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The role of the supervisor of an afterschool club

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## **Tiivistelmä**

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena on tuoda esille kokemuksiani työskentelystä vastuullisena johtajana iltapäiväkerhossa ja haasteita, joita olen kohdannut yhdistäessä erityistä tarpeita omaavia lapsia suureen määrään tyypillisesti kehittyvien lasten kanssa. Haluan myös tuoda esille tärkeitä asioita joita käymme läpi lapsien kanssa. On selvää että lapset kokevat voimakkaita tunteita myös iltapäivähoidossa. Lähestymistapani työssäni on kehittynyt omien kokemusteni kautta, ja siksi haluan korostaa, että tämä on vain yksi näkökulma muiden vastuullisten johtajien joukossa. Tein päiväkirja raportointia 8 viikon ajan keväällä 2025. Viikoittaiset raportit heijastavat omia kokemuksiani, joita tuen myös etiikan, lakien ja eri lasten kehityksestä käsittelevien teorioiden sekä Kouluhallituksen antamien ohjeistusten avulla. Käytin väitöskirjassani autoetnografista tutkimusmenetelmää. En paljasta mitään tietoja työnantajastani tai siitä, missä työpaikka sijaitsee, enkä myöskään tunnistettavia . Hyvin usein on luotettava omaan vaistoon ja kokemukseen. Erityislapset kärsivät eniten, kun päivittäiset rutiinit keskeytyvät.

## **Avainsanat**

Autoetnografia, iltapäiväkerho, erityisen tuen lapset, vastuu ohjaajuude

**Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to highlight my experience of being an after-school club leader and the challenges I have faced when integrating special needs children with a large group of typically developing peers. I also want to highlight important moments that we share with the children, where it becomes evident how strong emotions a child experiences even in after-school care. My approach in my work has developed through my experiences, and for this reason, I want to emphasize that this is just one perspective among other responsible leaders. I conducted diary reporting for 8 weeks during spring 2025. The weekly reports reflect my own experiences, which I also support with ethical and legal considerations, different theories about child development as well as the guidelines provided by the Finnish Board of Education. I used an autoethnographic research method in my thesis. I do not disclose any information about my employer or where the workplace is located, nor any identifiable characteristics of individuals. This applies to my workgroup and clients, namely the children. After reading my diary I find it clear how hard it is to make plans because of the unexpected situations that happen frequently. The law does not give guidelines in all tricky situations that occur in after school clubs. Very often you have to trust in your own instinct and experience. It is special needs children who suffer most, when the daily routines are interrupted

**Keywords**

Autoethnography, after school club, special needs children, supervisor work role

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## **1 Introduction**

My Thesis is written as a diary based thesis. This structure makes it possible for me to focus on practical work and theory simultaneously. I will try to reflect on why I am doing certain things, and making certain decisions during a normal working day. I try to reflect on what the thoughts are behind the many small choices I make during the everyday routines at work. What knowledge do I lean on when doing my weekly activity planning? When should I interfere if choices made by my co-workers, who sometimes are overloaded by work tasks, sometimes seem to be made more from a practical than from an educational point of view?

The same goes for me when I am doing my planning of our weekly activities and we are short of staff. I will also be paying attention to how I am communicating with my co-workers during very stressful periods of time. And most importantly, how sensitive I am to the needs of every single child in the group when I actually get to spend time with the different childgroups. There is a risk of letting the routine take over at times when the situation is stressful and tiring.

In this work I try to be critical towards myself and more aware of what the children in my care actually need. My aim is also to reflect on the needs of children who have special difficulties and assist them in their adaptation to the big group of children.

For my thesis, I chose a topic for which there is very little previous material. However, I want to provide others with more information on the subject, as I find it interesting and important. There are very few theses about afternoon clubs, and not a single thesis has been written about the responsibility of leadership in afternoon clubs or about children needing special support in afternoon clubs.

I took notes every day and made a weekly report for 8 weeks. The purpose of my thesis is to answer the questions, “ What are the main duties of a lead supervisor in an after school club?” and “ What are the challenges of integrating special needs children in the afterschool club?”

## **2. After school clubs**

In this work I will be writing about after school clubs in the meaning of morning and after school daycare.

In Finland after school clubs are not a new phenomenon. The earliest written information goes back to as early as 1800. The first after school clubs were more like workshops and school childrens day care centers. The provision regarding morning and after school clubs in Finland was only included in the law as late as in 2004. Then it was renewed in 2011 and again in 2025. The reason for founding after school clubs was to avoid children from being unsupervised during the long afternoon hours when the parents are working and away from home.

The Finnish law does not go into much detail concerning after school daycare; rather it delegates responsibility for practical implementation to the municipality level.

The Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for national guidelines for after school clubs. The tasks below are stipulated in the Objectives. It tells you which activities must be included. You need to pay attention to the following aspects. (Finlex Amendment 1136/2003)

- ethical development and gender equality
- play and interaction
- exercise and outdoor activities
- meals and rest
- culture and traditions
- practical skills and crafts
- visual, musical, physical and verbal expression
- media literacy
- everyday tasks, living environment and sustainable lifestyle
- various theoretical and practical topics

These are the general instructions for all morning and after school clubs. It is free for every club to emphasize some of the headlines above depending on the child group and the skills of the grown ups. For example if one is very talented in music, or if you have access to very good and safe sport facilities this will be taken advantage of.

The aim of morning and afternoon activities is to support educational work at home and at school as well as the child's emotional development and ethical growth. In addition morning, and afternoon activities must promote children's well-being and equality in society, prevent social exclusion and increase inclusion (Finlex 48 a). At our office, we try our best to support the growth of children's development socially and educationally

Municipalities can organize morning and afternoon activities themselves or together with other municipalities, or procure services from another public or private service provider. Municipalities may also procure services by awarding subsidies to service providers for this purpose (Finlex 48 b).

The municipality buys after-school club services from my supervisor, so I don't work directly at the municipality's after-school club. However, we operate in accordance with the regulations of the municipality.

In morning and afternoon activities, a person is eligible to act as a counselor if: 1) who has completed a university degree, post secondary qualification, vocational upper secondary qualification or equivalent previous studies, further vocational qualification or specialist vocational qualification suitable for the task, and who has the skill acquired in connection with education or demonstrated by experience to act a tutor for a group of children, or 2) who is qualified to provide class teaching, pre-primary education, special education or subject teaching or to act as a student counsellor (Finlex 9 a). We have many employees with different types of back ground, because it is not necessary to have formal training for the job. We also have a lot of students.

All children in first and second class in basic education have the right to enroll in afterschool clubs. Also children who require special -needs support have the right to apply for a place in afterschool clubs.

### **3 Special needs children**

The goals for special needs children in afternoon clubs are the same as in the above stipulated objectives with some added details. In this work I am not going into different diagnoses for special needs children. I am referring to the children who are considered to be in need of special assistance according to the National Agency for Education and who attend primary school.

According to the Law about Basic Education 30, 1 mom (642/2010) it is emphasized how important it is to take in consideration the child's level of development in various areas when making the weekly plans of activities. The activity must be chosen in a way that supports their individual growth. It must also be performed in a way that broadens their ability to do things independently, to promote their social development and stimulate them to make their own initiatives. All of this might in best cases increase their opportunity of feeling success and promote their self-esteem.

For special needs children it is furthermore important that weekly plans and routines are easily predictable, so that they beforehand know what will happen next. Many stressful and chaotic situations can be avoided by considerate planning.

Play is of very big importance; it is the best kind of positive interaction. Through play children can learn about rules, consequences and limits. Verbally it can be tricky to explain the agreements that are comprehended in play. To increase the ability to cooperate is important for all children and specially for children with special needs. Physical activity is of great value for learning teamwork and social skills.

There are many aspects of the physical environment that can promote the wellbeing and development of a special needs child. To mention some, the school space, the lighting or the acoustics. For special needs children the safety of the environment should always be in focus.

### **4 Current situation**

In September 2021, I began working as an instructor at an after school club. I started working as a supervisor in a team that had 2 other supervisors and one lead supervisor, along with about 40 children. My intention was to work until the beginning of the summer vacation, and when the employees were laid off for the summer, I was supposed to look for other work. However, I enjoyed my work so much that I returned for a new season in August 2022. For this season, I was supposed to help the new location get going and then move to my former lead supervisor's school into his team. After some time, however, I was asked by the school to stay in the afternoon club, and my supervisor offered me the lead supervisor position at that

location. I am working at the same workstation where I started in August 2022, and I serve as the team supervisor. According to the ( Amendment 1136/2003) the purpose of before and after school clubs is to support the schools and homes educational development of the child's emotional life and ethical growth. At our after school club, we have about 90 children and about over 10 special needs children. My team consists of 7 full time workers. The children come to the after school club at 12.30 and the club ends at 17.00. The children can do their homework and they get snack time at the after school club. Every week we have a beforehand planned theme that we try to follow the best we can.

## **5 Working life partner**

Given the sensitive subject of this thesis I have decided to do my thesis by leaving out my working life partner details. I'm also not going to name the school that I work at. I will also not name any of the workers that I work with. I will not interview any workers or children. I will only write about my own experiences and thoughts.

## **6 Research Method**

In this research, I use autoethnography, which is a way of conducting research in which the researcher's own experiences and field notes form the key parts of the research material. The field notes are a diary that I write every week. This research method is well suited to answer my thesis research questions. Autoethnography is a research method and genre of writing that connects the researchers personal experiences with broader cultural , social and political context. It blends the "auto" (self) and, "ethno" (culture) and "graphy" ( writing), reflecting on how personal narrative can offer insights into larger social phenomena. The development of Autoethnography can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s. ( Sociology plus 2024)

## **7 Diary Entries**

This thesis is going to be a diary based thesis. I will write every week to document my daily experiences and thoughts. I'm going to work all week every day writing notes and three times a week writing a journal using these notes. Each week will have a theme since at the after school club we have themes that we try to follow. Writing every week will allow me to give my personal reflection of working as a supervisor at an after school clu

## 7.1. Week 1 The importance of communication and collaboration

Monday

I came to work at 12:00 and I checked and replied to messages and emails on my work phone. Emails often take the form of notifications or complaints from parents. We also receive emails from the school about special schedules regarding children's school timetables . Text messages from parents include child absences and, exceptionally, departure/pick up times from the after-school club. We also receive messages from speech therapists and occupational therapists with the dates and times of appointments.

After this, we held a morning meeting where we planned the weekly plan and planned the course of the day. The weekly program is a piece of paper on which we fill in for each day, what each instructor takes care of on which day. It is done every Monday.

The weather was suitable for outdoor activities and it was not possible to stay inside, so we decided to go out with the kids after snacking and homework.

Tuesday

I came to work at 12.00 and immediately had a morning meeting with the employees where I announced that I was going to check the timesheets with the employees and sign them, as they would be picked up on the same day so that the salaries could be paid on Friday. I also discussed with the employees that they all have new tax cards sent to the payroll clerk. After that, I went through my work phone and replied to messages. I also marked the absent children in the child list. After snacking and homework we decided to go out to play with the children.

Wednesday and Thursday

On Wednesday and Thursday the weather was pretty bad and rainy in Espoo, so we used the school gym. The children really like the gym and we have the opportunity to play games together with the children. In the gym, we only arrange instructed activities for children to avoid chaos. We play with the children for about an hour in the gym.

On Thursday, when the children came to the after-school club, one of the children said that another of the after-school children had hit them on the way to school. I asked another employee to join me in the situation and together we asked the child additional questions. Initially, we checked if the child had reported the incident to a school teacher, as the after-school club only deals with incidents that occurred in the after-school club. The child responded that no school teachers had been told. The child said they haven't told the teacher because the teachers don't do anything about it. After the discussion, the employee and I decided that I would go to the school's vice-principal to tell them about the incident and find

out further steps could be taken. After I had told the vice-principal what had happened , he thanked me and promised to take the matter forward to the children's teachers. Later in the afternoon, the child's teacher and vice-principal wanted to discuss the incident with the child. The child's teacher wanted the child to tell the story again and honestly, as the incident had already been discussed with the teachers at school. The child finally agreed, after a long silence, to say that the matter was already sorted out at school, and in the situation he had been the initiator of the fight with a couple of other schoolchildren and therefore also received a post-session for the next day. I then apologised for disturbing the teacher unnecessarily, but he nevertheless thought it was a good thing that we intervened because we felt it was important to intervene.

Such situations are always difficult for us, because according to the law, the school cannot share information with us about children or even situations that happen at school. According to Perusopetuslaki 40/2010 members of bodies responsible for the organisation of education, persons referred to in Perusopetuslaki 37/2024 , representatives of school healthcare , school social workers, school psychologist and persons undertaking teaching training shall not disclose to third parties what they have learned, in the course of their duties.

Friday

On Friday I arrived at work at the normal time of 12:00 and we had a morning meeting where we decided that we would be outside part of the day and inside part of the day. After that, I went through my work phone and child list again.

Later in the afternoon, after the other employees had already left for home, I received a message from one of the employees expressing concern about how long they would be able to work for us anymore. I took the situation seriously and asked where this feeling came from and if there was anything I could do to help. They told me that they already suffer from some anxiety but at work it got worse. We went through the causes of the feelings together and discussed their future in the workplace. The conversation ended on a good note. Although it was sad to hear from the employee about their difficulties, it was reassuring that they decided to contact me and discuss the matter with me. I got more assurance that my employees trust me as a manager.

## Summary

This week was a good example of how important collaboration and communication are in my work. It has a big impact on the work atmosphere. In the workplace good communication isn't just about mitigating conflicts. Good communication is also an important factor in client relationships, profitability, team effectiveness and employee engagement (Bosworth 2022) As a supervisor, I want to be as approachable as possible. I try to be open and sympathetic. I

care about the well-being of my employees and always try to develop my own relationship with each employee so that there is trust in both directions. Trust in the workplace promotes an atmosphere of security and respect among employees (salary care staff 2025). Personally, I think job satisfaction and the working atmosphere are very important because I know what it feels like when they are not good. When the work atmosphere is bad, everything suffers, such as work motivation, cooperation and communication. It affects everything negatively. I know that I can influence these as a supervisor, leading by example. I want employees to always be able to approach me about anything and share their opinions with me.

I've been at this school for three years now, so I've also established a relationship with the school staff. Collaboration with the school has helped us in many situations and has given us access to knowledge that we haven't had beforehand. Working with others often enables you to see new perspectives or navigate challenging projects more effectively (Indeed Editorial Team 2024). Since we work separately with the school and take care of our own affairs, we do not have to deal with the school in particular, but it makes the work much easier. In challenging situations where we don't know everything about the child, the information shared by the school plays an important role in solving the situation. I also find it personally more difficult if we share the same school but do not cooperate at all.

## **7.2. Week 2 The challenges in after school club**

Monday

We had our morning meeting at 12:00 and planned the rest of the week's schedule. I also informed our team that we would be working for the rest of the week without one worker. This week's theme was Valentine's Day. Each week, we have a pre-planned theme, which I design in monthly plans together with the employees.

These monthly plans are documents with months and weeks listed, where each week is planned with a theme, games, and crafts that fit the theme. Monthly plans help ensure a balanced mix of activities, including educational, creative, and recreational components. They allow for gradual skill development over time rather than one-off activities.

Planning in advance helps with budgeting for materials, staff, and space. It ensures clubs have the necessary supplies and avoid last-minute issues. Clubs often follow monthly themes (e.g., STEM month, art month, cultural celebrations) to keep things fresh and engaging. Seasonal events (e.g., holiday crafts, sports tournaments) fit better within a structured plan. Monthly plans help the staff to prepare lessons, activities, and any required training. Ensures smooth transitions between different themes or activity blocks. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), children develop higher cognitive functions through guided participation and collaboration with peers and adults. Monthly planning in after-school clubs ensures that

activities are structured in a way that fosters peer learning and scaffolding, allowing children to progressively acquire new skills with the help of educators.

So, we decided to check what we could do to celebrate Valentine's Day. However, the craft we originally planned to do was one that we couldn't do without the missing worker, so we designed a simple heart card that all the children could easily participate in.

I went through the messages on the work phone, which were from the children's parents, and there weren't many of them. After this, we decided with the employees that we would go outside first and only come in for a snack after the outdoor activities, as the children's school day ends at 12:30 this week. After the snack, we went back outside to play for the rest of the time.

#### Tuesday and Wednesday

On Tuesday and Wednesday, we discussed bullying in our morning meeting. Our office had been contacted about a bullying situation, but the person who made the report did not want to go through the details with the employees and preferred to discuss the matter with the director of the after-school club. Bullying is repeated aggressive behaviour that involves an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. It can be physical, verbal, social, or online (cyberbullying) and is intended to harm, intimidate, or control another person. There are four main types of bullying, Physical Bullying is hitting, pushing, kicking, or damaging someone's belongings. Verbal Bullying is name-calling, insults, threats, or making hurtful jokes. Social/Relational Bullying is spreading rumours, exclusion, or manipulating relationships. Cyberbullying is using social media, messages, or online platforms to harass, embarrass, or threaten someone. (Salmivalli C., Kärnä A. & Poskiparta E. 2010)

Although we are trying to prevent bullying by having conversations with the children about bullying, what is it and we try to encourage anyone who's going to tell the instructors. I believe that it is constantly increasing among students, because younger students learn behaviours from older students that are not always right for students in first and second grades. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). In the context of bullying, children may imitate aggressive behaviours they see in their environment, such as at home, in media, or from peers. If bullying behaviour is rewarded whether through increased social status or peer approval it is likely to continue (Bandura, 1977).

I took down the phone number and name of the person in question and informed my supervisor. My supervisor later contacted me and told me that they had arranged a meeting with the person who made the report. My supervisor said they would let me know more about the situation when they had more information. We have never had a situation where a parent has contacted us about bullying but refused to share more detailed information with the employees. We had no choice but to wait for more details.

This situation made the other employees and me wonder why we weren't informed about the bullying. Together, we tried to think about whether we might have missed any bullying incidents among the children, or if it had something to do with the previous week's incident that had happened in school and that we had been involved with.

#### Thursday

On Thursday, when I arrived at work at 12:00, my work phone had received several notifications about the children's absences and special pick-up times. Many families start their ski holidays early, so some children are away or leave earlier, which is common before the holidays. A ski holiday is a week's break for the children when there is no school and, therefore, no after-school club.

We also had a morning meeting where I wanted to check in with the employees about their well-being and plans for the upcoming holiday. All employees were looking forward to the holiday, and many of them planned to rest and recharge.

Our newest employees, and those who study alongside work, mentioned that this job is mentally and physically draining, and they wouldn't have believed it at first when they started working. Working in an after-school club can be rewarding but also comes with several demanding aspects. These challenges include behaviour management, emotional demands, workload, lack of resources, and maintaining engagement.

Managing children's behaviour is one of the most demanding aspects of after-school programs. Staff often face aggressive behaviour, hyperactivity, and attention difficulties, which require effective intervention strategies. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, a child's behaviour is influenced by various environmental factors, such as family, school, and peer interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When children experience challenges in their home or school environments, their behaviour in after-school programs may be affected.

Balancing multiple responsibilities such as supervising activities, ensuring safety, and handling conflicts makes after-school club work highly demanding. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), individuals need to feel competent and in control to stay motivated in their work. However, the fast-paced nature of after-school programs, combined with limited planning time, can undermine staff's sense of control, leading to frustration and reduced job satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Keeping children motivated and engaged after a long school day is challenging. However, if activities are not age-appropriate, interactive, and stimulating, children may become disengaged, making supervision more difficult. Staff must continuously adapt activities to meet the needs of diverse age groups while ensuring that learning remains enjoyable.

When you arrive at the after-school club, you don't necessarily think that the job includes a lot of things, because the requirements of the job are not high, and you don't think about the fact that because of the short working day, there is also a limited time for work.

We took the children outside before the snack. After the snack, we went to the school's gym to play with the children. That is one of the favorite things for the children to do. At the end of the afternoon, another employee and I prepared the Valentine's Day cards for the next day. We pre-cut heart-shaped cards for the children for the next day.

## Friday

I arrived at work at 11:30 today because I knew Friday would be hectic as it was the last day before the holiday. I checked my work phone and replied to the messages, wishing the parents of the children a good holiday.

Today, my supervisor was coming to a meeting at our office, and afterward, they would discuss the bullying situation with us in more detail. Naturally, this was on my mind, as well as on the minds of the other employees, throughout the day. I was really bothered by the fact that none of the employees were allowed to participate in the meeting, because the person who reported the bullying had specifically requested that only my supervisor and the company's coordinator be present.

We picked up the children at 12:30 and immediately took them outside before the snack. While outside, we discussed the possible bullying situation even further. We discussed the possibility that a former employee might have complained about the work atmosphere. However, we concluded that our work community has been functioning well, even though not everyone is best friends with each other.

After the outdoor activities, we came inside for a snack. Afterward, some children stayed behind to make heart cards, while others went to play in the school's gym. We were divided into two groups, with three adults supervising the crafts and the school corridor, and three adults supervising the children in the gym. The children enjoyed making the cards and began collecting names from other children in the after-school club for their cards. It almost turned into a competition. This activity also encouraged children who weren't friends to communicate with each other in a positive way. Crafts serve as a common ground for children who may have different backgrounds, personalities, or interests. Unlike free play, which can be intimidating for shy children, crafting provides a structured activity that naturally encourages interaction (Maslow, 1943).

Later in the afternoon, my supervisor came to discuss the meeting with me. The meeting had gone well, but the person who made the report still didn't want to share specific details. They were more interested in discussing what could be done in the after-school club regarding bullying. In the meeting, the person who reported the bullying expressed concern that the situation could worsen if the employees knew who had been bullied, which is why they didn't want the staff to be present. They discussed possible options for moving forward. My supervisor recommended contacting the school about the bullying, as it was also occurring at school. Then, the school and after-school club could arrange a meeting where the bully's

parents and the bullied child's parents could work together to address the issue. We've had a meeting like this in the past with the school, which was effective.

At the end of the conversation, I shared my concerns with my supervisor, as this incident worried me and the other employees. We were seriously wondering if we had done something wrong. However, my supervisor immediately reassured us, saying we had done well and encouraged us to continue as we have been.

## **Summary**

This week focused on Valentine's Day activities, staff well-being, and a bullying concern. We adjusted our planned craft due to a missing staff member, opting for a simple heart card that all children could participate in. Monthly planning ensures structured activities, supports skill development, and prevents last-minute issues.

A bullying concern was reported, but the person did not want to share details with employees, leaving staff uncertain. We discussed the different types of bullying and how Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) explains that children may imitate aggressive behaviours they observe. Staff reflected on how older students might influence younger ones. At the end of the week, our supervisor provided an update on the bullying case. The reporter remained vague but wanted preventive measures. Our supervisor suggested working with the school and parents to address the issue. Staff initially felt uncertain, but we were reassured that we had handled the situation well. Despite some challenges, we maintained a positive and engaging environment for the children, ensuring a smooth transition into the holiday break.

With the upcoming ski holiday, we checked in on staff well-being. Some employees found the job more mentally and physically demanding than expected, with challenges like behaviour management and keeping children engaged. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) highlights how a child's environment affects their behaviour, which can impact their interactions at the after-school club.

Children enjoyed a mix of indoor and outdoor activities, including gym games and Valentine's crafts. The crafting activity encouraged social interaction, helping children engage with peers outside their usual friend groups (Maslow, 1943).

### **7.3. Week 3 Adapting to unexpected situations**

#### **Monday**

We started the day with a morning meeting where we went through the week's plan. Our apprenticeship students had a demonstration week, during which they planned to hold a craft session for the children on Wednesday and play with them in the gymnasium on Friday. As the student's supervisor, I monitored her work and ensured she met all the necessary goals.

During demonstration days, I observed her guidance skills but did not interfere. I have done this before and afterwards there is a meeting with their teacher where we all three together evaluate their work. Student demonstration week is an essential educational experience, rooted in the principles of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), constructivist theory (Piaget, 1972; Bruner, 1966), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). It enables students to showcase their skills, reflect on their practice, and build confidence in their professional abilities. Supervisors play a crucial role in guiding the students through this process, offering both observational feedback and support to facilitate their growth.

At 12:30, we picked up the children. I immediately noticed that one child with special needs seemed fearful and very sad. Soon after, I received a call from his mother, who told me that the child had been followed by older students to the metro station, where they had nearly pushed him under a subway train. This had occurred the previous week when he was leaving the after-school club. The mother had not yet informed the school, so I offered to handle it myself. Since the incident happened on the way home from our club, I was in a position to intervene. After-school clubs are typically bound by certain limits of authority and responsibility, which are defined by the hours of operation and the spaces under their care. This limitation can be understood through various theoretical frameworks and legal principles. According to Goffman (1959), individuals in specific roles, such as educators or after-school staff, act within certain boundaries defined by society. These roles are not limitless; for after-school clubs, their role is primarily confined to the designated after-school hours and areas where they are responsible for child supervision.

Immediately after the call, I sent an email to the school's vice principal. Later, the vice principal called our work phone, and we agreed to meet in his office that same day. I took the child with me, and he explained what had happened. Together, we identified the older students involved, and the vice principal assured us that he would address the situation the next day and update me once it was resolved. The rest of the day went peacefully outside with the children.

Tuesday

I arrived at the office at 12:00 and checked messages and emails. One email was from a child's parents, explaining their child's prolonged absence due to a newly diagnosed long-term illness. They asked if the after-school club could provide support. I responded that we could offer some physical assistance and provide mental support as well as we could. After-school clubs, as extensions of the school environment, can adhere to inclusive education principles (UNESCO, 1994), ensuring that children with long-term illnesses are integrated into all activities to the best of their ability. This includes adjusting physical activities, ensuring access to appropriate medical support, and creating a culture of acceptance. Inclusive

education can help children with long-term illnesses build confidence and participate fully in the after-school experience.

During the morning meeting, I shared the email with the staff, and we adjusted the weekly plan. We decided that each day, one staff member would check on the child. However, this posed a challenge, as we already had a large group and could not assign one adult solely to one child. After-school clubs often have a large number of children with diverse needs, which requires adults to manage groups efficiently. Staffing issues, such as employee absenteeism or limited numbers of employees, make it challenging to provide dedicated one-on-one supervision, especially for a significant portion of the children (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Moreover, in situations where a staff member is dedicated to one child, other children may not receive the necessary supervision and support. This could compromise their safety and the smooth operation of the club. We decided that one adult would monitor the child while still supervising the others. The child's parents agreed that he would return to the club the next afternoon. We also assigned specific staff to monitor him on Wednesday, with me as additional support.

In the afternoon, the vice principal called me to his office to update me on the metro station incident. After speaking with both the bullied child and the older students involved, he determined that while no one had attempted to push the child under the subway, he had been physically grabbed at the station after provoking the older students with insults. Regardless, this did not justify their actions. Additionally, he had been followed home, where he was pushed to the ground.

The parents of the older students were informed, but communication was difficult due to language barriers, requiring an interpreter. The bullied child's mother also informed the vice principal that she intended to file a police report, which was her right. After thanking the vice principal for his help, I considered our after-school club's role in the matter resolved.

#### Wednesday and Thursday

In the morning meeting, we reviewed the day's schedule. I stayed inside with our student and a group of children for a craft session. One staff member remained in the hallway with the work phone and folder, while three others supervised children in the school hall. One of them also ensured that children needing taxis got into their rides safely.

At 12:30, we picked up the children and spent an hour outside so they could release some energy before going indoors. Afterward, we lined them up and took them inside for a snack. After snack time, the children did their homework. Those uninterested in crafts went to the school hall with three staff members, while the rest stayed with me and the student for the craft session.

The craft project involved making and colouring flags from different countries. The student had prepared books, an iPad for reference, and a variety of colouring materials. However, she struggled initially with giving instructions, as many children did not listen and shouted

questions simultaneously. I usually advise staff to divide craft activities into smaller groups to maintain order and provide assistance more effectively. Smaller groups allow for better management of behaviour and more individualized attention. In a larger group, children may struggle to receive guidance or may get lost in the crowd. Teachers or facilitators can more effectively guide each child's creative process, address difficulties they may face, and offer personalized encouragement. This kind of attention fosters a sense of confidence and competence in children (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

It was difficult for me not to intervene and take control of the situation. Having maintained order for so long, I found it challenging to watch without stepping in. However, despite the initial chaos, the session went well, and the children enjoyed making multiple flags.

The following day, we continued the flag project, adding a large flag to the display on our wall.

## Friday

Before the workday started, I received calls from two employees informing me that they would not be coming in. After thanking them for notifying me, I contacted another staff member and asked if they could come in early to help prepare. They agreed, and I arrived at work at 11:30.

In the morning meeting, I informed the team that we would be short-staffed with three employees absent. We adjusted the weekly plan accordingly: I would be in the gym with the student while also managing the children taking taxis. One staff member would handle snack time alone, while the remaining two supervised the other children and managed the work phone and folder. When employees are absent, we typically do not receive replacements and must manage with the available staff.

That day, the student led international games for the children, while I observed from the gymnasium's edge without assisting. The first game went smoothly, but the second was more challenging. It required the children to follow multi-step instructions, including commands in another language. Many children grew impatient, got confused, or left the game midway. In the end, the student decided to switch to a familiar game the children requested.

At the end of the afternoon, I gathered the employees to plan for the following week.

Although we create weekly schedules in advance, we adjust them as needed, just as we had done this week.

I also monitored the long-term sick child throughout the day and reminded staff to check on them regularly. Even though they are quite independent, children sometimes forget to monitor their own well-being while playing. Additionally, their parents appreciate daily updates on how they are doing at the club. I instructed staff to ask them about well-being periodically and to share observations with their parents when they pick them up.

## Summary

This week, the after-school club had a demonstration week, with a student leading a craft session and gym activities. I supervised the student, monitoring her progress and offering feedback, while focusing on experiential learning and self-efficacy. During the week, we handled a serious incident involving a child with special needs who was followed by older students. After-school clubs typically have limited authority outside the hours of operation, but we intervened to resolve the situation for now. In the future we have to find a solution because everybody has the right to feel safe on the way to and from school.

Additionally, we received a request to support a child with a long-term illness. After-school clubs can adapt to meet the needs of such children through inclusive education principles, ensuring they participate in activities to the best of their ability. However, the challenge of assigning one adult to a single child in a large group led to a solution of monitoring the child while ensuring others were also supervised.

On Wednesday, the student led a craft session with children, making flags from various countries. Smaller groups proved helpful for maintaining order and offering individualized support during craft activities. On Friday, the student led international games, though some difficulties arose with following instructions. The rules were not in level with the children's development and some of them had difficulties to follow them. Despite being short-staffed, we managed the day's activities and made adjustments where needed.

Throughout the week, I also monitored the well-being of a child with long-term illness, ensuring staff checked on them regularly. The staff communicated updates to the child's parents and ensured the child's well-being while participating in the after-school club activities.

### 7.4. Week 4 Daily Routines and Responsibilities

#### Monday and Tuesday

I arrived at work at 11:30 and checked my work phone and email. I had received an email regarding a child who previously had a full-time contract, but whose parents had recently switched to a part-time contract. Despite this change, they had still received a bill for full-time care and wanted to understand why. I responded to the parents via email, informing them that I would forward their concern to my supervisor, who would resolve the issue.

Our morning meeting started at 12:00, during which we reviewed the weekly plan. The plan assigns specific responsibilities to each staff member daily. Some staff members prepare snacks, such as buttering sandwiches, cutting vegetables and fruits, and pouring juice into mugs. Others handle the work phone and folder, managing calls, messages, emails, and recording children's arrival and departure times. It is required that the time for childrens

arrival and departure are listed. (Orientation folder) The remaining staff supervise the children and assist those handling assigned responsibilities.

After the meeting, we picked up the first group of children at 12:30. Before moving inside, we ensured they formed a straight and quiet queue. Once they were settled, we guided them inside for a snack. Upon entering, the children removed their outerwear with assistance from staff if needed and washed their hands before eating. Snack time for the first group started at approximately 12:50 and ended around 13:15. Afterward, we assisted them with their homework. Once around 10 children had finished, we took them outside via the toilets. Today, I was responsible for managing the work phone and folder. At 13:30, I went to pick up the second group of children while two adults supervised the first group outside, and another staff member remained in the school corridor to assist with toilet visits and dressing. Two adults stayed inside to manage the second group's snack time, while one continued helping with homework. At 13:45, I brought the second group inside for their snack before heading outside to support the two staff members supervising the children.

During outdoor playtime, children were free to engage in their own games, and adults sometimes joined in. By 14:45, all children and staff had to be outside, as part-time children left at 15:00. One staff member was responsible for ensuring the three children who took taxis left on time, escorting them to the school's parking lot. Since I was managing the work folder, I ensured all part-time children left by 15:00 or were picked up, marking their departures accordingly.

At around 15:10, we brought the remaining full-time children inside to play. Indoors, they could play with toys, draw, or play board games. Any leftover food from snack time was offered as an extra snack for the full-time children. Between 15:00 and 17:00, full-time children remained inside, leaving either independently or when picked up. During this period, staff members could take short 10-minute breaks. At 16:00, all the staff except for me and one other colleague left. Since we often had nearly 20 children left, two staff members were required to manage them. At 16:30, I helped a child put on their outerwear, and at 16:40, I escorted them to their taxi in the school parking lot. By 17:00, the last children had gone home, and we closed the after-school club, concluding the workday.

### Wednesday

Wednesday followed a similar schedule to Monday and Tuesday, with one difference: children arrived in three separate groups instead of two. Some children had language lessons after school and therefore joined the after-school club later.

The first group was picked up at 12:30 and immediately taken outside to play. Outside children can freely play their own games. I believe it is good for them to have time to play their own games. The importance of autonomy in children's development is emphasized in Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which suggests that children are more

motivated when they feel in control of their activities. The opportunities for children to choose their own outdoor games or decide on their preferred activities foster a sense of autonomy, which enhances their intrinsic motivation and social confidence. At around 13:10, we gathered them in a queue and moved inside for a snack. After eating, we assisted with homework. It is decided by the parents who have to do homework in the afterschool club. Some parents do not need help as the children can do the homework by themselves at home. We keep the homework area quiet and if needed we can offer help with some tasks. Today, I did not have a major responsibility, so another staff member managed the work phone and folder.

At 13:30, two adults picked up the second group of children, who remained outside until 14:00 before coming inside for a snack. At 14:15, we gained access to the school gymnasium. The third group of children, who had been in language class, arrived at 14:20 and went straight for their snack. Two staff members supervised children in the gym, while the remaining staff stayed with children who either preferred not to participate or were still doing their homework in the classroom.

In the gym, we played various group games. The children were allowed to request games, and we tried to accommodate all requests before the 15:00 departures. At 14:30, I escorted the children leaving at 15:00 to the parking lot before returning to the gym. After the part-time children left, full-time children were given free playtime in the gym.

#### Thursday

On Thursdays, nearly all children in the school had lessons until 13:30 due to religious studies taking place from 12:30 onward. A small group of children consisting of around 10 students have their Islamic studies in the morning so they could arrive earlier. The children are used to this schedule. We took them outside immediately, then brought them inside at 13:10 for a snack.

After the snack, we assisted with homework before picking up the second group at 13:30. Since this group was larger, three staff members supervised outside while the remaining three stayed inside. The second group played outside until 14:00 before coming inside for a snack. At 14:15, we again had access to the gym. Today, I supervised in the gym alongside another staff member, while the others remained in the classroom.

A difficult situation arose during the early departures when multiple children wore the wrong shoes or outdoor pants. Three children had identical black winter boots, none of which belonged to them. Additionally, one child's outdoor pants were missing. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that most children's clothing was not labeled. This happens in spite of us constantly reminding the parents of how important it is to nametag their belongings. To resolve the shoe issue, we decided to check all identical shoes the following day to ensure each child had the correct pair. Regarding the missing outdoor pants, we asked if any children had the same pair. It turned out one child did, but they had already gone home. The staff

member responsible for the work phone messaged the child's parents to ask them to check. Meanwhile, the child who had lost their pants was being picked up, so we called their parents and asked them to bring a spare pair. The child refused to leave without outdoor pants, so they waited until their parents arrived.

## Friday

I arrived at 12:00 and attended the morning meeting, where we planned the weekly schedule for the following week. During this process, I checked for staff absences due to school or other commitments. Staff members were given the opportunity to express their preferences regarding responsibilities. Some preferred child supervision, while others were willing to handle snack preparation or the work phone. I accommodated these preferences while also supporting those interested in learning new tasks. If someone was unfamiliar with a role, we provided training by pairing them with an experienced colleague and maintaining a written instruction folder for reference.

The missing outdoor pants were located with another child, whose parents had apologized for the mistake. The child received their pants back during after-school club hours.

Following the morning meeting, we picked up the first group at 12:30 and stayed outside to play. At 13:20, we formed a queue and moved inside for a snack. Since no homework was assigned on Fridays, we did not need to schedule homework assistance.

At 13:30, I picked up the second group, and after their snack, we went to the gym at 14:00. At 15:00, the part-time children left, and full-time children were given free playtime in the gym. Some children who typically avoided the gym due to noise levels chose to join after 15:00, when the space was quieter.

## Summary

During Week 4, the after-school club followed a structured routine with some variations across the days. Each morning started with checking messages and emails, addressing parental concerns, and holding a morning meeting to review responsibilities. Tasks included preparing snacks, managing the work phone and attendance folder, and supervising children during activities.

Throughout the week, children were picked up in groups, queued up quietly before moving indoors, and followed a routine of snack time, homework help, and outdoor or gym activities. Staff members ensured smooth transitions and monitored children's well-being, especially those requiring extra support.

On Wednesday, an additional group of children joined later due to language classes, and gym time was integrated into the schedule. Thursday presented a challenge when multiple children wore the wrong outdoor clothing, requiring staff to communicate with parents to

resolve the mix-up. By Friday, the missing items had been returned, and the weekly plan for the upcoming week was created, taking staff preferences into account for assigned tasks. This week's theme was the week's routine and responsibilities. I try to keep the same routine with the kids every week. Piaget (1972) suggests that children develop cognitive abilities by interacting actively with their environment. The hands-on activities in the after-school program, such as assisting with homework and engaging in group play, provide opportunities for children to refine their cognitive skills and develop their problem-solving abilities. From the first day when the season starts, we teach the children the same routine so that they learn it by heart. In the after-school club, there are often changes and situations that can cause the routine to change, but I still try to keep the daily routine as similar as I can. There can be several situations for changing the routine, such as weather, staff shortages, availability of indoor spaces, challenging situations with children and unusual children's schedules. In the afternoon club, there is only limited time with the children from 12.30 to 17.00 and most of the children are part-time. In this short time, we try our best to fit in a snack, outdoor activities, playing indoors and homework. Sugai and Simonsen (2012) advocate for the implementation of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) to promote desirable behaviors in educational settings. This proactive approach is reflected in the after-school program, where the structure and consistency of routines (e.g., quiet transitions, conflict resolution, and positive reinforcement) help children understand expectations and exhibit appropriate behavior. That's why scheduling everything is important and it's important to follow each day's schedule closely. Weekly plans also help us stay on schedule and employees know what they are doing and when.

Overall, the week involved structured supervision, problem-solving, and coordination among staff to ensure a safe and engaging environment for the children.

## **7.5. Week 5 Supporting Children with Special Needs in After-School Programs**

Monday

I arrived at work at the usual time, and during the morning meeting, we went through this week's plan. We also reviewed how the previous week had gone, as one staff member had been absent. When an employee is away, we do not get a substitute, as there are no replacements available. If more than one employee is absent and the group of children is large, my supervisor can step in to help.

When we are short-staffed, we adjust the day's program to minimize transition situations and ensure that there are enough adults to supervise. We also prioritize staff placement in areas with more children, such as outdoor activities, where children play freely over a larger space. Additionally, we make sure that children who need extra support always have additional supervision, whether indoors or outdoors. This approach reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, where scaffolding is provided in environments requiring more support.

In this case, additional adult presence in certain areas represents a form of scaffolding to aid children in transition or group activities.

At 12:30 p.m., we went to pick up the first group of children from the schoolyard. The children arrive independently and line up to have their attendance marked in our records. We do not need to pick them up from inside the school unless a teacher requests assistance due to behavioural challenges.

Today, I was responsible for attendance and noticed that one child who requires additional support was missing. Since there had been no prior notice of absence, I decided to investigate. I instructed my colleagues to take the other children inside for a snack while I went to find the missing child.

Inside the school, I immediately heard loud crying and shouting from upstairs. I followed the sound and found the child with their teacher. I greeted the teacher and offered to take over since their workday had ended. Once alone, I calmly encouraged the child to share what had happened. The child was reluctant to talk but eventually expressed frustration about their phone not being returned after the teacher had put the phone away when the student had been behaving disturbingly with their phone.

I asked why the phone had been withheld and where it was. The child admitted to throwing trash in the classroom and needed to clean it up before getting their phone back. I suggested that we clean up together so they could retrieve their phone. The child hesitantly agreed, and after tidying up, I returned their phone. This approach is consistent with Skinner's (1953) Behaviourist Theory, which emphasizes the use of reinforcement in behaviour management. In this case, by allowing the child to retrieve the phone after demonstrating the desired behaviour (cleaning the mess), I reinforced positive actions and encouraged cooperation. Shortly after, a colleague called to check if I needed assistance, but I assured them the situation was under control. I then contacted the child's parents to inform them of the incident, and we agreed that it would be best for the child to go home to calm down. I escorted the child to the school entrance before rejoining the group. The rest of the day was spent playing outdoors and inside.

Tuesday

When I arrived at work, I checked a message from an occupational therapist requesting an appointment for a child who requires additional support. I confirmed that 1:30 p.m. the next day would be suitable, as it allowed the child time to finish their snack before transitioning to gym activities. This was important because transition situations can be challenging for the child, and leaving things unfinished may cause emotional distress. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, where it is understood that children can accomplish tasks with the appropriate support, such as managing transitions, which is crucial for children with special needs.

After the morning meeting, we picked up the first group for a snack. While there, the school's special education teacher approached me for assistance. I informed my colleagues that I would return shortly and went with the teacher.

In the lobby, I found the school principal and an assistant with one of our children who requires extra support. The special education teacher explained that they had even needed the principal's help due to the child's behaviour. The teacher asked if the child was attending the after-school club that day, and I confirmed. The teacher then asked if I could manage the child, and I assured them I could.

Once alone with the child, I gently asked if they wanted a snack, to which they nodded. I guided them to hang up their coats and wash their hands, which they did without issue. This reflects Piaget's (1972) Constructivist Theory, where learning occurs through active participation and interaction with the environment. In this case, the child was able to complete the steps of getting ready for snack time, which helped them build independence in the process. The rest of the day was spent playing outside, and later in the afternoon, we played board games indoors.

#### Wednesday

Today, I arrived earlier to place the snack order, which is my responsibility as the designated instructor. I sent a text message with our snack needs for the remainder of the week. Orders are placed on Wednesdays and Fridays.

We started the afternoon with outdoor play, followed by a gym session. When I joined the group outside, a colleague immediately informed me about a concerning incident. A child had repeatedly attempted to harm themselves by deliberately trying to fall forward headfirst. The instructor had intervened, and we monitored the child closely to prevent further attempts. Fortunately, the behaviour did not continue. This aligns with the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Theory, which emphasizes the importance of managing emotions and teaching children how to respond appropriately to difficult feelings (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Later, we moved to the gym, where I played with the children and reminded them about safe play. I emphasized that while excitement is natural, they must be mindful of others—especially in games involving chasing and tagging—to prevent injuries. This conversation was necessary because we had frequent incidents of accidental rough play. This conversation had to be had with all the children, reflecting the concept of social-emotional learning (SEL), which involves teaching children how to engage positively with others and manage conflicts in a non-aggressive way (Zins et al., 2004).

When the parent of the child involved in the earlier incident arrived, I informed them of the situation. They assured me they would discuss it with their child at home.

## Thursday and Friday

On both days, I arrived at my usual time. On Friday, we planned the schedule for the following week during the morning meeting and discussed any anticipated staff absences. Despite the sunny weather, it was still relatively cool, which led to the usual challenge of convincing children to dress warmly. Many children believe it is warm enough to forgo jackets, hats, gloves, or outdoor pants. Since this is not usually addressed during school hours, enforcing proper attire at the after-school club can be difficult. As expected, we had to remind several children to wear their coats while outside. This relates to Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, where children's learning and development are shaped by the environment and the adults around them. By guiding children on proper attire, we are also modelling behaviour that supports their development in the social and environmental context.

A conflict arose between two children over a missing toy. One child, who requires additional support, struggled to verbally express their perspective, making it difficult to resolve the misunderstanding. The situation de-escalated when the missing toy was found. To prevent similar issues, we have a policy against bringing personal toys to the club.

On Friday, after placing the snack order, I took a group to the gym. However, we encountered a disruption from a group of students waiting for football practice. They were shouting inappropriate remarks and slamming doors. Despite my repeated requests for them to stop, the behaviour continued. To avoid further disturbance, we decided to leave the gym early. I plan to report the incident to the school next week so that the complaint can be forwarded to their coaches for appropriate action.

## Summary

I had a fulfilling yet challenging week as an instructor in the after-school program. My main responsibilities involved ensuring the children's safety, maintaining attendance records, and managing the day-to-day activities. This week, we had to adjust our plans due to staff shortages, as we don't have substitutes available. In those situations, we make sure to minimize transitions and ensure enough staff is present, especially in areas where there are more children or where special support is needed. The children with special needs suffer the most from shortage of staff. They do not get the extra assistance they need.

Throughout the week, I encountered several situations that required my attention. For instance, I had to find a child who was missing and later discovered that the child was upset due to a phone being put aside by the teacher. After helping the child calm down, I worked with them to clean up a mess they had caused, and eventually, I returned the phone. Another challenging situation was when a child attempted to harm themselves. I monitored the situation closely, and thankfully, it didn't escalate. Sometimes even a too loud environment can trigger a child who already has some emotional issues. Although we try to maintain a

calm and structured environment for all children, our too large groups sometimes cause strong emotional outbursts, especially in special needs children.

A significant part of my role was also collaborating with the school staff, such as the special education teacher and therapists, to ensure that the children, especially those needing special support, were receiving the right care. I had several interactions with parents as well, informing them about their children's well-being and the challenges we faced during the day. It is very important to have good communication and change of information with the parents of special needs children as the children themselves are not always verbally skilled and able to express themselves.

Overall, it was a week filled with problem-solving, communication, and making sure the children felt supported. Whether it was helping a child with special needs manage their emotions or guiding them through conflict resolution with others, my goal was always to create a safe and nurturing environment for everyone.

## **7.6. Week 6 Gathering information and drawing conclusions**

Monday

I arrived at my usual time for work. During the morning meeting, we reviewed the week's plan. Due to the weather conditions, we made an exception and decided to stay indoors with the children all afternoon.

We planned to watch a child-appropriate movie after snack and homework. For those who did not want to watch, I provided an alternative activity with drawing and play. The movie was shown in the school's dining hall using an overhead projector connected to a laptop and speaker, which one of the employees brought. At the end of the meeting, I collected the necessary equipment from the school secretary, including the overhead projector, remote control, and connection cable. Since I am the responsible tutor of the group, I usually handle communications with the school and ensure that borrowed equipment is returned the next day.

After the meeting, I checked messages and emails on my work phone, as my assigned responsibility for the day was managing the child list folder and the phone. Outside, two counselors informed me that a child with special needs had claimed to be sick, reporting symptoms of diarrhea and vomiting multiple times during the school day, and wanted to go home. I assessed the situation and, knowing the child's tendency to report symptoms in hopes of leaving early, I called the parents. They confirmed that the child had pretended to be sick at home before school but had not shown actual symptoms. Since the child's family had recently returned from a long vacation, adjusting to the routine had been challenging. We agreed that the child would stay, and I would monitor the situation, calling home if genuine illness arose.

Later, I took attendance and asked the children to line up quietly. They were pleased to hear that we would stay inside for movie day. After snack and homework, I supervised drawing with a few children while the rest watched the movie. During the afternoon, my supervisor called to inform me that they would collect sick leave certificates, timesheets, and absence forms the next day. I assured them that everything would be prepared.

## Tuesday

Upon arriving at work, my colleagues informed me that some cucumbers meant for snack time were spoiled. I advised them to serve what remained and assured them that I would arrange for more cucumbers the following day. I immediately contacted my supervisor, who confirmed they would bring additional cucumbers in the morning.

After the morning meeting, we went outside to pick up the children. A special education teacher approached me with a backpack belonging to a child who had run away, refusing to come to the after-school club. I assured the teacher that I would handle the situation and asked where the child had gone. After receiving directions, I handed my work phone and folder to another instructor and set off to find the child.

Understanding that I needed to approach the situation carefully yet firmly, I walked up to the child and asked why they had run away. At first, they refused to answer but later said their parents had told them they were not supposed to attend that day. I explained that, even if they were not staying, they should have checked with an instructor instead of running off. I made it clear that I would not chase them around the schoolyard; if they wanted to resolve the problem, they had to come to me. This approach aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy while maintaining structure. By giving the child the responsibility to return with me instead of forcing them, I supported their need for control while ensuring cooperation. Situations like these are complicated and there are no direct guidelines. You have to trust your instincts and collected experience.

The child agreed, and after calling the parents, they confirmed that the child was indeed not attending but had forgotten to inform us. Shortly after, the child's parents arrived, apologized for the confusion, and took them home. For some children it is really important that promises are kept and that the schooldays proceed as they expect. We then went inside for a snack, and after finishing, we spent the rest of the afternoon outdoors.

## Wednesday

I started work early to complete administrative tasks before the children arrived. I reviewed employee timesheets and ensured missing work hours were updated. I also checked attendance records to document children absent for more than ten consecutive days, as these must be reported to the municipality.

Later, a colleague showed me a message from a concerned parent regarding their child's recent drawings. The child had been drawing "monsters" with blood and missing body parts, and the parent was worried. They had spoken to the child at home about avoiding such drawings and asked if we could supervise and determine the reason behind them. Before responding, I consulted the other counsellors. They confirmed that another child, a close friend of the concerned parent's child, also made similar drawings. I did not know how to handle this matter so I contacted my supervisor for advice just to be on the safe side. I have not had any similar experience before.

We decided to observe both children's drawings and inquire about their inspiration. I arranged a call with the concerned parent for later in the afternoon. During the conversation, I explained that the children had been drawing characters from a game they enjoyed, which they found amusing rather than frightening. The parents recognized the game but were unaware of its "horror version." They requested that we discourage their child from making such drawings, and we agreed to monitor the situation and update them if necessary. The parent also mentioned concerns about their child's language use at school and asked if similar issues had arisen in the after-school club. I assured them that, so far, there had been no issues but promised to notify them if any arose.

#### Thursday and Friday

I began by visiting the school's vice principal to confirm gym availability. We discovered that, due to a scheduling error, part of our reserved gym time had been given to a gymnastics class on Thursdays. However, our bookings for Wednesday and Friday remained unchanged. I informed my colleagues that Thursdays would now be spent entirely outdoors, except for children staying after 3:00 p.m., who could still use the gym. I also relayed this information to the children during snack time.

After snacking, I went outside with a group of children, but my colleagues soon called me back inside due to multiple issues. First, a child was acting unusually withdrawn, refusing to eat and sitting alone. After speaking with them, I determined they were unwell and instructed staff to call the parents to arrange for them to go home.

The second issue involved a group of children who had behaved disruptively during snack time. They had ignored instructors' requests to calm down and had also made inappropriate, racist remarks. My colleagues asked me to address the situation.

Recognizing the children's differing temperaments, I divided them into two groups for discussion. With the first two children, I firmly explained that their behaviour was unacceptable and asked if they understood the meaning of their comments. They admitted they did not but knew it was wrong. I explained why such remarks were offensive, instructed them to apologize immediately, and informed them that their parents would be contacted. Additionally, I told them they would be seated separately in the future.

The second pair of children were more sensitive and had followed the others' lead. One of them tearfully admitted they had copied their friends. I reassured them but emphasized the importance of making their own choices. They also apologized to the instructors, and I informed their parents.

Even if I understand that this kind of behavior is due to lack of understanding I make it very clear that we have a zero tolerance for this kind of behavior. The instructors appreciated my support, and the remainder of the day passed peacefully with outdoor play.

## **Summary**

This week, I wanted to reflect on my role as the responsible instructor in an after-school club. As an instructor, I believe that after-school clubs vary greatly in how they are managed, and each staff member contributes their unique approach to the environment. This is just the way I work, and I find it crucial to adapt to the needs of the children and staff.

I strive to be a supportive and reliable presence for my colleagues and the school staff. They know they can always approach me for help, particularly when they are unsure how to handle a situation. My tasks include coordinating with the school, communicating with parents, solving issues, fulfilling tasks assigned by my supervisor, and handling situations that may be challenging for other employees. My role requires a blend of leadership, understanding, and flexibility in managing the dynamics of the after-school club.

Throughout the week, I applied several psychological theories to guide my actions in various situations with the children. For example, when a child pretended to be sick on Monday, I drew from Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) to understand the possible anxiety the child was experiencing due to routine disruptions. Bowlby's theory suggests that children can experience separation anxiety when there are changes in their environment or schedule, which can sometimes manifest in behaviours like feigning illness to avoid school. I made sure to approach the situation with empathy, recognizing that the child's behaviour may have been driven by a deeper emotional need to regain control.

On Tuesday, when a child ran away from the after-school club, I applied principles from Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). I wanted to give the child the opportunity to make their own choice about returning to the group, allowing them to feel some autonomy while maintaining the necessary structure. According to Self-Determination Theory, children's motivation is influenced by their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By respecting the child's autonomy in this situation, I was able to maintain order while ensuring the child felt understood.

Later in the week, on Wednesday, I addressed a concern from a parent whose child had been drawing disturbing images. The child had drawn "monsters" with blood and missing body parts, which caused concern at home. After speaking with the other staff members, I recognized that the behaviour could be explained using Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). The two children involved were close friends, and Bandura's theory highlights how

children often imitate behaviours they observe in others, particularly in peer relationships. I was able to ease the parent's concerns by explaining that the drawings were inspired by a popular game that the children enjoyed, showing how children learn from one another and the media they consume.

When a group of children made inappropriate comments during snack time on Thursday, I reflected on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which emphasizes the importance of learning through experience and reflection. I used the opportunity to engage with the children, discussing their behaviour and helping them understand the consequences of their actions. By encouraging them to reflect on their choices and apologizing for their behaviour, I created an environment where they could learn from the experience, which is central to Kolb's approach to learning.

Throughout the week, I also kept in mind Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development (1936). Understanding where each child was in terms of their cognitive and moral development helped me tailor my interventions and activities to their specific needs. Piaget's theory emphasizes that children progress through stages of cognitive development, which influenced the way I approached each child's behaviour. Recognizing the developmental stage of each child allowed me to respond appropriately to their emotional and cognitive needs, supporting their growth and learning.

In conclusion, my role as the responsible instructor requires a balance of direct responsibility, support, and flexibility. I continuously apply various psychological theories Whether it's dealing with emotional challenges, promoting autonomy, or encouraging positive behaviour, these theories help me understand and respond to the children's needs effectively.

I also have to follow the action plan made by the municipality. The action plan states what are the requirements for an afterschool club to guarantee that it can function systematically and in the long term. The plan is based on Basic education act 24 .It guides my actions and ensures that the children receive a safe, supportive, structured, and positive environment to grow and learn. The action plan can be viewed as a framework for our work.

### **7.7. Week 7 "Fostering Trust and Support in After-School Care"**

Monday

Before coming to work, I got a message from a worker saying they were sick and wouldn't be coming in. I asked them to first find out how many days they would be on sick leave and then inform our supervisor. In the morning meeting, I let the team know that one employee would be absent from Monday to Wednesday. We adjusted the weekly plan so the absent colleague's responsibilities could be shared. It was agreed that I would monitor the well-being of a child with a long-term illness in their place and also handle the snack shift on Wednesday.

When we were picking up the children outside, I noticed there were fewer than usual. Sometimes, students are with another group for support lessons or arrive later, so I didn't

react immediately. With the first group, we went straight to snack and then helped with homework. Before picking up the next group, a colleague approached me about a student who was having difficulties with homework. This child had received a lot of tasks, but it would have been nearly impossible to complete them without direct help, as their vocabulary was very limited, and they couldn't write the words they knew.

The instructor was concerned and unsure of what to do. I advised them to leave a note in the child's book explaining why the homework hadn't been completed and to let the child know that the note would be passed to the teacher. Since we don't have the resources to give one-on-one academic help, the teacher needs to be aware of the situation. I don't believe giving children the answers are helpful in the long run. Hopefully, the teacher will understand the level of support this student needs and be able to provide more help at school.

Once the situation was resolved, I went to collect the next group from outside. The attendance list still showed many missing names. I spoke with a first-grade teacher who confirmed that several students were out sick – only 11 children had attended class that day. I thanked them for the update and brought the group inside for a snack. Unfortunately, even though we regularly remind parents to inform the after-school club of absences, many forget to do so. This situation brings to mind Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which stresses the importance of early relationships and reliable support systems (Bowlby, 1969). The rest of the day went peacefully, and we enjoyed some outdoor play.

#### Tuesday and Wednesday

On Tuesday, the day went as usual with outdoor and indoor play. At the end of the day, I bumped into a special class teacher along with another instructor. We decided to talk about the same child who had been struggling with homework. The teacher confirmed our observations and mentioned that the student receives support at school. They didn't expect us to offer the same level of help in the after-school club, understanding the time limits and high child-to-instructor ratio. The teacher also mentioned that the child receives solid support with homework at home, so it's okay if more is done there than during after-school hours.

On Wednesday, I arrived earlier and helped another colleague prepare snacks. It was refreshing to do the preparations again—spreading sandwiches, cutting fruit, and pouring juice all went smoothly. In our morning meeting, we agreed that another employee would handle snack distribution, while I would take care of the work phone and the child list folder for the day.

Outside, after recording arrival times, I noticed that a child who wasn't expected to attend was still waiting in line. This child, who has special needs, was crying because they had expected their parents to pick them up. Together with another instructor, we calmed the child and then brought everyone inside for a snack.

I called the parents once we were inside. The parent answered and sounded very emotional—they had just lost a beloved pet. They asked me not to tell the child, which I agreed to, and offered my condolences. I reassured them that we would take care of their child, and they could take their time. The parents said they would come at 2:00 p.m. This scenario relates to Erikson's psychosocial development stages, particularly the stage of Industry vs. Inferiority, where a child's sense of competence and emotional stability is deeply influenced by their social interactions (Erikson, 1950).

I informed the child that their parent was running a little late and would arrive at two. After snack, the child was picked up slightly before the agreed time. I went to speak with the parents, shared a personal experience about losing a pet, and offered them support. They appreciated the conversation and said they would explain the situation to their child at home.

#### Thursday

The day started with a short morning meeting at noon. One employee shared that they had received a job offer, meaning they might need to leave before the end of the term. While it's always sad to see someone leave early, I understand—after-school staff are laid off during the summer, so finding paid work for the break is common.

We picked up the first group, which was smaller than usual due to religion lessons, and went straight in for a snack. We decided to stay inside until the second group arrived, after which we'd go outdoors. At 1:30 p.m., another colleague and I collected the second group and directed children participating in gymnastics to their teacher. My colleague took them while I marked attendance.

After bringing the rest of the children in for snack, I guided the other instructors and had two stays behind to finish snack service and supervise the children outside. Typically, children play instructor-led games before free play begins. This time, I stayed inside to wait for the gymnasts, whose session ends at 2:30 p.m. I updated the attendance accordingly marking those staying and those going home.

The gymnasts who stayed joined the others for a snack and then went outside to play. Afterward, I joined the rest of the staff outside.

#### Friday

Today, I didn't have any specific responsibilities, so I focused solely on supervising the children. I appreciate days like this—when juggling responsibilities and supervision, it's easy for small things to go unnoticed. During our morning meeting, I also agreed to make a phone call about a child in a special class and speak with another parent about their child's drawings.

We took the first group outside before snack and stayed longer than usual because the weather was great, and the kids enjoyed it. We did the same with the second group. During this time, I made a phone call to a parent about their child's unusual behaviour. The parent had previously asked for updates because their child had recently started medication. I described some concerning behaviours: hitting themselves, complaining of head pain, and mood swings. The child often tried to get sent home by pretending to vomit or walking unsteadily. These behaviours escalated when receiving attention from instructors. The parent was surprised but shared those similar things had happened at school, including emotional outbursts and shouting at teachers. They explained that the medication dosage had been increased a couple of weeks ago, which might be a factor. We both agreed that these behaviours might be strategies to avoid school, or the club and that the child should only be picked up if genuinely unwell. The parent planned to speak with a doctor about adjusting the medication.

Later, I spoke with another parent whose child had previously been drawing monsters. I updated them that the child had started drawing more positive images and using brighter colours. The parent had also noticed the change and thanked me for the update before wishing me a good weekend. We spent the rest of the day playing indoors in the gym.

## **Summary**

This week offers a clear view of the kind of instructor I strive to be. While responsibility instructors receive training, I believe much of what makes us effective comes from our individual attitudes and experiences. For me, having been in a special support class as a child and working extensively with children across age groups has shaped the way I guide and support others.

When I was trained by a former responsibility instructor, I noticed that while their approach was valid, they had limited interaction with parents or school staff. I found that working closely with both families and schools helps earn trust and gain valuable insight, which in turn makes our job easier and more effective.

Building trusting relationships with children is just as essential. In a large group, this takes extra effort, but it pays off. Knowing the children well helps me understand their behaviour and make better decisions—such as whether a child is genuinely unwell or possibly trying to avoid activities. This aligns with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the importance of observing and interacting with others for social and cognitive development (Bandura, 1977).

That connection, both with the children and the adults in their lives, is what makes the work meaningful and successful.

## 7.8. Week 8 "Not Just After School: Creating Space for Growth and Belonging"

Monday and Tuesday

The work started promptly at 12:00 with a morning meeting, where plans for the week were discussed. This week, we had planned to do Easter crafts in preparation for the upcoming "easter holidays," but the plans had to be changed. Due to the weather, the branches that were intended for the refreshment had already bloomed and fallen off. Instead, the focus shifted to preparing for next week's Easter crafts. The goal was to ensure that all children could participate in the crafts, regardless of any special needs they may have.

We designed a simple Easter egg pattern. White, orange, and yellow Easter eggs would be pre-cut for the children to decorate as they liked. The idea was to allow children to decorate the eggs in any way they wanted, without the need for a strict Easter theme. This approach would also ensure that children who do not celebrate Easter could still engage in the craft.

In Finland most of our traditions and festivals have a religious origin. However, the people of Finland today do not lead a particularly religious life. The celebrations and festivals are more a tradition and a habit than a religious rite. Our aim in the after-school club is to include all children traditions of our country. It is easier to integrate into a new environment if you have some knowledge and understanding of the habits in the country. We also teach the children that the year is divided into weeks, months, seasons, different holidays and birthdays, that are repeated year after year. In this way we help the children to develop their sense of time. Due to the weather, the afternoon activity was changed to watching a movie with the kids. A series appropriate for children was selected, and the school dining hall was prepared. However, the first group of children still had to go outside for a while because the movie could only begin after the preschoolers finished their snacks in the school canteen.

While outside, one of the instructors came to ask for help with resolving a dispute between two children. One child had hit another with a large stick out of anger, then ran away when an instructor tried to intervene. Since I was familiar with the child's behavior, I took over the situation. I found the child, approached calmly to avoid them running away again, and asked them to explain what had happened. The child explained that they had been collecting sticks for a hut, and when they tried to move some sticks that another child had placed, the other child stopped them. This caused the child to become so angry that they struck the other child with the stick.

I calmed the child down and asked them to join the other children involved. Upon hearing both sides, I explained to them that both had acted incorrectly. I emphasized the importance of coming to an adult for help before situations escalate into conflict. Both children apologized, and almost immediately, they returned to playing.

Afterward, the children went inside for a snack. Following snack and homework time, the movie started. Just before some of the earlier-leaving children were about to go home, the

child who had struck another child came to ask if I had informed their parents. The child was visibly upset and began to cry. After calming them down, I learned that the child had argued with their parents the night before, which had led to a threat of canceling a birthday party. I reassured the child that sometimes emotions can lead to actions that one may regret, but that apologizing for those actions helps make things right. I suggested the child talk to their parents calmly about the birthday party.

It is not always clear where to draw the line between information that should be shared with the parents and things that do not need to be repeated outside the afterschool. Trust is something you build up with time and that is being earned. If a child has the feeling that everything that takes place in the afterschool club is reported home, they do not feel at ease. Naturally you have to share information in more serious cases.

The lack of self control is a big problem for children in first and second grade. During the years in Kindergarten the children have more freedom to move around versus after school starts when they are required to be in a classroom and focus on the lesson. This change in the environment together with a normal maturation process mostly shows a significant development in the children's self control, the good self control. Bad self control consists of strong impulses combined with weak control. (Ting Tao , Chunlei Fan & Wenbin Gao Scientific report, Art.nr. 7272, 2014) They also tested the development among girls versus boys and it showed that the girl's good self control develops faster than the boy's. Constant emotional outbursts are very energy consuming for everybody involved, and for the after school club it takes a lot of time that could be used for other purposes. In my role as supervisor I find myself taking care of bigger and smaller conflicts constantly. Self control is a skill that can be taught and in my opinion it should be prioritized higher.

While the children watched the movie, the instructors began preparing for the Easter crafts. I was assigned the task of checking craft supplies to ensure we had everything needed for the upcoming project. A list of the remaining supplies was sent to the supervisor for ordering. At the end of the day, I played a board game with the children after submitting the list.

Wednesday

The morning began as usual. One instructor requested to oversee the work phone and work folder for the day, which I agreed to. We decided that the first group of children would be outside until snack time, after which they would use the school's gym. While picking up the first group, I noticed that one child from the special class was missing, and there had been no notice of their absence. Since the child usually takes a taxi home, I went to find out where they were. After searching the school, I learned from the assistant that the child had had a difficult day, and their parents had been asked to pick them up. I informed the other instructors so that the absence could be marked. In Finland the schools and the after schools are two separate units, and they are not obligated to cooperate. It is the parent's

responsibility to inform both the school and the after school club in case a child is absent. For some parents this seems to be unclear.

Afterwards, during snack time, I noticed that the school teachers were frequently going in and out of the gym. When I asked, I was told that it was spring-cleaning day, and they were moving things around. I asked how long it would take to clean, as we had planned to use the gym. The teachers couldn't give a clear timeframe, so I updated the instructions, and we decided to change our plans. We would stay outside with the children after the second group had their snack instead of waiting for the gym to be free. The children were informed of the change, and we went outside. Despite good cooperation with the school, I've noticed that not all information is shared, even when it directly affects us.

#### Thursday

Today, I had the work phone and folder. After checking for any important messages from parents, I noted a larger than usual number of requests for exceptional departures. These were added to a note in the folder for reference, so the right children could be sent home at the correct times. With no emails to address, the plan was to take both groups of children outside, followed by snack time, homework, and gym.

While outside with the first group, a child approached me, upset because they felt the others weren't playing fairly. I advised the child to talk to their friends and suggest making the rules of the game fairer. The child nodded and went to speak with their peers. However, a short time later, the same child returned with another child, saying the others had become angry for talking to the instructor and didn't think the rules were unfair.

I reassured the child and asked them to bring their friends over so we could discuss the situation. It was clear that the other children didn't want to be involved, so I started by explaining that it's never wrong to ask an adult for help, and we encourage the children to do so when they have concerns. After discussing it, the children realized that there was a divide in how they viewed the fairness of the game. I suggested they create a new game with fair rules for everyone. The children apologized to the upset child and started planning a new game. I decided to monitor the situation, as one parent had previously asked me to watch for potential bullying in this group.

After taking the other group inside, we went out with the remaining children for the rest of the day.

#### Friday

The morning was spent planning for the upcoming week. Easter decorations were scheduled for the start of the week, as there would be no after-school club on Friday due to the Easter holiday. We decided that two instructors would supervise the crafting activity while others

would supervise children who opted out of crafts. Based on experience, we expected that many children would choose not to participate in the craft activities.

While waiting outside, I noticed that the same child who had been missing before was absent again. I asked classmates if they knew where the child was. One replied that the child was still in the classroom, as they had thrown things at other children and the teacher. I thanked the instructors for the information and went inside to offer support.

By the time I arrived, the situation seemed to be calming down. The teacher explained that the child had been struggling lately, particularly at the end of the school day, possibly because of medication wearing off. The teacher had initially asked if I'd noticed anything unusual, but before I could respond, they continued explaining that the child had made an upsetting comment about the teacher wanting to harm them. The child had refused to apologize.

I encouraged the child to apologize, reminding them that they've done so in the past and that taking responsibility for actions is important. After some hesitation, the child agreed, and we were able to move on to the next activity.

Later, I was informed about a situation involving three children. Two had claimed that a third child had exposed themselves during a video call. After investigating, I learned that the story had been exaggerated, and the child had not been naked. I spoke to the children about the seriousness of spreading false information, especially when it involves someone who may not be able to defend themselves. I informed the children that I would notify their parents about the situation. While they weren't happy, they agreed, and returned to playing.

After a snack and gym time, the school secretary informed me that the after-school club space would be used for election day and the fridge needed to be emptied. I passed the message along to the instructors. Later, the afternoon coordinator brought the child lists for the following week, which were added to the work folder for Monday. At the end of the day, I took time to clean the fridge and ensure that all lockers were locked.

Before the other instructors left, I spoke with one of them about the earlier situation. I reminded them that in any conflict, all children involved should be spoken to, and the facts should be gathered from everyone before conclusions are drawn. It's important to remain impartial and not rush to blame one child based on the words of another. The instructor acknowledged this and agreed to be more cautious in the future. The conversation ended positively, and the instructors headed home

## **Summary**

After-school clubs are often thought of as simply a place where children come to play and frolic after school. Through this week, and previous weeks, I've tried to give a more realistic picture of how our after-school club works. While play is an important part of what we do, structure and support are just as vital. There needs to be discipline, but also a strong sense of safety, encouragement, and guidance. I believe we are an important part of each child's

development, and we teach them things that, hopefully, they will carry with them far beyond their school years. According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, children in the school-age years (6-12) are navigating the "Industry vs. Inferiority" stage, where they are learning to develop competence and confidence (Erikson, 1950). This is exactly what I aim to foster in our after-school club. By guiding the children through difficult social interactions and helping them build new skills, I believe I am helping them develop confidence that will serve them later in life. When children face challenges, like resolving conflicts with peers, it's not just about resolving the issue at hand, it's about teaching them how to navigate similar situations in the future, which is key to their emotional development.

This week also highlighted how cooperation between the after-school club and the school doesn't always go as smoothly as it should, no matter how much effort is put in. This can be understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which suggests that a child's development is influenced by various layers of their environment, such as their family, school, and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). When these layers do not collaborate effectively, it can lead to misunderstandings or missed opportunities. While these challenges do arise, I believe that the more we work together, the more we can change misconceptions about the after-school club and show the value it adds to children's development. For some, that disconnect is constant. In our case, it's more of an occasional challenge but still one worth paying attention to. I truly believe this can improve, and that, little by little, we as after-school club staff can help shift perceptions and change the way people view our role. Over time, I've seen how much impact this work can have. I am reminded of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. For children to feel safe and ready to learn, their basic needs must first be met (Maslow, 1943). When children feel secure and supported, they can begin to focus on developing higher-level skills, such as social and emotional intelligence. In our after-school club, creating a safe and nurturing environment is always my priority, as this foundation allows the children to grow and thrive in all areas. Each moment of guidance, every resolved conflict, and every craft, game, or conversation is an opportunity to help children grow, not just academically, but socially and emotionally too. That's something I'm proud to be part of.

## **8 Ethical consideration**

When working with children, ethical thinking is done without even noticing. As after-school instructors, we constantly guide children in what they are doing right and point out wrong actions. Of course, conscious ethical thinking must also be implemented in guiding children. Every day at work, there are situations where we consider whether a child's behavior or difficulties at the playgroup are matters that should be reported to the parents immediately, or if the situations can be resolved sufficiently in the afternoon club. If informing the parents makes the child's situation or behavior at the afternoon club more difficult, or if it helps the situation. Is our intervention in the matter enough, or is other support needed for the situation?

The well-being of our children are based on certain values such as democracy, equality, caring for our nature and wildlife, cultural diversity and gender equality.

For me, the biggest ethical dilemma is always whether every child is genuinely heard, seen and taken into account when there is such a big group of children as mine. Another big ethical dilemma that I'm sure many professionals sometimes ponder is whether we always act professionally in challenging situations, without letting our emotions and opinions show. An ethical issue that I often encounter in my work is the great amount of loyalty that I feel towards both the children and their parents when I have built a relationship of trust with them. When I have established a trusting relationship, the situations in which I have been instructed by higher authorities to report events have been personally challenging and emotional for me. In these situations, it feels like I am breaking their trust, and trust is not easy to repair once it has been broken. The mental burden of work becomes apparent in those situations where one has to follow instructions but still wants to act as the best version of themselves in the workplace. As an employee whom both children and other adults trust.

My first ethical dilemma where I really had to think about whether my actions were right was when I had to make my first child protection report at the afternoon club. The situation was difficult because I personally wanted to act in such a way that I wouldn't make the report yet, but would continue to observe the situation and try to find a solution by talking to the parents first. In this particular situation, one of our children had been violent towards other children in the club and adults a couple of times due to emotional outbursts. These situations had been reported to the parents, but they did not respond to the situations with the desired seriousness. After informing my supervisor, he instructed me to make a child protection report so that the child and the parents could receive the support intended for them and that the parents would take the matter more seriously.

This was challenging for me, which I openly expressed to my supervisor, but my supervisor insisted that it should be done. Eventually, after discussing it with other school staff, I made a child protection report considering the child's best interest. However, I still believe that these situations are not always so black and white.

## **9 Conclusions and Summary**

During the time I have been keeping a diary and working at the same time, it was difficult to think about what to conclude in my reports and what to leave out. I was worried about giving away too much information about my colleagues and working place. Also finding the theories and research material that would be useful for my work felt challenging. After the first struggling weeks I found confidence thanks to the support I got from my instructor who seemed to understand my difficulties. I feel confident in my role as lead supervisor, but there are many challenges that I faced in the afterschool club. To mention some, the lack of guidelines for unexpected situations and the lack of suitable facilities for the group size. In

spite of this the more time I work at after school clubs, the more convinced I become of the advantages it has both socially and academically for the children.

School related afternoon clubs are an important part of the education system in Finland. The activities are and should be well planned. It is important to use enough time to carefully plan the daily/weekly program for the children. The more we understand the background of the different children, the better we can adapt our activities and attention to the right aspects. It is also important to keep close contact with the parents. Active information flow between the staff and the parents enables us to work as a team for the best of the children. The supervisor's role is very much to ensure that the above happens. Also the supervisor should ensure that the whole staff is properly informed about the working plans as well as special circumstances. This is an important factor in developing motivation and a positive atmosphere with the staff. An approachable supervisor is always ready to keep open communication both towards the staff as well as the parents. In this way you develop a trustworthy relationship with them.

As a supervisor I consider, even though I understand why children with special needs are placed in larger groups of children, it is still a big loss for the child when they do not receive the support and help they are entitled to from an adult. Wouldn't a child in need of special support get the most out of being in a smaller after-school club, where his or her special needs could be better taken into account? This is an important question, because are we forgetting the best interests of the child to some extent when we try to combine children with special needs into larger groups?

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