions with peers and adults and also from the cultural beliefs. Language plays an important role in the process. Vygotsky also states that a child benefits greatly through their interactions with or when guided by someone who is more

knowledgeable than the child. This someone can be a parent, guardian, educator or also a peer. This type of learning is not restricted to only academic learning but also extends to learning life skills in daily routine.



In his theory, Vygotsky explains that learning happens in three stages,

1. What the child can do independently,
2. What the child can do with help, (Zone of proximal development, ZPD)
3. What the child cannot do.

Figure 1: Vygotsky's ZPD

The concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) can be explained as `` The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peer (Clabaugh 2010) ``. In the ZPD, the child is encouraged to do the tasks that are slightly more challenging than what the child can achieve independently. The child is then guided by an adult/peer to accomplish the task.

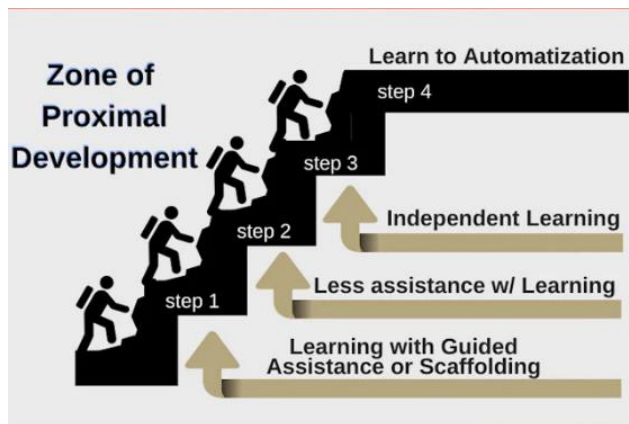


Figure 2: ZPD and Scaffolding (Warren 2021)

In co-relation to Vygotsky's theory, in her article Warren (2021) describes that children learn most in the ZPD. In the ZPD children are challenged enough to achieve the goals with proper and adequate guidance. Once the children reach stage 4 (as shown in the above diagram), where the child is able to accomplish the task independently, the support can be taken away as the child has overcome his/her challenge. To keep supporting the child in the same area will only hamper the child's self-esteem.

### 3.3 Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a sociocultural approach of supporting a child's development sensitively through dialogue, giving support in steps until the child achieves the goals (Puntambekar 2021). Scaffolding can occur even as children who are struggling in a certain skill are paired with those who can perform the same skill independently, through peer learning. Educators should be able to identify the children's need and use their observations to pair children in a way that facilitates peer learning (Vygotsky's scaffolding 2023). The educator's role in the process of scaffolding is to focus on children's strengths so as to build a positive base for learning new things, identify the child's needs and areas of development, to realise the child's achievements and allow the child to become independent (Rintakorpi 2021). In her article, Rock (2022); describes that with appropriate scaffolding, children feel involved in the process of learning and are motivated and engaged during the process. This builds their self-esteem as they are able to achieve challenging tasks in a relaxed, stress-free environment. Children get enough time to learn. They can even learn different things that they come across during the process. With peer pairing, children learn to help each other and also understand the importance of asking for help, this builds good friendships and social skills.

### 3.4 Sociogram

Child observation, individual and as a group is important and is an integral part of ECEC work. From observing and documenting children's behaviour, adults working with children can understand the children's interests, abilities, skills, needs of support more precisely which facilitates child-oriented planning and actions. Along with different ways of making observations and documentations for example, photographs, written documentation of children's work and their conversations; sociogram is a way of observing and documenting the children's social behaviour in the group. Sociogram is a map or a diagram representing how the children are interacting within the group. It gives a clear picture of which child needs more support to interact with his/her peers. It also shows with whom the children are interacting more and how the dynamics is working in the group (Lorina 2023).

Following figure (figure 3, page 13) is a depiction of how we made a sociogram for our group. The names of children are changed for confidentiality reasons, the one we made was more colourful. Double headed arrows represent that both the children like to play with each other, Single headed arrows represent that the child from whom the arrow starts prefers to play with the child the arrow is pointing to, and a dotted line represents that those two children play with each other when they are paired together by an adult.

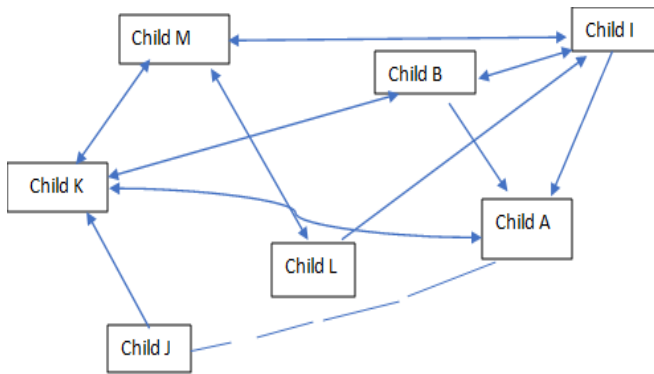


Figure 3: Sociogram

## 4 Diary

The process of writing the diary started with first observing the group where the thesis work was done. The set up of the place, children's behaviour, their strengths and areas of support were taken into consideration while making goals for the activities. The diary was written for a period of ten weeks. Depending on observation from previous weeks the goals were set for coming week and activities that can be useful to achieve these goals were written. A short description of each day was written down and pictures were taken from children's work/ activities. Confidentiality, regarding the children, work life partner and place of work were followed during the whole process. Parent's media permission forms, from the day care were used for checking the confidentiality. Any of the children's faces or names or any information to disclose their identity was not used in the entire diary. Use of gender specific words is only made to ease writing the description for the day. At the end of each week, a conclusion for that week was written down focusing on the goals that were set for the week, what went well and what could have been done differently. The supervisor from Laurea assessed the diary weekly and gave feedback for the week which was considered when making goals for the upcoming week.

### 4.1 Weekly plan

Week 1

**Goals** - Identify a learning environment.

**Activities** - observe the group, make notes of the strengths and what works well and what needs to be / can be changed according to the learning environment and work on making it better.

Week 2

**Goals** - Continue to work on developing the indoors physical learning environment.

**Activities** -observe what the children are interested in, bring in books and pictures related to those topics, display them so that they are reachable for the kids.

#### Week 3

**Goals**—Start to work on positive reinforcement of behaviour related to daily routine regarding movement, noise levels indoors, sharing, asking permission.

**Activities**—Give positive reminders, for ex. Instead of do not run or shout inside, say use your walking feet or remember using quiet voice. Go through the rule cards, display them on the wall where children can see them. Appreciate proper behaviour with encouragement than materialistic rewards.

#### Week 4

**Goals**—Continue to work on developing the physical and social environment in the group.

**Activities**—More focus this week is on developing the social environment. Building friendships and continue with positive reinforcement of behaviour in the group. Start by making a sociogram to see the dynamics in the group and then work on encouraging children who are playing alone or are being left out to be involved in group play.

#### Week 5

**Goals**—Continue working on developing the social environment in the group

**Activities**—Improvise the sociogram as per advice from our pedagogical manager.

Pair the children in different ways and encourage them to play with everyone in the group.

Bring in ideas to play games as a group during circle times and/or in teams during gym. Read books on friendship, talk about feelings and expressing our feelings.

#### Week 6

**Goals**—Focus on social and emotional competence and needs of support.

Start making a manual.

**Activities**—Making the sociogram as a reference create different play situations for the group. Consider that the children get opportunities to play with friends, whom they don't play with voluntarily. Observe how the children are handling the situation and intervene when only necessary. Make notes on which area the children are comfortable and which area seem to be challenging for them.

For the manual make notes on observations made, ideas that worked well, changes made to the plan, suggestions.

#### Week 7

**Goals**—To continue to work on supporting social skills in the group. Continue with the manual.

**Activities**– To support the social skills, continue to pair and group the children with each other. Let them choose where/what they want to play as a team. If they are struggling, give them options but allow them to decide.

Identify situations to add to the manual.

#### Week 8

**Goals**–To keep working on developing the different environments, more on emotional competence which contributes to a safe psychological learning environment.

#### Week 9

**Goals**–This week is about Christmas and activities related to it. So, the goal for this week is to keep the atmosphere in the group relaxed and festive, not to burden the children with only activities and make sure they have time for free play too.

**Activities**–Keep activities simple, even though they are meant for all children to do, encourage but not to force the ones who are not much interested, some activities can be done as a whole group, some in smaller groups and some in pairs.

#### Week 10

**Goal**– I am observing that the children in the group are needing more emotional support, my goal for this week is to give as much support as possible when and where necessary.

Work more extensively on manual and data compilation.

**Activities**– Identify the needs of support, is the child trying to get negative attention or is there something that is troubling him/her genuinely. Approach the situation calmly and initiate a conversation by ensuring the child that you are there to help and together we will sort things out. Make notes on the different learning environments, their significance in providing a holistic education in an ECEC set up.

## 4.2 Detailed description of each week

In this section, there is a description of each day during the 10 weeks period and at the end of each week there is a conclusion for the week, reflecting on the activities and what was achieved during the week or are there any changes to be made in the approach while working.

### 4.2.1 Week 1

17.10-21.10.2022

**Goals** - Identify a learning environment.

### Monday

There are 14, 4-year-old children in the group with two adults. The classroom has three big rooms, one is mostly used for free play and has a role play corner, car play area with a car mat and a wooden parking area, and a semicircle table by the wall which the children use if they want to colour or do any free play arts and crafts activity.

The other room is used for circle times and for playing. This room has a sofa where the children read books, and area to play building games and puzzles. There is a sliding door between the two rooms which is used to display the calendar things during morning circle. Then there is a third room with a small kitchen attached to it. This room is used for mealtimes and having guided activities. There are 4 tables and sufficient chairs for all kids and teachers to sit together in the room. The tables are arranged in pairs with 8 chairs around them respectively.

### Tuesday

With the above arrangements, I saw that the mealtimes are the most challenging, considering that there are 6 to 7 children sitting at one table. We tried moving those children from their places who were disruptive and making the lunch times more difficult for others and for themselves. This also worsened the situation as the children did not have a designated spot and made it difficult for them to settle in. This was the same situation last week as well when I started working with the group.

### Wednesday

Today, I discussed the above situation with my colleague. I suggested that we separate the tables and have only 3 to 4 children at one table, thus making few changes to the indoors physical learning environment. This way we have 4 separate tables and gives us more chance to separate the disruptive ones and put those who need help in eating. The ones who are noisy are mostly the ones who eat fast and need less help to use the fork and knife (they are more independent than others). Once they are separated, we will try to use their skills to motivate other children to eat.



I have discussed with the children about this change that we will be doing in the sitting



arrangement during the afternoon circle time today so that those who struggle with transitions and accepting sudden changes are informed and know what is going to happen, which is a part of developing the psychological learning environment.

Figure 4: New table Arrangement for lunch



Figure 5: Painting corner (before and after)

#### Thursday

As discussed with the children yesterday, we changed the arrangement of the tables before lunch today. The children helped in arranging the chairs around the tables. And as it was the first day with the new arrangements they could choose where they wanted to seat. We only made sure that the ones who are struggling quite a lot with mealtimes are seated in a way so that they are seated next to me or my colleague. Today the lunch time was calmer than before. It could be either because it was the first day with this arrangement and the children are still not familiar to it. We will observe how this change works during the next few weeks.

#### Friday

Today was a quiet day, I started displaying the children's work on the walls for them to see and hang their crafts, in short, I started to decorate the classrooms with the children's works. We also displayed drawings, the children made during free play (Figure 7, page 19). This made

them feel proud to see their art works been displayed and they were proudly showing them to their friends and parents.

A couple of children wanted to make pumpkin pictures for Halloween. They were talking about shapes for the pumpkin eyes and were confused. So, along with the children, we drew and cut 4 basic shapes and put them up on the wall in our art corner, adding to the indoors physical learning environment.

The books were kept in a messy way and children would just pile the books on top of each other. I asked the children to help me arrange the books. We segregated the books according to their size and then placed them in two different baskets with different colours. The children liked segregating the books and were helping each other to identify which basket the book goes into. It initiated children's participation and helped to make them quieter as they were all becoming very noisy in the afternoon. In the figure 6 below, you can see children helping to arrange books and the result of their work, a neat reading corner.



Figure 6: Reading corner (before and after).



Figure 7: Displaying children's work.

### Conclusion of the Week

Most of the children in the group have been together for at least a year. There are 4 new children who have joined the group since August. They, all play with each other mostly, which is the group's strength as there is not a child playing alone at any given point of time. It was also my second week with the group, and I have to observe them more closely for their social, emotional skills.

The physical learning environment needed a few changes to be made. Having a proper sitting arrangement made the mealtimes peaceful and we could help the children who needed help more efficiently. This minor change brought more calmness to our routine.

Also, starting to display the children's work boosted their self-esteem and seeing that their friend's art is displayed, the ones who were not interested in the art activity have started asking when they can make their art and crafts.

### 4.2.2 Week 2

24.10-28.10.2022

**Goals - Continue working on developing the indoors physical learning environment.**

#### Monday

Today is a festival day for our children from India. It is the biggest and important festival of Diwali celebrated all over India. There are many Indian families in the day-care and in also in the group I am working with. All the groups had a festive atmosphere today. This was a good opportunity to involve diverse cultural discussion with children. I made paper lanterns with the children, and we watched a small video about Diwali.

In the afternoon we watched a kid's video about Diwali.



Figure 8: Diwali lanterns.

### Wednesday

Today's morning was a difficult for most of the children to be calm and play with their friends. Me and my co-worker decided to take the group to the forest to spend some time out of the classroom in the nature, using the outdoors physical learning environment.

It was a rainy morning so there were quite many puddles on our way. Instead of walking around the puddle I let the children walk through them. The children enjoyed it as most of the times before they had been told to stay away from the puddles.



We saw a few birds in the bushes on our way to the forest, we tiptoed very quietly while walking near the bush to see if the birds notice us or not. Sadly, the birds flew away, the children started coming up with reasons why this happened, 'the birds saw us coming', 'birds are scared of us', 'we are big, and the sparrow is tiny'. It was interesting to listen to their suppositions.

Figure 9: On our way to the forest.





Once we reached the forest. I asked them if they knew who lived there. I explained to them that we are visiting the animals' home and we should take care of it by using our quiet voices so that we do not scare them and not breaking the branches and leaves from the trees. Children explored different tracks in the forest.

Figure 10: Exploring the forest track.

We spent an hour in the forest, we listened to the sound of forest, of the leaves, of the raindrops dropping from leaves. I asked all the children to close their eyes and we stood there trying to listen to different sounds and smell the fragrance of the forest.



Figure 11: Listening to the forest sounds.



Figure 12: Observing an earthworm.

On our way back we found an earthworm and we stayed there for some time to see how it moved. It was a good trip and spending time in the nature helped to calm them down as they spent their energy climbing up the hill and down and walking. Even meditating for a short time to listen to the forest sounds was a good calming down activity for them.

Me and my co-worker have planned that Wednesdays will be trip days for our group. We will go to the nearby park, library, forest or just for a long walk. Though we chose Wednesday as our field trip day, we are staying flexible about it depending on the children's eagerness to go on other days, weather and other factors that may affect the day.

#### Thursday

Today I experienced how important it is to remember about any changes in the daily routine that can happen. It is necessary so that the children are informed in advance as sudden changes in daily routine are difficult for children to understand. It was an unintentional mistake today, and a couple children got very upset as they are struggling to handle with sudden changes in the routine. I talked with them and apologised and told that I understand that it is not easy. I told them what is going to happen next, and the children calmed down for that moment. Even afterwards the kids kept asking why we did not go to the gym, and why I forgot to tell them until I promised that it won't happen again.

#### Friday

Friday is a toy day for all the groups in the day care. In the morning circle, the children were getting very excited and a couple of them started disturbing the circle. I wanted to turn the children's behaviour from being disruptive and noisy to being attentive and interested in the circle. I asked everyone to give their toys to me and hid the toys under a pillow in my lap, using the resources from the indoors physical learning environment. Once I hid the toys everyone was waiting to see whose toy peeps out of the pillow. This turned the whole noisy situation to be more fun and exciting.

Everyone sat down and waited for his/her toy to come out. I also gave them clues which toy wants to come out, for ex. One child had a bunny soft toy, so I told them that this toy tugging my hand has long ears, it is hungry, loves carrots and belongs to the one who is listening so nicely to his friends. I also tried to add a little drama to the whole thing by changing my tone, if it was car, I made a sound of the car horn, etc. I observed that instead of repeatedly telling the children to sit and listen, when I turned the situation around in a positive way helped them to be attentive, follow what is being said and listen to one another. I will continue to find more positive options to manage the group behaviour.

Today we also finished with our preparations for our Halloween party on Monday. I took the children's opinions on how to decorate our classroom for Halloween. We finished painting our alien. Most of the children wanted to paint the alien green, one child wanted it to be blue and red, another wanted it to be pink. We discussed what we can do so that we have all the colours on the alien and came with a conclusion that the face is green with pink dots and the

eyes are blue and red. The final product is a very funny alien who is going to eat fire balls on the party day.

#### Conclusion of the week

This week went well even after Wednesday being a little messy. The children have enjoyed the activities and are excited for the Halloween party. They have been talking about their costumes for the entire week and are liking the decorations we have made together. Also, the changes that we made with changing the set up for mealtimes is working well, we added the names on the chairs so that the children know where they are sitting.

I had a small discussion with my co-worker and our pedagogical manager about the children's behaviour as I felt that they were all trying to test the boundaries. They both agreed and one reason we think this is happening is because the adults in the group have changed quite often. I mentioned to them how it helped to divert the children's attention by adding a simple change to the toy circle. I mentioned that even if the game worked well, I am worried that the children should not get used to the reward and no reward habit. They both agreed to it, and we have discussed about positive reinforcement than just talking about good and bad behaviours or giving consequences.

#### 4.2.3 Week 3

31.10-4.11.2022

**Goals—Start to work on positive reinforcement of behaviour related to daily routine regarding movement, noise levels indoors, sharing, asking permission.**

Monday

Today was our Halloween party day. Children were all dressed in different costumes. We had a very nice morning, we played Halloween games, had our own mini fashion show where the



Figure 13: Halloween experiment.

children showed off their costumes to their friends while the friends cheered. It was the first time for the children to experience this and few were very shy to come forwards. We asked if anybody would like to help their friend and it was nice to see how everyone hopped in and encouraged each other. We played a game of feeding fire balls(meteors) to our alien and finding the hidden Halloween items under a witch's potion using our magic glass.



Figure 14: Halloween decorations.



For the alien game I used a hula hoop for the children to stand in pretending that it was our spaceship. The children enjoyed throwing the fire balls (bean bags). Before starting the game, we discussed that having fun and enjoying the game is the most important part of the game and not winning or losing.

Figure 15: Halloween alien game.

Today I observed that the children were very calm at mealtimes. Separating the tables is working well and having allocated spots at the table has reduced the initial chaos that happened when the children could choose their own place to seat at mealtimes. Also, the children are now getting into the routine that even after finishing their lunch and tidying their place, they need to wait for one of the teachers to be free and then they can go and play as that teacher calls them. We have been explaining the reason why we are doing this, we have talked about the safety issue and that it is a good table manner to give company to your friend who is still eating.





During the free play in the afternoon, a couple of children came to me asking to play with them. They chose a game of matching the code. It was impressive to see their problem-solving skills as both are otherwise either very quiet or making silly sounds and disturbing others.

Figure 16: Playing coding game with children.

## Tuesday

Tuesdays are music mornings for children who have enrolled to the music lessons. Lessons are provided by a private music school. So, a few children have these lessons every Tuesday morning. The rest of the children are with us, and we do some art activities, play board games, puzzles together. We document the children's work during and after they have finished.

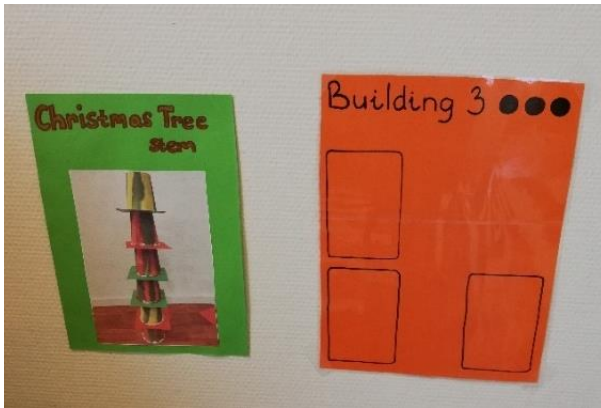


Figure 17: Number of children.

In each play corner there is a chart which shows how many children can play in that corner at a time. The children choose their corner during free play and stick their picture on the board. This distributes the children evenly and it is easier to see who plays the same games most of the times, for example we can guide the children who we observe to be always playing with cars to play in the role play area or the building area by joining them in the play. This also takes care of the noise levels inside the room as the children are distributed evenly in each play area.

It was interesting today to see how giving a positive alternative works with children. We had a situation during afternoon play, there were 6 children who wanted to play with cars, and they were all disappointed as per the chart only three can play on the car mat. So, I was discussing with them what can we do, how everyone get to play with cars. I tried to suggest some ideas, asked if some can choose a different corner for a while and then we swap but no one agreed.



Then I suggested what if we build our own track in the building corner and then we can drive our cars on the track. This seemed to work as they all got excited. We could involve everyone as the building corner has more space. Everyone got involved and we managed to build a nice long track with a small bridge and then one child even built a garage at one end of the track.

Figure 18: Building a track with blocks for cars.

### Wednesday

Wednesday is the trip day. We had only 9 children in the group today. They all remembered our forest trip from last Wednesday and wanted to go. So, after the morning circle we went to the forest. We first went for a small walk around the community, there is some construction work going on in the nearby area. The children get excited whenever they see a construction vehicle passing by. So, keeping safe distance we went to see how the excavator works. The children were amazed but started complaining about the noise. We soon moved from there and this time we explored a small forest nearer to the day care.



Figure 19: Our way to the forest.



There is a big rock in the forest which we climbed on, and we explored the forest floor, found a variety of mushrooms and pinecones. We collected few pinecones too. We came across an interesting hole in the trunk of a cut tree. The children were peeping in it and came up with some very imaginative ideas, some said it was a door to the Gruffalo's house underground, some said only a hedgehog, or a mouse can fit into it and not a Gruffalo.

Figure 20: Beautiful mushrooms we found.



We saw a lot of broken branches and sticks on the forest floor. A couple of children wanted to build a campfire, so we found a little clearing and we built a nice campfire. Then the children found pieces of pine branches which they used to cover the sticks, a couple brought pieces of moss and soon our campfire turned into a cosy home for a squirrel.

Figure 21: Building a nest for squirrels.

Before returning, we did some meditation and breathing exercise, we took in deep breathes to get the fresh forest air and listened to the birds singing whilst closing our eyes. This way we said bye to the forest and walked back to the day care feeling good about trying to help the squirrel.

In the afternoon we painted the branch that we had collected on our previous trip to the forest. There were different ideas how to paint it, a couple kids suggested rainbow colours,



two others wanted it all blue, and some wanted it pink and white. Luckily, the branch is in Y shaped, so we decided to colour it in parts, the stem of the Y blue, one side in Rainbow colours and one white. It was good to have a Y shaped branch. Thus, we used resources from the outdoor physical learning environment for our artwork and also made sure that each child's views are heard and considered.

Figure 22: Colouring the branch from the forest.

Thursday

I have been observing that it takes quite some time for a couple of children to calm down and they start disrupting the entire group during morning circle. Today, I tried to add a physical activity before starting the circle. When everyone gathered around, we played a game where each of us had to suggest an action with the number of times (1-5) to do that action and then the rest will follow, for example, clap your hands 4 times or stomp your feet 5 times and so on. I saw that once we had our energy out it was easy for those couple children to sit and focus. I also added some simple fun ideas to the circle like instead of only asking the children to put their pictures on the wall for who is present and who is absent, I held the photo against the light showing the back of the photo to the kids. They were excited to see that they can still see whose picture it was and were eagerly waiting to see their own. Positive reinforcement made the morning circle fun and I had to give fewer reminders to sit properly and pay attention.

Conclusion of the week

I am noticing a slight change in the group. Whenever I have given constructive, simple, and positive idea the group was listening and following better. I understand that this is a process and there won't be results in a day or two. I plan to continue working on my skills to encourage good behaviour through positive motivation instead of giving consequences. I have observed that by giving consequences the children take time to develop trust and are stressed to behave in a normal way. I do not want that to happen in our group and want the children to feel happy, heard and that we build trust amongst each other.

**1.1.1 4.2.4 Week 4**

**7.11-11.11.2022**

**Goals—Continue to work on developing the physical and social environment in the group.**

Monday

Today we started going through our classroom rules during the circle time. I started by asking from the children why we need rules, we discussed about safety indoors, why it is necessary to use inside voices.

I kept the instructions positive, like

Rules/Instructions	Instead of
We use walking feet inside	do not run inside
We use listening ears to listen to our teachers and friends	do not talk at the same time when a teacher is talking



We keep our hands to ourselves	do not hit
We use our quiet voices inside	do not shout
We raise our hand to talk when in a group	Do not talk in between when others are talking
Try to eat with your mouth closed	Do not open your mouth while eating

Table 1: Positive Instructions.



To display the rule cards, we have decided to match the cards with the children’s pictures that we took during the circle time or free play when they were following the rules.

Figure 23: Rule cards.

Tuesday



We made simple cards, for Father’s Day, as the main goal was that the children make them as independently as possible. I provided them with paints, and coloured card paper. One child made a coloured handprint and most of them did the same. I only helped them to fit their hand on the card and if they asked for help.

Figure 24: Making Father’s Day cards.

During free play we mixed children in pairs or small groups so that those who are always playing together have a chance to play with other friends too. It was interesting to see how the children behaved and slowly started to play with each other without minding with whom they are playing. Some pairs played consistently while a few stated playing individually after a while.

We also discussed about our trip for Wednesday. We are going to the library, and we discussed how we behave in the library. I asked the children what a library was and why do we go to the library. Most of them knew and started talking about their visit to the library with their parents. Then we talked about how to behave when are in the library going through the rule cards.

#### Wednesday

As discussed yesterday, we went to the library today. We walked down to the library. On our way we stopped to see different construction vehicles at couple of places. The group is interested in different types of truck, they get excited to see even a garbage truck. So, we stopped every time we saw a vehicle they are interested in, luckily there was construction work going at different places on our way.

Our trip to the library went very well. The children were on their best behaviour, they had fun exploring through bookshelves and playing in the play areas. But they remembered to use inside voices and walking feet, which made us very proud of them. Before coming back, we gathered the children and praised them for their behaviour and made them realise that we are proud of them for how they have behaved. We borrowed a variety of books, some of which the children chose, even in different languages/scripts.

Me and my co-worker have started making a sociogram for the group as suggested by our pedagogical manager. Currently we have made one from our perspective, on how we have observed the kids playing with each other. It gives an idea of who plays with whom most of the time and which child is getting excluded from group play.

#### Thursday

Today the morning circle was nice and playful. We started with head -shoulder-knees and toes song. We sang it in different ways. I have observed that adding a little action to the activity either in the beginning or in the middle, when the children start getting restless, always helps to get back their attention and makes the activity proceed better.

After our normal morning circle routine, we sang a couple of more songs as everyone was in a mood to sing. I also asked them what they liked about our trip, to see how much the children remembered. They talked about the different trucks we saw on our way. So now we are planning to do more activities related to this theme. We have even borrowed a couple of books and will print few pictures and information about different trucks. I will also plan few more art activities, but that depends on the children's choice.

Friday

It was a slightly different day today, there was a workshop on language development. Few of the children attending the workshop struggle dealing with changes in the routine, so I talked with them before and explained what is going to happen. I told them that they will stay with another teacher and will be playing some fun games and the photographer will take their pictures when they are playing.

I ensured them that even if me or my co-worker were outside with rest of the children in the group, we are going to be close by. I had also talked with the parents about the workshop and explained to them that they should discuss it with their child at home and explain about the day in their mother tongue. This will help the child to be prepared for the change and the child can participate in the activities without being stressed. The workshop went well. The teacher conducting it made a few observations which are helpful to observe the children.

The morning was very hectic for the group, so we decided to keep rest of the day as free play. While the children were playing, me and my co-worker, we joined the children in their play and were also observing the dynamics in the group comparing it to our sociogram. My colleague has a nice idea how to mix the children, so that they all have a chance to play with each other. We are going to try it in the coming weeks.

Conclusion of the week

A slightly hectic week and each day there was something happening, but the group managed well. We are proud of our children how they have handled this week. The sociogram was a good thing to make. Our pedagogical manager has advised that we talk to the children also, individually, and ask them whom they like to play with, and which area is their favourite. This will help us to put kids who are not playing with each other voluntarily but have similar interests together when we put them in pairs or groups.

I have seen that giving positive instructions in every situation is difficult, but not impossible. There was a situation during the week when the children got very excited and started to run around. This time both, my colleague and me, had to talk to the kids in a serious voice. After the children calmed down, we both discussed and decided that next time this happens we can try to play a calming down music which will distract the children's attention and then gather them in a circle, and we all sit down with our eyes closed for a while. After everyone is quiet, we remind them about the rules and ask if they are ready to use their walking feet and inside voices before letting them play again. This might help the children to calm down and this way we are not stressed too.

#### 4.2.5 Week 5

14.11-18.11.2022

**Goals—Continue working on developing the social environment in the group.**

Monday

There are seven 4-year-olds who are in different premises. We have been planning for these two 4-year-old groups to get to play together. So, today onwards, every Monday morning we will be mixing these two groups together. The groups are divided into 2 smaller groups. Together with the other teacher we have separated the children in a way that they all get a chance to make new friends. Today was the first day of this experiment. We allowed the children to play in their groups and observed how they were mixing along, by being around them or joining the play as necessary. We have discussed that we do not force friendships but make the process smooth.

Tuesday

Morning went as always with few children having music and the rest doing a art related activity. We practised the grip of pencil while colouring pictures of different trucks. Excavator is the most favourite with the group.

I observed that there are children who are trying to use both the hands simultaneously while colouring. A couple of children are holding the pencil in their palm like a shovel. I did not change the child's way to figure out with which hand it was easier to colour. I only put it in words, like 'I see you are using your right hand or now you are trying with your left hand'. I feel this way will help the child to be aware of the right and left hand and also not make him/her conscious of the action. I also joined the children in colouring, I think it is better to show the grip of pencil, colour within the lines or colour the entire picture through example than just telling them what and how to do a certain task.

I do not want the children to feel stressed or conscious about the activity that they are enjoying. I noticed that a child realised how I was colouring and wanted to colour the whole picture, I only encouraged and appreciated them for how they worked together peacefully and remained focused. In the afternoon we watched a short video about the excavator truck and the children were trying to match what they watched to what they have seen, if the excavator that they saw did the similar tasks or was it just standing, etc.

Wednesday

It was a cold, chilly morning today. The children were not keen on going for a walk or trip to another park or forest. So, we unanimously decided to spend more time inside and just go



outside for a short while for fresh air. We had our regular morning circle routine with the hello song, going through the days of the week, weather, and season. I am practising with the children to raise hands to talk, give answers in a sentence rather than just saying the word, tenses. I am doing this by asking them questions about what **was**, what **is** or what **will be** the day and emphasising on the words related to the tenses.

I also use actions for yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Using actions, emphasising the words the children start understanding them clearly and makes learning easier. Even if a child struggles, I am not pressurizing them, I just ask if he/she needs more time to think and then ask the same question to someone else. After going through the same question with a couple of children I go back to the child who seemed to struggle and ask if he/she is ready to answer. Still, if the child becomes conscious, I ensure him/her by saying it is ok and he/she does not have to answer today. We then move forwards.

I knew that if we are going to stay in the circle longer it will not be easy, and the children will become restless. So, after the daily routine things we sang a few actions songs where the children could move and do some physical exercises. They all love the head shoulder song. We sang it in a way where every time we sing, we only hum one of the body parts at a time in the song and we continued until we sang the whole song humming. It was long but the children enjoyed it.

After this I let the children have a break. They could lie down if they felt like it, go around the classrooms, use the toilet. I informed them that after the break we will gather again and play a game together. This helped as the children were not sitting for the entire morning and resting in between helped them to focus better. After the break we all gathered and played a game where we practised listening to each other, waiting for our turn and make a descriptive speech. It was a game based on language development. Children showed enthusiasm and did well with listening and waiting for the turn. Even the children who do not speak much otherwise were eager to participate. I helped them with the vocabulary wherever necessary.

This way we all enjoyed our long morning activity and then we went for a short walk around. The children found a long log in the forest and wanted to walk on it. We practised our balancing skills. They realised that the log was slippery, and it was interesting to see them do some problem solving on how to balance themselves and see them sharing their ideas and encouraging each other.

Thursday

I have seen that the children are not getting enough of sensory play during the day. So, today me and my colleague decided to make it as our main task to focus on during free play. I have some colourful pebbles that I brought for the group; we have a sensory table with sand, and

we also put some water trays in the art area. The children want play dough which I have promised to make with them next week. I asked them to choose a colour and we have also discussed to add some essence to the play dough. So now we make a blue and green playdough with vanilla and strawberry flavours which seemed to be our current favourites.

We observed that the children were enjoying these sensory activities and played peacefully. There are a couple of children who struggle with getting their hands dirty. The pebbles worked well with them as they could feel them, look through the coloured pebbles. They made some patterns with the pebbles. One child was engrossed playing in the sand table with animal toys, making mountains and pretending to have found treasure while digging with the excavator.

The water play did not seem interesting. One reason could be that it was placed a little away from other areas and the children may be feeling alone there. So even if a couple of them started to play at that table they soon moved away. This time neither me nor my colleague made the children to stay at the water table. We will change the place for the water play and will have one or two sensory play area at a time so that children get a chance to explore the areas more.

Friday

Toy day today. Like every Friday the children were very excited about the toys they brought. It was good to see the toys children brought were not gender specific and they all played and shared each other's toy. My colleague and me, were satisfied to see that the group has started to get along. Now we shall start to work on bringing them close to each other as friends and develop a sense of belonging. The sociogram is helping to pair/group the children in different ways. We have also asked the children individually whom they would like to play with, where they like to play and made a note of it.

Today after snack, I asked the children sitting at the same table to choose a corner they would like to play. The children started talking about their personal choices. I helped them to make a choice by helping them to ask each other about their choices and then make a unanimous decision. There were children who were upset initially to have to change their choice but once they all started playing together everyone was playing nicely.

I noticed an interesting behaviour from a couple of children today while getting dressed in the afternoon. This group of children is always playing together or choosing each other to play with. But today, when I appreciated one of the children for being consistent and dressing up independently the other two were quite jealous. They started making unkind remarks about the child. I was at first angry at their remarks, but instead of confronting them in an angry tone, I stayed calm. I asked them why they were not happy for their friend. I made them

realise the feeling they had and explained that everyone feels that way at some time or the other.

This led us to discuss about jealousy while we all were dressing up. Instead of taking those two children to one side and talking to them I started talking to the whole group. I started by explaining what jealousy means. We discussed if jealousy was a good or bad feeling. How it makes us feel when we are jealous. What shall we do if we feel that way. I told them that feeling jealous is not bad but the way we say unkind things to the other person is not nice. This makes the other person feel sad.

I told those two children that they felt that way because, the child who got dressed faster stayed focused and did not play with anyone in the locker until she finished dressing up, while they kept playing in the locker area. So, if they also wanted to be ready earlier, all they needed to do is stop playing with anyone around for a while and try to focus on getting dressed. This way they will be appreciated too. I also made sure that they gave the other child a hug and appreciated her.

#### Conclusion of the week

This week's highlights were the mixed groups and bringing in more sensory play activities. The group activity is a good step forwards in developing the social environment in the group and will be helpful for the children to expand and build new friendships. Being considered as a part of the group by our peers is a good booster to develop self-esteem in children and so we will continue to work on building the social skills and playing fairly with everyone.

I am happy that the children are not hiding their negative feelings from us. This way we can help them to express such feelings in a better way and ensure them that the feeling itself is not right or wrong but how we react is more important. I was personally delighted when the children came to me and wanted to share their feelings, talk about their toys. A couple of children also shared about their weekend. This shows that the children are building more trust in us, and I will also work on developing the emotional competence in the upcoming weeks.

#### **4.2.6 Week 6**

**21.11-25.11.2022**

**Goals—Focus on social and emotional competence and needs of support.**

#### Monday

As we have started having our group playdates, today also few friends visited us, and we spent time together playing and getting to know each other. I have made a few observations

and I think we need to plan the group play more precisely, consider different possibilities, and make sure that each group gets enough time to play with each other.

Tuesday

Today was the music morning. I put out some puzzles, board games, beads at different tables. I let the children choose where they wanted to start with. There are a couple of



Figure 25: Writing with beads.

children who only want to play with cars, table activities or any guided play is a challenging situation for them. My aim was to encourage them to at least try two of the set activities. I joined a child to play with the beads. Together we arranged the beads in a colour sequence, made our names with beads, counted the letters in our names etc.



Figure 26: Solving puzzle together(Scaffolding).

There was another child playing at the same table with us and we started to make a design with the beads, once they were playing together, I moved away to help another child. This child was struggling with a puzzle. It was about the seasons. We started by focusing on one season at a time and I asked him what the season is now. I did so because I felt it would be easier for him to find pictures with snow which he can relate to as there is snow outside.

Then I diverted his attention to the sequence by pointing out the details to each piece he picked. I asked him questions to see if he is following the picture sequence and we built the puzzle together along with one more child. I only helped the child to pay attention to the details and then we also talked about the seasons as we made the puzzle.

Wednesday

There is a nice park nearby the day-care and the children like to go to that park. Even though it was cold today; the group was excited to go to the park. I decided to focus on the dressing up routine and gave children enough time to get dressed and not to rush them up. Giving the

children enough time made the dressing routine less stressful. I have discussed with my colleague, and we planned to make use of the trip days to work on dressing up routine as then we are more flexible with the time and can let the children practice dressing independently. This is not possible every day when we must follow a certain schedule and when other groups are dependent on us during outside play.

On our way to the park, we were looking at different road signs and stopped if the group wanted to talk about a particular sign. They noticed the different colour patterns on the signs and also the shapes. Once in the park, they all enjoyed the snow. We let them roll over, lie down on the snowy ground for some time before leaving the park.



Figure 27: Visit to a local park, enjoying snow.

#### Thursday

This week in the gym we practised throwing and catching, listening, and following instructions, played games in teams, and worked on team building skills. We also moved in different directions and different ways, walking backwards, galloping, running sideways, crawling. In these the children had to take care that they are not bumping into each other. I divided the group in two teams and each time the groups moved in a certain manner from one end of the room to the other, one child in each team had the responsibility to check if all the teammates have reached their team. There are children who will walk on their tip toes most of the time. So, we practised walking on our whole foot by marching around the room, walking on a beam, and walking very slowly. We also played balancing the bean bag on either the head, shoulder, elbow, back and moving around. This was a tricky task for most of the children. I briefly explained to the parents, in the evening, the reason why the children need outdoor activities.

Friday

Fridays are toy days. We had our regular toy circle where each child described the toy they had brought and why they had chosen that particular toy to show and share with their friends. A couple children had forgotten to bring a toy from home, so we asked them to choose one from the classroom that they like to play with. A couple children brought more than one toy, so I told them that they can show and tell all the toys that they had brought in the circle but later to choose one from those toys, one which they like the most and which that they did like to share with their friends while playing. We also talked about how to ask a friend for his/her toy and how to say no politely, for example if Child A is playing with his own toy and a friend asks for that toy, then how can child A say no. We had a short drama where I (P) pretended to be a child playing with my toy. My colleague (C) pretended to be the one wanting my toy.

C: Can you give me your toy to play with?

P: I can give it to you after I finish playing, but you can join me. We can play together.

C: ok

And we pretend to play together. This short play seemed to work, and we could see children using similar conversations while playing.



As you can see in the picture, Figure 28, one child brought a doll and other one chose the blocks from day-care. This child wanted to play with the doll too, and after discussing how they can work together, they made this lovely house with blocks and a swimming pool for the doll to swim. These two children play together rarely, still their teamwork was amazing!!

Figure 28: Working together.

Conclusion of the week

This week, along with working on physical and social learning environments, building a friendly atmosphere in the group, I also tried to support the emotional well-being for those children who are struggling to express their feelings or start crying immediately when they are confronted. There was an incident in the gym where a child started crying because she was asked to stop and follow rather than just do what she wanted to. The child was extremely upset, and I had to move her away from the situation for a while. I sat down with her till she calmed down and was ready to listen, then I explained the game again and asked

if she would like to be my partner. She was then happy as she started following what was happening. I have noticed that those children who are getting less time with their parents are trying to get affection and attention from us by being overly emotional over simple things.

Me and my colleague discuss such situations with each other and how we handle it in each other's absence. This way we are on the same page and the children get a steady and similar response from each of us. This will bring in stability to the children's behaviour. Both of us also communicate to the parents the importance of constant and similar response from the adults at home too. This helps the child to handle emotions clearly.

#### **4.2.7 Week 7**

**28.11-2.12.2022**

**Goals—To continue to work on supporting social skills in the group.**

Monday

It was a calm day today; I used this time to give more individual attention to a child who is struggling to get accustomed to the new change. This child has moved to Finland just recently. After the VASU talks with the parent, we have a clearer picture of the family and how the child was in their home country. Coming to Finland is a drastic change for the child, there was sudden change with weather, people around the child, food, even the flooring in the house, eating habits, the language, the clothing is a new experience for the child. The child was used to having grandparents around, many friends to play with and suddenly they are a nuclear family now. So, today I stayed with the child more and played and talked with the child. Made more simple, short sentences while communicating with the child, gave the child extra time to dress up as we were not in a rush.

Tuesday

Today we started with our Christmas decorations. We started with making Christmas wreaths. A simple activity where the children practice to cut on straight lines. The lines are made only so that they know where to cut but I allow them to cut as they can, assisting and guiding them. More attention is on guiding them to use scissors safely as some of them are looking elsewhere cutting or some start waving the scissors and take it close to their or other child's face. Most of the children in the group are struggling with using scissors. A couple of them are trying to cut with both left and right hand. So, I am letting them use whichever hand they are comfortable with. Today a child started cutting with the right hand and then changed to the left hand.

According to the child's individual skill in cutting, I take them one or two at a time to do the activity. This helps me to give them proper guidance and help accordingly. This helps in

observing the children more closely and understand their needs for support because even though we are doing a certain craft, the children talk about other things that they find interesting, or they are worried about. They are talking about their family, their friends. This helps to understand how the language skills are developing, how the children are co relating past incidents and to understand their needs.

I have observed that the children need more activities to strengthen their hand muscles. Playing with play dough is one of the activities helpful to build this strength and we have started to have play dough in our art corner. I have made a scented playdough as per the children's choice.

Wednesday

Today we had a wonderful forest trip. We had been to this forest in autumn before the snow. So, today we decided together with the children to visit the forest again and see how it looked now after the snow. The children were mesmerized by how pretty the forest looked. It was nice to hear them discuss with each other that we are visiting the animal's home and we should use our quiet voices and not disturb the animals, take care of the trees and branches while walking through the forest. It made me realise that the children remember things easily when they are explained to them in a form of a story rather than as rules.

One child in the group is trying to get sympathy from every adult around. Me and my colleague have noticed this behaviour, and both feel that the child does this type of attention seeking more when there is a new adult around him. It happened when I started working with the group and it happens every time there is a substitute teacher coming to the group. Today was such a day. There was a substitute teacher and the whole day this child was finding reasons to cry. I explained to him that the new teacher is here only for today and he can come to me anytime he needs help. I also made clear that even though there is a new teacher for today, our daily routine is going to be the same. We also went through the daily routine pictures that we have on the wall.

Still, the day was quite difficult for him to handle. At lunch time when he started crying just looking at the lunch then I had to take him to one side to calm him down. After he calmed down, I had to use a firm tone so that he realises that the unnecessary crying won't work. I felt sad for him. It was getting challenging for me too to stay calm and had to ask one of the teachers from the other group to come for a while so that I could go out and get some fresh air. In the evening I talked with the child's parent and explained the whole situation. I explained the parent why it is important not to give in immediately the child starts crying unless and until it is necessary as the child has learnt that he can get away with everything once he starts crying.



I have also observed that this child tries to pick on a child who is having extra needs. He will blame the child for everything or instead of focusing on his own play he will go after the other child and disturb him. I have talked to him about this and me and my colleague are paying attention to his behaviour. We feel that the child feels superior to this other child when he thinks he can manipulate him. This could come from the lack of self-esteem and we both are working on him by giving him responsibilities that he can achieve and encouraging him to be more independent in managing his own self for example while getting dressed, choosing a game, making simple decisions.

Thursday

First day of the Advent calendar, so everyone was very excited to start opening the calendar. We have a reindeer soft toy who is now one of Santa's reindeer. Children have named him Dancer. To make it a fair decision, Dancer will choose one child every day to open a day from the calendar. Today's task was to decorate our Christmas tree and we all enjoyed it. We kept



all the decorations we had in the middle and children took turns to pick a decoration they liked and put it on the tree. We then took a vote where to place the tree in our classroom. It was a fun morning, children enjoyed, and we had a countdown in the end when we lit the lights on the tree. After the activity we had a short yoga session as Thursday is our gym day. It also helped to calm the group and bring the noise levels down.

Figure 29: Christmas tree with Dancer

Friday



Figure 30: Candles for Finland's Independence Day.

Today we celebrated Finland's Independence Day as the day-care is closed on 6<sup>th</sup> and on Monday, we have very few children in the group. It was also the activity for today in our Advent calendar. Children chose to make candles for crafts, we painted the Finnish flag and discussed the significance of colours in the flag and later watched a short video about Finland that a parent had shared with us.

### Conclusion of the week

Support in developing Emotional competence is becoming more prominent and I feel it is necessary to have more knowledge on how to build a learning environment where the children feel safe and free to express themselves. While searching for more information, these are the links that I came across. There are sections in each article which I found useful. I will make a proper note of these while writing the description for the thesis and in referencing.

The next weeks are going to be busy with Christmas related things to do from the Advent calendar which the children have planned. I am planning to use these weeks, specifically the last week, to make notes on the different learning environments and work on the manual simultaneously. I feel that Scaffolding is a good pedagogic way to work with children, as it makes the activity less stressful for children and their participation and engagement in the activity becomes easy thus helping their learning.

#### 4.2.8 Week 8

5.12-9.12.2022

**Goals—To keep working on developing the different environments, more on emotional competence which contributes to a safe psychological learning environment.**

Monday and Tuesday

Day care closed.

Wednesday

Today, I had a situation with a child in my group. This child is smart, and her skilful for her age. She wants to be perfect in everything she does and gets worried, starts crying when she finds the tasks challenging. The child wanted to make a Christmas tree and I helped as the child had asked for help. Both of us made the picture together and then the child started colouring it. Soon the child saw a friend getting another picture and demanded that she gets the same. The child threw away her picture and started screaming because I asked her to finish the picture she had made and then I will give her another one.

The screaming became louder and was disturbing other children who were playing peacefully. So, I moved the child away but made sure that I am able to see her all the time, to ensure her safety. I made it clear to the child that she is moved because of the screaming and once she stops, we can talk. It took her some while to calm down. Once she had calmed down, we discussed how we can solve the problem. At this time the child was able to listen and

together we decided that once she finishes her colouring, we can make another picture together. In the evening I mentioned the incident to the parents so that it does not come as a surprise to them from the child.

#### Thursday

Christmas party day. We celebrated along with our families in the evening. In the morning we practised singing the songs. One child from the group became nervous because he felt that he was not able to sing all the songs as well some other children from the group. Me and my colleague, both assured him that it is okay, and he was singing most of the songs very well. In my day-care, teachers, children, and their families, we all sing together, and then the children have few activities to do along with their parents and siblings. While we are carolling, a special visitor pays a visit to the children. After the carolling I went to the child who was nervous about singing and praised his efforts and appreciated his for singing along with everyone.

A child from my group came up to me saying he knows that Santa is not real. There was another child nearby who heard this and there was a small, interesting argument between the two. One believed in Santa being real and other was denying it. I tried to settle a sweet argument between two children about Santa. I told them that it depends on what each of us believe, some children think Santa is real and some think it is some person dressed as Santa. We should be polite to the one visiting us and say thank you if he is giving you a present. The day ended on a good note with the families participating enthusiastically in all activities and enjoying the party atmosphere. It was interesting to see the parents interacting with their children and how some children behaved differently with their parents around them.

#### Conclusion of the week

Managing emotional situations with children is a tricky task. I noticed that the tone we use to talk with a child in distress makes a lot of difference in handling the situations. First, I had to make sure that I stay calm throughout, give the child time to calm down, understand when to give attention and when to let go but not leave the child alone and make a fair decision. I marked that even though a child, who at first glance seems to be doing well in different areas of development may be needing support with emotional and/or social skills. There is some area that takes time to develop in each child and each child grows at their own pace.

It is important as educators to notice these challenges, work towards making the children feel safe and happy in their learning environment and develop a positive approach in them. My goal in my work is to make the children feel they are heard and build trust so that they feel safe to confide to us. For this it is more important that the educators and parents have a good

open relation with each other for the children’s emotional development; Cooperation in ECEC (NACCE 2022, Section 3.3).

#### 4.2.9 Week 9

12.12-16.12.2022

**Goals**—This week is about Christmas and activities related to it. So, the goal for this week is to keep the atmosphere in the group relaxed and festive, not to burden the children with only activities and make sure they have time for free play too.

Tuesday

Today’s Advent calendar activity was to make trucks. As we have been talking about trucks, children wanted to make their own truck. So, when we were planning the advent calendar activities along with the children, they had chosen to make their own trucks on one of the days. Along with the children we planned to make this from recycled and reusable things. Today we did the activity with only two children at a time so that each one can get enough time and space and also, they can stay focused.



I paired the children according to their skills. We have few truck pictures displayed on the wall. I asked the children to decide which type of truck they wanted to make and pick the materials accordingly. I only helped them to put the carton pieces together with a tape and cut the wheels out (as many as they wanted for their truck) from a thick cardboard. Rest the children designed their own trucks. I had kept the paints out too for those who wanted to paint the truck. There were beads, a couple of children used the beads as lights on their truck, one child also glued a paper fan, as it was a fairy truck.

Figure 31: Designing our own trucks



Figure 32: Trucks made from recycled materials.

#### Thursday

The gym today was a lot of fun. We played winter sports and did stretching exercises. While stretching, some of the children found it difficult to bend, or to spread their legs straight in front. Most of the children who showed rigid body movements. We played ice hockey and practised pushing the ball/peg with the ice hockey stick. Except for 2-3 children others struggled to hold the hockey stick. It was interesting to see how they problem solve and at the same time we noted down the group's gross motor skill requirements.

The group needs a lot of teamwork exercises. We played a game of snowball throw where the plastic balls were pretend snowballs in teams. When I divided the group in two teams each child in the group immediately grabbed a few balls saying they are his or hers. I had to explain that they are a team, and everyone plays as one team, helping each other. The groups needed to work together so that they have the least number of snowballs on their side when the time is up. After a trial round the children understood the game and then when we played the game all of them worked together in their own groups well.

#### Friday

Toy day, our reindeer, Dancer, was the one to pick a toy today and the child whom the toy belonged to then talked about the toy while we all listened. The children were enjoying while the reindeer hopped on the toys before choosing one and were excited when their toy was been picked. I asked questions to those who were shy to talk, for example a child had an elephant soft toy but was very shy to say anything. So, I asked if it was a cat, or was it a pet animal or a wild animal, I asked the group to make a trunk with their hands and we all trumpeted like an elephant. The child was then talking, and it was good to hear how much he had to say about his toy.

In the afternoon, after quiet time, I had to comfort a couple of children. They were crying as if they had a bad dream. Eventually after talking to them, one was crying as he wanted to sleep longer and watching this child cry another one started crying too. I sat close to them and gave each one a hug. I gave them time to calm down by gently stroking on their back. Once they stopped crying, we discussed why it is important to rest and not play during quiet time. I let them rest on the sofa for a while before snacks. In the afternoon both the kids were just sticking around me, and we played together till they felt better to go and join other children.

#### Conclusion of the week

The week was fun and exciting. The children were deciding if they wanted to participate in a certain activity or have free play. Still, there were situations when some of the children were

getting very emotional for reasons that looked quite normal superficially. We noticed that the children are getting tired easily. It could be because they are getting tired of the darkness, cold weather and the daily routine. That is why my goal for next week is to pay attention to the children's emotional needs and make them feel less nervous and less stressed.

#### 4.2.10 Week 10

19.12-23.12.2022

**Goal– I am observing that the children in the group are needing more emotional support, my goal for this week is to give as much support as possible when and where necessary.**

##### Monday

Today we made joulu torttu, a Finnish Christmas pastry, with the group. Each child got a piece of pastry sheet, and they made their own pastry. The children decided what shape and which toppings to add to their own pastry.

##### Tuesday

A trip day today. We had divided our responsibilities amongst teachers so that the trip goes smoothly. There was a lot of excitement in the group. It was quite a hectic journey but once we were at the Stockman window, all the children were amazed to see the beautiful Christmas decoration, and all the Christmas lights on our way were so pretty. Children loved the decorations and were noticing details in the sceneries. From there we went to the Oddi library. In the children's section there is a beautiful touch screen room that they have built. Children enjoyed seeing how the Auroras moved while they touched the big screens.

##### Wednesday



We had free play the whole day today. Normally we have designated number for each play area to keep it safe, less noisy and to make sure that there is enough space for children to play. But today we decided to keep it more flexible as it was a last day before holidays for most of the children. Children played very well, role play is becoming more popular in the group and as there could be more children playing there, it was interesting to see how they were communicating and accommodating each other in the play.

Figure 33: Building with paper cups

### Conclusion of the week

It was a busy week, but we have tried to keep it as stress free as possible for the children. There was a lot of free play this week and it also gave us a chance to make more observations related to the social skills and communication skills. Observing the children for their strengths and needs for support and giving them required support is an ongoing process. Playing with them and being an active part of the play is one of the good ways to make observations. Through play we can go through different sections of the transversal competences and learning areas as mentioned in the National core curriculum. For example, this week when the children were playing with the cups, stacking them to make different structures, they were developing their team building skills because they were playing in a group, which leads to communication with each other thus building language skills. There were different patterns on the cups, so they were segregating the cups according to the patterns, making a pattern with colours, building tall or short towers, balancing the cups, counting them.

All these activities involved in one play covers competences like thinking and learning, interaction and self-expression, participation, and involvement, multiliteracy. There are different learning areas like rich world of languages, exploring and interacting with my environment and me and my community, that are also involved in one play. So, when adults/educators become a part of the play we can encourage the children to stay in the play longer. Thus, they get more time to develop their skills, and this is what me and my colleague focused on more this week.

When me and my colleague saw that the children are starting a play and soon moving to some other area, we tried to be a part of the play and played with them a little longer so they could explore different ways of playing in the corner they have chosen and not just hop around from one play area to other. We took care that we encourage them and are not forcing them to stay.

## 5 Conclusion

The ten weeks of writing the dairy each day, was a good way to reflect on the situations in the day care and the ways in which we handled those situations. In chapters 2 and 3, I have discussed about the three learning environments and the concepts and theories involved in this process. In this chapter I am going to explain how and where these theories and/or concepts were used in daily routine while working and how are the learning environments impacting children's holistic growth.

The ambience of the place, which is a main component of the indoors learning environment in an ECEC facility, is the first impression a child has when entering the day care. The

arrangement of tables and the way in which children are sat during mealtimes is one such example in my experience during the thesis process. A small change in arrangement of tables brought about a big change in the children's behaviour during mealtimes. With changing the table arrangement, we were able to distribute and combine children at each table according to their needs for help during eating. Placing the ones who struggled eating closer to the adults and with children who are good eaters, children are observing the adults, their friends and are motivated to eat. With fewer children at each table, the children are able to have more chances to communicate with their friends and still the lunch times are peaceful. Thus, a change in indoor physical environment also facilitated children's social behaviour which is a part of social learning environment.

Having a flexible learning environment is very essential for children's stress free learning and for them to have the joy of learning. This applies to all the learning environments. In an outdoor physical learning environment, it is important for the educators to show flexibility while planning trips. The days and times can be changed depending on the weather, number of children present and a proper adult-child ratio. Children's opinion and interests must be considered while making the trip plan. For example, if the group is interested in talking about space, a trip to aquarium is not a good idea. Allowing children to spend time with nature, exploring the forest is a good way of imbibing environmental awareness in children. Trips to local parks are also fun, depending on children's age and interest elements like making maps, reading road signs, can be added to such trips. The children while exploring the forest are becoming aware of their physical capabilities, they are taking care of themselves as well as their peers, Therefore, a trip (outdoor physical learning environment) that is fun, brings joy to the children. At the same time learning areas, exploring and interacting with my environment; I grow, move and develop and transversal competences like taking care of myself and managing daily life (NACCE 2022) are also involved in the process.

During the thesis process, I came across few situations that involved a lot of emotional support to be given to the children. I realised that even the smallest things/situations can cause distress to a child. The child in such a situation needs an adult who is calm and composed and who will understand their feelings. We as adults, need to analyse the situation quickly, consider the child's areas of strengths and needs for support and approach the child peacefully. We need to develop trust with the child so that the child feels safe to confide in us. Talking to the child calmly, showing that we understand how they are feeling and that we will help them through their emotions is very important. Once the child is calm then the next step is to help the child express the feelings by either showing pictures or by asking simple questions depending on the child's age and language capabilities. During all this time it is important that we are not making the child conscious of the way he/she is feeling, but make them aware of the feeling, sad/angry/hurt, and how to handle it. This contributes to a safe and healthy psychological learning environment.



Involving children in decision-making, being a part of the group and considering their thoughts in planning, implementing and evaluating activities is important in ECEC . This builds their self-esteem and children are more interested in learning new concepts. I experienced this when we observed that the children are interested in trucks and made it a theme, planned activities involving children's ideas, displayed the truck pictures they drew/coloured, read books, watched child specific videos about truck. Even on our trips we stopped to watch a truck whenever children noticed one. The theme wasn't time specific, and we discussed about trucks as long as the children were interested in it. During this process the children learned new words, new concepts like digging, lifting, excavating. This type of child oriented planning involves social learning environment as it involves children expressing their ideas, listening to others and considering each other's thoughts. Children are practicing working in a group during various activities, they also feel good about themselves when they see their work being displayed. All this enhances their psychological growth as being appreciated, considered and involved in the group helps to bond with each other and boosts their confidence. This interconnection of physical and social and psychological learning environments is a reminder of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, which states that learning is a social process and not an individual one.

Scaffolding and zone of proximal development (ZPD), concepts from Vygotsky's theory, are important to develop a psychological learning environment. In my understanding, it is important to first identify a child's ZPD. This way, educators can understand the child's needs of support and then modify the activity/process of taking care of the child accordingly. To explain this with one of the examples from my work is where there was a child who was struggling to solve a puzzle (figure 26). I noticed that he/she was able to arrange the pieces properly according to their size, this was the child's ZPD because child needed help to proceed further and struggled to follow the sequence in the picture. Next step was scaffolding the activity. So, we change the activity by making it a pair work, where we involved one of the child's friends. This way the child is not feeling as if he/she is alone. We started by focusing on the child's strength in this particular activity, that was grouping the piece according to the size. Both the children put the smallest pieces on the board, then chose which part of the puzzle they wanted to solve first. And as we proceeded, I was explaining the picture and asking what can be the next piece that will match the picture. During the activity the two children are also encouraging each other and appreciating each other for their success. I made sure not to over guide them. We celebrated the children's success by appreciation and positive feedback.

Here also the social and psychological environments are interconnected. The children are working as a team, taking turns, encouraging and appreciating each other, interacting with each other. Because the activity is modified as per the child's ability, the child is not very stressed even though he is struggling. The child learned to solve a problem, by not being

conscious of his weakness which boosted the child's confidence and made the child interested in learning a new activity. Transversal competences like thinking and learning, interaction and self-expression, along with learning area like rich world of languages are also involved during the process.

For a healthy social learning environment in the group, it is important for the educators to recognise the dynamics of the group. This can be done by observing the pattern in which the children play with each other. A sociogram is a useful way of documenting this pattern. With the sociogram, me and my colleague, we could identify the children who need more support to make friendships. Then we made efforts to combine children in different ways during activities, play, gym and arranged group play activities for the group. Initially the children showed reluctance but as we joined them to play, they started playing freely with each other. So, we as educators initiated play and moved back once the children were comfortable with the change. Along with assisting children in developing friendships, it is also important that the educators are communicating with each other and showing respect for each other in practice. This way the educators are able to handle situations in similar ways and making decisions that are not conflicting with each other developing a stable and safe environment for the children.

The underlying values of ECEC which are the intrinsic value of childhood, growth as a human being, the rights of the child, equality, equity and diversity, healthy and sustainable way of living, diversity of families all explain that every child in ECEC has the right to be heard and understood, to express their opinion, experience joy of learning, has the right to good instruction, education and care. The child's integrity is the responsibility of the ECEC personnel. Children should be guided to develop emotional and aesthetic skills (NACCE, 2022). An overall view of the thesis process shows that the EDUCARE model was followed throughout when children were given care when they received support for their needs, education was achieved with child-oriented planning and teaching was involved in every activity or situation during daily routine. With properly developed learning environments, goals of ECEC can be achieved contributing to a holistic development and promote lifelong learning of children in early childhood education and care and where even the parents and/or guardians share good open communication with the ECEC personnel and feel involved and welcome (Wardle 2010).

## **6 Diary Summary**

To summarise the 10-week diary, in this chapter I have collected some of the main findings I did during my diary thesis process. I am presenting them here to give a description of how they were approached and handled and which learning environment was involved in those situations. This can be useful for other educators to get practical ideas about how to develop

their learning environments in daily situations or learning areas that are often considered challenging.

## **6.2 Noisy mealtimes.**

According to the setup there are two big tables which accommodate 8 children at each table. Even after moving the places of the children there is a lot of noise during lunch.

Goal was to have peaceful mealtimes.

1. Identify the children who are good eaters.
2. Then the ones who struggled with mealtimes and
3. Then those who are disturbing the group while eating.

### **Observation:**

1. The children who weren't interested in eating were mostly the ones who made noise, kept talking and thus disturbed the whole group at the table.
2. With the big table it was getting difficult to have these children closer to an adult while eating.

### **Method and how it helped:**

1. We separated the two big tables into four smaller tables.
  - This way the group got divided into 4 small groups instead of two big groups.
2. Arrange children at each table, 4 at each table, we mixed two good eaters with two who struggled eating.
  - This gave more chances of separating the children according to the situation.
  - The children are also learning by watching their friends.
3. There is a teacher next to the children who struggle eating. Encourage children to tell what they like from the food they are served.
  - Children start focusing on the food they like and are less stressed about eating the food they dislike.
4. Children will try eating what they like first, then encourage them to taste the rest of the food.
5. Teacher also encourages the children to use inside voices and talk to the friends at the same table while eating.
  - This way children are not talking across the tables and are learning to make new friends.

Having changed the set up made the situation calmer and we started to have peaceful mealtimes.

### **Learning environment:**

With a slight change in the indoor Physical Learning environment, the situation turned from being noisy to a more peaceful mealtimes where the children get enough support and guidance from the adults.

### 6.3 Restless behaviour during circle times/activities

Even with one child becoming restless in the circle or during an activity disturbs the entire group. Goal is to keep children involved and motivated to participate.

#### Observation:

1. Children who are active struggle to sit for longer time during circle or during an activity. These children eventually start disturbing the ones paying attention.

- To avoid such situations, it is necessary to keep the activity shorter or divide the activity in smaller sections.

#### Methods, with example and how it helps:

1. Daily morning circle: Adding a physical movement in between the circle routine

- Helps to break the monotony and children can focus better.
- This also helps the ones who are active to get their energy out and they are then ready to listen and follow.

Physical movement can be either,

1. an action song like head, shoulder, knees and toes or wheels on the bus, 5 little monkeys etc.

2. some light yoga exercises

3. shuffling the sitting arrangement in the circle, like by asking child A and child B change your place with each other by crawling from your places or by hopping in between.

4. letting children have a short break in between, for example my group loves the crab walk, so if the group is getting restless, I usually tell them to move around like crabs till I count to a certain number and then they are back to the circle.

2. Toy circles: Toy circles are usually the longest as each child should get enough time to describe their toy or express their thoughts. At such times I,

1. Hide the toys under a pillow or blanket or in a bag.

- Children are curious to know whose toy will be popping out and then are waiting eagerly for their toy to come out from the hiding.

2. Describe the toy that wants to come out, like the texture of the toy, hard or soft, or it can fly or where we usually find it, i.e., if the toy is a ship, I tell them that it is something that goes on water and so on.

- Children are paying attention, children listen to new words as you describe the toy, helps their vocabulary and mainly children get involved in the circle time.

3. Art and craft activity:

1. Plan and modify the activity according to the age and skills of the children.

- Depending on the age the activity can be made simpler by dividing it into smaller steps and
- Depending on the skills having not more than 2 to 3 children at a time helps to give individual attention and necessary support to the children.

It is okay even though there are fewer number of activities that can be done this way because the goal is that all children get the required support and not the number of activities.

**Learning environment:**

Using the Physical learning environment; space and the resources; appropriately, helps to make learning playful and enjoyable.

Scaffolding, flexibility from adults in planning and implementing is an important element of a good, stress-free learning environment.

## 6.4 Trips

### 1. Forest trip

**Observation:**

Going for a walk to the forest can involve a variety of learning opportunities for children. It can also help to channel the children's energy into a proper way.

**Method and how it helps:**

1. Start by discussing about the forest, habitat, trees, taking care of the forest and their importance. Keep the discussion age specific and simple.

- Children get interested in the trip.

2. Before leaving on a trip go through the safety rules. Tell the children what they can do instead of what they cannot do.

- Children start focusing on the positive, which helps to inculcate positive thinking.

3. Make the children aware that it is our responsibility to care for our environment and our forests.

- We use lower voices because loud voices scares and disturbs the birds and animals living in the forest. Children learn to respect nature and other's space.
- We can pick things from the forest floor but leave the flowers and leaves on the trees/bushes. Children are practising to take care of the environment they live in.

4. In the forest, depending on the season/ weather do simple activities

- Build a nest for the squirrels or hedgehogs using forest material, children show a lot of creativity and enjoy this activity. Children are practising to work as a group/teamwork.
- Finding mushrooms and taking pictures or playing a simple forest bingo. Children focus on observing and appreciating things from the nature.

5. End the forest trip by a simple meditation.

- I ask the children to close their eyes and listen to the sounds in the forest.
- On one such trip when it was raining the children loved listening to the sound of rain and they had a smile on their faces.
- Meditation helps to calm down the minds and children also practise to sync mind and body with the nature which makes them feel relaxed.

6. Then before leaving the forest, we thank the forest for letting us spend time together.

- This way children learn gratitude and to respect the nature.

## 2. Trip to the local park

### **Observation:**

Children do not want to go the same day care yard every time. They are not motivated to go outside. A trip to the forest is not possible because of the weather.

A change in the routine is sometimes good as the children also get tired with the same daily routine.

### **Method and how it helps:**

1. On our way to the park, we observe the traffic signs. Colours and shape of the sign boards and what they mean.

- The children observe their surroundings, learn orientation while we are walking from day care to the park.

2. As we are visiting a local park there are chances that there are other children in the park.

- This is a good social learning environment for the children as they have to manage the same space with other children around them.

3. During certain trips we need to use public transportation.

- The children get to practise how to behave in a public space, safety on the bus/train.

### **Learning environment:**

Trips to forest, parks, library, museums, theatre are all a part of outdoor Physical learning environments. The children are practising areas of the transversal competences concerning with me and my community, taking care of oneself in an outdoor learning environment.

## **6.5 Making friendships, Communication, and Interaction in the group.**

### **Observation:**

1. Children are constantly practising their communication skills in various activities taking place.

2. At times they struggle with expressing their emotional needs and/or making new friendships.

3. A particular child is not interacting with anyone, prefers to be alone.

### **Methods and how it helps:**

1. Make a sociogram for the group.

- A sociogram helps to identify social situations in a group more clearly as then we can identify may different ways the children are seeking friends.
- From a sociogram it is visible which child needs a lot of help and support to make friendships and interact with the group.

2.The educators then need to identify the reasons, work on helping the child to build friendships.

3.If the child has joined the group later in the middle of the year the educator can try to understand what the child is interested in, be a part of the game with the child and other children thus initiating a conversation between the children.

4.Help the child to know the friends' names, by playing games in the circle together with the whole group.

- Seeing the teacher be a part of the play other children also join in and this helps the children to know each other.
- They start communicating with each other with adult assistance.
- Communication will gradually help build friendship.

**Learning environment:**

A Social environment where the children feel included and heard is necessary to build positive self-image and self-esteem in children. The sociogram can be made more times during the year, as the way children are playing, and interacting is changing, and it is quite possible that a child who was struggling with building friendship in the start of the year is then the one with most friends towards the end of the year.

**6.6 Children needing or looking for emotional support.**

**Observation:**

1.The children express this need for emotional support through their behaviours.

2.They become sensitive to small confrontations, are extra possessive of their belongings, insecure, some become defiant of the daily rules, show jealousy.

3.They may even show less appreciation for what they have or lack the joy of learning.

**Methods and how it helps:**

1.As Early childhood care gives it is important to identify the reason behind a child's behaviour.

2.Staying calm and patient is an important step in approaching and dealing with a child who needs emotional support.

3.Talk to child calmly. Allow the child to express his emotions, Do not expect the child to stop and listen immediately.

4.Give him/her some time to calm down.

5.Ensure the child that you are there with him/her and will help once he/she is ready to talk.

- All these initial steps help the child to feel safe to express his negative emotions that he is struggling with.

6.Once the child has calmed down, talk in a peaceful tone.

7.Depending on the age of the child, try to find out the reason for the child's disappointment, without asking leading questions.

8.If the child says he/she misses their parent, make sure you tell this to the parent in front of the child when they are picked up.

- This way the child is ensured that his feelings are taken seriously, and it will help him/her to express them in words rather than crying to get attention.

9.If you notice that a child is being rude to a friend out of jealousy, talk about the feelings. This can be done through picture cards, stories, drama play.

- Giving a name to the feeling is helpful for the children to recognise it. Explain that everyone has these feelings, and it is okay to feel that way, at the same time show them a proper way to express those feelings.

10.The tone in which we, adults, talk to children in such situations is very important.

- A low, calm tone of voice while handling sensitive situations helps the children feel safe to express their negative emotions.

11. Educators should also recognise their own state of mind and if it is necessary to move away from the situation for a while, they should ask for help from other adults in the group.

- This helps to keep the situation under control and most importantly the child is not getting more nervous and stressed because of an impatient adult.
- The educator also gets time to calm down and then is in a better position to help the child.

12. Communicate with the parents after the child calms down, it facilitates good parent-teacher relations.

#### **Learning environment:**

Building a safe psychological learning environment is important for the holistic development of children. Two different but interconnected areas are handled in the situation wherein the child was in distress.

1. Building a safe psychological learning environment for the child, where the child feels safe but also learns to express his/her strong emotions.
2. Cooperation with guardians as described in the National Core curriculum for Early Childhood education and care (2022; Chapter 3, section 3.3).

When the children feel safe and trusted, they will learn to recognise their feelings and with adequate support will learn to express themselves in a proper manner. When the children feel that their thoughts and feelings are heard, they will also build friendships based on trust and develop good social skills which contribute to their lifelong learning.

## **7 Self-reflection of the thesis**

It was an interesting ten-week process. The work was goal oriented and as the goal for each week was set beforehand it was easier to work accordingly and know what to expect. I



started the diary within a week after I started my work and so the group was very new to me. The work became easier as the group was welcoming and we (children, my colleague and me), easily bonded with each other. My colleague was open to my suggestions, we listened to each other and chose to do what was best for the children. Keeping an open mind, being open to suggestions, observing the needs of children and staying flexible with the plan(scaffolding) are the key requirements to achieve the goals when working as a facilitator in ECEC. I used them in practice and so the work became less stressful and enjoyable.

During the process, I became more acquainted with the learning environments. I had an idea about them but now I am able to understand the reasoning behind my actions more clearly. While explaining to the parents the reason for certain ways we follow in the day care, it is easier now to explain in a more pedagogical manner. I have also observed that with scaffolding, the children are more eager to learn. They are less stressed to perform and therefore experience the joy of learning which is also the right of the child (NACCE 2018,21). I have enjoyed working with the group and writing a daily report was interesting. It helped to reflect on and evaluate my own work. While writing the diary I realised few situations that I could have approached differently and also situations where I was able to give my best to the children. I have changed certain ways of my work, for example changing the indoors physical learning environment as needed, recognising, and taking care of the socio-emotional environment in the group more closely.

I was able to help the children and the results were visible when the children were feeling safe to communicate their feelings, their needs with us and the way they showed trust in us. From my perspective, children in ECEC should be approached more sensitively and their needs should be addressed in a way that benefits a holistic development in children. For this to happen, all the three learning environments need to be developed carefully keeping in mind the needs of the children in respective age groups. Working with children is not challenging but the most challenging part of the whole process, for me, is writing the theory and connecting every thought with a reference. I am practising this process. I feel my thesis will help to give an overall explanation of different situations from each of the learning environments. It may help educators who are new to the field of ECEC to know how to approach different situations from the daily routine.

### **7.1 Workplace partners' involvement and feedback:**

The feedback is given by the pedagogical manager from the day care and my colleague with whom I worked with during the thesis period. I have added my colleague's feedback too because she was the one to observe my work closely throughout the 10 weeks of the diary writing.

The pedagogical manager, who was representing the work life partner and was the workplace supervisor for the thesis was involved during the thesis process where all the situations that are described in chapter 6 were discussed with the pedagogical manager and her suggestions were worked upon accordingly. For example, the manager suggested us to make a sociogram to access the social environment in the group. This helped us guiding the children to make new friends and building the social environment in the group. The manager also gave useful insights on handling the emotional needs of the children when I discussed a couple of situations where a child was in distress and needed to be handled sensitively. Also, when I suggested about making changes to the physical learning environment, the pedagogical manager was involved where the three of us, pedagogical manager, my co-worker and myself, we discussed the situation together before making the decision. Other than this the involvement of the pedagogical manager was beneficial in the process as we discussed about the importance of the learning environments and their influence on daily life in ECEC.

#### 1. Feedback from the workplace supervisor:

Introduction is Clear and understandable for those who don't know anything about ECEC.

Chapter 2.1. good materials and different ways to observe them (Berris-Miller vs Merewether, Rintakorpi). Vygotsky's theory is always reliable to compare to our methods right now. Its almost 100 years old theory. And you have found some new info from him! You have used different forms of media in your work like you tube, videos and books. Description about Sociogram is useful for other teachers to use in their work. Diary could have been shorter if, you could have written more comments between lines like connecting daily work to the goals and theory. Or your idea of situation when you realize something. Really good evaluation , then in, the end. These are something that everyone at day care should read and know. You had some ideas how to work in the situation and what do next time.

#### 2. Feedback from the work place co-worker

As I have read Prajakta's thesis after careful consideration I have come to the conclusion that it would be really useful to use the information she wrote for work environment as well.

The methods she has been introducing in her writing are great illustration for other educators on how to handle various situations, it also has good ideas of activities to do with children.

It indicates for example how to observe children and how to help them develop, how to make their environment safe. All in all, I believe that Prajakta's approach is very useful for everyone who is working in Early Childhood Education.

To end my thesis, I would like to thank my guide from Laurea, for her guidance, valuable suggestions and encouraging feedback during the thesis work, the work-life partner for their support and suggestions during the thesis work.

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