

How children interact with peers in a multilingual environment

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Year	2017	Pages	56
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The purpose of this study was to find out if and how the interaction between peers differs during free play and teacher led activities, while focusing on aspects such as use of language and the differences between two different age groups.

This thesis includes a large theoretical framework including early childhood education, HighScope, play, teacher led activities, development of language, importance of relationships and previous research.

This was a qualitative study which used observation to conduct the research. Narrative records were used as the form of data collection, recording the context of the situation, the individuals in question as well as what was said or did. The target group was 2-5 year olds, split into groups of children aged 2-3 and 3-5 at I.C.E.C: International Child-care and Education Centre. The data was analysed through thematic analysis.

The findings showed that there were differences in the ways the children interacted with their peers during teacher led activities and free play. The children interacted with each other much more during free play, both verbally and non-verbally, whereas during teacher led activities, the children focused their attention more on the teacher. The findings also showed that there were large differences between the ways in which the two groups interacted with their peers. The younger group used much more non-verbal communication and needed more support and guidance from their teachers, whereas the older group used more verbal communication and were predominantly able to interact with each other independently.

In conclusion, the interaction between children is a vital and natural part of daily life in nurseries. The children interacted with each other actively and this interaction supports their overall development as well as making their time at nursery more enjoyable. The children were able to form friendships and influence one another's behaviour.

Keywords: Early childhood education, observation, interaction, multilingual

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1 Introduction

This thesis is a theoretical study, exploring the way children interact with peers during free play, contrasted with how they interact with each other during teacher led activities. The research for this thesis was carried out at I.C.E.C: International Childcare and Education Centre, which will from now on be referred to as I.C.E.C.

The reason I chose this topic is because I myself am bilingual and attended I.C.E.C when I was younger, I have also taught at a Finnish school in England for three years and carried out a placement at an English nursery in Finland. These experiences further heightened my interest in bilingualism and how children interact with each other in a multilingual environment. The actual focus point: how the children interact with each other in different settings was a suggestion from I.C.E.C.

This thesis will cover a range of topics starting with basic background information about the studied topic, then going on to the theoretical framework which acts as the foundation of this thesis, including areas such as early childhood education, HighScope: a method used at I.C.E.C, play, teacher led activities, different types of relationships and the development of language. The methodology that I used for the research will be covered, as well as the findings, discussion and aspects of validity and ethical considerations.

2 Background information

The research for this thesis was conducted in October 2017 at an English nursery and pre-school called I.C.E.C. The nursery has six English nurseries across the metropolitan area of Finland with an eighth opening in 2018, as well as a further nursery in Inkoo which is an English language immersion nursery. I conducted my observations at the Töölö nursery which has space for 40 children between the ages of 2 - 7. The children are split into groups via age. The nursery has a part time group where the children are aged 2 - 3, only attend the nursery two mornings a week whereas the other groups: 2 - 3 years, 3 - 5 years, 5 - 6 years and 6 - 7 years, have the opportunity to attend full time. I conducted my research in the 2 - 3 and 3 - 5 year olds groups, also known as pre-school 1 and pre-school 2. I observed the children during free play and during teacher led activities.

The main focus point of this thesis is the interaction between peers, therefore it is crucial to understand what is meant by peers and peer groups. According to developmental psychology, peers and peer groups are children who are around the same age and are at roughly the same stage of development. However, as each child is unique, they will also develop differently at different times, therefore some children will be more skilled in some areas and vice versa.

(Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 105.) I studied interaction between children, including both non-verbal and verbal interaction. It was interesting to see how the children interacted with each other when they did not have a common language, resulting in using more non-verbal language such as gestures. However, many of the children did share a language, therefore it was interesting to find out and how this changed in free play and during teacher led activities. Another aspect which will be considered in this thesis, is the differences in the way the two different groups of children interact with their peers. In this thesis, I will be using the word teacher to refer to all early year's practitioners working at the nursery, as this is the word used at I.C.E.C.

I will be using words such as mother tongue and bilingual throughout this thesis. There are many ways to define a person's mother tongue, however in this thesis I will be using the sociological definition of the mother tongue being the first language a person learns. (Halme & Vataja 2011, 16.) There are also many ways to define bilingualism, however for the purpose of this thesis, being bilingual refers to a person who is able to communicate in at least two languages, regardless of whether they learnt the languages simultaneously since birth or if they were first introduced to the second language later on, in nursery (Baker 2006, 4).

I researched children in a multicultural environment where the children become acquainted with many different cultures simultaneously. It is therefore important to understand what childhood and belonging to a culture really means. This thesis will be using different perceptions of childhood which are influenced by the views of Piaget, Vygotsky and Smidt, where childhood is seen as the process of growing from birth to adulthood, in which children are seen as active learners and are able to explore the world including themselves, languages, cultures and the people around them. This can be done by exploring their surroundings as well as communicating with and imitating those around them. (Smidt 2013, 9, 19.) Humans are incredibly social beings; therefore, other people play an essential role in the children's progressing overall development and learning. This has been researched numerous times and is part of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: humans need love and a sense of belonging (McLeod 2016). Through socialisation with others, children are introduced to different aspects of culture and slowly begin to feel like they belong to a particular culture or group. They will begin to understand and act on different features of culture, such as beliefs and values. (Smidt 2013, 33.) As children grow and develop, they are introduced to a variety of different cultures and also belong to more than one culture simultaneously. They may begin to experience contradictions between their cultures but as they often belong to both cultures, they can begin to modify their understanding of the cultures, so that they can belong to both. (Smidt 2013, 91 - 94.) Language is often a big part of culture and is a powerful way of communicating with others, belonging to more than one culture and being able to use more than one language can be incredibly enriching. (Smidt 2013, 33; Opetushallitus 2016, 47.) All of these

aspects of childhood will be important to consider alongside my research as they act as the foundation guiding this thesis. When conducting any kind of research with children or human beings in general, it is important to remember that every individual person is a unique human with their own strengths, needs and interests.

3 Purpose & Research question

As this thesis was researched at I.C.E.C, many of the children will come from different cultures and speak different languages at home, therefore although the early years professionals at the nursery speak English, many of the children's own mother tongue is not English. The purpose of this thesis is to find out how the children at I.C.E.C interact with each other during free play and during teacher led activities, focusing on aspects such as the differences in use of language between these two settings as well as the differences between the two groups.

The research question this thesis mainly focused on is: Do the interactions between peers differ during free play and teacher led activities?

Marion (2010, 9) states that observation and assessing children is a key part of supporting children's overall development however daily life in nurseries can be hectic, therefore the research carried out will give I.C.E.C useful information on how the children interact with each other at their nursery, allowing them to use the information produced by the research to be able to develop their activities or approaches to certain situations in accordance to the final results, as well as giving them an insight into how the children truly interact with one another.

4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework section will include aspects of early childhood education, especially in the context of I.C.E.C. HighScope will also be explained as I.C.E.C use this approach; therefore, it is important to understand it to fully understand how the nursery works. Secondly, play and the importance of play will be explored with views from researchers such as Piaget and Vygotsky. Thirdly, the development of language and especially bilingualism will be included, as this is a crucial point to consider before conducting research on language use in a multilingual environment. Finally, the importance of relationships, both between peers and between teacher and child will be explored as this is the main focus point throughout this thesis. Relevant research will also be mentioned throughout this theoretical framework section.

4.1 Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education should be taken with a holistic approach; children are human beings who need to be given the freedom to explore themselves, their abilities and their surrounding environment. Children learn constantly, meaning they are continuously learning and adapting their previously acquired knowledge. As mentioned earlier, humans are social creatures, therefore children should have the opportunity to build relationships with their teachers and caregivers as well as their peers. These relationships influence the children's emotional and social well-being, as well as aiding aspects such as language- and social development. (Bruce 2011, 15-17.) Early childhood education institutes should therefore provide the children with a safe, comfortable environment which supports and enhances their overall development, as well as supporting the children's parents and guardians (Järvinen, Laine & Hellman-Suominen 2009, 90).

In Finland the VASU: national curriculum guidelines on early childhood education and care, which will from now on be referred to as VASU, is a nationwide set of guidelines which puts certain demands on nurseries and other early childhood education institutes and guides the way they are run. VASU includes the rights of the children as well as the curriculum and goals. Municipalities also have to make their own VASU; however, the nationwide VASU works as the grounding framework. The municipal VASU then guides and supports the work at nurseries within its own area, the nurseries then develop their practices and approaches to fit with the current VASU. As each child is a unique individual, the teacher and parents or guardians will create an individual VASU for each child which will be based on the child's abilities and needs. If the child is in need of extra support, this will be included in the plan as well as how this support will be provided. (Opetushallitus 2016, 8 - 10.) The guidelines clearly state targets for early childhood education in Finland which include: giving equal opportunities to all families, supporting development and any additional needs, ensuring a safe environment and providing diverse pedagogical activities giving the children opportunities for play, movement, creativeness and culture. (Opetushallitus 2016, 15.)

4.1.1 In the context of I.C.E.C

As I.C.E.C is an English nursery in Finland, it uses both the VASU and the EYFS: early years foundation stage, as well as the KS1: key stage 1, as a base for their practices. As I will be observing children aged 2-5, the VASU and the EYFS are the guidelines which I.C.E.C predominantly use for my target group. The EYFS, like the VASU is a set of guidelines for early childhood education, which supports and guides early childhood practitioners work, provides a set of rights for the children as well as a framework of what daily nursery life should entail. (Department for Education 2017, 5 - 6.) According to the EYFS there are 3 central areas that

early childhood education must focus on and centre its activities around, these are “communication and language, physical development and personal social and emotional development” (Department of Education 2017, 7). Communication and language is a very central aspect of I.C.E.C, considering its predominant language is English.

The children at I.C.E.C are from a large variety of different countries across the globe, meaning that there is also a large variety of mother tongues and a range of levels of English, ranging from complete beginner to native speaker. Children whose mother tongue is something other than English should aim to learn English to at least a functional level where they are able to fully participate at I.C.E.C, where almost all teaching and activities are held in English (Halme & Vataja 2011, 21). The nursery also has Finnish lessons, however the teaching and activities at the nursery are predominately in English. For this research, it is important to acknowledge and understand that at the nursery, the children will not only learn the English language, they will also learn how to adapt their own cultural identity. A cultural identity is where an individual learns, accepts and adopts a certain set of values, norms and belief systems (Smidt 2013, 91). Developing a cultural identity is something that all humans do, this generally starts in the family and as the child is introduced to more places and communities, their cultural identity begins to adapt and develop (Smidt 2013, 106). Their own home culture and cultural identity may contradict the culture at I.C.E.C, therefore may bring their own experiences and some parts of their home culture to the nursery which is a chance to enrich the daily life at the nursery for everyone involved (Kernan & Singer 2011, 89). The social enrichment that diversity brings offers learning opportunities and broadens the minds of those in a culturally diverse environment. The children and adults at I.C.E.C are able to learn about different cultures and languages just by being in the same environment as each other. (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Award 2015, 306.) Bruce (2011, 135) expresses the importance of early years practitioners taking this opportunity to make the child feel welcomed by valuing, respecting and supporting the child, and their mother tongue and culture. This is especially important as the cultures of the children intersect one another constantly, allowing the child to further develop and elaborate their own identity to fit the particular environment they are in (Smidt 2013, 91). Through this exploration children are able to define themselves as members of the community at I.C.E.C (Smidt 2013, 90). I.C.E.C respect all cultures and celebrate many different holidays, such as Diwali, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Smidt (2013, 106) states that when children feel attached to their own home culture, they are better able to work alongside and accept others who have different beliefs and backgrounds. Bruce (2011, 135) also concludes by saying that bilingual children are more able to understand social differences, as well as respect these differences. These points are important to consider as the interactions between peers will be studied. In the context of I.C.E.C, the children will all be bilingual to some extent, and will have spent a part of their

early childhood in an environment which is rich in different cultures, languages and beliefs. As the children will have been introduced to such diversity, early on in their lives, the children may not choose their play companions by language.

4.1.2 HighScope

HighScope is an approach used by I.C.E.C. The foundation for the HighScope approach was originally inspired by Piaget's cognitive development work, however the approach is continuously being developed. Vygotsky and Bruner's work also played a part in developing the approach and HighScope has been researched numerous times. It is an approach in which children are given an active role in planning their own learning, therefore does not follow the traditional approach of the teacher or other early years professionals planning all of the activities. However, this does not mean the early years practitioners are not involved, on the contrary they are extremely involved and also play an active role. (Miller & Pound 2011, 102-103.) This means that the adults supply the children with the necessary materials, space and opportunities, but most importantly challenge the children to develop and use their own initiative and creativeness to aid their own learning, as well as supporting and encouraging the children throughout the day (Miller & Pound 2011, 104). Miller & Pound (2011, 104) mention five key fundamental features which are vital for the HighScope approach, adults actively participating is one of these however other vital features include: materials, manipulation, choice and child language and thought. Materials need to be diverse and challenging enough for the children to continue to develop, however not too difficult which would result in the children losing interest and motivation. Materials should also be natural, allowing the children to learn about the world around them, consequently allowing the children to explore the materials using all of their senses. These materials should also allow the children to have the opportunity to manipulate them, this is what Miller & Pound (2011, 104) described as "hands on minds on". Being able to manipulate the materials allows the children to begin to understand how different materials work and how they can use these creatively to build for example houses or food during play. Children planning their own activities was shortly mentioned earlier, however choice not only allows the children to plan or contribute to the planning of activities but also to choose play companions and materials which appeal to them. Finally, children are given the opportunity to communicate both verbally and non-verbally to develop their language and reflect on their own thought processes and understand the thought processes of others, resulting in them beginning to understand how others think. (Miller & Pound 2011, 104; Marion 2010, 49-50.)

Planning is a vital part of the HighScope approach as it gives the children the opportunity to plan the activities according to their own interests. Research has shown that giving children the opportunity to plan their own learning activities as well as participating and reflecting on these activities afterwards, results in them playing with more purpose which therefore results

in these children performing better in tests on different areas of development, such as social and academic. (Miller & Pound 2011, 106-107.) This also develops the children's sense of self as they are given the opportunity to explore their own interests in ways which motivate them, giving them positive experiences by being able to accomplish things which children feel are important to them (Miller & Pound 2011, 104-107; Marion 2010, 49-50).

Planning and carrying out the plans are vital to the HighScope approach, however reflecting on these activities is also crucial. This reflection is also known as "recall time". (Miller & Pound 2011, 105.) *Recall time* is used to aid learning, as it gives the activity meaning by encouraging the child to remember what they did, how they did it and why they did it. This aspect of HighScope also gives the child the opportunity to develop and enrich their language by conversing with others. Not only is there potential for language development, but also for socioemotional development, as the child begins to develop a sense of initiative through making decisions for themselves, exploring the consequences of these decisions and finally reflecting and interpreting their own actions and thought processes at different stages of the process. (Miller & Pound 2011, 105.)

4.2 Play

Play is a vital part of early childhood education; therefore, nurseries should give children diverse opportunities for play (Opetushallitus 2016, 38). There are many ways to define play and this is something that theorists have argued over for centuries, however Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner all viewed play as being a significant element of development (Smidt 2013, 49). In this thesis, play will take on the postmodernist definition, which describes play as a "vehicle for learning" (Miller & Pound 2011, 46). Play is an act in which children are freely able to express themselves as well as explore different roles, situations and fantasies in a safe way (Miller & Pound 2011, 46-47). Children experience emotional, intellectual, linguistic, physical and social development and play is one means of further developing all of these aspects of development, therefore play is not only a way for children to explore different situations, they also experience the affects play can have on their overall development. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 4). Play is such a powerful facet for aiding development because it stems from the child and the child's own desires to partake in a particular activity. Thus, allowing the child to demonstrate their own skills, such as the ability to co-operate, dance and use language. This authentic desire is one feature that is commonly characterized as play, other features include focusing on the present activity rather than the end goals, active participation and freedom from external rules (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 6). Although play is an incredibly effective way for children to develop a multitude of different skills, socialise and work through situations, it is not something that anyone can make a child do. It is something which children instinctively do, and something which comes from their own interests and motives, thus bringing an air of enthusiasm to play which accelerates their development and increases their desire to learn. When

children are interested in what they are doing they are deeply focused and involved in the activity. This type of concentration is a vital skill to learn for all stages of life. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 6; Miller & Pound 2011, 58 - 59.)

4.2.1 The importance of play

Sheridan (1999,10) describes play as something which has the ability to accomplish a clear purpose, therefore it is not pointless or random. This gives the participants of play positive, meaningful experiences (Smidt 2013, 59). Some may see play as just a way for children to enjoy themselves, however through play, children are able to among other things, reflect on past experiences, try out new ideas and explore their own questions and possible answers (Smidt 2013, 58 - 59). This is why play is not always about having fun, there is an aspect of pain and sadness, as children are able to explore different situations that may make them anxious or sad, in a safe way through play. They are in a place where they can easily leave the situation if they no longer want to be in it, however also have the option to work through things and experience certain situations in a way they understand. (Miller & Pound 2011, 58.) Many researchers have focused on the aspect of children using their own experiences during play, Froebel was one of these. Froebel researched early childhood and the importance of play which led to creating his own approach to education centering around play. Froebel believed that there were 3 key aspects to children's play: the use of real life experiences in play, the way patterns and symmetry are discovered and used and finally the way more difficult things to understand can be defined and understood through play. Froebel's research has inspired many aspects of early childhood education. (Miller & Pound 2011, 56 - 59.)

Play allows children to be creative, as through play children are able to explore all aspects of themselves and their experiences, thus developing their intellect. (Miller & Pound 2011, 32). Through this exploration children experience an array of emotions which aids emotional development as children can begin to learn their ability to feel different emotions, slowly beginning to manage these and learn how to express different emotions, ideas and needs. (Miller & Pound 2011, 75; Van Hoorn et al 2015, 58). Although there are many different types of play, play generally puts children in control of the situation and allows them to make their own rules. Although children are able to portray different feelings and challenge themselves, they also have the opportunity to move in and out of play if they feel uncomfortable with any situation they find themselves in. (Miller & Pound 2011, 58.) Through play, children are able to express and show off their personality, their different stages of development, the way they feel about different situations as well as themselves and those around them, however children do not tend to be aware of the possibilities play brings to them. Play is one way children are able to express their own interests as well as their abilities and through expressing themselves, they are able to begin to form friendships with their peers in accordance to similar interests. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 4; Opetushallitus 2016, 38-39.) Developing social skills is one

important reason children need to play with others, children learn to negotiate, develop language skills, collaborate with others and learn important team skills, however children should also have the chance to play alone. Playing alone allows the child to fully explore themselves, their own needs and ideas, which can then be used to enrich many types of social situations. (Miller & Pound 2011, 58 - 59.) Play is not only for children, adults should also engage in play with children as this is one way of forming and building a relationship, however adults should be aware of themselves during play and not be too dominant, as play is an important way for children to express themselves and a place where children are able to make their own rules. Adults should respect children which will teach the child to also treat others with respect. Play situations between children and adults are also incredible opportunities for language and social development. (Miller & Pound 2011, 58-59.) There are some situations in which adults can lead play, however this will be explored later.

Play often puts children in situations where they have to face conflicts, this allows children to independently or as a peer group try and solve different problems encouraging both social and intellectual development. Vygotsky believed this was a vital part of development in early childhood. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 42.) Solving problems requires advanced social development as the children will need to assess the situation from other people's perspectives as well as weighing up different solutions, sometimes children need the help of an adult to solve situations (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 6; Macintyre 2012, 13). Once they have experienced more problem situations and witnessed different solutions, they begin to explore and try out different strategies to solve problems. Thus, beginning to increasingly regularly, independently solve problems, thus enhancing their intellectual development. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 58.) These conflict situations allow children to develop their own moral values. Through experiencing different situations children are able to decide for themselves what is fair and unfair, which then influences their behaviour and increases their capability to make informed decisions with peers and teachers. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 73.)

As this thesis is focusing on the use of language during play, it is important to note that play also plays a big part in the development of language. In a nursery setting, children often play with others, especially as they grow and develop, they begin to collaborate with others during play. To be able to do this, children need to be capable of communicating with one another, to be able to express their wants and needs. As the children begin collaborating with one another they begin to develop friendships which often leads to choosing the same playmates. Language is also important when children come across problems, they need to be able to solve the problems and the most effective way of doing this is often by using language. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 209.) As I will be carrying my research out at an English nursery, some of the children may not speak the same language, which may make solving problems more difficult. This is when the children can turn to the early years practitioner for support and advice.

Van Hoorn et al (2015, 209) write about a child who did not share a common language with her peers or teachers, however through play and story play activities, the child was able to quickly pick up words and language skills which lead to her being able to communicate with her peers and teachers and attract others to the play she wanted to participate in. This shows that not only are the early years practitioners vital resources for language development, but peers also play a crucial role in supporting language development. Through play, children have the opportunity to acquire words that are linked to certain interests. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 209.)

4.2.2 Different types of play

There are many different types of play which play varying roles at different stages of development. Younger children begin playing with objects however as children's imagination develops, they begin to participate in symbolic and social pretend play. In this type of play children no longer need to use the correct physical object to mean a certain thing, for example a phone does not have to be a physical phone, children can use a wooden block or even just pretend they have a phone, representing this in a way which shows meaning to the rest of the players. (Smidt 2013, 41.)

Piaget believed there were three different types of symbolic play: constructive, dramatic and games with rules. Children often begin with constructive play, as within this, children are introduced to more advanced types of symbolic play in which they use their imagination, however use physical objects that are as close to the desired object as possible. As the child develops the objects the child wishes to represent become more and more different, thus becoming the base for abstract thinking. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 40, 59-60.) This then morphs into dramatic play, in which children create different events, situations and roles and begin to use more abstract ways to represent objects. In dramatic play children use both verbal and non-verbal language to represent different roles. They use past experiences of different roles to create characters, thus reflecting on how they perceive different roles and bringing the type of language and gestures that they link to a certain role. (Smidt 2013, 41; Van Hoorn et al 2015, 40.) Children do not only use their own life experiences but combine these with how they think a certain role or situation would be played out, such as an astronaut in a spaceship. Although the child has not been an astronaut in a space ship, they will be able to use their imagination combined with their knowledge of astronauts to create their character. By doing this they are able to explore different roles and be creative. (Smidt 2013, 53.) Both of these types of symbolic play can be played alone or with others, however symbolic play demands a certain stage of intellectual and social development to be able to use imagination at this level. This type of symbolic role play allows the children to express their individual interests as well as showing their developing capacities to be creative and imaginative by progress-

ing from using costumes and physical objects to using subtle gestures and language to represent certain situations and roles. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 40, 60.) Games with rules requires further social development as players need to be able to view things from other players perspectives and reflect on this, as well as remembering the rules. This type of play requires children to agree on a set of rules, this can be done before they begin playing or when they come across a situation in which they need a rule. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 41.)

As mentioned earlier, it is important for children to play alone and with others, however there are different ways of playing with others and this also changes as children grow and develop. Most children begin with solo play where they play alone, this then moves onto parallel play. During parallel play children are able to introduce themselves to playing with others however still remain in their own comfort zone. This type of play means a child will play in close proximity to another child, however will be occupied by their own play without proper interaction with the other child. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 74.) An example of parallel play would be two children playing with Lego next to each other, sometimes asking for a certain coloured block but still building their own constructions. This then begins to mould in to the first stages of group play in which the children still lack full co-operation, however will begin to involve one another in play, for example helping each other with their Lego constructions and giving each other ideas. The final stage is co-operative play, where two or more children are fully involved in the same play, stepping in and out of play to negotiate events. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 75.) For co-operative play to work successfully the children will have to both be equally focused in the play and navigate through many obstacles, such as what they both want to play, where and how they will play as well as who will play which role. To do this, they will often have to try and see the issue from the other persons perspective, this will allow the children to solve problems while taking into account everyone's wants and needs. (Smidt 2013, 41; Van Hoorn et al 2015, 60.) Co-operative play also shows cognitive development as some instances require advanced cognitive abilities, such as a child pretending to see a lion and the other children reacting to this and also pretending to see the lion so that the play can progress and form different dimensions (Smidt 2013, 57). Older children tend to participate in role play and advanced symbolic play, this play tends to be more organized and creates certain borders not allowing others to join the play as freely. Older children are more likely to negotiate who is allowed to play together and how they should play. (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 58 - 59.)

As there are many ways to play, there are also many types of play, which are often referred to as: spontaneous play, guided play and teacher directed play. All of these are important for development in early childhood. Spontaneous play is a type of play where children express their own interests often basing the play on their own life experiences. In this type of play children are able to make their own rules and direct the play themselves, either alone or with

others. Guided play is where children's play is guided by adults, by for example setting out certain objects which will interest the children to learn something new. Teacher-directed play is when the early years practitioner organizes and directs the play. In this kind of play the teacher will have set specific targets and the play will have an intended educational purpose. This can be for example singing a song or involving the children in a drama-play activity. (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 10-11.)

4.3 Teacher led activities

Daily life at nursery should include plenty of free play and teacher led activities both inside and outside. Teacher's can lead a multitude of different types of activities such as arts and crafts, gymnastics or science based activities, many of which are based around play. As my thesis is focused on interaction between peers during free play and teacher led activities, the type of activities themselves aren't the focus, but generally the importance of teacher led activities and what they mean. The purpose of these activities is to guide and support children and their overall development, most activities focus on a specific area of development, therefore it is important to plan a variety of different types of activities, however all activities should aim to support and develop the children's learning process. These activities should also allow children to gain new experiences and learn a diverse range of skills. The activities should be challenging enough so that the children have the possibility to learn something, try out different possibilities and even fail sometimes, however not too challenging so that the children become demotivated. The important thing is for children to feel like they succeeded in something and enjoyed the activity. (Järvinen, Laine & Hellman-Suominen. 2009, 172 - 174.)

It is important for the teacher to not only lead sessions, but also plan them carefully and assess them, together with the other teachers in the group. When planning, the teacher should take into account each individual child's stage of development and targets as the activities should reflect these so that the children can achieve these developmental goals. The themes and types of activities planned and carried out should come from the children's interests, as when they are interested in the activity, they are much more motivated to learn and participate. To get the children's attention: different books, music or toys used as mascots can be used to introduce the theme of the activity and to motivate them to actively participate, in some instances the teacher can also ask the children to help set up the activity. It is crucial for the teacher to also be fully present in the moment by being an active participant in the activity and enjoying the shared experience as this will motivate the children to join in and make the experience more enjoyable for the whole group. Throughout the activity the teacher should take into account how they act and how the children may perceive and understand them. Instructions should be simple and straight to the point so that the children stay interested in the topic and understand what is asked of them. Each

individual child as well as the group as a whole should be given time to think and process the activity, remembering that it is not the final product which is important, but the experiences the children gain from participating in the activity. Another way to help the children gain more positive experiences is by thanking the children for participating at the end of the session and asking them to share their favourite parts or what they learnt. The teacher should use these statements to help improve future activities as well as assessing his/her own teaching during the activity. (Järvinen et al. 2009, 172-174.)

4.4 Development of language

Many people have researched language acquisition, which is also known as the development of language, in this thesis it will be referred to as language development. Researchers such as Chomsky and Vygotsky agree that language develops through imitation as well as reinforcement. (Smidt 2013, 67.) Children will hear people around them speaking and begin to imitate these sounds to form their own words. Social interactions, especially verbal interactions are vital for language development as this is how children learn. As children begin to make sounds, the people around them reinforce this learning by praising them which motivates them to form the sound or word again. Adults and peers around the children should also share meanings of words and try to correct the children's language mistakes by for example affirming what the child said in a grammatically correct way, for example if a child says, *the dog goed over there*, the adult could reply to this by saying, *Yes, the dog went over there*, this teaches the child different types of language rules and allows the child to reflect on the situation and begin to internalise different words and rules. (Smidt 2013, 70.) As well as making simple language mistakes when first beginning to make conversation, children also tend to overestimate how much the listener knows about what they are talking about, by for example starting a sentence with, *she was funny* without actually telling the listener who 'she' is. (Brooks & Kempe 2012, 144). Early years practitioners should also praise children for their use of language, this will motivate them to carry on using it and explore different aspects of language, thus allowing for further language development (Opetushallitus 2016, 40). Although adults play an important role in the language development of children, it is also necessary for children to interact with peers. This will allow them to engage in conversation where both participants will often share common interests, therefore learning specific vocabulary on topics that interest them. (Brooks & Kempe 2012, 143.)

As mentioned earlier, play is an effective way to aid language development, it allows children to try different words and ways of saying them as well as using these within different roles. Therefore, the child has to reflect on what they know about different roles and choose the suitable language and intonation for these. (Smidt 2013, 71.) The development of language is also often seen as a type of play, as to develop, children will play around with different

sounds and meanings to understand and internalize what they have learnt (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 62 - 63).

Some children become bilingual by growing up with people who speak different languages to them, whereas others learn a second language when they start school or nursery (Baker 2006, 4). This thesis will be focusing on learning a second language at nursery, however some of the children at the nursery may be native speakers. As this thesis is focused on nursery age children, it is important to note that at this age, children are still able to learn and pick up the language without formal education, however additional language support sessions may start becoming included during the last year or years of nursery if the child has only just started learning the language (Baker 2006, 97). If children begin learning a second language at nursery, they may begin to feel pressured by their environment to learn the language fast, however learning a new language is a process which takes time and early years professionals should not add strain to the children but try and motivate them to develop their language skills (Halme & Vataja 2011, 21). In the beginning the child may speak their own mother tongue however they will begin to pick up the basics of the new language and imitate others. This is the sort of language that is repeated often, thus helping the child participate in repeated activities, such as understanding and following instructions for washing their hands or sitting down. It is also important for the teacher to be aware of how language develops, so that they can help the children understand what is being said. If a child cannot yet rely on their second language, the teacher should use non-verbal ways to show the meaning of different things, such as asking the children to sit down and also showing them what sitting down means by doing the action themselves. It is also important not to force the children to speak English, as this may make them anxious and demotivate them. (Smidt 2013, 121; Marion 2010, 97.) At the beginning the children may go through a phase where they will practise the language on their own or at home, however not feel comfortable enough to use the language that they do know at the nursery (Halme & Vataja 2011, 22).

Children first begin to develop social language, this means they are able to manage in everyday situations by following basic instructions and knowing what to say in these situations, this then slowly develops into a more academic, abstract language which allows the children to follow more complicated instructions therefore aiding their overall development as well as allowing them to express themselves in the way they want to. (Halme & Vataja 2011, 21-22.)

4.5 Importance of relationships

As this thesis will be focusing on the use of language during free play with peers and during teacher led activities, it is important to understand that humans are social beings who tend to thrive from social interaction, and to understand the importance of these two different types of relationships (Smidt 2013, 40). As mentioned earlier, children are active learners, to

learn and develop a child will need to be actively involved in their surroundings, including in social interactions (Smidt 2013, 43). Vygotsky believed that children are at one of two different levels, either the child can express what they can do without guidance, indicating that they have already reached a certain level of development, or to attain a certain goal, they need the help and support of an adult or another peer who has already reached this level. This shows that through social interactions and with the help of those around them, a child can develop and learn new skills and reach goals. (Smidt 2013, 39.) A nursery environment allows children to form relationships with teachers and peers, this helps them form their own social identity (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 22). Social interaction also aids development in many different ways, Van Hoorn et al (2015, 43) explain how children first learn something through some form of social interaction, then are able to internalize this new skill and are able to do it individually without guidance. This could be something such as learning how to make a sand castle by watching others and then later being able to make a sand castle independently. Therefore, relationships in a nursery setting are vital, research has shown that when older children and adults are asked what they remember from nursery, they comment on the relationships they formed with both their peers and their teachers and view these as the most important part of this early stage of life. (David 1999, 1.) Not only is it important for children to form relationships with individual adults and children, it is also important for them to feel like they belong to a community. A community is where a group of people share a feeling of belonging towards the group, where they all feel important. Communities often arise through shared experiences and emotional connection, communities also have a certain set of values and rules. (Marjanen et al 2013, 21.) Forming relationships with others and feeling belonging towards a community happens through actively participating in interactions and activities which is a vast part of daily life in a nursery environment. (Marjanen et al 2013, 22).

4.5.1 Peer relationships

Peers can motivate each other, make their time more enjoyable and help each other learn (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 42; Kernan & Singer 2011, 31). Children often express desires to help and teach each other skills, as the more capable child in a certain skill will be able to act as an expert, and then vice versa allow their peers to teach them something new (Smidt 2013, 95). Peer interaction allows children to form their own social identity and supports the continuous overall development of a child's personality, such as emotional development. As children participate in many different activities with many different people, they will often feel a large range of emotions and will start to learn how to deal with these emotions and how to interact with peers. A nursery setting also allows children to express themselves creatively and experiment with different aspects of social interaction such as social skills, different roles, how to treat others, language and problem-solving skills. (Marjanen, et al 2013, 22, 104.) The main social skills that children will learn from peer interaction within a group are listening,

sharing, helping, controlling one's emotions as well as the ability to verbalize these emotions, being a member of a group and how to operate within a group (Marjanen et al 69).

Peer interaction aids children's integration into the group and protects them from feeling lonely or excluded from the group, this feeling of membership in the long run will influence how children treat each other (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 103). Research has shown that a lower social status within a peer group can lead to mental health problems later on in life, thus confirming the importance of regular, positive peer interactions and feeling a sense of belonging within the group (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 103). Peer interaction also allows children to discover new interests and participate in activities with peers that are interested in the same things, thus forming friendships (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 104). Kernan & Singer (2011, 31) found that children find friendships to be the most important aspect of daily nursery life, these friendships allow them to feel a sense of belonging and connect with others. These friendships motivate children to learn and develop in many ways, such as through play as they begin to co-create imaginary situations, therefore creating new symbolic meanings and learning to view things from other people's perspectives (Van Hoorn et al 2015, 42). As children form friendships they also begin to form smaller groups within the bigger community of their nursery group. These smaller groups are often formed through shared play experiences in which they have formed their own routines and practices. (Marjanen et al 2013, 38.) There are many factors which influence how smaller groups are formed. Having shared interests is an obvious reason to form a group, as the children will be able to participate in activities and play which all participants are interested in. Research has also shown that in larger nursery groups gender has a part to play as children tend to choose their play partners according to gender, however in smaller groups, this is not as apparent. (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 57.) I am interested to find out whether sharing a common language influences the children's play partner choices as the groups I am observing are quite small, having only 10 and 14 children in each.

4.5.2 Relationship with teacher

An adult's role in a nursery setting is vital, not only to teach, guide and support the children but also to create a bond with each individual child and to create a small community within the group where each child feels welcome and included (Marion 2010, 99). As each child starts at the nursery, it is important for the teacher to form a respectful and caring relationship with them showing genuine interest in the children, their interests and development. This form of emotional relationship allows the child to feel safe and appreciated at nursery, however it is also important to remember to treat each child the same. (Department for children, schools and families 2009, 7; Miller & Devereux 2004, 197; Marion 2010, 220.) The teacher does not only form a relationship with each child, but also their parents and guardians, supporting the work they do at home. Once the child has seen their parents/guardians

building a relationship with their teacher, they will often also feel more comfortable with their teacher. The parents will also think more positively and feel more relaxed once they have established a positive relationship with the teacher. (Järvinen et al 2009, 118 - 120; Marion 2010, 73.)

Especially for young children, once an emotional relationship has been established, teachers have the ability to offer comfort, guidance and nurturing support, therefore they have the chance to teach children a multitude of different skills by acting as a role model and influencing their behaviour. When a teacher acts in a positive, constructive way, the children will want to model this and gain examples of positive social interaction, thus influencing them to participate in positive social interaction and enhancing their social competence. (Marion 2010, 49, 211-125, 221.) In some situations, within free play, children need the teachers help and guidance, for instance if the children come across a conflict and cannot solve the conflict themselves, an adult can step in and guide the situation and teach them different ways of approaching and solving problems, emphasising the importance of listening to others (Marjanen, Marttila & Varsa 2013, 57; Marion 2010, 99.) It is crucial for adults to offer support and guidance in these types of situations as this is where children build social knowledge and competence (Marjanen, et al 2013, 68-69; Marion 2010, 124).

As well as influencing children's behaviour towards others and enhancing social competence, it is crucial for children to form healthy, positive self-esteem, as this will influence their views on their own self-worth and abilities. If children have a positive self-esteem they understand that to achieve a goal, work has to be put in, therefore increasing their own motivation. This motivation will help them explore the world around them in the early stages of life but also enhance their learning later on in life. (Marion 2010, 125, 222-223.) This is something that teachers can help build and form by creating healthy and nurturing relationships with the children, influencing their behaviour by acting as a positive role model, setting boundaries, guiding and supporting them. By observing the children in different situations and taking an interest in their need and feelings, teachers also have the ability to help children understand and control their emotions as well as express them in a constructive way. (Marion 2010, 98 - 99.)

The teacher is required to form a relationship with each individual child as well as helping to connect the children to each other. Although a certain group of children are placed into the same nursery group, it does not mean that the group dynamics are set and they can begin working as a functioning community from the beginning. The teacher has an important role in creating the community within the group and also allowing the children to feel like they can have an input into different aspects of their group such as rules and ways of doing things. Through shared experiences, the group will slowly turn into a community. (Marjanen et al

2013, 22, 68.) As the children get to know each other, they will begin to form their own smaller groups and it is important for the teacher to allow these groups to form as this gives the children a feeling of belonging. It is however also important for the teacher to make sure all the children have sense of belonging to the bigger group and community (Marjanen et al 2013, 66).

4.6 Previous research

It was difficult to find research which focused on peer interaction in different settings; most of the research I found was based around how peer interaction influences second language development. The following section includes previous research on the general topic which this thesis will be studying.

One study researching the differences between childrens use of language within a peer group and with an adult showed that with adults, the children tended to talk in monologues more, where as when talking to peers, they asked questions and were interrupted by different questions. This shows that children used more social aspects of language with peers where as with adults, they mostly let their imagination flow without expecting as much input from the other participant in the conversation. (Piaget, Gabain & Gabain 2002, 245.)

Research has also shown that peer interaction has a significant influence on second language learning. Swaine, Brooks & Tocalli-Beller's (2002, 171-185) chapter on peer dialogue includes multiple studies conducted by different researchers which all show that children developed their second language through peer interaction. This gave them the opportunity to play with the language, try out different ways of saying things, immitate their peers and even discuss what the correct way to say something is. Children often enjoy teaching each other, therefore language is another skill which they can help teach another child. (Swaine et al. 2002, 171-185.)

Kim's (2015, 323-325) study on Korean-English bilingual children included an example of two girls interacting using both languages. Occasionally, they would predominantly use one language however then add words in the other language to emphasise particular statements, or to say a word which they did not know in the other language. The children's teacher also sometimes asked one of the other children to help their peer whose second language wasn't as developed, this interaction eventually formed friendships during teacher led activities. (Kim 2015, 323-325.)

5 Methodology

The following section will explain what the target group of this thesis is, the type of methodology I used, how I conducted my research and finally how I analysed the gathered data.

5.1 Target group

I observed the two pre-school groups aged 2 - 5 at the I.C.E.C's Töölö nurse's. I chose to observe both groups as they often spend time together as well as using the same space however still partake in activities at different times, therefore it was easier for both me and the children to observe the children from both groups. This allowed me to see how the children chose to interact with each other when they were in a bigger group. In the mornings the groups have separate activities, so I alternated between the groups, observing pre-school group 1 while pre-school 2 were outside and vice versa. Occasionally the groups would go out together, therefore I also had the chance to observe both groups outside simultaneously. Pre-school group 1 has roughly 10 children aged 2-3 and pre-school group 2 has 14 aged 3-5. As the groups are fairly small, I was able to observe all of the children at some stage during the day.

5.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research methods are used when a researcher needs more in depth data to answer questions such as how or why and use words instead of numbers, therefore qualitative methods will work best to answer my research question: how the interaction between peers differs during teacher led sessions and free play (Kananen 2008, 24; Nolan, Macfarlane & Cartmel 2013, 88). This type of research allows the researcher to carry out smaller studies including a smaller group, as qualitative research is often time consuming. Conducting smaller studies allows the researcher to fully focus on the research question and acquire in depth data straight from the target group themselves (Nolan et al 2013, 88-89). Qualitative research is often not as straight forward as quantitative research, as it is a process which tends to progress in circles, going back and forth from one stage to another through assessment and modification, instead of going in a straight line moving from one stage to the next (Kananen 2008, 26). Different types of qualitative research methods include interviews, observation and focus groups (Nolan et al 2013, 91). For my research, I used observation as my research method, to make obtaining in depth data straight from the source possible (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2009, 213).

5.3 Observation

The observations for this thesis were carried out over the space of two weeks, where I spent around 3-4 hours each morning. This timeframe allowed the children and the teachers get used to the researcher's presence quickly and they were therefore able to act as they naturally do without paying much attention to the researcher. By conducting the observations every day, the children did not have a chance to forget who I was, therefore further allowing them to not be phased by my presence. I introduced myself to both groups and told them that I will be observing them for the next two weeks which would mean that I would be taking notes throughout the day. I also told them that the observations are part of the research for this bachelor's thesis. This allowed the children to understand why I am there however also not be phased by my presence, thus allowing me to get as valid and pure data as possible. This was all explained in language that the children would understand, as it is important for the researcher and participants to have a relationship where the participants feel comfortable being observed. (Albon & Rosen 2014, 3.) I observed the children both inside and outside and during different types of activities, allowing me to accumulate a full picture of each child I observed (Bruce, Lois & McGall 2014, 2).

A letter was sent to the parents through a database used by I.C.E.C to share information and pictures with the parents. This way the parents were sure to receive information about my research. A poster was also put up next to the front door in the cloakroom of I.C.E.C which parents would see as soon as they came in. I felt it was important to inform the teachers prior to beginning to conduct my research of the observations and what they would entail so that the parents and guardians would be clear on what I am doing so that they would be as comfortable as possible with the conducted observations. The parents had the chance to tell me if they were not comfortable with their child taking part in the observations, however this did not happen therefore all children in pre-school group 1 and 2 were observed.

I observed the children at I.C.E.C during their normal day, and did not give them any pre-set tasks to do. After researching different methods of observation, it seemed that observing the children in their natural environment would allow for more spontaneity on their behalf and more natural data (Bruce et al. 2014, 126). Bruce et al. (2014, 126) stated that for more accurate and reliable assessments, observations should be carried out during everyday interactions, as this is when children's natural development can be seen. This decision was also heavily influenced by researches such as Piaget, who concluded that observations he made in a natural setting produced his best work, whereas conducting observations in test settings did not enable the children to fully be their best selves (Bruce et al. 2014, 8). Isaacs also stated that a lot of the vital information would be missed if the children were observed in a manipulated setting, whereas allowing the children to truly be themselves allows the observer to see their honest feelings, interests and development in a more natural way (Bruce et al. 2014, 6).

Another reason I decided to observe the children in their natural environment, was so that I could get an overall image of the nursery group, however I had to focus on what I was doing and why I was doing it, thus staying in my role as a researcher (Nolan et al 2013, 92). This is something that I made very clear to the children: that I would be there to observe, not to be included in their activities.

5.4 Data collection

I recorded my observations through narrative records. This way of recording seemed the most effective for me as it tends to emphasise the children's own strengths where as more pre-structured record forms are prone to focus more on weaknesses (Bruce et al. 2014, 11). Through my own observations, I recorded everything I saw and heard, as some details may not have seemed important at the time of the observations however ended up bringing interesting ideas to my research. Consequently, if I would have used a pre-structured form, I would have missed these important details. There are multiple ways of recording through narrative records, these include diaries, anecdotes, running records and specimen records. (Bruce et al. 2014, 13.) I mostly used running records and specimen records as I was at the school to observe, and not to act as a teacher, therefore the children knew that I was observing them, thus were not as phased by my note taking, once they had got used to me as an observer. Running records are concise and fast to make, they include details such as who is in question as well as what they said or did, more details can be added to these notes later, however these can be less valid as exact details are not always remembered when reviewing the notes later, therefore I predominantly used specimen records, these are similar to running records however they are more comprehensive, they also include the context of the situation as well as more in-depth notes. This type of recording allowed me to get the most thorough data which ultimately added validity to my research. (Bruce et al. 2014, 13.) I therefore recorded the date, rough time, who was in question, what the child said, what the child did and the context of the situation (Bruce 2011, 211). I used a new page at the beginning of each day and setting. As recording notes takes time, there was not time to specifically write the context, people in question and data into an organized format, however all of this information was included in the recordings. After each observation setting, the recordings were written up so that that each observation could be organized into the same format.

5.5 Data analysis

Conducting qualitative research meant that the data was analysed throughout the observation period, not only once the observations had finished (Kananen 2008, 24). After each day of conducting observations at I.C.E.C, the data was analysed, initially it is important to collect and process the data, extracting the useful pieces of data, as this is a vast and crucial part of data analysis (Mauther, Birch, Jessop, & Miller 2002, 159; Kananen 2008, 88). Bruce (2014, 15)

emphasises the importance of reflecting with a particular focus, therefore once I had finished each observation session, I reflected on these observations with the focus of how the children interacted with each other and what patterns arose, as well as detecting any anomalies. After each observation session, I read and wrote up my recordings, therefore processing the data into a structured form. Once this was done, I was able to reflect upon each sessions observations individually and finally at the end of my observation period I assembled, assessed and reflected on all of my observations as a whole. By doing this I was able to answer my research question and have information on how children interact with each other at ICEC during play and during adult led sessions and how the use of language between the children differs in these situations.

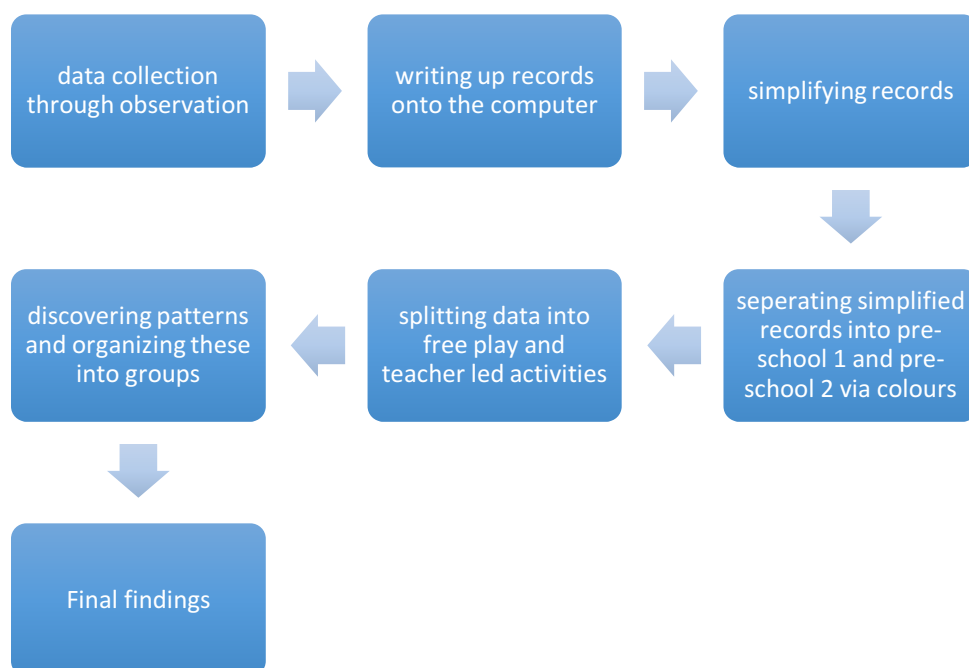


Figure 1 Data analysis stages

To analyse the data, I first systematically organized my findings by splitting it into two groups: interaction during teacher led activities and interaction during free play as well splitting these into pre-school 1 and pre-school 2. I then went through the data in each group and separately tried to find patterns, such as a particular way in which the children regularly interacted with each other, thus categorizing and grouping the data into an easily read format. I was also aware of possible anomalies, which might contradict the rest of the data. Once I had found the similarities and possible anomalies, I was able to contrast the two settings as well as two groups with each other, seeing how they differ and coincide. As I am a visual learner, it was important to initially analyse the data in a way where I could see all of the data at once. This was not possible to do on the computer, therefore I used a large white wall and different colours to visualise the data. This form of analysing the data divided the data into settings and groups, allowing similarities, differences and possible anomalies be easily discovered. (Matthews & Ross 2010, 321 - 322.) See picture below.

The left side shows observations from free play whereas the right side shows teacher led activity observations, the writing in blue as well as the brackets show which patterns belong to which groups. Orange is for pre-school 1 and yellow for pre-school 2.



Figure 2 Data analysis wall

Each individual observation had been simplified and included the date and code informing me where I could view more in-depth data on each observation, which had also been organized into a table. Once I had finished all of the observations I was able to analyse all of data produced by the conducted observations. This visual method of analysing the data allowed the most significant, common ways of interacting be easily discovered as well as seeing anomalies. During the observation and data analysis period I started to notice patterns in the way the children interacted with each other. I then allocated these patterns into four groups; use of language, conflict situations, verbal and non-verbal communications and finally importance of peers and co-operative interaction.

This was not a linear process as the data analysis began after the first day of observations and was constantly reviewed and reflected on after every day to make sure I was as familiar with my data as possible. When going to conduct the initial observations it is important to stay open minded, this is also vital when analysing the final data, it is important to thoroughly go through all the data with an open mind as otherwise I may have run the risk of only looking for certain pieces of information and missing something crucial, however while analysing the

data, it is still vital to focus on the research question and not be led astray by other interesting pieces of data. By constantly reviewing and reflecting on my observations, I not only reflected on the data, but also on the way I conducted the observations and notes, therefore I was able improve my observing and recording for the next day by for example creating codes to make recording faster. (Nolan et al. 2013, 99-104.) These codes included setting each child a number. This made recording much faster and also allowed the children to stay fully anonymous. The pronoun he was always used, also to keep the children anonymous. The groups also had a letter, B and G, this made recording faster and reviewing the data clearer. Many words were also shortened, such as 'each other' became 'eo', teacher became 'T' and Finnish and English became 'F and E'. Examples of data analysis can be seen below.

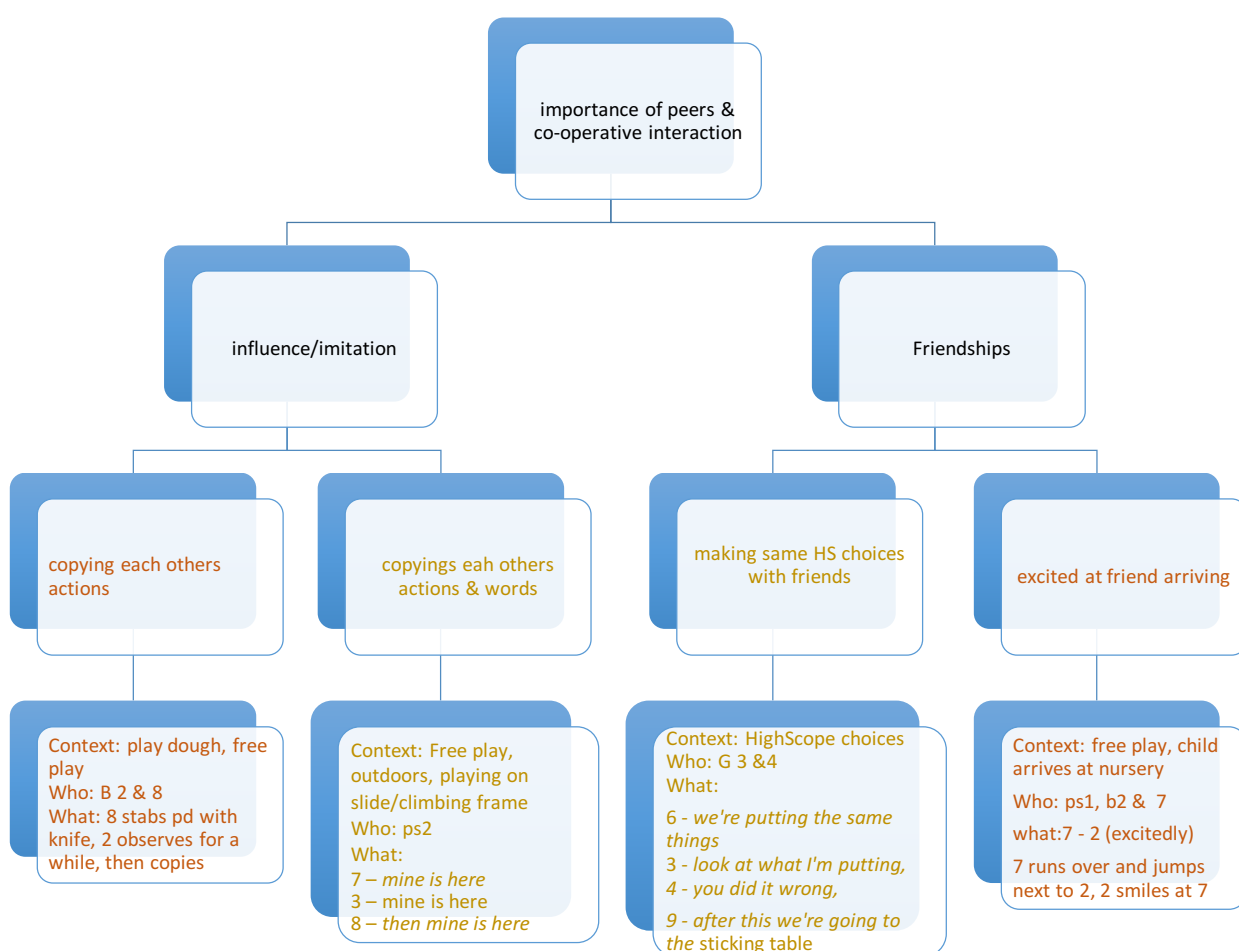


Figure 3 Data analysis, patterns and groups

6 Findings

The following section will include the findings from the conducted observations and data analysis. The findings will be split up into four main groups focusing on different aspects of the childrens interaction. Although many of the patterns interlink, they have been grouped into separately to make this section clearer. In accordance to the research question; Do the

interactions between peers differ during free play and during teacher led activities? This section will be contrasting free play and teacher led activities, however the line between these two types of activities is scewed. For the purpose of this thesis, free play will include instances where the children were partaking in free play inside or outside as well as activities such as crafts and colouring where the children were predominantly in a group of peers without a teacher present for the majority of the activity. Teacher led activities will include activities where the teacher was in a major role, such as leading circle time, a crafts activity or a game such as tag with the children. Although during free play, the children were just among peers for the majority of the time, a teacher was also present for some of this time. At I.C.E.C the teachers play an active role, therefore also partake in play with the children. Teachers were also needed in some situations such as to offer guidance and support in play situations as well as intervening in conflict situations. Although the main research question was to find out whether the interactions between children differ in different settings, it is important to note that there are vast differences between children of different ages. This thesis is focused on children ages 2-5, however the observations showed that there are also big differences in the way children interact with each other within this age group, therefore these differences will also be shown in the following section. Children spoke in both Finnish and English however all of the verbal interaction will be translated into English in this thesis, therefore to indicate speech in Finnish, *italics* will be used.

6.1 Language

As this thesis is studying the interaction between children in a multilingual environment, language plays a considerable role in the interactions between the children. A majority of the children in both groups are Finnish or half Finnish, therefore their mother tongue is also Finnish. Some of the children's English language development is more developed than others where as other children have only just started at I.C.E.C, therefore there are large differences in the childrens language abilities. The following section will be split into subsections showing the different patterns that were found, shown in the figure below.

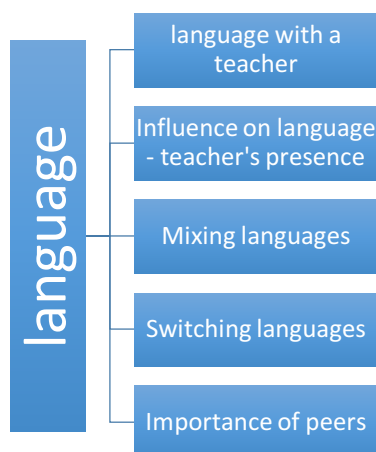


Figure 4 Language

6.1.1 Language with a teacher

The majority of the children who were not Finnish always spoke English, except for a few exceptions where a pre-school 1 child mixed English and another language in some sentences. The Finnish children almost always spoke to the teacher in English, there were times when the children could only say a particular word in Finnish, therefore used Finnish as well, such as “yeah, *pepper*”, but predominately, the children only spoke to the teachers in English. One exception to this, was while communicating with their Finnish teacher. The children have one Finnish lesson a week and during this lesson they are supposed to only speak Finnish, however a few of the children also responded in English during their Finnish lesson. It was noticeable that during these lessons, the children interacted more, especially in the pre-school 2 group. The Finnish teacher also works at the nursery, therefore the children interact with her outside of their Finnish lessons as well. Although the children know this teacher speaks Finnish, they tend to speak to her in English, outside of their Finnish lessons.

6.1.2 Influence on language by teachers presence

The presence of their teacher therefore influenced the language the children used when interacting with their peers. Children in both pre-school 1 and pre-school 2 used more English when their teacher was present, especially during teacher led activities as the teacher was in a major role during these activities. The children in pre-school 1 often used singular words to mean full sentences and their peers often understood the meaning behind these utterances. This happened in instances such as during a cooking activity, one child said “and and” to indicate to his peers that he also wanted to try some food. The children also often said “this” while showing things or to indicate that the child wanted something. However, the children tended to interact with each other less when the teacher was present. Although they may all be in the same conversation or partaking in the same activity, the children often directed their speech to their teacher instead of each other. For example during pre-school 2’s circle time, one child was talking about going to the airport with a big bus, another child then directed speech to the teacher by saying “Teacher, I also went with a big bus” and continued to tell a story to the teacher. There were many instances where the children would clearly listen to each other and add on to each others statements, however direct these statements to their teacher. When the teacher was not present, the children interacted with each other much more and produced more speech. This was noticeable during both free play and teacher led activities, as as soon as the teacher left, the children interacted with each other more, however when the teacher returned, the children would direct their speech and attention to the teacher again.

6.1.3 Mixing languages

While the Finnish children used some Finnish words while speaking English, they also used some English words while speaking Finnish. During pre-school 2's HighScope sessions, when informing each other what they were choosing or where they were going, although they were speaking in Finnish, they also used some English words, such as "snack", "mark making table", "floor toy area" and "happy face brown" to refer to different areas and activities. These are all words which are regularly used by both the teachers and the children. They also used some other words in English such as colours and objects, for example "*I have a shovel*". These instances happened more regularly during free play than during teacher led activities. Some of the children mixed both languages in the same sentence to refer to more than just an object, colour or activity. Sentences such as "*I want another one*", "*you can't throw things*" and "*no, I want, this one*" were used fairly often. The children would however mostly reply to these mixed sentences in Finnish.

During free play many of the children spoke Finnish, as the teacher was not in a major role most of the time. A majority of the children played with everyone regardless of language abilities, however it is important to note that when the children partook in longer play, the children predominantly chose to play with peers who shared the same mother tongue or communicated only in English. Therefore the Finnish children mostly played with each other where as those who were from elsewhere played together. Sometimes one child would say something in English such as "*I see two firetrucks*" and another would then answer in Finnish "*I want it*", clearly having understood however deciding to respond in Finnish. As the non Finnish children heard so much Finnish they had also picked up a few words. In pre-school 1 it was notable that the non Finnish children sometimes used Finnish to tell the Finnish children to stop doing something. They occasionally used the word "*no*". However in most situations, children from both groups often used English to tell someone to stop doing something. Regardless of what language the children were using during a particular activity, in both free play and teacher led activities, the children said 'no' and "stop it".

6.1.4 Switching languages

The children were also able to successfully swap between languages depending on who they are interacting with. This happened both during teacher led activities and free play, however was more noticeable in pre-school group 2. The children in pre-school 1 also swapped languages and would try their best to speak English if a non Finnish child was present, however as during play the children interacted more through non-verbal communication and focused on the teacher more during teacher led activities, language was not always their main method of communication. One example of switching languages in pre-school 1 was not from Finnish to English, but vice versa. During a teacher led activity, a child answered the

teacher in English but then turned to the children to emphasize his own feeling. The teacher asked the child “you don’t like it?”, the child answered “no” and then turned to his peers and said “*it is bad*”. In both groups, however especially in pre-school 2, the children would often speak only English if a non-Finnish child was present, they would also remind each other that a child only spoke English if their peer was trying to speak Finnish to a child who does not speak Finnish. This applies in situations such as when there was two Finnish children and one non-Finnish child at the same table, the Finnish children also communicated in English with each other.

6.1.5 Importance of peers

The English language abilities of the children in both groups varied a vast amount. Many of the children spoke and understood English and they often helped the others whose English language abilities were less developed. This was often noticeable during teacher led activities in pre-school 2, where the teacher would ask a child something and if the child was not able to answer, one of the other children would answer for their peer. It is also important to note that a majority of the children understood English and were therefore able to follow instructions efficiently, however there were a few children who were new at I.C.E.C therefore needed more support and guidance from both their peers and teachers. The children, especially in pre-school 2 would repeat what the teacher had said in Finnish to their peers, so that they could also follow instructions. This was observable in situations such as when the teacher told a child that they could play later, however the child did not understand this, so another child translated this into Finnish. There was a few children who understood almost everything however did not yet produce much English speech. They would therefore use more non-verbal language such as pointing and smiling to interact with their peers and teachers. Although the observations were conducted over the space of 2 weeks, even in those 2 weeks, it was noticeable how quickly the children’s language skills develop as it was perceivable that the children understood more and started producing more speech.

6.2 Conflict situations

The conflicts observed and explained in the following section were a range of different situations including disagreements between peers, situations where a child was provoked and instances where the children tried to prevent further conflicts by influencing their peers to follow instructions. Conflict situations appeared regularly in both teacher led activities and during free play. The children in both groups are beginning to learn how to resolve these independently and co-operate with their peers. It was notable that the children in pre-school group 1 needed much more support and guidance in conflict situations than those in pre-school group 2, there were also significant differences in the way the children dealt with conflicts. During the observation period, 3 different ways of dealing with conflicts were

detected. These were, using non-verbal communication where the teacher had to intervene, independently resolving the conflict by using non-verbal communication, trying to use verbal communication however still needing the teachers support and guidance and finally independently resolving the conflict by using verbal communication. Conflict situations arised in both teacher led activities and during free play, however they were more frequent during free play.

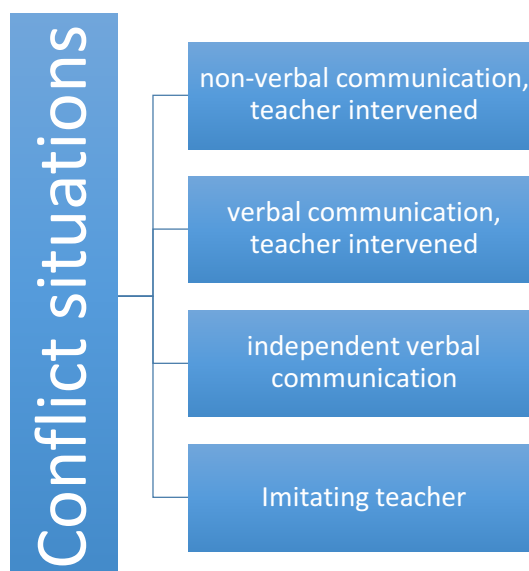


Figure 5 Conflict situations

6.2.1 Non-verbal communication, teacher intervened

In pre-school 1, during teacher led activities, the reasons conflicts arised were often due to one child harrassing their peer, by for example constantly touching them or crawling up to them to get a reaction. The other child would then hit or kick their peer to make them stop, which would then lead to the teacher intervening. Restlessness was another reason for a child hitting or kicking their peers. During teacher led activities, towards the end the activity, some of the children would start to become restless, leading to them behaving aggressively towards their peers and a teacher intervening to stop this behaviour and settle the situation. During free play, one common reason conflicts arised was when one child disrupted their peers play in some way, for example taking toys or not sharing. In these instances the children would both pull at the toy but not use words to express their feelings, a teacher would then intervene to resolve the conflict. There were also many instances where a child wanted to play with their peers however did not know how to, such as when 2 children were play fighting and another joined in and properly hit the other child, therefore disrupted their play and a teacher was needed to settle the situation. The teachers support and guidance was crucial in these situations, to teach the children how to deal with these situations, remind them of how to co-operate with each other as well as making sure the children are in a safe environment. This type of behaviour, where only non-verbal communication was used, was

only observed in the pre-school 1 group apart from 1 exception where a child in pre-school 2 hit their peer when their peer would not give them an object they wanted.

6.2.2 Verbal communication, teacher intervened

Trying to use verbal communication to resolve conflicts, however still needing a teachers support and guidance was also more visible in the pre-school 1 group, however there was also a few instances when the pre-school 2 group needed a teachers help to solve conflicts. This way of resolving conflicts was also more visible during free play, however on occasion was used during teacher led activities. In pre-school 1, there were occasions where two children would try and sit on the same chair and one would say "I was sitting there", however the other would not listen to their peer therefore needed a teachers help. In pre-school group 2 during teacher led activities, these situations arised when a child would try and prevent further conflicts by telling their peer off or reminding their peer of instructions or rules. If they were ignored, a teacher would have to intervene to make sure all of the children were abiding by instructions and rules. These included situations such as a child not joining circle time and another child saying "come here, circle" and "you have to", however were responded with "no" and "I don't want to", therefore a teacher stepped in. During free play in pre-school 1 when the children used verbal communication to resolve a conflict, a teacher was needed when this communication was ignored or requests not followed. These were often instances where a child would take their peers toy and their peer would use phrases such as "mine, that's mine", "no, I was playing with that" or "no, no, no". These were often ignored therefore a teacher was needed to settle the situation. Another cause of conflicts was disruptive behaviour while others were playing. For example, 2 children were playing with a train track however a third stood on the track blocking the track, the children reacted by saying "*I can't get through here*" and "stop it now" followed by pushing the child out of the way, the child however retaliated by hitting them on the head causing the teacher to intervene. Situations like this occurred more frequently in pre-school 1, however also happened on occasion in pre-school 2, such as in instances where a child would take anothers toy and not give it back after they were asked to by their peer, needing a teacher to resolve the conflict.

6.2.3 Independent verbal communication

The children in pre-school group 2 predominantly indepdently resolved conflicts using verbal communication. This happened during both teacher led activities and free play, however during teacher led activities the conflicts often arised by someone not following the rules and their peer telling them to stop, or when the children were sat for example in circle time and did not have enough room or could not see what was happening, they settled the situation by telling each other where to move and then following these instructions. During free play,

these conflicts were very different and included disagreeing on what should happen next while playing or wanting something the other has. The children in pre-school 2 were predominantly able to effectively solve these problems by telling each other what they did or did not want and then listening to these wishes. On occasion, they did threaten to tell the teacher, which was also an effective way of telling a peer to stop what they were doing.

Therefore the differences between adult led activities and free play weren't so much how these conflicts were solved, but more about what the conflicts were about. The biggest differences were between pre-school 1 and pre-school 2. The children in pre-school 2 told their peers what they wanted or didn't want, which then allowed those involved to understand each other, however in pre-school 1, the children just used words like "no" and "stop", while also using non-verbal methods such as wagging their finger to indicate that what another child was doing was wrong. This is why often the teacher had to intervene, however occasionally the teacher was not needed and the children listened to each other.

6.2.4 Imitating teacher

At nursery, children often learn how to resolve conflicts by observing their teachers and then later imitating these actions or words. This was more noticeable during free play, as this is where most of the conflict situations arise. However during teacher led activities there were moments where a teacher would tell a child to stop doing something and their peers would imitate this instruction, such as when a child was trying to eat from the bowl during a cooking lesson, their peer said "*no*", the teacher then noticed and said "no more hands in the bowl" which was imitated by the peer "no more hands in the bowl". These instances happened more during free play, this was often when a conflict had arisen and the children needed a teacher's guidance to resolve the situation, predominantly when a child had taken another's toy. A teacher said "give it back, come on", "come on" was then repeated by the child to urge their peer to give the toy back. The same child then said "come on" again later when they were once again in a conflict situation. In pre-school 2, this type of imitation was not noticeable, however from experiencing conflict situations, they were better able to handle these situations independently. A teacher is often the impartial party who guides the situation, children in pre-school 2 sometimes took this role on to help solve conflicts. Two clear examples of this are when two children were fighting. In the first example the other child stepped into the situation and took the toy the other children were fighting over, one of the children protested by saying "*it was mine*" however the child acting as the mediator responded "*neither of you had it*" and took the toy away, leaving the other two children to carry on playing with other toys. In the second example two children were fighting and another child stepped in and said "*stop it, we're friends*". The two children then stopped and decided to play in separate places for a while.

6.3 Verbal and non-verbal communication

The children in both groups communicated with each other using both verbal and non-verbal communication. The children used these forms of communication in different ways and 3 patterns were found. The children communicated with one another through conversations, statements and non-verbal communication. These patterns will be explained below.

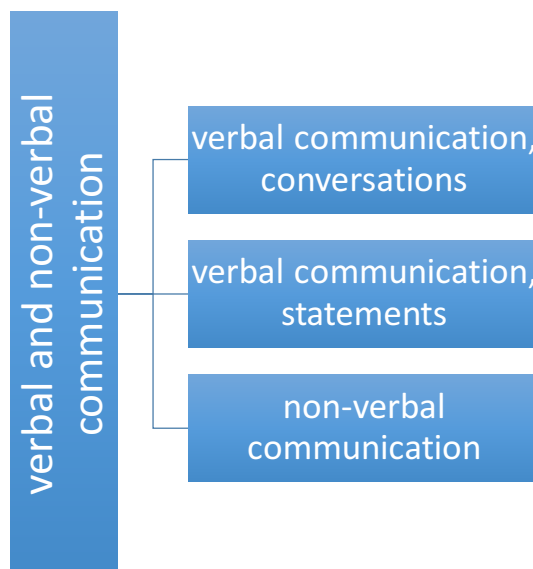


Figure 6 Verbal and non-verbal communication

6.3.1 Verbal communication, conversations

Most of the children expressed themselves verbally more often when they were in smaller friendship groups. The children in pre-school 1 rarely had conversations about something other than play, however the children in pre-school 2 occasionally had conversations which were not linked to play, although these conversations would sometimes lead to play. This happened in an instance when two children were talking about halloween and this conversation then inspired them to bring this theme into their play by pretending to be witches and ghosts. Conversational skills were apparent as the children took turns talking and conversed about the same topic. It was however notable that the children never stayed still while conversing, they danced, walked around or moved in another way as they talked. The children in pre-school 2 also had more developed social skills. As well as conversing with each other outside of play, they said sorry without being prompted to by a teacher and praised each other, such as when a child showed his work, their peers would often reply with comments such as “*nice*” and “*pretty*”.

6.3.2 Verbal communication, statements

Although the children in pre-school 2 can successfully have a conversation, while playing they still often talk in statements, not properly replying to each other. Such as: Child A *"I'm making a pizza that's going to have lots on, lots, lots, lots."* Child B *"mine is really flat"* Child C *"I'm making a nest"*. The children listen to what their peers are saying, however do not comment, instead add their own statement. This happened very regularly, however more in pre-school 2. During free play these types of statement conversations where the children repeat what their peer has said or add on to this statement were often used to tell the other children what role they were playing or where they were going. Such as a conversation between 3 children in pre-school 2: child A - *"I'm going here then"*, child B *"I'm going here then"*, child C *"the police car is here"*, child A *"the police is here"*. child B *"the police is leaving. Here's a robber, look"*. During teacher led activities, the children rarely had these kinds of conversations, however imitated each others statements or words regularly. This happened in both groups. These instances often surfaced when the teacher would either ask the children something or say something, such as: Teacher - *"what colour is this?"*, child A *"blue"*, child B *"blue"*, child C *"blue"*, the children would then all laugh. Or for example when the teacher said *"criss cross apple sauce"*, a few of the children copied this sentence. It was noted, that often when the children copied each others sentences or words once, they would do this again multiple times during the same activity and all laugh.

6.3.3 Non-verbal communication

The children did not only interact with each other using verbal communication, they also used non-verbal communication in many different situations. Pre-school group 1 used non-verbal communication much more than pre-school 2, however it was observed in both groups. During teacher led activities, the children in pre-school 1 interacted with each other occasionally, such as in situations in which a child would pester their peer which would make them react. This was already discussed earlier in the conflict section, however on occasion, the children would calmly push the child away, look the other way or even smile at their peer, which would often be enough to make the child stop harassing them and continue participating in the activity. Non-verbal communication was also clearly observed in situations where the teacher asked a question, and if a child was not able to answer they would turn to look at their peer, indicating that he should try and answer. In pre-school 2, the children also slightly pushed their peers away or turned their heads if they were pestering them to prevent further conflicts. Also, when children arrived at the nursery during an activity, the children would turn and look, sometimes smile and make space for their peer to be able to participate in the activity. On occasion, the children would use non-verbal communication to remind the children of instructions, such as in situations where a child left the circle during circle time, the child nearest to them would slightly nudge them, to indicate that they should return to their

own space. During free play, the children in pre-school 2 interacted with each other mostly using verbal communication, however they also picked up on non-verbal cues when these were given. The most noticeable way the children used non-verbal communication was when a peer was annoying them or doing something they did not want them to do, the children would ignore this child to indicate that they wanted them to stop, this often worked. The children would also sometimes partake in a more social type of parallel play, by for example jumping in separate puddles next to each other and doing the same actions however not speaking. This was more common in pre-school 1. The children would often play co-operatively together, picking up on each other's prompts and imitating one another's actions without verbal communication. Although conflict situations in pre-school 1 often led to needing a teacher's guidance, there were also instances when the children were able to prevent this from happening through non-verbal communication, for example in a situation where a child hit their peer twice, first by accident and then on purpose, their peer ran away to indicate for them to stop and they did. Although the children interact with each other a lot, either through non-verbal communication or verbal communication, they did also sometimes play alone or next to each other without communicating at all. This was more common in pre-school 1, especially for children who did not speak Finnish.

6.4 Importance of peers & co-operative interaction

The children in both groups also interacted with each other in many ways during both free play and teacher led activities that have not been explored in the sections above. This section will be explaining how the children's peers affect them in many situations, by influencing them and forming friendships. The following section will pinpoint various different ways the children partook in co-operative interaction, which therefore shows the importance of peers and peer relationships. The patterns included are friendships, going along with peer's play prompts, interest in each others activities, exciting each other, influence and imitation, observing peers, attention seeking, helping each other and peer learning. This section includes many patterns however they interlink with each other a vast amount, therefore separating them into further groups was not possible.

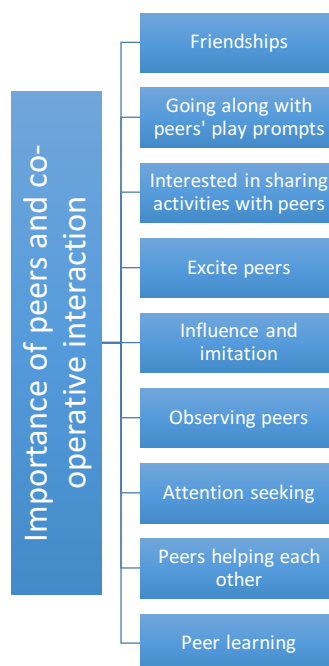


Figure 7 Importance of peers and co-operative interaction

6.4.1 Friendships

The children had clearly formed close friendships with some of their peers meaning that they often played with each other and sat near each other during teacher led activities. This was very visible when pre-school 2 were choosing their highscope choices. Particular pairs or groups of children would discuss what they were choosing so that they could choose the same things. They would say things such as “*what are we doing next*” and “*I’m going to do the same things as you*”. During free play the children who had formed closer bonds often played with each other, they would also spend time with the other children in the group, however close friendships were still clearly visible. In pre-school group 1, the children’s playmates often changed, however, friendships were still visible, such as in situations where a particular child came in the morning and another ran up to him while shouting his name showing excitement about his arrival. Another example of how friendships were visible in pre-school 1 was when one child had been on holiday for a week and another child was asked when his peer was returning, the child was able to answer the correct day straight away as he was excited for his return. In both groups, friendships were more visible during free play as the children could autonomously choose who they spent time with.

6.4.2 Going along with peer’s play prompts

The children predominantly went along with each others play prompts. As the children played, the play morphed and changed constantly, therefore to be able to co-operate the children had to either agree or come up with a an alternative. This happened in both groups, however only in free play, as they did not have a chance for this type of autonomous play

during teacher led activities. Sometimes while the children were playing the theme or play changed very suddenly, such as while 4 children from pre-school 2 were playing outside: one moment the children were digging a hole and the next moment they were playing a tag like game. All of the children went along with this change and were able to carry on playing with each other. This also happened in pre-school 1, for example while two children were running around a table making their trains chase each other, they did not verbally communicate however when one child stopped, the other did too and when one child decided to fall to the floor and start playing with a stethoscope, the other child joined in. The differences between the two groups in situations like this was that the children in pre-school 2 often verbally communicated these changes, or verbally went along with these changes, whereas in pre-school 1, the changes happened mostly through non-verbal communication and imitating their peers. A good example of this happening through verbal-communication in pre-school 2 was when two children were playing with dinosaurs and talking about who was who and which dinosaur was which member of the family, suddenly one of the children said “I’m coming for you, now” and both children began making the dinosaurs fight, a lion and a zebra also joined the dinosaurs and both children went along with these changes. Although the children primarily went along with one another’s statements and prompts, this was not always the case. Occasionally the children in pre-school 2 did not agree with what their peer said so would inform them. Such as when when child A pretended to shoot child B’s car with a rocket, child B responded to this action with “*no don’t, I don’t want you to shoot*”, child A then stopped the action and played something else. In these situations the children generally stopped what they were doing so that they could carry on playing co-operatively.

6.4.3 Interest in sharing activities with peers

Another aspect of interaction which was clearly noticeable was that the children often showed and told each other what they were doing and asked each other if what they were doing or about to do was ok. Although the children often participated in activities that were led by the teacher which would give the children the opportunity to show each other what they had made, they normally directed these statements to the teacher. The children often watched what their peers were doing, but I only observed the children in each group once telling their peers what they were doing or showing their peers what they had made. In pre-school 2 this was verbal, saying “I’m going to do green next”, where as in pre-school 1, this was more non-verbal as the child pointed at their picture and once they realised their peer was not looking yet they said his name to grab his attention. However during free play, both groups much more actively showed interest in sharing their activities with their peers, using phrases like “*look at this*”, “*I’m doing it like this*” and “*look at mine*” in pre-school 2. Their peers would then look and either comment, smile or reciprocate the action by showing their peer what they had made, such as when child A said “*look, what a funny face*” and child B replied with “*well look at how funny this face is*”. Therefore sometimes almost competed

with each other. The children also asked questions like *“do you know what”*, *“can I see”* and *“is this ok”*, this indicated that they were interested in their peers, their opinions and wanted to make sure they both agreed with whatever they were doing. In pre-school 1, the reason for showing their peers something was slightly different. The majority of the time when a child said *“look”*, it was to show something funny which would make their peer laugh. Occasionally the children in pre-school 1 would also ask their peers if they could do something while playing, such as *“shall we take this off and change to something else?”* and *“shall we put this here?”*. The children asking these questions were often the older children in pre-school 1.

6.4.4 Excite peers

While the children in pre-school 1 made each other laugh when they showed each other what they had made or what they were doing, children in both groups tended to excite each other a lot, which in the long run, can make their time at the nursery much more enjoyable. Both groups excited each other or made each other laugh during free play and teacher led activities. During teacher led activities the children, especially in pre-school 1 would make each other laugh by looking around at each other and laughing which would spur their peers on to laugh as well. This often happened during circle times when they found a story funny or were excited by what the teacher was doing. Sometimes the laughter happened in a chain started by one child looking at another, however occasionally all of the children would start laughing at the same time and continuously look at one another. Pre-school 2 were more likely to find copying each other amusing, such as when the children were deciding what to put on their imaginary pizza's, child A said *“a hundred, million pizza's”* and a few moments later child B said *“a hundred pizza's”* while looking at child A and laughing. This also happened occasionally when a teacher would ask the children something and one child would answer and then their peers would copy the same word making all of the children laugh. There was not a big difference between the ways the children in both groups were amused during free play, as it was mostly due to imitating each other, such as making the same noises, running and copying another's actions. Just by one child laughing, they affected their peer and made them laugh too.

6.4.5 Influence and imitation

Children influencing and imitating each other has already been mentioned numerous times, such as while exciting each other and co-operatively playing with one another. Imitation is a crucial factor of children's overall development and was clearly visible during the observation period. The children in both groups imitated each other and influenced each other's behaviour, sometimes positively and other times negatively during both teacher led activities and free play, however often in slightly different ways. In pre-school 1 during teacher led activi-

ties, the children often influenced each other to not listen to instructions or generally misbehave. One child would often start doing something such as climbing over their peers, running away or generally misbehaving, their peers, often only one however sometimes more children joined in, would then imitate this behaviour until the teacher stepped in. The children occasionally did also try to influence their peers to actively partake in activities by repeating the teacher's question or encouraging them to answer by saying their name. The children in pre-school 2 generally influenced each other to behave in a positive way. There were however instances where one child would, for example start flapping their HighScope book and those around them started imitating this action, nevertheless, this behaviour happened less frequently, instead the children would influence each other to for example tidy up by singing their tidy up song loudly, near those who were not yet tidying. The children imitated each other during different activities, influencing each other to actively participate, by doing the actions to songs and following instructions.

During free play, the children in pre-school 1 did not influence each other to imitate one another's negative behaviour as much, however they just imitated each other in play, such as when a child started making his car go back and forth, those around him copied, or when a child slid on the floor or started jumping, his playmates imitated these actions. The children also imitated each other's speech by copying their peer's words. Many children communicated just by saying the same words repeatedly, such as saying "*mine went boom*" over and over again. In pre-school 2 the children also repeated each other's words and phrases often, however not repeatedly over and over again. The children would also imitate each other's behaviour and actions, such as when a child saw their peer building a spaceship, they would also start building a spaceship or when a child started speaking like a robot, their peer imitated them. The children did occasionally influence each other not to follow instructions, for example when a teacher asked two children to participate in an activity, they conferred with each other by saying: child A "*let's not go*", child B "*yeah, no*". This happened rarely though.

6.4.6 Observing peers

During free play, the children in pre-school 1 often observed each other before deciding what they wanted to do or whether they wanted to join in or not. During teacher led activities however, the children focused more on themselves and the teacher than what the other children were doing. Most of the children in pre-school 2 however did not observe each other while playing as much, but did often observe each other during teacher led activities. They would watch what their peers were doing and how they were doing it. This was the case during activities such as singing, dancing and crafts.

6.4.7 Attention seeking

During teacher led activities, the children tried to get one another's attention to make each other laugh or to try and influence their behaviour, however during free play, if a child wanted to play with others, they had to seek their attention. Sometimes, naturally the children would just start playing in the same area and the children would begin playing together. However, if a pair or group of children were already playing, the child who wanted to join had to grab their attention. The way the children did this in pre-school 1 and pre-school 2 was very different. In pre-school 1, the children often used more non-verbal communication and noises to grab their peer's attention, such as picking up toys and laughing or jumping in front of the children to indicate that they want to join too. It was clear, in both groups that some of the children were unsure of how to play with others and would therefore gather negative attention, by for example stealing their peer's toys. In these instances, the child needed more support and guidance from their teacher to be able to participate in joint play with their peers. The children in pre-school 2 would say each other's names or previous play roles to get their attention or by saying things like *"I need help"* or *"look there's a fire"*, which would grab their attention and draw them into the play. These efforts did not always work and the children were occasionally ignored, however most of the time their peers would react in some way, either by looking over and smiling or actively interacting with the child and including them.

6.4.8 Peers helping each other

One significant aspect that was clearly visible in the way especially pre-school 2 interacted with each other, was that they helped each other, co-operated well with each other and looked out for one another, particularly during free play. Some situations where pre-school 2 helped each other were also observed during teacher led activities where the children mostly helped each other tidy up after an activity and while trying to comfort each other if someone had hurt themselves. During teacher led activities, the teacher was present therefore they did not need each others help as much. However, during free play the children often helped each other reach objects, such as handing their peers a particular coloured pencil if they asked for it. Occasionally the children offered their toys without being asked, such as when two children were building houses next to each other and one ran out of blocks, the other gave his blocks to to his peer, so his peer could finish his house. Another example of the children in pre-school 2 helping each other was when a child went for snack however there was no space for him. The other children then moved around to make space as well as offered him everything he needed including a plate, a cup and food, without being asked by the child. This aspect of interaction was not as visible in pre-school 1, on occasion the children did share toys nicely and help each other build something, however this happened more rarely than in pre-school 2.

6.4.9 Peer learning

Children learn through interacting with those around them. Teachers undeniably aid, support and guide children's overall development, nevertheless peers also play an important role. This was evident in multiple different situations, however more apparent during teacher led activities in pre-school 2. The children taught each other how to do things and what things were. This occurred in situations such as when one child was not sure how to tidy up after lunch, another child showed him how to put the leftover food in the bin and which buckets to put his plate and cutlery in. Another instance was when children were looking at a map, one child asked questions like "*is that Finland*" and "*what is that*", his peers then showed him where Finland was and that the image he was pointing to was of a volcano. When asked what something was, the children would respond and tell them, teaching them what different things look like, such as Finland, a volcano and tomato sauce. The Interactions between peers are also effective ways to support language development. On occasion a teacher would ask what something was while showing an image or object, one child would answer in Finnish, such as "*parrot*" and their peer would then translate this into English, after which many of their peers would also say "parrot", showing that they had learnt this word. Another way in which peers supported each others language development was by asking. Here is an example of a conversation which was observed: Child A "*what does stop it mean?*" Child B - "*it means stop it*", Child A - "*stop it now, stop it now*". Later on during play, the child was observed using this phrase to tell their peer to stop doing something, indicating that he had internalized this new phrase.

6.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, there were many differences between the ways in which the children interacted with their peers during free play and teacher led activities, as well as differences between the two groups. The teachers presence changed the way the children interacted with each other. During teacher led activities the children predominantly focused on the teacher and directed their communication to the teacher more than their peers. This also affected their language, as the children whose mother tongue was Finnish interacted mostly in Finnish during free play however switched to English when a teacher was present. There were more conflict situations during free play than there were in teacher led activities as the children were often more focused on their teacher than their peers. The biggest differences in conflict situations were in the ways the two groups dealt with these conflicts. Pre-school 1 used more non-verbal communication and needed a teachers support and guidance more whereas pre-school 2 mostly communicated verbally and were able to resolve the conflicts independently. The children communicated both verbally and non-verbally during both different activities, non-verbal communication being used more in pre-school 1 whereas verbal-communication was more common in pre-school 2. The children imitated each other a

lot and were influenced by each others actions and words. During teacher led activities, in pre-school 1 this often caused the children to misbehave whereas in pre-school 2 the children tried to influence each other in positive ways. Both groups children found imitating each other amusing and would do this to make each other laugh. The children also tried to help each other, especially in pre-school 2 by translating English words and phrases into Finnish and teaching each other how to do certain tasks. This was more common during free play, as during teacher led activities, the teacher was the mostly the person the children turned to for help and guidance.

7 Discussion

The theoretical framework that was used for this thesis gave a deeper insight into how the children interact with each other and how different aspects such as play and language development play a part. The theoretical framework worked as a base of knowledge, giving more in depth information about many different aspects that are vital to understand before conducting research on child interaction. Something that was extrememly challenging was finding previous research on this specific topic. A lot of the research I found was often focusing on a slightly different area, therefore I hope my research can add to the existing research with a slightly different focus.

I started conducting my observations on a particularly busy day, so although I had planned to inform the children who I was and why I was there immediately in order to make sure the whole process was as transparent as possible, this was not possible. Therefore I started my observations while pre-school group 1 were already involved in an activity and pre-school group 2 were starting their highscope session. Before lunch on the first day, pre-school group 1 had a short circle time in which they went through everyone who was present, with the cooperation of the groups teacher, I was included into this so that I could properly introduce myself and tell them that I would be observing them over the next two weeks and that I would be mostly writing while I was there. I introduced myself to pre-school group 2 in a similair setting on the second day of observations. I feel that, in the end, this was actually a better way to introduce myself as the children had already had the chance to see me taking notes so knew what to expect over the period I was there. I should have also been more clear to the groups teachers about who I was and what I was doing. Daily life at nurseries is incredibly busy, therefore more indepth conversations with the teachers about what I was researching happened after starting my observations. The teachers were however incredibly interested in what I was doing and how my thesis could help improve their activities and general daily life at the nursery.

I had originally planned to spend 2 weeks conducting observations at I.C.E.C, however already in the planning stage it became apparent that this would be too much, therefore I decided to

observe for 8 full days. While discussing this with my peers and supervisor, they expressed concerns that this may also be too much, however I wanted to go to I.C.E.C to observe for 8 days as if during the observations I found out that this was too much, I would have to possibility to modify my observations and observe for shorter periods of time. This is what I did in the end as in the first days, it became very apparent that I was getting a large amount of data just from the morning. I had originally decided that I would like to observe one teacher led activity and one free play session from each group every day. I was able to do this and more during the morning therefore I only observed for half of the day and was then able to carry out my data analysis during the afternoons when I was still able to remember each observation clearly.

As I was conducting the research alone, it was at times challenging to decide which particular children to observe. If I had observed less children altogether, such as only one group, I would have missed a lot of data which would have changed my final findings. Another option would have been to only observe certain children, however during my observation period, many of the children were not at the nursery, therefore this would have been problematic for the research.

An interesting aspect of my findings was the differences between pre-school 1 and pre-school 2. I had anticipated finding differences between the two settings, however I had not expected such big differences between the two groups as they are so close in age. Children develop and learn at a very rapid pace, therefore this discovery was expected, however the vast differences were not as expected.

It was particular interesting to observe how the children used language and how they switched languages. Often to tell someone to stop doing something the children used English, however it was also interesting to see that English was also used during instances where a teachers help might have been required however not mandatory. The children would not direct the speech to the teacher, however would speak in English. It was also interesting to see how the children played with each other, especially for those who had more difficulty playing with others. Sometimes they were able to partake in co-operative play, however other times needed more guidance from a teacher. It was interesting to see how sometimes a child who normally found this difficult, was able to play with another child and how they sometimes looked around to see if a teacher could see them playing. It seemed that these children often had a deeper connection with their teachers than the other children.

I feel that I was successful in answering the research question for this thesis. Through the conducted research, I was able to gather a large amount of data which gave me an insight into many different aspects of child interaction at I.C.E.C. Interaction is a broad term for how

people communicate and behave with one another, therefore there were many different aspects of interaction that needed to be observed. I feel that I was able to answer how children's interaction with their peers differs during teacher led activities and free play, as well as bringing in the aspect of how the interaction between peers differs between children of two different age groups. The answer is not short and simple, however there is a difference and it was interesting to find out that the change in the way children interacted with one another was not only to do with the different settings, but also a lot to do with the presence of a teacher. The children communicated with each other more when they were only among peers.

7.1 Ethical considerations and validity

As this thesis includes a large theoretical background, I have respected earlier research and theory by referencing them correctly. Before starting the observation stage of this thesis, it was important to take into consideration my own views and perceptions of childhood and the different areas I will be focusing on. Our own perceptions influence how we behave and interact with others, as well as influencing what we think, therefore everyone perceives situations differently. Once I had reflected on my own views, it was easier to go into a situation with an open mind. (Miller & Pound 2011, 154; Bruce et al. 2014, 2.) Validity is a big concern whenever conducting any kind of research, therefore staying open minded is crucial. Staying open minded allows the researcher to see the situation and the people they are observing as they are, not as they are expected to be. It is important not to come to any conclusions before coming to the end of the research, this could alter how they are perceived without seeing the full picture, therefore the person being observed could be seen in a more negative or positive light, whereas all participants of the observations should remain neutral. Staying open minded also allows the researcher to observe and record unexpected data, as this is valuable to helping them understand the full situation (Hatch 2007, 143.)

From the beginning, I have worked together with I.C.E.C to make sure this thesis was ethically carried out. I have taken into consideration their wishes and have informed them of changes when these have occurred. I have also updated them on the whole process and sent them both my topic analysis and thesis plan. Once this thesis has been finalized, I will also send them this thesis so that they are able to read it and use it to their advantage in any way they deem best.

It is vital to have consent from the participants of the research, as in my case I observed children, I informed their parents of the observations so they had the chance to notify me if they did not feel comfortable with their child taking part in the observations (see Appendix 1). In this case, I would not observe these children. It is deemed unethical to not have consent from the participants and gather data without their knowledge. (Hatch 2007, 177.) However, this

was not necessary to do during my research as all of the parents were happy to let me observe their child. This is why I also clearly told the children what I was doing so they were aware of why I was there and what I was doing. It is vital that I was able to tell the participants and their guardians in detail what I was doing and why I was doing it in a way that they can understand, so they fully understand what they are participating in and what is expected of them, this also gives the children a chance to decline if they themselves do not feel comfortable. (Nolan et al 2013, 75, 84.) The use of the letter to the parents as well as introducing myself to the children is not only to inform them of my research, but it is also to build trust between myself as a researcher and the children and their parents. Trust will allow me to be able to conduct my research in a way that the children feel safe and respected. (Nolan et al 2013, 77.) At ICEC the parents/guardians do not have to give me written consent, therefore I did not ask them for this, however they did have the right to inform me if they did not feel comfortable with their child participating in the observations. I.C.E.C did feel it was important for me to include a picture of myself so that the children and their parents/guardians as well as the teachers knew who I was as soon as they saw me. The letter to the parents can be seen in appendix 1.

Another vital ethical consideration is confidentiality. The names of the children I observed were not used, neither were any identifiable qualities such as gender, or language used. From the beginning, I assigned each child a number, thus even my notes made sure that each child stayed anonymous. The children were referred to in this thesis through codes such as 'child A' to make sure they remained anonymous. Therefore, all participants remained anonymous and any data I gathered was only used for this thesis in a way that the participants are not be identifiable. (Nolan et al 2013, 74.)

As I conducted the research on children, this in itself causes many ethical dilemmas which need to be considered, such as my contradicting role as an adult and researcher. While observing free play there were situations where the children needed an adult's help to solve conflicts. In a few instances, I was the only adult who noticed, therefore notified the groups teacher so that they could come and intervene, I did not want to manipulate the situation, however did not feel it was ethically correct to allow the conflict to grow. There were no situations where I was the only adult nearby, however I had decided that in a situation like this, it would be ethically incorrect for me to allow a child to for example physically hurt another, therefore would have intervened. In one instance a child was crying and the groups teachers were preoccupied with other tasks, therefore I went and consoled the child until their own teacher could come and help. This was also an ethical dilemma, as researcher's role is not to intervene in situations like this, however ethically, I could not leave the child to cry. As I had clearly introduced myself as a researcher and predominantly stayed in this role, the children

very rarely turned to me for help. As they got more used to me, they more and more began acting naturally as they normally would, therefore turned to their teachers when needed.

Children are curious beings, therefore there was a few instances where the children tried to interact with me and played near me. As an observer, I did not want to manipulate the situation, however I also did not want to make the children feel unappreciated or ignored, therefore in these instances I interacted with the children and replied to them. This happened so few times that it did not disrupt my observations in any way and also allowed the children to feel heard and appreciated.

I mostly tried not to make eye contact with the children so that they would act naturally and not be aware that I was listening and watching what they were doing, however there was one instance in which there was a conflict between two children. One of the children pushed the other, however noticed that I was looking over so stopped pushing his peer. Although I did not tell them to stop, they still knew what they were doing was wrong so me looking over stopped the action. This therefore manipulated the situation, so I decided not to include this observation in my findings as I want my findings to come from valid, natural data.

As I was the sole observer in this case, I could not observe each child at the same time and write everything that is said down. To combat these dilemmas, I tried to observe each child at some point throughout each session to make sure that I gathered enough data from each unique individual, instead of only focusing on a few children. If I noticed that I did not have enough time to transcribe everything that was being said, I wrote down the main points of the conversation. Especially as I developed as an observer, if this situation arised, I was able to pick out the important pieces of data, enabling overall valid data.

While the observations for this thesis were being conducted, many of the children, especially in pre-school 1, were not at present. This may cause an issue of reliability, as if all of the children were present, the findings may have been different. The children who were present, were mostly the youngest children in the group, therefore their overall development and abilities may be lower than those who were not present, resulting in bigger differences between the two observed groups. Therefore it is important to take into consideration that when contrasting these two groups and reading this study, that the children who were observed in pre-school 1 were around 2 years of age where as the children in pre-school 2 were around 3-4 years of age.

7.2 Development suggestions and further research

To further develop this thesis, interviews or questionnaires could have been used to gather more data from the teachers in the groups, who will have previous knowledge of the children in both groups. However, as the observations themselves already provided so much data, this will have overloaded the data analysis and would have needed a larger thesis. The teachers also would not have known how the children truly interact with each other as many of the children speak Finnish, however not all of the teachers do.

Further research following this thesis could be carried out on other age groups to see how the interaction between them differs to the children in this thesis. Research could also be carried out on the same aged children at a different nurseries to see if they differ, especially at a nursery where the children predominantly share and speak the same language.

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Appendix 1: Letter to parents/guardians



Dear parents/guardians

I am Varpu Polvikoski, a 4th year social services and kindergarten teacher student at Laurea University of Applied Sciences and I am currently writing my thesis. I am writing my thesis on the way children interact with each other during free play contrasted with how they interact with each other during teacher led activities in a multilingual environment. I will be carrying out my research at ICEC at the Töölö school over two weeks: 11.10 - 20.10.2017. My research will include observing the children during free play and during teacher led activities where I will be writing down the context of the interactions as well as what was said, I will not be taking any pictures or recording video. All of the gathered data will remain anonymous and I will not be using any names, therefore none of the children will be identifiable in my final thesis. The data will only be used for my study.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask me or one of the teachers at the school.

Best wishes,

Varpu Polvikoski