Metropolia

Luz Elena Castro - Lähteenmäki

Developing Learning Environments and Creative Activities to Promote the Acquisition of English as an Additional Language in Early Childhood Education

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

Bachelor of Social Services

Degree Program in Social Services

Bachelor's Thesis

28 September 2022

Author	Luz Elena Castro - Lähteenmäki
Title	Developing Learning Environments and Creative Activities to Promote the Acquisition of English as an Additional Language in Early Childhood Education.
Number of Pages	41 pages + 4 appendices
Date	28 September 2022
Degree	Bachelor of Social Services
Degree Programme	Degree Programme in Social Services
Instructors	Sylvia Hakari, Senior Lecturer Jyrki Konkka, Senior Lecturer

The motivation to write this qualitative and functional thesis was to support a group of children during their first introduction to the English language at their Finnish Early Childhood Education and Care unit. I aimed to create a small English language atmosphere to encourage participation and demonstrate how learning environments and creative activities promote acquiring an additional language in early childhood education. I wrote a short pedagogical plan as a development suggestion for this unit.

The theoretical foundation integrates a short revision about language development and second language acquisition in early childhood education; it includes a brief examination of how forming a relationship with a group of small children help them ease anxiety. It considers the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2018, as the guideline to explore different learning environments and develop creative activities to support English language acquisition. The revised literature justifies the implementation of play, circle time, reading, and creative activities with children to motivate and encourage them to participate and become familiar with an additional language.

My interactions with the children, their daily participation, and their feedback underpin the action research and qualitative part of the thesis. This practice exemplifies that reflecting upon the learning environments and the implementation of activities is necessary to support children learning a second language; however, small children are ready to learn in any environment, and therefore, planning activities is more effective for early childhood educators, who make the activities attractive and organized for children to execute them. The electronic questionnaires for staff and parents were anonymous to find their opinions about the children learning an additional language. The results and analysis of the questionnaires served me to develop practical activities during the implementation according to their expectations and suggestions. The functional element of the thesis is the pedagogical plan, which offers a framework to organize a day in an early childhood and care unit.

Keywords	English as an additional language, learning environments, pedagogical activities.

ekijä	Luz Elena Castro - Lähteenmäki
Otsikko	Oppimisympäristön ja luovien toimintojen kehittäminen varhaiskasvatuksessa liittyen englannin omaksumisen edistämiseen lisäkielenä
Sivumäärä	41 sivua + 4 liitettä
Aika	28.09.2022
Tutkinto	Sosionomi (AMK)
Tutkinto-ohjelma	Sosiaalialan Tutkinto-ohjelma
Ammatillinen pääaine	Sosionomi (AMK)
Ohjaajat	Sylvia Hakari, Lectori Jyrki Konkka, Lectori

Tämän kvalitatiivisen ja toiminnallisen opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tukea lasten englannin kieleen tutustumista suomalaisessa varhaiskasvatuksessa ja päiväkodissa. Tavoitteenani oli luoda osallistumaan rohkaiseva ilmapiiri englannin kieleen, ja osoittaa kuinka oppimisympäristö luovine toimintoineen edistää uuden kielen omaksumista varhaiskasvatuksessa. Kirjoitin lyhyen pedagogisen suunnitelman yksikön kehitysehdotukseksi.

Tämän tutkielman perusta yhdistää lyhyen läpikatsauksen kielellisestä kehityksestä ja toisen kielen omaksumisesta varhaiskasvatuksessa; tutkielmaan sisältyy myös suppea tutkimus siitä kuinka pienen lapsiryhmän muodostumisen myötä jännittäminen vähentyy. Tutkielmani huomioi Suomen varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman, 2018, joka kehottaa tutustumaan sekä erilaisiin oppimisympäristöihin että luoviin englannin kielen omaksumistapoihin. Läpikäydyn kirjallisuuden mukaan on perusteltua motivoida ja rohkaista lapsia toisen kielen oppimiseen leikkiin osallistumisen, ryhmätyöhön, lukemisen ja luovien toimintojen ohella.

Vuorovaikutukseni lasten kanssa, heidän päivittäinen osallistumisensa ja palautteensa, alustaa opinnäytetyöni käytännön ja kvalitatiivista osuutta. Tämä käytäntö on esimerkkinä joka viittaa oppimisympäristön ja aktiviteettien välttämättömyyttä lapsen toisen kielen oppimisen tukemisessa. Kuitenkin, pienet lapset ovat valmiita oppimaan ympäristössä kuin ympäristössä, ja näin ollen, varhaiskasvattajien, joiden lapsille suunnatut aktiviteetit on suunniteltu mielekkäiksi ja järjestelmällisiksi, tulokset ovat tehokkaimmat. Henkilökunnalle ja lasten vanhemmille lähetettiin kyselykaavakkeet sähköisesti. Niissä kartoitettiin anonyymisti heidän suhtautumista lapsen toisen kielen oppimisen suhteen. Kyselyn analyysi ja tulos auttoi minua kehittämään käytännön aktiviteetteja ja toimintoja ottaen huomioon vastanneiden odotukset ja ehdotukset. Tämän opinnäytetyön toiminnallinen elementti on pedagoginen suunnitelma, joka antaa puitteet organisoida päivä varhaiskasvatuksessa ja päiväkodissa.

Avainsanat	Englanti lisäkielenä, oppimisympäristöt, pedagogista toimintaa.

Contents

Appendices
Appendix 1. Thesis Permit Agreement
Appendix 2. Questionnaire for the staff
Appendix 3. Questionnaire for parents
Appendix 4. Pedagogical plan

Table 1: Normative language development, modified chart. Source, Bruce and Meggitt, 2005: 30-32.
Table 2: Kurt Lewis Action Research Steps. Source, McTaggart, 1994.
Table 3: Research methods process.
Table 4: A multilingual learning environment divided into four categories, space, time, people, activities, and quality-quantity variables. Source, Dodman, 2016: 7-8.
Table 5: Different play situations.
Table 6: Circle time area for children two-and-three years of age.
Table 7: Circle time wall for children four-and-five years of age.
Table 8: Art project about good manners.
Table 9: Outdoor ball painting to make a butterfly as a final work.
Table 10: Different art activities.
Table 11: Some survey results from the staff, all staff responded.
Table 12: Some responses from the parents' questionnaire.

Table 13: Questionnaire answers examples from some of the children

1 Introduction

Finland holds a worldwide recognized education system that has become a model to follow by other nations. The guidelines for education are determined by the legislation and are framed in the national core curricula. One of its most important aims is the provision of equal opportunities for everyone, the responsibility of education lies on highly qualified personnel who are trusted and provided with the autonomy to deliver quality professional input to their work (Finnish National Agency for Education and Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017.) Finland is rapidly becoming a more global nation, and the influx of immigration slowly grows each year. The 2016 statistics showed that close to 13 percent of pupils in the capital area were of immigrant background, and consequently, their mother tongue was not Finnish. (Kumpulainen, 2018:14.) This information demonstrates that although education is high at all levels, Finland must prepare to understand the international community where cultural, ideological, and linguistic diversity gains presence each year.

My working partner for this thesis is a Private Organization that aims to encourage children with a social and cultural understanding of our diverse world by providing care and education in small, cosy ECEC units that are functionally bilingual (Ankkalampi, 2022). I intend to promote using different learning environments and creative activities to support children learning in English while fulfilling the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care principles.

This thesis is functional; its principles lay in action research where children actively participate in organized pedagogical activities to encourage English language learning. It offers a set of pedagogical plans supported by the revision of literature. The thesis does not pretend to create educational change in this Early Childhood Education unit; however, learning an additional language, strengthens children's skills, such as thinking capacity, memory, verbal abilities, and other skills (Clarke, 2009:7). The thesis is functional because I aim to create a small scale-bilingual atmosphere that can be developed further in the future. The final work is a ready framework to ease the understanding and planning of activities; also, it can serve as a guide for a new worker, student, or substitute needing to improvise activities for a group of children. The topic of this thesis was the suggestion from the director of the unit. For the first time, they include English in their pedagogical instruction as an extra service for their clients.

It is essential to point out that I do not possess a sufficient understanding of the Finnish language, which was a significant limitation for both the creation and implementation of this project. For example, I could not support my work on Finnish literature, and there is limited information about bilingual education written in English by Finnish researchers. Additionally, I could not fully communicate with the staff members and guardians who preferred speaking Finnish with me. However, we tried to work out our communication using both Finnish and English languages simultaneously. I also had limited time to complete this project, which took place from January to mid-June 2022. Unfortunately, four months and a half were not enough time for the children to fully understand English; however, it was a reasonable time for the children to become familiar with the language and learn to respond to simple everyday commands, such as please come to me, put your shoes away, wash your hands, etcetera. It is also my hope, although it will be difficult to measure, that this short period of exposure to English will leave a positive mark on their future attitude towards foreign languages and different cultures. The Early Childhood Education unit will have the final pedagogical plan to use as a reference for new staff responsible for teaching English.

2   Background

Finland is a bilingual Nation where Finnish and Swedish are the official languages; however, English is notably popular at all levels of education and is the most preferred second language in comprehensive schools. (Kumpulainen, 2018:15.) The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the decision-making of education, including planning, guidance, and monitoring. The municipalities ensure that early education fulfils families and their children's needs, including early childhood education and care services.

Most English early childhood education services function in the private sector; nevertheless, they are under the supervision of the corresponding municipal authorities. The applications for Private English ECEC services are independent of the municipal system; however, KELA grants families a private-care allowance, but each private organization holds certain freedom regarding their fees (City of Helsinki, 2021.) Furthermore, to my knowledge, English language instruction in early childhood education settings has become more popular, and in recent years, new Private English ECEC offer services, especially in the metropolitan area.

Helsinki, Espoo, and Vantaa have the largest concentration of English ECEC services. YLE News (2019.) presented a report on the matter, discussing different reasons for its popularity. The news mention that some families prefer sending their children to a language ECEC unit because English is their family language. Others believe that introducing their children to an additional language at an early age facilitates learning it. For other families, the language ECEC unit is coincidental because it happens to be the closest place to their home or the first place where they could enrol their children. Furthermore, according to bilingual expert and researcher, Hassinen (2019) mentioned in the report, children can learn languages as a mother tongue during the first four years of life without causing delays or problems learning their home language.

Nevertheless, the children's guardians have the right to decide if they want to send or not their children to early childhood education; however, preschool education is one year previous to comprehensive education, and it is compulsory. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021.) According to the Finnish National Agency for Education (2018:15), English is the most popular language to learn as the first foreign language in comprehensive education. Statistics Finland (2021) shows that studying English in comprehensive schools increased last year by 10% compared to 2020. The results were that 93% of children from grades1 to 6 took English as their second language.

According to the Basic Education Act 628/1998, all children without distinction must have access to education; however, children do not have the subjective right of admission into English-education schools compared to the local Finnish or Swedish schools. Admissions to English and Bilingual Comprehensive Schools require an aptitude examination in which pupils demonstrate school readiness and pre-knowledge of the English language, regardless of the children being English native speakers or knowing English by other means. Not all children who take the examination have a guaranteed placement; nevertheless, they all are guaranteed placement in the local Finnish or Swedish schools. (City of Helsinki, 2021.)

The purpose of ECEC is to provide wholistic education that supports growth and development to ensure children's school readiness., (National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2018:7). In addition, some theorists believe it is easier for children to learn languages at an early age; for example, Ruston and Larkin (2001: 26) state that children are more receptive to learning specific skills at particular stages in their life, which are called windows of opportunities. The Finnish National Agency for

Education (2018: 54) mentions that the goal of bilingual education in early childhood education and care is to capture the children's sensitive period to learning a language. The Finnish education system also aims to support language and cultural diversification preparedness by offering children the opportunity to maintain their language and learn not only a second language but possibly a third, even a fourth language, as optional free choices throughout their comprehensive education (Kumpulainen, 2018:15).

The best way to guarantee the integration and acceptance of different languages and cultures within a society is by preparing children to embrace diversification from an early age. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), article 30, stipulates the children's right to use their language, religion, and culture. Understandably, it is almost impossible for any nation to educate children in every language; however, the real meaning is the obligation that all Nations bear to offer everyone equal opportunities to support children's right to their heritage, including their language. A common language is best for people to communicate, and many rely on English. English as a second language seems more popular to learn than any other language in Finland and probably worldwide.

2.1   Working life partner

My working life partner is a private Finnish early childhood and education unit with more than a thirty-year-long tradition of providing service to children in the area of Jupperi Espoo. This unit recently became part of a larger, private organization that owns more than 20 locations around the metropolitan area, including Turku. The emphasis is on ensuring early childhood education and care in safe, small, home-like environments. The main languages of instruction are Finnish or Swedish, and nowadays, English is spoken and taught as an additional language. The principle is for the children to learn functional bilingualism as a supplementary benefit. The early childhood education and care plans for each group of children are play-based pedagogical activities carefully organized according to age and stage of development. They prioritize movement, expression of the arts, and cultural sensitivity. Group experiences and individual attention are daily supported to enrich children's learning outcomes. The children develop and learn skills in a safe and stimulating environment. (Ankkalampi, 2022.)

The facility is a large, detached house with plenty of square meters divided into separate rooms for the children to play, be creative, have physical activities, eat, change

clothes, and sleep. They have a back and a front yard where children play outdoors in separate groups. The children are split up into three groups according to age and stage of development. A total of 39 children are under the care of 7 staff: the manager, two early childhood teachers, two early childhood educators, two social services students specializing in early childhood education, and a kitchen helper. The location of the early childhood education unit is on a quiet street in Jupperi Espoo. Near a forest, a lake, a city park nicely equipped with climbing frames, a large area to play football and run, a shop, and a recycling area. There is also close-by transportation to access the library and a large sports centre where the children can go ice skating during the winter or visit other Ankkalampi-partner units.

My role in the group was to be a classroom assistant and support my working partner with all activities. The development and implementation of my work allowed me to spend full working days observing and interacting with the children and staff. I was appointed to work with a small group of eight children aged two and three years; however, I also had plenty of daily casual interactions with children aged one-and-two years during breakfast, outdoor play, and nap time. I supported the elder groups during outdoor playtime and occasional English circle times by reading, singing, and learning English words. Nevertheless, the target group for this research was mainly children between two and three years of age.

At the beginning of my work in the unit, I had an introductory meeting to become familiar with the Ankka Way of doing things. This meeting helped me understand the expectations regarding the children, their guardians as clients, and the working code of conduct. I also became familiar with curricular, pedagogical activities, and daily practices for all groups, which foundations are embedded in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education. Therefore, staff initiatives are essential and provide an opportunity to be spontaneous and creative in developing a pedagogical plan based on one's experience and interactions with the children and other staff. This background supports my idea of preparing a plan to guide a substitute or a new teacher in creating their daily program. I considered the opinions of the children and their guardians for the development of this work. I collected their participation on various occasions, such as through spontaneous conversations, daily interactions, and formally using an electronic questionnaire. The staff in the unit are experts in their field, knew the children better,

and were my closer guidance during the practical work and journey throughout this process. They supported me daily and answered an anonymous electronic questionnaire too.

3   Theoretical foundations

The theoretical foundation of this project considers the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2018 to support the creation of a plan that comprises a background to create ideas and activities that are motivating, engaging, and age-appropriate. It also aims to justify children's language development and showcase a short literature review about the process of acquiring a second language. It includes the importance of using and developing appropriate learning environments for children to interact during spontaneous play and adult-directed activities.

3.1   The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care

3.1.1   Obligations, local curriculum, and individual plan

The Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for issuing the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, and it frames its objectives according to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The mission of ECEC is to support parents and guardians in ensuring children's well-being by offering equal opportunities for participation, holistic growth, development, and learning. It also promotes equal support through a planned provision of care and education called Edu-care. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018: 7.) The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education consists of three sections: the national curriculum, the local curricula that every day-care organization may formulate while ensuring they meet the National Curriculum guidelines, and the children's personalized plans (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018: 8.)

The local curricula entrust an opportunity for both privately and municipally operated early childhood and care organizations to develop their particular pedagogical identity. Furthermore, organizations may integrate additional or alternative curricula into their programs; however, these are binding and may be subject to revision by different mu-

nicipal administrative departments. Every early childhood education and care organiza-
tion must include in their local curriculum ECEC aims and principles that are fundamen-
tal for children and their families as referred to in the Finnish Act on Early Childhood
and Care (540/2018), the National Core Curriculum for ECEC, and other Acts and de-
crees that protect children's rights, such as the Welfare Act (417/2007) and the Integra-
tion Act (1386/2010). The local curriculum should also promote cooperation with per-
sonnel, guardians, and the children (Finnish National Agency for Education 2018: 9-
10.)

A competent teacher or social pedagogue, in cooperation with the child and their par-
ents, should be responsible for the child's plan preparation. The plan must include the
objectives and pedagogical activity plans that support the child's development, learn-
ing, and well-being. It is essential to consider personnel input and observations regard-
ing the child's learning stage and development process. If necessary, a special ECEC
teacher or other specialists may participate in the planning process if the responsible
teacher contemplates special support measures. The plans are revised periodically ac-
cording to the child's needs (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018: 11-12.)

3.1.2 Developing the operational culture

The operational culture is the scheme in which each organization lays its values, work-
ing preconditions, learning environment, collaboration board, leadership structure, and
how it organizes the plans, implementation, and evaluation of the entire community.
The operational culture is never still; it should seek progress and constant evaluation to
achieve development. All parties involved in the provision of ECEC are responsible for
procuring quality, well-being, and the child's best interest. (Finnish National Agency for
Education, 2018: 30.) The main objectives are the promotion of children's learning and
well-being with a holistic approach that frames the development of pedagogical activi-
ties surrounded by the transversal competencies, the learning areas, the children's in-
terests, and needs, carefully defined by each early childhood education and care or-
ganization. The interaction and cooperation between all pedagogical activities are the
preconditions to creating a framework that considers the concept of learning through
well-defined values for the Finnish society (Finnish National Agency for Education,
2018: 38.)

3.1.3   Learning areas of early childhood and education

The national core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2018: 42-51:) describes five learning areas:

1. The rich world of languages is the area that supports linguistic abilities. Children learn about different cultures and languages, promoting multiliteracy, social participation, and interaction.
2. Diverse forms of expression encourage children to express themselves physically, musically, visually, and verbally. Children learn to appreciate cultural diversity and their heritage.
3. Me and our community promote the development of an appropriate self-image and the ability to understand the world. Children learn to reflect on ethical issues, friendships, and other people's worldviews.
4. By exploring and interacting with the environment, children learn to examine different contexts, such as mathematical and technological understanding to activate critical thinking, including a respectful relationship with nature.
5. I grow, move, and develop. This area is for children to learn the value of self-care. The main goal is to promote physical activity, healthy living, and safety.

The National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2018: 52-53) specifies its perspectives on different languages, cultures, and worldviews, aiming to integrate the diversification of language and cultural backgrounds amongst children to enhance unification and participation. Children are encouraged to interact in multilingual environments. They are not only offered the possibility of learning Finnish or Swedish, but they can also maintain and preserve their parents' language and heritage, such as the Sami, the Roma, and other foreign languages. Children are encouraged to learn about their folklore and traditions and develop a positive identity toward their own culture and history.

Bilingual education offers families with children the choice to learn languages in private or municipal sectors in total language immersion units with large-scale early education where the language of instruction is other than Finnish. Or in small-scale language-enriched early childhood education units, where the functional language counts for less than 25% of their activities than the language of the early childhood education and care unit, Finnish or Swedish (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018: 54-55). My life-working partner fits the small-scale language-enriched bilingual early education classification.

3.2   Language development

Humans develop language naturally; however, it requires good working biological and neurological functions, which adapt according to sensory stimulation and individual experiences. Furthermore, Babies are born naturally multilingual and have the skill to learn more than a natural language and thus communicate in different ways. For example, by using body language, such as posture, movements, and facial expressions, or using sound language, which involves sounds, rhythms, and melodies, with visual language, we use images, symbols, and shapes, and with spoken language, we learn to use words, speech, writing. Finally, with technology, there is the possibility to adapt, develop or aid from other forms of communication (Dodman (2016:2-3.)

Babies' potential to make different sounds is a debate to prove if all babies make the same pattern of sounds because, by age one, most children will tune to the language they listen to (Lindon, 2012: 137). Babies are born socially active and can communicate using non-verbal expressions. At very early stages, babies imitate actions that a carer stimulates face to face, such as opening the mouth and showing the tongue. This early form of communication with a carer is crucial to language development and for learning attachment and understanding towards others even at this primitive stage (Whitehead, 2010: 142.) Babies are alert to stimulation and use their senses to interact with their surroundings, paying careful attention to the human voice. The foundation of the gradual development of babies' language is their socio-cultural context and interactions with other people (Lindon, 2012: 134.) Children develop abilities to create mental representations that are crucial to learning the language and traditions of their community (Cowie 2012: 85.)

Research demonstrates that babies prefer to listen to speech sounds and look at human faces rather than listen to other kinds of sounds and look at non-human figures. In the early communication stages, babies learn to respond to verbal communication with cooing sounds and expect speech responses from the people they interact with (Hummel, 2014:7.) Research proves that children develop better language abilities when they receive encouragement with spoken language, plenty of social interaction, and experience other forms of communication; in comparison, children with limited stimulation and communication experiences may not develop language as fast or rich in vocabulary (Lindon, 2012: 136).

> Language is a form of communication – whether spoken, written, or signed – that is based on a system of symbols. Language consists of the words used by a community and the rules for varying and combining them. (Santrock 2014: 253.)

We understand that communication is achieved in various forms and not only through a spoken language; however, for children to learn a spoken or sign language and communicate with others, they also need modelling from someone and experience social interactions. Although most babies are born with the ability to speak, children are also born with individual differences. The sensory and mental processing of hearing, touch, sight, and speech are essential before learning to speak or sign a language; in consequence, some children are born with an impediment to spoken language; nevertheless, most children can learn a form of communication with proper stimulation from the early stages of life. Such is the case of deaf babies early exposed to sign language; they usually learn to babble using their hands and fingers, similarly to babies who can hear (Bloom, 1998 cited in Santrock, 2014: 256.)

Language follows a set of rules that are systematically organized (Santrock, 2014: 253-255).

- Phonology: the system of sounds that can differ between languages.
- Morphology: the system to form words in a language.
- Syntax: the combination of words to form understandable phrases.
- Semantics: the meaningful formation of sentences.
- Pragmatics: the correct use of the language according to the situation.

3.2.1 Language and thinking theories

Researchers have found that certain cognitive skills are required to develop language; for instance, Piaget's theory (1936), cited in Cowie (2012: 85), stated that language exists in the cognitive system and emerges from sensory-motor experiences; babies can communicate with others through their actions, such as crying and gestures before they can speak. Santrock (2014:168-170) refers to Piaget's theory of cognitive development; infants learn to adapt to the world through internal biological features and external experiences. The child learns skills by seeing, hearing, and touching, constructing new knowledge not always from the environment but also independently. Furthermore, infants adapt to inevitable physical and mental changes and sculpt their knowledge and

understanding of the world through a learning process in which the developing brain builds up schemes that evolve as the child grows. Children further assimilate, accommodate, and organize new information and experiences that trigger an internal need for equilibrium. Children in this form pass from one stage of cognitive development to the other; the sensorimotor stage is from birth to two years, and the preoperational stage is from two to seven years. The other two stages are from seven years to adulthood.

According to Vygotsky's theory (1962), cited in Lindon (2012: 138), language happens when thinking processes support making connections and memorizing words to understand the ideas that others want to communicate because children do not immediately understand the meaning of words. Santrock (2014: 185-187) also points out Vygotsky's contributions summarizing that children use language for communicating and solving tasks, and in his view, children are naturally social creatures. He created the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which indicates that when a child is ready, they can learn something with the support of an adult or a more skilful child. Gradually, changing to a new concept; Scaffolding, where the sponsor adjusts the level of help to allow the child to become independent. Furthermore, Vygotsky argued that children practice language to self-regulate with a period of private speech, which usually appears between three to seven years. He pointed out that for children to master a language, first, they learn to understand themselves, as if thinking out loud to organize their thoughts.

Chomsky, (1957) mentioned in Santrock, (2014: 270) is the creator of a well-known theory arguing that humans are born with an internal biological ability to learn a language which he called the language acquisition device; nevertheless, humans do not acquire a language in solitude, it requires social interactions and the appropriate stimulation and context.

Baron (1992), and Galinski (2010) cited in Santrock (2014: 273), language is fundamental for learning; it allows for expressing ideas and thoughts. In addition, Gjems (2012: 40) and Santrock (2014: 271) suggest that teachers and caregivers in early childhood groups must generate language conversations to support language learning and promote building knowledge. Language development can be supported by ensuring timely language stimulation, slow-down speech, and pace, looking at the child´s eyes, pointing to places you refer to, being simple and concrete, playing games, listening to the children, asking questions, and making children feel you understand what they say (Santrock 2014: 273.)

Tomasello et al. (2005), cited in Cowie (2012: 89), discuss children's interest in being social and their ability to engage in activities with others. Infants learn at an early age to interpret what their caregivers mean to say; for example, when they point at something, ten-month-old babies can imitate the action and ask for something in the same manner. In this sense, babies will acquire language, knowledge, skills, and characteristics of behaviour that represent their social group and culture.

3.2.2 Milestones of language development

In general, we develop as most other individuals; however, as a result of our personal experiences in life, each of us has distinctive characteristics which make us unique. Developmental milestones measure the pattern of ordinary skills most of us share. Milestones are essential to evaluate if we accomplish the necessary skills of development. Santrock (2014:13.) describes the changes in human development, which are consequential to biological, cognitive, and socioemotional processes; these influence each other and are inseparable. The biological processes are changes in the body, such as brain development, the acquisition of skills, and others. Cognitive processes are changes in language, intelligence, and thinking. Socioemotional processes are changes in our emotions and personality. For example, language development milestones delineate skills between speech, language, and the ability to communicate (Visser-Bochane, et., al. 2019: 421).

Babies express their first vocalizations at birth; they make humming noises and cry for different reasons, for example, when hungry, cold, or uncomfortable. In a short time, children begin to use gestures. In the case of deaf children, they learn to move their hands similarly to hearing children who start babbling, this prelinguistic stage is the first one, and it happens as early as three or four months. Around one year of age, children will form their first words (Santrock 2014. 256-257.) Between two and three years of age, cognitive development, and quality of exposure to a language will show in their ability to communicate using complete sentences, even demonstrating an ability to make up their own grammar rules (Dodman, 2016: 4). During early childhood, children become linguistically capable of verbally communicating with others and stop acting on their thoughts; preschool activities such as reading promote language vocabulary expansion and support learning letters and their sounds which later become essential for learning literacy (Cowie 2012: 94.)

Worldwide, children seem to experience comparable language stages independently of the language they speak, thus achieving language milestones similarly (Hummel, 2014:9). Although milestones represent the standard of development, they do not always determine strict results. The recommendation for anyone working with children is to appreciate their accomplishments according to their individual learning experiences and stage of development (Whitehead, 2010: 146). Child practitioners must understand all aspects of children's development and view them from a holistic perspective, especially during planning, executing activities, and during evaluations (Crosse, 2007:18).

Normative Language Development 0 – 6 years	
From birth to 4 weeks	From the start, babies need other people. They respond to sounds, cry to indicate a need, they make eye contact.
4 to 8 weeks	The baby recognizes carers and familiar objects. They make noises, such as cooing and gurgling.
1 to 3 months	Babies listen to people's voices and call out for company. They respond to being talked by babbling and cooing. They cry when they need something. Hearing-impaired babies also babble and cry. Babies are comforted by familiar voices.
3 to 6 months	Babies become more aware of others. They imitate the sounds they hear. They react to different tones of voice. They begin to use vowels, consonants, and syllable sounds.
6 to 9 months	Babies repeat sounds and become tuneful (except in hearing-impaired babies). They begin to understand words like up and down.
9 to 12 months	Babies understand facial expressions, combined sounds, shared meaning, persuading, and feelings. They follow simple instructions, such as kiss teddy. They begin to speak with word approximations such as mamma and dadda, to say, mother and father. Their babble is more expressive and becomes jargon.
1 to 2 years	Children begin to talk with words or sign language. They use more language for communication. Children enjoy trying to sing and looking at picture books. They echo the last part of what others say. Gestures develop alongside words, although they are used in some cultures more than in others.
2 years	Children become more competent speakers. They extend the use of words and can talk about an absent object. They use phrases and can follow simple requests. They want to share conversations and what they know.
2 to 3 years	At this stage, language, and the ability to communicate advance rapidly. Children begin to use plurals, pronouns, adjectives, time, tenses, and sentences. They love to converse, chat, and ask questions. They enjoy more complicated stories and love to hear their favourite ones repeatedly. Their thinking is faster than the pace at which they can express themselves.
3 to 4 years	Children ask why, when, and how questions. They become interested in understanding cause-effect situations. They begin to intend problem-solving and make a hypothesis. They begin to use past, present, and future tenses more frequently. They can learn their name, address, and age. They can pronounce correctly and begin to use grammar. They also enjoy making up words and telling jokes.
4 to 6 years	Children try to understand the meaning of words. They use adverbs and prepositions. They talk with confidence and fluency. They become aware of the rules of the languages they speak. They use language creatively and add more vocabulary as they learn it. They begin to define objects by their function. They like to share new information. They begin to understand that different situations require different ways of talking.

Table 1: Normative language development, modified chart from (Bruce and Meggitt, (2005: 30-32).

3.3   Second language acquisition

Different studies indicate the natural ability of humans to learn one or more languages. Babies are born with a biological system built in their brains that is programmed to learn not only one language but two or more languages with appropriate stimulation. For a small child, in comparison to an adult, no language is more complicated to learn than another (Dodman 2016:3.) The possibility for children to learn additional languages can start for different reasons. Children's first introduction to bilingualism can come through their parents, for example, when their language is different from the other, because of interaction in a multilingual community, at the early education centre, or school, and other possible means (Crosse 2007: 16.)

Furthermore, from birth, babies already discriminate phonetic differences between languages; this natural skill gradually readapts to concentrate on the languages they hear most. Around age one, a toddler begins to increase words in their vocabulary; by three years of age, small children have acquired enough vocabulary and understanding from each language they regularly hear and need to take part in spoken narrative conversations with others. (Dodman 2016:4.) Additionally, children quickly adapt and acquire an ability to swap between the languages they know to use the correct one according to the people they speak with (Crosse 2007: 16.)

Being bilingual is an advantage in education and people's lives. Learning an additional language in the early years contribute to cognitive and social development; helping small children shape their individual and cultural identities (Clarke, 2009:7.) For children to establish a sensible relationship and understanding of their second language, they need to feel that other people also appreciate their home language and culture. This appreciation contributes to developing self-confidence and a sense of belonging (Crosse, 2007:17). The Primary National Strategy (2007) states in this regard that Bilingualism is an asset for anyone; subsequently, a child should always be encouraged to maintain their first language because of the significant role in keeping a cultural identity and connection with their family, besides the ability to learn other languages in the future.

Some studies suggest that bilingual children develop a cognitive advantage where their mental processes facilitate linguistic awareness, literacy, and organized thought (Yip and

Matthews 2007: 5). New educative programs emphasize that learning additional languages in early childhood is more effective and is instrumental to acquiring better school outcomes and achieving future success (Dodman, 2016:1). Being multilingual supports the brain's attention capacity; this process involves the ability to be selective, make choices, and acquire skills to manage different tasks simultaneously, besides helping develop the extended cognitive functions that support building creativity and, most importantly, in the long term, can prevent the deterioration of degenerative processes such as dementia (Dodman 2016: 7.)

When learning English as an additional language, the ideal is for children to experience natural, daily life listening and speaking exposure, similar to the family environment where daily communication naturally supports language development (Crosse, 2007: 16). Motivating children to learn a language can begin by, for example, having regular daily routines, such as circle time, where the children are welcomed and introduced to the day, and other routine activities such as toileting, lunch, play, and sleep. These daily activities help children integrate the information into a concrete format and connect them to their real-life experiences (Dodman 2016:9.) First-hand experiences and free play are the best practice for children to learn in general, and the same conditions apply to acquiring a second language. Children also learn to appreciate languages and cultural diversity through music, rhymes, stories, poems, and art (Crosse, 2007:17.)

In a multilingual environment, communication must have an intention for children to understand the context of the information they receive. It also helps to provide guidance and clues in other forms than verbal communication, such as visual aids, facial gestures, print-rich environments, fingerplays and songs, role play, and hands-on activities (Lake and Pappamihiel, 2003: 9.) Moreover, when children learn an additional language, the instructor should carefully plan tasks and activities according to the pupils' cognitive stage level, having in mind how meaningful and relevant these are to support children's interests and motivation (Crosse 2007: 5). Consideration to children's different learning abilities and understanding to their silent period is essential to support additional language acquisition. Children gradually increase their participation as their language ability progresses. Additionally, Crosse (2007:19) points out that welcoming environments and timely reassurance from caregivers and parents activate language skills promoting the child's holistic development and contributing to a solid learning foundation.

According to Scovel (2001), cited in Lessard-Clouston (2017: 26), there are three points to consider about the critical period for learning a second language before the age of twelve. First: when provided with the appropriate conditions, children exposed to a second language can learn the phonology of a second language similar to a native speaker. Second: the critical period includes learning the correct accent and syntax of the language. Third: there are exceptions between the age when a child learns a second language to achieve a similar native-like pronunciation.

Furthermore, different studies support the so-called critical or sensitive period for learning a language. For instance, children are receptive to learning specific abilities at certain periods of their life, also called windows of opportunities according to (Wolfe, 1998 cited in Rushton and Larkin 2001: 25). Verissimo (2018: 1-3) suggests that sensitive periods are dependent on the child's age and the aspects of language acquisition, such as the mental and psycholinguistic processes that provide material to be ready to learn. He concludes that although earlier exposure to second language acquisition supports developing the complexity of a language and better native-like pronunciation, further studies are needed to specify age and learning outcomes.

Second language skills include word knowledge, grammatical rules, and comprehension. Developing vocabulary skills require the ability to understand what is said and the ability to respond by producing words. Additionally, the variation in vocabulary development is a consequence of biological factors and environmental facts for which the home environment is most attainable; however, it is in early childhood education where children can experience a more quality and structured vocabulary (Hansen and Broekhuizen, 2021: 303-304.)

3.4 Learning Environments

Appropriate learning environments are essential for children's learning. They should primarily be stimulating and safe. A classroom should present children with opportunities to explore, investigate and develop their ideas in various forms. Additionally, each child is unique in personality, temperament, and the way they learn. Not all children mature or learn a skill at the same speed, and children also differ in how they process information, pay attention, and memorize information (Rushton and Larkin, 2001: 5.) Introducing an additional language can merge as part of the natural daily routines where children become accustomed to functioning in that language. The Primary National

Strategy (2007) suggests that when planning the learning environments, schedules and routines need special attention, observing the needs of the children. The pedagogical activities should have a degree of challenge but must be achievable. The learning areas should not be limited to the indoors, as children can experience learning outdoors, in their early education yard, in the forest, and during field trip visits to other locations.

In this regard, Davies et al. (2012: 8) provide research evidence of how appropriate learning environments issue the conditions for children to develop creativity and thinking skills, implying that learning environments should comprise the physical environment, the outdoor areas, and external environments where also learning can happen, considering place and time. Furthermore, early childhood education should promote autonomy and self-agency, where children have free access to materials, toys, and space, in addition to pedagogical activities and formal learning. Educators and caregivers must cooperate with multidisciplinary institutions, such as doctors, nurses, psychologists, and other professionals in the field, to support children's holistic growth and well-being.

In Finnish Education, play is fundamental for children's development; they should have opportunities and encouragement to naturally interact within the learning environments to explore their imagination, creativity, and self-sufficiency. Play also promotes agency and participation. Collaboration between caregivers and children supports the development of social, verbal, cognitive, and physical skills (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018: 31.) Moreover, when children play, besides joy and pleasure, they activate their learning process, where the events and experiences become meaningful, they learn the rules of social interaction and begin to self-regulate. Adults should devote time to playing with children to enhance their experiences (Karvonen et al., 2022.)

Understanding multiliteracy implies different ways of communication, including languages and the use of technology within the classroom environment. Early childhood educators are now working with a generation of children for whom using technology is the norm (Kervin and Comber, 2020.) Multiliteracy in Finnish education is a composition of printed-based literature, videos and graphics, media, and digital literacy, which are part of the transversal competences of the national curriculum (Kumpulainen and Sefton-Green, 2020. 10). Educators have the role of inspiring and supporting the development of children's multiliteracy by encouraging them to use language and verbal

thinking, play with sounds and letters, create, and narrate their stories to others, making attempts to write, read and use technology in creative ways that inspire literacy (Karvonen et al., 2020 33-40.)

4   Research questions

The theoretical foundation of this work aims first to understand the processes of learning a language and how a second language is implemented successfully in early childhood education and care. Additionally, to revise some perspectives on learning English as a second language. Secondly, applying this knowledge is essential when planning pedagogical activities for children from one to five years of age; therefore, the guidelines from the National Core Curriculum for Early childhood Education and Care 2018 are part of this work. Thirdly, to defend the central question, a review on how learning a second language can be influenced by the practical use and development of different learning environments.

I believe the framework to reach my goals is participatory action research. According to McTaggart, 1994: 315 participatory action research follows a process of steps first described by Kurt Lewis (1946, 1952): planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. I pursued this model to develop my activities with the children and repeated it many times during the implementation. An input in participatory action research from Mackay, 2016: 1; is about self-reflection, where action research undertakes an uninterrupted process. She also suggests that a researcher should influence changes in the environment. For McTaggart, 1994: 320, action research is about knowledge production that requires participation and empowerment. My goals are to support children acquire a language with a participative approach that enhances their trust in their abilities.
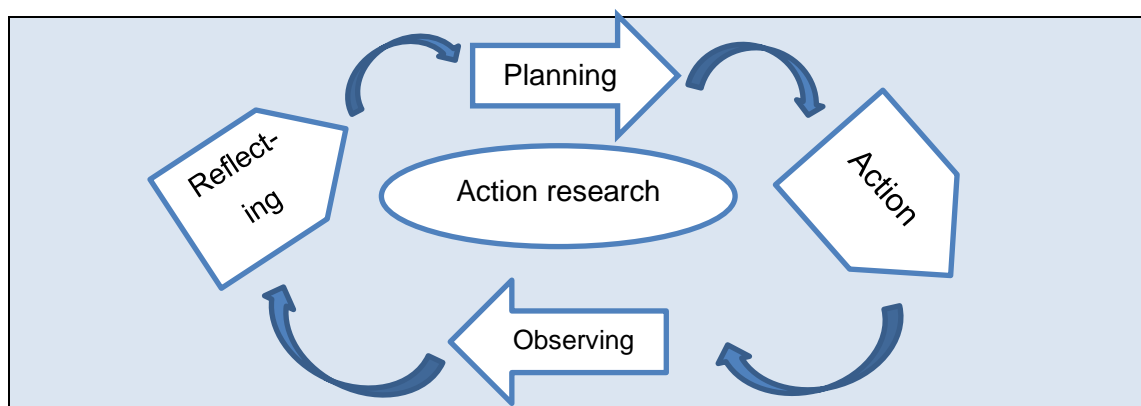

Table 2. Kurt Lewis Action Research Steps in McTaggart, 1994.

The qualitative part of the research took place by applying two similar questionnaires to the unit's personnel and the guardians. The idea of the questionnaires was to gather information about their wishes and expectations regarding the children learning English for the first time. The children's opinions were also essential for the development of this work; however, given the age of the children, the method to recollect their input was mainly through play, observation, and documentation. Carrying out this qualitative research supports this work attaining to the guidelines of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, where it is stipulated to consider the personnel, the guardians, and children's input when preparing the plans to develop the local curriculum, as well as the children's learning plans. (Finnish National Agency, 2018: 9,11.)

5   Methods used to gather information

This project began in January to the middle of June 2022 to complete a consecutive four-month and a half of total time with my working-life partner. During this time, I had the opportunity to interact daily with the case study groups, mainly children aged one to three and occasionally four to five-year-old children. For the qualitative part of this work, I used traditional research and socio-pedagogical methods, such as daily observations and dialogue during play and interactions with the children. Children's participation, inclusion, and empowerment were part of almost every aspect of the day as children are encouraged to take part; however, carefully considering their agency and abilities. To recall daily experiences, I used documentation and reflection in the form of a journal. Timely dialogue with my working partner was essential to agree, coordinate, plan, perform and evaluate my performance. Because of continued COVID-19 restrictions, a good part of the study time, parents were not allowed inside the premises, and communication with them was limited.

After a few weeks of working in the unit and getting acquainted with the children and their parents, I obtained permission to distribute questionnaires to find out the opinions and expectations of parents and staff about the addition of English as a functional language in their early childhood education unit. I used two online questionnaires prepared in a generic google forms format, with both open-ended and open-closed structured questions. I disabled the recognition of electronic mail addresses to keep the an-

swers anonymous, and the choice to answer them was voluntary. I shared the questionnaires with the families of my assigned group and with all the staff in the unit. Most of the invited people answered the questionnaire, except for one family.

The focus of the questions was to gather information to understand their perception of English instruction at the early education unit and perhaps understand their feelings, ideas, and expectations of everyone involved. The results and analysis of the questionnaires served me to create part of the pedagogical activities according to the expectations and suggestions of parents and staff. When COVID restrictions eased, the parents were comfortable asking me questions and giving comments during arrival and dismissal times. My colleagues offered feedback during our meeting times and whenever we had the opportunity to dialogue during spontaneous formal and informal conversations.

The recollection of information from the children was possible during individual interactions and group observation, where I could ask questions, hear their comments, and capture English language and socio-emotional progress. Although, it was difficult to interpret their input because of their age and language abilities. To support my research method, I kept a journal where I wrote significant happenings and unusual situations that occurred to the children during the day, as well as comments and feedback from staff and parents. This journal helped me recall experiences and daily self-reflection.

Table 3. Research methods process

5.1   Ethical considerations

Ankkalampi -Jupperi organization approved my research work (Appendix 1), and as a member of their personnel, I carried out my daily responsibilities according to their policies and values. As an Early Childhood Educator, I followed recommendations from the ethical guidelines for social welfare professionals (Talentia, 2019). These include various acts from the Finnish legislation, values, ethical behaviour, and specific regulations that support the integrity of this work and my professional performance. Furthermore, I consulted the Finnish Advisory Board of Research and Integrity (2012) to become familiar with the regulations for the responsible conduct of research. All my research activities emphasized honesty and integrity. I pursued to follow ethical procedures, looking through recent literature from reliable and trustworthy sources. The publications and professional authors are cited accordingly to avoid plagiarism and wrongfully misappropriating their ideas.

To comply with the General Data Protection Regulations, ethical consideration to receive the different opinions from parents and staff was private and anonymous. There was no collection of electronic mail addresses from the questionnaires nor the respondents to maintain their anonymity. There is no need to preserve the questionnaires and responses after the approval of the thesis; therefore, I will delete the files from my database in google forms. The estimated time is between September-October 2022.

As a moral person and a professional, I must maintain the secrecy of the company I work for, its clients, and my co-workers, as stipulated in Finnish law. Therefore, no disclosure of names or photographs that compromise the integrity of the company or the people to whom this work is related.

6   Implementation

On my initiative, my colleague and I organized and wrote a weekly plan of shared responsibilities to lead routines such as morning or afternoon circle time, monitoring morning or outdoor time, reading, playing, and so forth. The primary goal was to coordinate our interactions with the children, work upon clear aims and planned activities, and share the amount of Finnish and English instruction and communication. We mostly followed a play-based approach to learning, and occasionally, adult-led peda-

gogical activities to motivate children's participation in organized tasks to reinforce specific skills, such as music, physical education, art, language, cultural knowledge, and other abilities as framed in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care 2018.

6.1   Building a relationship with the case group

I had no previous experience working with small children; therefore, in the beginning, I spent time observing and learning from the other staff. Initially, the children showed interest and curiosity towards me, especially the youngest children who did not mind what language I spoke; they liked whenever I offered to play, care for, hold them up, dress them, or be close to them. However, my assigned group of 2-and 3-year-old children had difficulties and started acting out whenever I was present. Some did not want to hear English, showing their dislike by putting their hands on their ears and often crying and refusing to be near me. After a short time, the situation was stressful and uncomfortable for everyone. It was challenging for both the children and staff. I believe some children were suffering from strange or separation anxiety, which is normal behaviour at this age because they did not understand me. While separation anxiety and anxiety towards strangers are normal behaviour during the early years, according to Darling-Churchill and Lippman (2016:1), small children slowly learn the skills to control their feelings and emotions. The control of emotions is a continuous practice based on socio-cultural expectations. It supports how children learn to relate to peers and adults and may impact their future success in many spheres of their lives.

6.2   Anxiety to strangers and Separation anxiety

Different studies refer to Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment and point out that healthy attachment is the instrument for developing self-confidence and trust. Children must identify with a primary caregiver at the early stages of their life (Eisen, Schaefer, and Barlow, 2005: 17.) Additionally, developing socio-emotional abilities in early childhood education begins by recognizing feelings and emotions. Studies also suggest that emotional skills are fundamental to forming relationships and supporting school achievement (Darling-Churchill and Lippman 2016: 2).

I tried to work with the children individually and as a whole group. Nivala and Ryynänen (2019: 230, 342) suggest that socio-pedagogical methods consider essential to be inclusive and create a community atmosphere. Most importantly, children need to build trust towards their caregivers to achieve better outcomes in developing learning in other areas (Darling-C., and Lippman 2016: 3). To build up children's trusting me, I carried out all regular routines as usually and invested time in procuring activities for the children to interact, either playing, listening to a story, singing, painting together, and others motivating tasks. When we were able to engage in an activity, I held them, paid attention, listened, supported them, and participated in their games. I acted as a provider and caregiver, available and happy to play with them. My goal was to make them feel safe around me. These are specific actions I took to support children.

- I supported children during their mealtimes, while in the toilet, getting dressed, playing indoors or outdoors, and when they slept.
- My colleague and I created pedagogical activities together, considering the children's opinions and individual interests.
- I cared, held them, talked to them, and cheered them up when they were upset.
- I invited other children to play with a child that was upset.
- I communicated with parents asking for feedback.
- We read stories and sang songs about feelings. We used puppets to act stories that helped them reflect upon similar situations.
- I started occasionally speaking Finnish and translating words. This action helped the children to respond. They also realized I could understand them, allowing me to comfort them in their language when they felt distressed.

6.3 Translanguaging

There are different ways to implement bilingual education; one method is the Two-Way Immersion program, meaning one language – one subject; however, studies demonstrate that bilingual children quickly acquire the skill to switch between the languages they speak when they need to, making this rule unnecessary. Additionally, this practice comes from the idea that mixing languages cause confusion and learning delays, but there is not enough scientific validation in this regard (Antón et al., 2015: 2.)

Nevertheless, there are opposite studies to the traditional monolingual manner of teaching a second language, which requires avoiding talking to children in their native

language to prevent cross-linguistic contamination. Portolés and Martí (2017:70) examined the benefits of Translanguaging as a practice in early English as second language instruction. Translanguaging is a term to describe the ability multilingual speakers have to alternate between languages they know. Portolés and Martí found that occasionally speaking to children in their native language mediates their understanding, supports the construction of the whole meaning, and reinforces inclusion.

The issues in my group demonstrated that gaining the children's trust was the primary need I had to solve. By showing evidence that I could understand them in their own language, children slowly began to accept my presence. I recognize that figuring out what to do with small children was initially challenging, and it took me quite a while to understand that I needed to concentrate on our communication and interactions rather than on achieving activities through formal English instruction.

6.4 Methods to develop the learning environments and pedagogical activities

During my designated formal and informal pedagogical activities, I resourced on the library, the internet, my previous experience, and my observations of other staff working styles and wisdom, especially from my partner teacher. I applied my recently acquired knowledge, creativity, and personal style while relating to the children during spontaneous interactions or routines while playing, eating, or getting dressed. I talked to them naturally, speaking English as if they understood me; I repeated words, used physical actions with my face, hands, and body as necessary, and showed them objects or pictures whenever available. I also resourced on translanguaging; I said words and sentences in English and said the same information in Finnish. I used media for specific purposes, such as looking at pictures, reading books, listening to music, and singing; however, I avoided showing the screen when it was for singing and dancing.

When thinking about the children's learning areas and the opportunities to learn during different pedagogical activities, I followed the Dodman Multilingual Environment variable framework, in which space, time, activities, and educators are central to organizing learning in a multilingual setting. Quality and Quantity of stimulation are part of these variables, which is especially necessary in our case since my colleague and I had to divide the children, our time, and efforts between English and Finnish instruction.
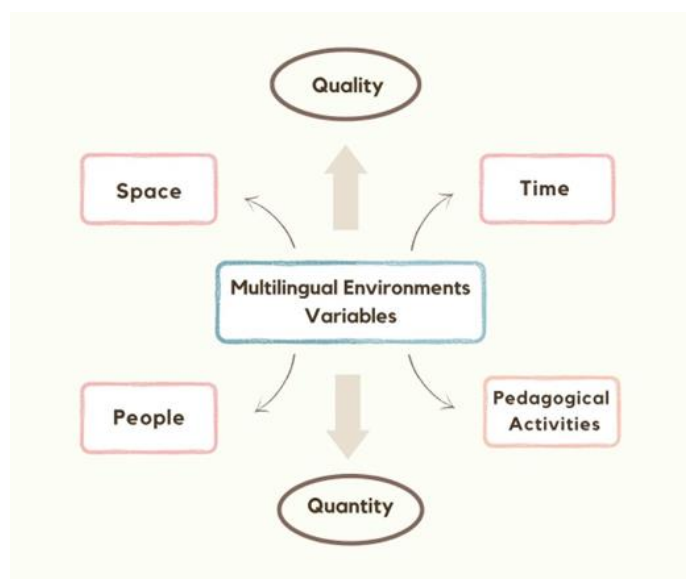
Table 4. A multilingual learning environment divided into four categories, space, time, people, activities, and quality-quantity variables according to Dodman (2016: 7-8).

6.4.1 Play

A great part of my interactions with the children in all different environments was through play. Playing needs to be understood as an approach to learning since playing is what children do on their initiative, and they do not need an adult around them to enjoy it. When it comes to playing, children freely decide where, what, with whom, and how long they want to play. Children possess within, enough self-initiative and autonomy to give purpose and interpretation to their games; (Arnott and Wall, 2021: 8.) The authors add that playing, learning, and developing are interlinked, and through this process, children acquire knowledge, social affective, cognitive, and cultural identity abilities. Nevertheless, interactions between adults and children enhance successful learning, where the adult supports the child's initiatives (Anning and Edwards, 2010: 8). Furthermore, adults need to evaluate the necessary level of involvement in children's play, procuring being a companion, an admirer, a facilitator, and a safety moderator; maintaining equilibrium to avoid interfering too much and becoming a commander, or too little that children do not benefit from their presence (Lindon, 2012: 205.)

After agreeing with my colleague, we prepared the playing areas for children to explore, play, interact and learn freely. Our role was to provide materials, communicate in

English or Finnish accordingly, and monitor that while the children played, we also encouraged learning socio-cultural abilities, such as sharing, being fair, self-regulation, using their voice to communicate, and cleaning after themselves, among many other skills. The first steps towards observing and documenting children's learning experiences started after discussing with my colleague the use of the learning areas within our designated space. We agreed on making some changes within the play areas; although we could not buy new furniture, toys, or materials, we decided to move the furniture around for the children to have an organized space, ensuring free access to toys, such as cars, construction toys, colourful blocks of different sizes, a properly equipped kitchen with utensils and dolls. We organized an area for quiet reading, close to a floor area with a large mat for children to sit on during adult-conducted circle times.

We used ready-placed shelves on the wall for extra toys, such as big toys, big cars, board games, puzzles, drawing books, paints, colours, paper, balls, dressing-up costumes, and so forth. The children could see these toys and ask for them whenever they wanted to use them during their free choice of activity. We continued changing the furniture and toys around throughout the four-and-a-half-month period of my work to motivate the children to play and interact with peers.

The children played in different environments, in the indoor designated areas, for example, the circle time area, the playhouse for role play, and the tables to play board games, puzzles, and make art activities. We used the sleeping room's free floor space for construction games where the children played with big blocks, a train track, and played with cars. The sponge-carpeted room functioned as the gymnastics area where we supported gross motor skills and different forms of expression with games, music, and dancing, using equipment such as balls, hula hoops, balancing boards, and a parachute. There were two outdoor play areas: the front yard with a large sand pit, a furnished playhouse, and a concrete floor for riding foot-to-floor on cars and tricycles. The backyard was carpeted with fake grass to play with balls, a slide, a swing, a shed, a small trampoline, and many other toys and equipment. We often went to the forest to explore during the snowy season and spring. We made a few trips for sledding, a museum visit, and to complete an Olympics track.

With this in mind, we understand that children-initiated play was when children had free choice of activities and developed their games alone and with their friends. Whereas caregivers-led play; was organized activities and playing required adult interference in

the sense that without a leader, children could not perform them, such as when we used a parachute, went to the forest and children used a tablet to take photos, skipping the rope and singing English rope songs, and more games of such type.

Table 5. Different play situations

6.4.2 Circle time

Circle time activities support learning English as an additional language; according to Weatherhead (2008: 4), to prepare a circle area as a learning environment, there must be a designated space in the classroom for children to sit all together on individual mats or a large mat. They should face a wall where pictures and labels are displayed, such as vocabulary, objects, animals, letters, a calendar, days of the week, and other items that can change according to a theme. These visual charts encourage learning through repetition and continuity and support language progression. According to some research, children usually enjoy the variety, dynamics, and creativity of the linguistic and visual sessions of circle time. Circle activities promote listening, attention, collaboration, self-regulation, and better relations between peers and adults (Cefai et al., 2014: 125-126.)

I received ready picture cards, letters, days of the week in English and Finnish, colour cards, weather cards, children's name cards, and vocabulary flash cards. Initially, during circle time, the children were asked to sit on a chair, and they listened to music and participated from their chair in whatever the leading staff planned for them. I suggested changing it to the floor on a mat, although chairs versus a mat do not matter according to (Weatherhead, 2008: 4). I felt that giving children the freedom to self-regulate, participate, and learn to remain in the circle by their choice was a development step for them. We accommodated those cards on a wall and placed a mat on the floor. This change proved positive. Often, I asked children to put their name cards on the wall or the weather card according to how the weather looked outside. They also played rhythm beats on a triangle to match their name syllables or tapped a drum along a song, and these acts encouraged them to sit and wait their turn to participate in doing something. They also enjoyed movement songs, especially doing silly actions, singing songs that helped expand their English vocabulary and comprehension, such as body parts, colours, numbers, polite words such as please and thank you, and other topics of their interest such as animals and objects.

Spontaneously, I held a few circle times with the elder groups, but later I requested the opportunity to create a new learning wall for them and placed it in a different room. Their original designated area had many distractions, and some children were used to taking books and toys to play with them instead of paying attention to the activities presented by the leading staff. The new room had a large circle carpet ideal for this purpose, and I made charts for the alphabet, a calendar, numbers 1 to 30, and regular geometric shapes for their learning wall. I held three circle times on the new area, and the children seemed to respond positively to the changes; we used the picture cards on the wall for visual support, repetition, and learning new vocabulary. We sang and danced to songs, and I read stories from picture books to support language progression by asking simple questions that I expected children to know, such as answering the name of an object, a colour, a number, or a weather word, which was the vocabulary these children were able to learn during our spontaneous and circle time interactions.

During circle times, I read the children about 35 different books and taught them a repertoire of more than 20 songs and rhymes in English. I was pleased to observe them learn many words from the books, such as the colours, animal names, and objects. The children also learned to respond to simple instructions, such as sit down, come

here, stand up, raise your hand, and what is this colour? What is the name of the day? What is the weather like today?

I suggested Finnish or English circles as an everyday activity after outdoor time, which is ideal for children to internalize it as a routine, the same as they wash hands after being outside or eating meals at the same time every day. Unfortunately, because we shared the instruction times in the Finnish language, I could only lead two or three circle times a week. It took longer than expected for the children to settle and learn to join in. Some circle times were challenging because circle times are an activity that requires one adult leading and at least one more adult supporting the children, especially when they are small and do not understand the language.

According to expert suggestions, circle times should be a whole school foundation; they are more effective when all participants understand that circle time promotes self-regulation as children learn to follow commonly agreed rules. It takes training and patience and sometimes negotiation with some children, but they become good listeners and confident to speak up as they become accustomed to sitting, listening, and participating, especially when they begin to understand what is happening. (Weatherhead, 2008:3.)

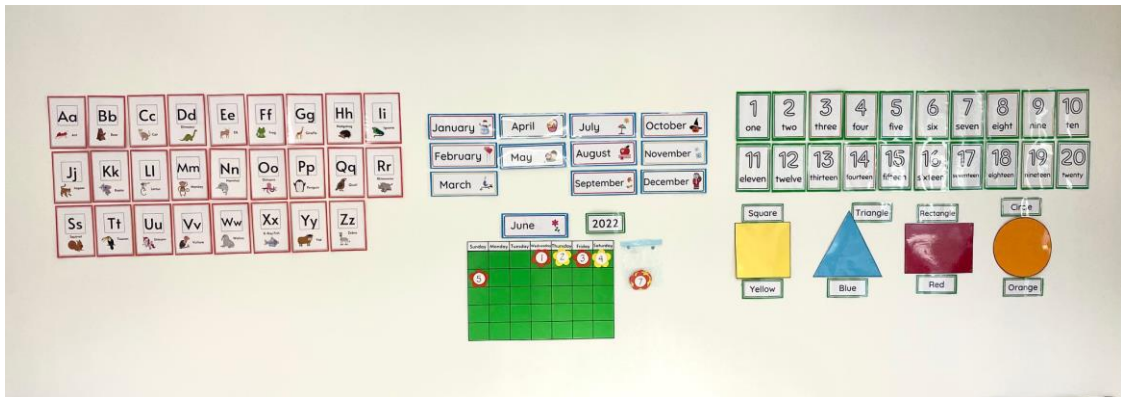Table 6. Circle time area for children two-and-three years of age.

Table 7. Circle time wall for children four-and-five years of age.

6.4.3 Reading big picture books

Reading picture books with children is one of the most common activities in early child-hood education. It supports an ideal platform that encourages different forms of com-munication besides listening and speaking and supports language and literacy compe-tence (Roberts, 2008: 1.) Research demonstrates that repeating the same storybooks increases the acquisition of vocabulary in comparison to always reading different books. Children love listening to the same stories, which offers the possibility of mas-tering vocabulary and language structure (Mart, 2012: 104). Children learning a second language engage in dialogue during reading using different forms of expression before they can form words and phrases, such as gestures and sounds. The approval of this form of interaction promotes participation (Kappenberg and Licardio, 2022: 4.) Further-more, children will learn to engage in stories as they begin to understand the vocabu-lary, eventually learning to respond to open-ended questions. Reading increases the ability to answer questions and supports autonomy and decision-making (Zhou and Yadav 2017:3.)

I borrowed books from public libraries and chose those with little text and bigger pic-tures. I also considered the children's interests according to what I noticed they liked. I tried to read as often as possible to the whole group of eight children, and occasionally, I would also read to one or two children during one-to-one interactions. While the chil-dren did not understand the language, they only held their attention for short periods. I

had to scan through the pages and concentrate on a few facts, pointing at specific pictures and repeating words. I read books that would help them increase relevant vocabulary, for example, about family, colours, animals, cars, numbers, feelings, body parts, etcetera. We repeated a few books I had already read to remind the vocabulary. While reading, I asked children to repeat simple words, and I asked questions I knew the children would be able to answer in English, such as naming animals, telling colours, and counting objects. I also allowed children to share their comments and experiences while we were reading, although they communicated these in Finnish. The children learned a good part of the English they could understand throughout these reading interactions. By the end of this project, when the children saw me with a book, they happily came to circle time because they knew I would have something new to show them.

6.4.4 Activities that promote creativity

Creative activities that support the development of fine motor skills, visual arts, self-expression, music, and the use of different materials, help children adopt an aesthetic understanding (Karvonen et al. 2022: 140). Children need to explore firsthand and have real-life experiences; for example, trying different musical instruments, learning to use glue and paper, and cutting with scissors. Children's creative experiences should be their own and not copied from an adult. These not only refer to arts and crafts but to creativity in general because children can explore their imagination with other subjects such as science and mathematics (Bruce and Meggitt, 2005: 264-365.)

Art can be an instrument for research; the opportunities for dialogue that materialize during the activities are a resource for teaching and learning about the child, what they like, and what they want to express. A teacher needs to pay attention to the child's point of view because the result may be too abstract to have an adult meaning, and they must avoid influencing the child's perspective (Biff and Zuccoli, 2019: 59-60.)

We worked on different activities to promote music making, dancing, painting, colouring, and using materials such as glue and paper. Small children enjoy sensory-motor experiences, and using materials can be appealing to them. They created many projects out of simple exercises; for example, we started a discussion about good manners; we read a couple of stories about being kind; How to Say Hello, by Sophie Beer, and I Am a Kindness Hero, by Jennifer Adams. We found children's songs about good manners on YouTube and sang them a few times. We complemented this topic by

making a flower display with the children and labelled four important polite phrases, thank you, please, sorry, and excuse me. The children helped make this piece of art by sponge printing a piece of paper. They chose the colour themselves. Later we cut out petals, and the children helped ensembled the flower together, cut out the centre, and pasted it on top. The children were reminded about their manners the entire time the display was on the wall, and they were proud of their flowers.

Table 8. Art project about good manners

The children did many art activities during the time I spent with them. The photos included on these tables, 8, 9, and 10 show only a few of our projects. We used different environments, such as the outdoors, and different materials, snow, paper, paint brushes, and blocks. Presenting activities with a variety of purposes motivated the children to take part in them. These gave us plenty of opportunities to use language and learn new vocabulary. At the same time, we ensured the support of the different areas of development according to the national curriculum. We practiced working together, waiting our turn, and sharing. The children learned about science, mathematics, multi-literacy, cultural knowledge, and different points of view. They learned about themselves and ways to express themselves, among many other basic concepts.
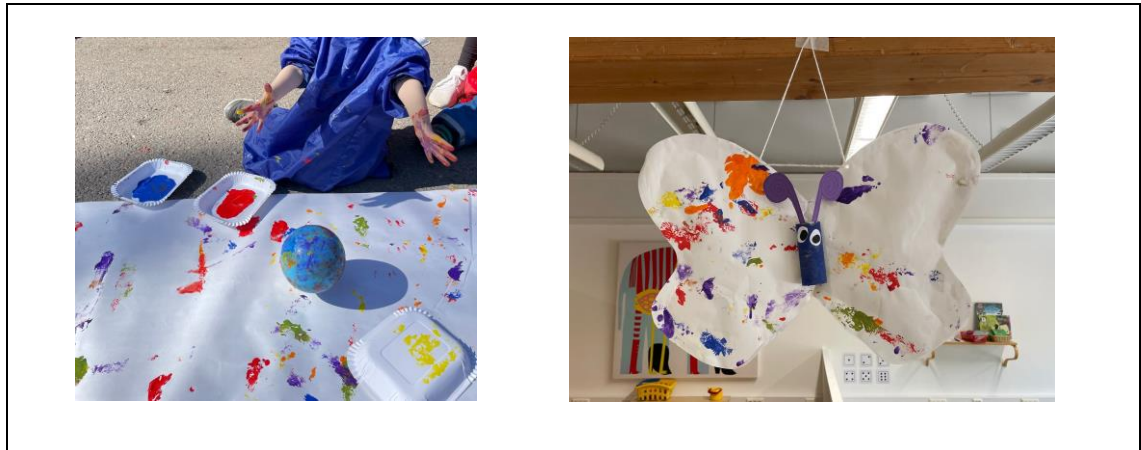
Table 9. Outdoor ball painting to make a butterfly as a final work
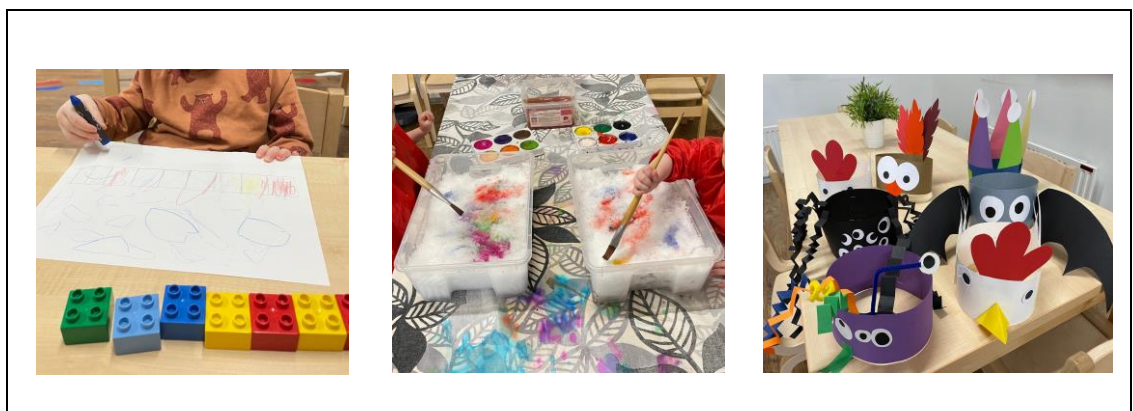
Table 10. Different art activities

7   Survey results and analysis

I applied surveys for the personnel and the parents of the children to find out their opinion regarding the children receiving instruction in English and their input on the possible pedagogical activities that could support learning. Collecting the viewpoints of the children was also necessary; however, the research methods applied were different, such as gathering information through their play, paying attention to their activities, and the conversations children had with each other. I kept a diary where I wrote notes to remember what the children said or how they acted during certain events. Nevertheless, interpreting and reflecting on the children's learning and actions was more subjective since most of them could not respond to direct questions, and the analysis of their behaviour is a reflection of these observations.

7.1.1 Input from the personnel

Understanding and respecting each person's role in the Early Childhood Education Unit setting is necessary to create a cohesive learning environment. It took some time for some of the staff to accept this change as a positive learning alternative. Some of them had doubts and questioned the need for children to start learning a second language at such an early stage; one of their fears was the consequence of speaking a second language to children who could not speak their mother tongue yet. Some staff also got anxious about listening to too much English. I understood that it might have been mentally exhausting at the beginning, especially for those who could not fully understand English.

I also recognize that it was also difficult for me as my Finnish is limited, and I had to communicate in Finnish with the rest of the staff. I was the only person speaking English in the whole setting. It took me some time to understand that I needed to lower my expectations and appreciate the opportunity I had by teaching the children English for the first time and proving that they were indeed receiving a lifetime benefit and were learning English.

The survey answered by the personnel shows that only 50 % of them felt that learning an additional language was positive, and the other 50% of the staff felt neutral about it. See table 7. However, the personnel recognized that children were learning English successfully, with 66.7 % against 33.3 % who felt children were not learning English. The reality is that children have a listening period in which they are silent. My practice was too short for children to learn enough English to start speaking in sentences, but they began to understand and respond to simple instructions, which was satisfactory enough for only four months and a half of exposure. Also, the personnel had no training in bilingualism; therefore, they did not have to know what kind of a process it takes for children to learn a second language.

1. How do you perceive the idea of children being exposed to English since the day-care is officially a Finnish language day-care?
6 responses

- ● A positive option
- ● A negative option because the daycare is Finnish
- ● Neutral

50%

50%

3. Do you think the children are effectively learning English?
6 responses

- ● Yes.
- ● Somewhat.
- ● Not really.

33.3%

66.7%
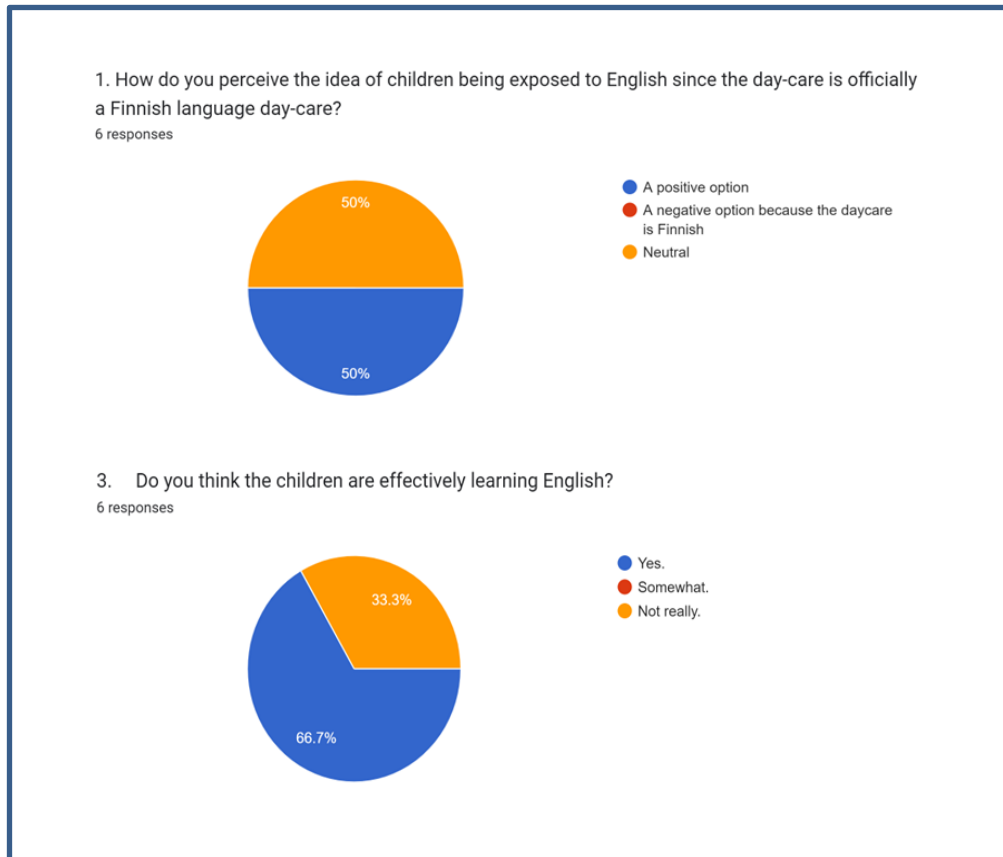
Table 11. Some survey results from the staff, all staff responded.

7.1.2 Input from the parents

The parents of the children had different opinions regarding their children learning an additional language. There were seven responses out of eight; however, one of the responses had no value to be considered. The majority of the parents responded that their children were enjoying learning English. They also mentioned how their children felt about learning English and the positive aspects of learning an additional language. In a different question, 42.9 % responded that their children were interested in all possible pedagogical activities; additionally, 28 % of the parents thought that their children enjoyed arts and crafts. I understood this as they liked when the children made creative activities with different materials and could take them home. Some parents chose storytelling and the outdoors as significant activities for their children.

- Learning English is fun.

- My child talks about the songs they learn.

- Uses English at home and is interested to hear Finnish words in English.

- At home, they are always very proud to show what they have learned, and like to calculate in English, sing the songs, etc.

- They ask frequently what different things are called in English

- They are so small that do not comment directly, but happily speak and chant the English rhymes, weekdays, numbers, and other nouns they have learnt.

  Positive aspects of learning an additional language.

- Learning about other cultures.

- Positivity.

- Diversifies learning and thinking, is easier to learn other languages and other new things.

- They are learning while playing and the threshold for language learning remains low.

- He gets to listen spoken English from very young age which hopefully helps him learning it easier in school later.

- Language skills in general are a good thing, I can't name any specific good aspects.

5. Can you mention day-care activities that your child seems more enthusiastic to take part in?
7 responses

- Story telling, reading, talking.
- Using their imagination, self expression, role play such as house, police, heroe...
- Exploring the environment, the outdoors, physical activities, such as running, fo...
- Construction activities, such as building with blocks, Duplo or Lego, puzzles, b...
- Drawing, painting, creating things with...
- All of them.
- Other.

Table 12. Some responses from the parents' questionnaire.

7.1.3 Children's input

Functional English does not require children to become bilingual. The idea is to become familiar with the language, learn words and phrases, and feel comfortable when someone speaks to them. Nevertheless, introducing an additional language in an early childhood education unit requires careful planning and consideration. However, it is also essential to understand that children must feel comfortable and enjoy the experience because, in early childhood education, the development of the child's holistic growth and well-being is a primary goal, and learning becomes a natural consequence.

In this sense, it is also necessary to be responsive to improvisations and to take the opportunities when they are present, especially if we want to allow children's input in their learning (Broad, 2021: 217.)

The children in the group I was assigned were too small to voice their opinions. I used observation and reflection to evaluate their choice of activities, as expected in action research (Mackay, 2016:1, McTaggart, 1994). I interpreted their preferences according to how often they chose the same games. This task proved to be difficult because the interpretation is my opinion, and it is difficult to measure value in something that results ambiguous. I observed them during their games, the materials, and toys they chose to play with, the preferred areas, and the spaces. However, many of the possible activities were previously framed somewhat by us adults since I considered Dodman multilingual environment variables, Dodman (2016: 7-8). We organized the learning areas, the time children had to play, and the adults involved in observing or interacting with them; involuntarily, the children had little influence on the arrangements. With this, I emphasize that the learning environments we chose, the play areas we prepared, and the toys and materials we made accessible for the children influenced the children's play choices to a certain point.

All of these play opportunities mentioned below supported English language learning. While caring for and observing them, we had plenty of verbal communication and interactions. The children were free, practicing empowerment at their level but similarly learning boundaries; children needed to self-regulate, participate with others, and practice inclusion.

- Most children took books to look at on their own or with a pair. They especially liked those with animals, trucks, and big pictures of familiar objects and situations.
- The children loved playing with physical education equipment, such as balls, a climbing ladder, and cushions to practice climbing or balancing.
- In the play area, they enjoyed the construction blocks, train tracks, cars, and trucks, and using their imagination in home and kitchen role play.
- The children loved being outdoors. They enjoyed games in the snow. When the weather changed, they played in the sand pit, made pretend cakes, and played with small building trucks on the sand. They enjoyed using tricycles, playing football, the swing and a trampoline, and many other games such as running and catching others.
- Going to the forest was also a preferred activity; the children had a short walk there. They practiced climbing on rocks and short brunches.
- The children did not look for doing art activities on their own or as a free choice; however, they did not have materials at hand; these were in drawers. Often, when I

invited children to participate in art activities, it was difficult for them to leave their games to sit at a table and produce a piece of art.

Direct questions for some children: What would you like to learn in English?

Children answered in the Finnish language:

- To sing
- Play
- Colours
- I do not like English! Oh! I know! I want to learn words: like hello, light, and toilet.
- I can say the colours; yellow, orange, and green. I like English!
- I want to know how to say hello, come with me, can we play? I want to understand because, in my new school, there will be an English boy who cannot speak Finnish.
- I can already say yes, thank you, no! Yellow, I can count to 11. I like English because then I know what others say. I would like to know all the things in English.
- I like English because I want to count to 100 and know all the dinosaurs' names.

Table 13. Questionnaire answers examples from some of the children.

8   Pedagogical Plan

The idea of developing a small-scale plan was to support new personnel that arrives at a new job with doubts about how to start the day. Early childhood education and care life is usually busy, and nothing happens slowly. It usually takes time to adjust and understand a new set schedule and the different routines. A substitute is usually suddenly called to rush to work. Unfortunately, this plan was not ready during my practice period at the ECEC unit; furthermore, I did not have time to receive input from the staff while preparing it except for considering their opinions about what children should learn in English. The final product is a mere suggestion, and hopefully, it can be of some use in the future for them. See appendix 4.

9   Conclusions

This professional practice helped me understand that small children need patience and consideration when introduced to a new experience. Not all children willingly participate

in a game or activity they did not choose. Not all the children were comfortable with me speaking a different language to them. The period of language barrier caused distress to some of the children. Crosse (2007:6) states that small children must feel emotionally relaxed and socially comfortable to learn new information, and the learning environment needs to support their feelings of safety. For me to build a trusting relationship with the children, it was essential to address their feelings of anxiety first. It was necessary to demonstrate that I was there to help them, make them happy, give them toys, and keep them occupied and motivated to learn English with fun activities.

After the children adjusted to me and stopped crying, they happily came to the early education unit and almost immediately started to play. They took every opportunity they had to play. Our communication took place at every moment, from saying good morning to directing them to take their shoes off and put on their slippers until the time came for them to leave for the day. I realized that for this age group, one to three-year-old children, daily art activities were not always motivating, and they did not care much about the visual environment. For them, it was more important to have objects and materials to work with alone or in groups and toys close by to have a little game. Nevertheless, considering the learning areas of the curriculum, we invested time in planning and preparing pedagogical activities for the children to take part in and fulfil different learning objectives.

For research purposes, I now understand that observing small children while they actively played was more helpful. Playtime supported their pedagogical opportunities for learning. The Finnish curriculum emphasizes that children learn, act, experience, and participate while playing, moving, exploring, and freely expressing themselves (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2018: 38). Having the opportunity to relate to the elder groups, preparing the learning areas, having visual aids, and planning creative activities supported much more learning English for them. I also dedicated time to observing them and reflecting on their participation and interactions with me and each other. Most importantly, they needed opportunities to enhance their abilities by encouraging them to be more independent with their learning and empower themselves in the classroom.

In response to the original questions in this thesis, how the learning environments and the development of pedagogical activities support the successful learning of a second language, I conclude that the learning environments were important and influential. They offered motivation and a way to express their creativity; however, they were not

all crucial for our interactions. For small children, like the ones I was working with, the emotional relationship, care, and support I provided were more important to respond positively to communicating with me, independently of the language we used.

10 Discussion

This thesis aimed to demonstrate how the physical and visual environments, together with the implementation of creative and stimulating pedagogical activities, support successful learning of English as an additional language; however, the age of the children I worked with led my research to a temporary detour, since I had to concentrate first on the children's well-being.

A future consideration is to evaluate children's priorities when they are small. I found out that for children to respond and participate in organized pedagogical activities, they first need to trust their caregiver. Attachment is the bond built between the child and their primary caregiver. It is an emotional process that supports the healthy emotional development of a child (Lindon, 2012: 82.) The same need for affection is transmitted when children go to an early childhood education unit. They need to feel supported and perceive that their early childhood educator is offering them their commitment. This process becomes challenging when we add a barrier to communication. It is equally necessary to recognize the feelings of the adults in the unit. Some caregivers might display strong feelings when children are in distress. Thus, for future development, workers should meet and discuss their feelings when they also present anxiety related to changes in the staff and adjusting to new daily routines.

After building a secure relationship with children, they were more receptive to participating in organized activities. According to Lindon (2012: 101), for children to learn, they need to have confidence in their abilities and social acceptance in the group. Caregivers need to ensure that children also relate to and accept each other. Furthermore, practicing self-chosen activities and free play supports interactions taking place. I realized that for small children, organized creative activities such as arts and crafts are fun, not because of the result but because of the experience; however, the children responded better to their free choice of activities than adult planned activities. With this research, I observed that the learning environments are of central importance because they offer a positive disposition to learn, and children will get involved if they have the

space and materials at hand; Nevertheless, adult supervision and encouragement remain as important.

The process of planning activities requires following all steps of action; therefore, once we create a plan, it is essential to execute it, being flexible to adapt to necessary changes. We must observe and attend to how children participate and acquire skills. Additionally, we need time for self-reflection and evaluation. The plan of action and activities does not stop. We should make improvements after each experience (McTaggart, 1994).

I suggest a pedagogical plan because starting a new work experience can be overwhelming. Communication with others usually happens eventually, but it needs to be straightforward. The human power in a classroom must coordinate in time and actions, knowing where each person needs to be and what each person must be doing in time and condition. I propose to write a framework for classroom management, with the participation of the responsible staff. Dodman's (2016: 7-8) variables of a multilingual environment showcase the equilibrium between time, actions, and resources; it prioritizes quality of instruction rather than quantity. The staff should create opportunities and provide spaces for pedagogical experiences. They also set a time for routines and activities and designate responsibilities for each situation. The organized pedagogical activities that ultimately support learning must be developed with the children's and their parent's input as stipulated in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC, 2018.

References

Ankkalampi, 2022. Ankkalampi – Ankdammen – Duckies – päiväkodit. < Tervetuloa - Ankkalampi-Ankdammen > Accessed 10 March 2022.

Anning, A., and Edwards, A. 2010. Young Children as Learners. In: Miller, L., Cable, C. and Goodliff, G. Eds. 2010. Supporting children's learning in the early years. 2nd ed. Routledge, CH 1.

Antón, E., Thierry, G., Duñabeitia, J.A., 2015. Mixing Languages during Learning? Testing the One Subject—One Language Rule. PLOS ONE 10(6): e0130069. < https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0130069 > Accessed 6 July 2022.

Arnott, L., and Wall, K., 2021. Research through Play: Founding Principles for Playful Research Approaches. London, Sage, CH 1.

Basic Education Act, 628/1998. < Perusopetuslaki 21 (finlex.fi) > Accessed 20 April 2022.

Biffi, E., and Zuccoli, F., 2019. Art as a method of research. In: Brown, Z., and Perkins, H. 2019. Using Innovative Methods in Early Years Research: Beyond the Conventional. Routledge, London and New York. CH 4.

Broad, M. 2021. Research proposal 2: Playing and being, here and now – Adults using improvisation to join children aged 0-5 play. In Arnott, L., and Wall, K., 2021. London, Sage, Pp. 215-225.

Bruce, T., and Meggitt, C., 2005. Child Care and Education. 2nd ed. Hodder and Stoughton: London.

Cefai, C., Ferrario, E., Cavioni, V., Carter, A., & Grech, T., 2014 Circle time for social and emotional learning in primary school, Pastoral Care in Education, 32:2, 116-130, < *Circle time for social and emotional learning in primary school (metropolia.fi) > Accessed 8 July 2022.

City of Helsinki, 2021. Early Childhood Education in Helsinki. < Early childhood education | City of Helsinki > Accessed 20 June 2022.

Clarke, P., 2009. Supporting Children Learning English as a Second Language in the Early Years (birth to six years). VCAA < (monavalekindergarten.com.au) > Accessed 30 June 2022.

Crosse, K. 2007. Introducing English as an Additional Language to Young Children: A Practical Handbook, SAGE Publications. ProQuest Ebook Central. < https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/metropolia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=433637 > Accessed 16 February 2022.

Darling-Churchill, K. and Lippman, L. 2016. Early childhood social and emotional development: Advancing the field of measurement. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology. ProQuest Ebook Central. V. 45, Pp 1-7. < https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2016.02.002. > Accessed 6 February 2022.

Davies, D., Jindal-Snape, D., Collier, C., Digby, R., Hay, P., and Howe, A. 2012. Creative learning environments in education – A systematic literature review. Thinking Skills and Creativity 2013 (8) 80-91. < *Creative learning environments in educ.pdf > Accessed 21 February 2022.

Dodman, M. 2016 Building multilingual learning environments in early years education. Journal of theories and research in education. 11 (1) 2016. < *Building multilingual environments.pdf > Accessed 20 February 2022.

Eisen, A. R., and Schaefer, C. E. Separation Anxiety in Children and Adolescents: An Individualized Approach to Assessment and Treatment, Guilford Publications, 2005. < https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/metropolia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=362582 > Accessed 6 February 2022.

Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity, 2012. P: 28-40 < HTK_ohje_2012.pdf (tenk.fi) > Accessed 2 June 2022.

Finnish Education in a Nutshell, 2017. Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish National Agency for Education < finnish_education_in_a_nutshell.pdf (oph.fi) > Accessed 20 June 2022.

Gjems, Liv. 2012. Teaching in ECE: Promoting children's language learning and cooperation on knowledge construction in everyday conversations in kindergarten. Teaching and Teacher Education 29 (2013) 39 – 45. < Teaching in ECE: Promoting children's language learning and cooperation on knowledge construction in everyday conversations in kindergarten (sciencedirectassets.com) > Accessed 13 February 2022.

Joakim E. Hansen & Martine L. Broekhuizen. 2021. Quality of the Language-Learning Environment and Vocabulary Development in Early Childhood, Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 65:2, 302-317, < DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2019.1705894 > Accessed 29 June 2022.

Karvonen, et al. 2022. Playful Learning in Early Childhood Education in Finland. Otava Publishing Company LTD, Helsinki.

Kervin, L. and Comber, B., 2020. Early Years Teachers' work and play with multiliteracies. In Kumpulainen, K., and Sefton-Green, J., 2020. Multiliteracies and Early Years Innovation: Perspectives from Finland and Beyond. New York, Routledge. CH 2.

Kumpulainen, K., and Sefton-Green, J., 2020. Multiliteracies and Early Years Innovation: Perspectives from Finland and Beyond. New York, Routledge. CH 1.

Kumpulainen, T., 2018. Key Figures on Early Childhood and Basic Education in Finland. Tampere: Juvenes Print-Suomen Yliopistopaino Oy. < Key figures on early childhood and basic education in Finland 2018 | Finnish National Agency for Education (oph.fi) > Accessed 13 May 2022.

Lake, V.E. and Pappamihiel, N., E. 2003. "Effective practices and principles to support English language learners in the early childhood classroom", Childhood Education, vol. 79, no. 4, pp. 200–203. < Effective Practices and Principles to Support English Language Learners in the Early Childhood Class (metropolia.fi) > Accessed 15 February 2020.

Leino – Kaukiainen, P. 2007. Kasvatuksen historiaa – Instituutioiden tutkimisesta kokonaiskuvan rakentamiseen. Kasvatus & Aika 1 (1) 2007: 75–82. [Pdf]. < kasvlein.pdf (helsinki.fi) >. Accessed 12 February 2022.

Lindon, J. 2012. Understanding Child Development 0 – 8 Years. 3rd Ed. London: Hodder Education.

Mackay, M. 2016, "Making sense of critical participatory action research. Reflections on The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research", Interna-

tional Practice Development Journal, vol. 6, no. 2. < Making sense of critical participatory action research. Reflections on The Action Research Planner: Doing Critical Participatory Action Research - ProQuest > Accessed 20 September 2022.

Mart, C. T., 2012. Encouraging Young Learners to Learn English Through Stories. English Language Teaching, 5(5) 2012: 102-106 < Learning through reading.pdf > Accessed 14 July 2022.

McTaggart, R. 1994. Participatory Action Research: issues in theory and practice. Educational Action Research. 2:3, 313-337 < Participatory Action Research: issues in theory and practice (tandfonline.com) > Accessed 22 September 2022.

Ministry of Education and Culture: Early Childhood Education and Care < Children's right to early childhood education and care - OKM - Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland > Accessed 20 May 2022.

Nivala, E., and Ryynänen, S. 2019. Sosiaalipedagogiikka: Kohti inhimillisempää yhteiskuntaa. Gaudeamus 2019. 230, 342.

Portolés, L. and Martí, O. 2017. Translanguaging as a teaching resourse in early language learning of English as an additional language (EAL). Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language and Literature. 10(1) 2017, 61-77. < DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.698 > Accessed 13 March 2022.

Primary National Strategy, 2007. Supporting children learning English as an additional language: Guidance for practitioners in the early years foundation stage < Supporting_Children_English_2nd_Language.pdf > Accessed 17 February 2022.

Roberts, T., 2008. Home Storybook Reading in Primary or Second Language with Preschool Children: Evidence of Equal Effectiveness for Second-Language Vocabulary Acquisition. Reading Research Quarterly. 43(2) 103-130. < Home_Storybook_Reading_in_Prim.pdf > Accessed 26 July 2020.

Rushton, S. and Larkin, E. 2001. Shaping the learning environment: Connecting developmentally appropriate practices to brain research. Early childhood education journal vol. 29 (1) 2001: 25-33. < Shaping_the_Learning_Environment-_Connecting_Developmentally_Appropriate_Practices_to_Brain_Research.pdf > Accessed 22 February 2022.

Santrock, 2014. Child Development. McGraw – Hill Education. Fourteenth edition, 251-278.

Statistics Finland, 2022. Share of pupils studying English continued growing in lower grades of comprehensive school < Statistics Finland - Subject choices of students 2020 > Accessed 20 April 2022.

Talentia, 2019. Work, Values and Ethics: Ethical guidelines for social welfare professionals. < Talentia Ethical Guidelines (e-julkaisu.com) > Accessed 2 June 2022.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. <convention-rights-child-text-child-friendly-version.pdf (unicef.org) > Accessed 19 April 2022.

Verissimo, J. (2018). Sensitive periods in both L1 and L2: Some conceptual and methodological suggestions. Bilingualism: Language and Cognition, 21(5), 932-933. < doi:10.1017/S1366728918000275 > Accessed 18 May 2022

Visser-Bochane, M.I. et, al. 2020. Identifying milestones in language development for young children ages 1 to 6 years. Academic paediatrics', vol. 20, no. 3, pp 421-429. < Identifying Milestones in Language Development for Young Children Ages 1 to 6 Years - ScienceDirect (metropolia.fi) > Accessed 20 February 2022.

Weatherhead, Y., 2008 Creative Circle Time Lessons for the Early Years, SAGE Publications, Limited, 2008. ProQuest Ebook Central, < https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/metropolia-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1023997> Accessed 8 July 2022.

Whitehead, M., 2010. Great Communicators. In: Miller, L., Cable, C. and Goodliff, G. Eds. 2010. Supporting children's learning in the early years. 2nd ed. Routledge, 141 – 149.

Yip, V. and Matthews, S, 2007. The bilingual child: Development and language contact. < ProQuest Ebook Central - Reader > Accessed 20 February 2022.

Yleisradio 2019. The popularity of English-language early education and care is slowly growing. < The popularity of English-language early childhood education and care is slowly growing | Yle News > Accessed 13 March 2022.

Zhou, N. and Yadav, A. 2017. Effects of multimedia story reading and questioning on preschoolers' vocabulary learning, story comprehension and reading engagement, Educational Technology, Research and Development, 65 (69) 1523-1545. < Effects of multimedia story reading and questioning on preschoolers' vocabulary learning, story comprehension and reading engagement - ProQuest (metropolia.fi) >

Thesis Permit Agreement

Luz Elena Castro-Lähteenmäki
Degree in Social Services
Thesis Instructors: Sylvia Hakari and Jyrki Konkka
Life partner organization: Ankkalampi Jupperi

The topic of my thesis is Developing the learning environments to support learning English as an additional language in ECEC. The theme is a suggestion from the director of Ankkalampi Jupperi. This proposal is for writing a functional thesis. My goals are to produce a practical and systematic pedagogical plan to facilitate the understanding of the physical and visual learning environments. At the same time, I also wish to implement creative and stimulating pedagogical activities with the children to support the successful learning of English as an additional language.

This plan is supervised by senior lectures at Metropolia, Sylvia Hakari and Jyrki Konkka.

In this form, I request formal approval to support this implementation. The process might include short questionnaires from the children, their guardians, and the facility's staff. Merely, to gather their input and interests to improve the development of my plan. The data collection will be through google forms for the adults, and no personal information will be requested, only ideas and suggestions. The children will respond in person about their theme preferences for the pedagogical activities.

According to the general data protection regulation (GDPR), the questionnaires and the analysis of the information will be anonymous.

Upon the agreement of this plan, I will send the questionnaires to the Ankkalampi director to send to guardians and staff. The children's surveys and observations will take place around the same time.

- This plan is obliged to respect the dignity and individuality of each participant. The surveys do not represent any risk or inconvenience as the objective is to recollect ideas only.
- Practical activities take place at the facility as any other classroom's daily pedagogical activities.
- Ankkalampi organization will have access to the thesis and pedagogical plan.

_____   _____
Luz Elena Castro – Lähteenmäki   XXX

Espoo, _____

Questionnaire for the staff

Dear Colleagues,

As part of my thesis development, I would like to ask you a few questions relevant to my project. I plan to justify how the physical and visual environments, together with the implementation of creative and stimulating pedagogical activities, support the successful learning of English as an additional language in Early Childhood Education. The responses are to understand your expectations, add suggestions, and for statistical purposes. The online questionnaire settings are assigned to protect your identity. I will not see your emails; therefore, your answers are anonymous. I will be the only person receiving and analysing the responses. This questionnaire is authorized to take place by Ankkalampi Director.

Thank you for your responses!

1. How do you perceive the idea of children being exposed to English since the unit is officially a Finnish language early childhood education unit?

2. To the best of your knowledge, how do you think the children are responding to being exposed to English as a second language? From 1 to 5, being 5 more positive than negative.

3. Do you think the children are effectively learning English?

4. Do you think the amount of English instruction is appropriate?

5. Are there any specific topics you would like the children to learn?

6. Would you kindly give suggestions of what you feel is needed for the children to learn English better?

Questionnaire for the parents

Dear parents,

As part of my thesis development, I would like to ask you a few questions relevant to my project. I plan to justify how the physical and visual environments, together with the implementation of creative and stimulating pedagogical activities, support the successful learning of English as an additional language in Early Childhood Education. The responses are to understand your expectations, add suggestions, and statistical purposes. The online questionnaire settings are assigned to protect your identity. I will not see your emails; therefore, your answers are anonymous. I will be the only person receiving and analysing the responses. This questionnaire is authorized to take place by Ankkalampi Director.

Thank you for your responses!

1. To your best knowledge, does your child enjoys learning English? 1 being, not really. 5 being A lot.

2. Can you please specify a couple of your child's positive comments regarding learning English?

3. Has your child made negative comments about learning English? Can you please mention them?

4. Do you think the amount of English instruction provided at your child's level is sufficient?

5. Can you mention day-care activities that your child seems more enthusiastic to take part in?

6. Can you mention what aspects do you think are positive about learning English?

7. Do you have any comments and / or suggestions of what you would like your child to learn in English?

8. Can you please ask the same question to your child and write their answer? What would your child like to learn in English? Themes, words, topics, songs, anything they mention.

Pedagogical Plan

Luz Elena Castro - Lähteenmäki

Introductory words

- This plan intends to support your understanding of the early education and care daily procedures at Ankkalampi Jupperi.

- It is a guideline for your responsibilities in this unit and the groups you are assigned to work.

- Please remember that this plan does not provide all the answers to your questions, remember to communicate with your colleagues any doubts and insights you might have.

List of contents

Getting Familiar with the Unit.

Check list

☐ I am familiar with the Ankka Way of doing things (Heidi workshop)

☐ I have read the safety file and the staff's handbook

☐ I am aware of the all safety features, emergency exits, fire extinguishers, fire blankets, main light switch, main water valve in the unit.

☐ I am aware of what to do when I am the first person or the last person

☐ I know all phone numbers and contact people in the company

☐ I know all the staff, children and parents

Daily schedule

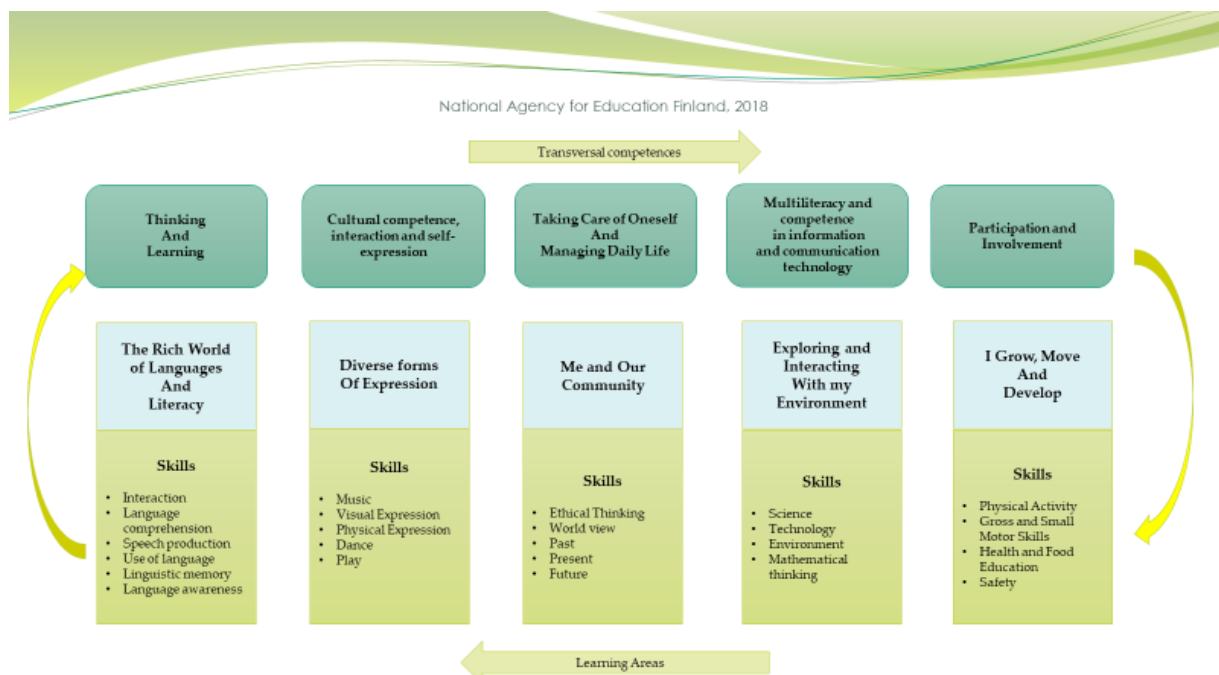| 7:25	Arrival time, turn on lights, take all phones, check messages, take register lists – open the door to parents and children.
7:40	The second person is usually the kitchen person who prepares breakfast. When the third person arrives, divide the groups. Maxi's children remain in one room. Midi and Mini children go to their room, check the register, and take their parents' notes. Children play while waiting for breakfast.
8:00	The fourth person arrives. Breakfast is served, consider allergies, for example, special milk needs.
8:30	The fifth person arrives. Breakfast ends, the food trolleys are returned to the kitchen, or you wait for them to be picked up.
8:45	Toileting, nappy change if needed. Dress up time, to go outdoors for the first groups according to the planned schedule, observe the weather, and dress children accordingly. The sixth person arrives around this time.
9:00	Outdoor time / Activity time, depending on the planned schedule, until 9:50.The last two staff arrive before 9:10. Earliest people arriving go outdoors in the morning. During this time, the staff that arrives last can plan or prepare activities while the group is out (This depends on the dates and the activities).The group/s that return indoors at 10:00 will have pedagogical activity time according to the plans.
9:50	Toilet and dress up if the group was indoors for activities, outdoor time 10:00 - 11:00.
11:00	Back indoors, children wash their hands and get ready for circle time while one staff serves lunch.

Daily schedule

11:15	Lunch is served – observe table manners - Maxi children clean up after themselves.
11:45	Toileting, changing diapers, children get ready for nap time
12:00	Children should be in bed. Maxi children listen to quiet music with one staff taking care of them. Midi and Mini children need all the staff to help them settle down. It takes 10 to 15 min for them to fall asleep. One staff member remains with them for one hour, then someone else takes the supervision turn. These two turns work on a rotation basis between Mini and Midi personnel.
12:15	While some staff are in the nap rooms, others have time to have a break. On Mondays, a weekly meeting is usually held. After the break, planning time is possible, writing the weekly newsletter, and taking care of outdoor clothes.
13:00	Nap time supervision swap up/ Break and planning time, writing newsletter when needed. Maxi children that are awake have quiet free play time. Time to do general chores continues.
13:50	Time to wake up children, send them to the toilet, and change nappies.
14:10	Short circle time: readying or singing while the snack is served
14:20	Snack time, observe table manners
14:45	Toilet and getting dressed to go outdoors, the first person arriving ends work at 14:55.
15:00	Outdoor time, Observe turns to supervise outdoor time. The two staff with the last shifts go outdoors last. They have chores indoors, such as washing the nappy bassinet and children's potties. This is also time for planning activities or preparing materials.
17:00	Closing / making sure all children were picked up and are properly marked in the register. Collect all the phones and laptops and put in the safety closet. Turn all lights off, and ensure all doors are closed.

Children's routines

7:30	Arrival and free play		12:00	Nap / Rest time
8:00	Breakfast		13:00	Free play or activity for Maxi group
8:30	Continue free play		13:55	Wake up time
9:00	Outdoor play or activity		14:00	Circle time
10:00	Outdoor play or activity		14:20	Snack time
11:00	Circle time		14:45	Personal hygiene - toileting
11:20	Lunch time		15:00	Outdoor time
11:45	Personal hygiene - toileting		17:00	Goodbye for the day

National Agency for Education Finland, 2018

Transversal competences

Thinking And Learning	Cultural competence, interaction and self-expression	Taking Care of Oneself And Managing Daily Life	Multiliteracy and competence in information and communication technology	Participation and Involvement
The Rich World of Languages And Literacy	Diverse forms Of Expression	Me and Our Community	Exploring and Interacting With my Environment	I Grow, Move And Develop
Skills • Interaction • Language comprehension • Speech production • Use of language • Linguistic memory • Language awareness	**Skills** • Music • Visual Expression • Physical Expression • Dance • Play	**Skills** • Ethical Thinking • World view • Past • Present • Future	**Skills** • Science • Technology • Environment • Mathematical thinking	**Skills** • Physical Activity • Gross and Small Motor Skills • Health and Food Education • Safety

Learning Areas

Year Calendar

- Ankkalampi prepares its own year calendar and usually follows a theme during the year.
- Special dates are marked.
- Add children's birthdates, name dates, and other special activities that you organize in your planning.
- Add Finnish national and perhaps some international celebrations according to the children nationalities in your group to create an inclusive, cultural and fun atmosphere.

Year Calendar - August

Considerations:
New children
Nice weather

Resources:
Library, books, internet, online apps, national curriculum

Outdoor play

- Consider spending longer time outdoors to enjoy the weather.
- Do pedagogical activities outdoors, such as physical education exercises, arts, music, and teach group games.
- Go on short trips to the forest or nearby parks.
- Organize a picnic, or have a snack outdoors if possible.

Circle times

- Teach good morning songs
- Talk about the calendar
- Days of the week
- Numbers
- Weather
- Children decide their group rules
- Use picture cards for vocabulary
- Read stories

Activity times

- Introduce children to different toys to learn to use them properly: puzzles, blocks, trains, cars, and board games.
- Introduce them to different materials: paints, playdough, colours, glue, paper
- Sing songs
- Organize art projects
- Work on a theme

August learning goals

Outdoor play	Circle time:	Activity times
• Promote children's interaction, making friends • Communication • Children play and physically move • Children learn skills: logical thinking and to solving problems • Being safe	• Promote language and literacy • Children can express themselves in different forms: speaking singing and dancing • Playing instruments • Children learn different points of view • They participate	• Children use their transversal competences • Learning a language, speaking and listening skills • Mathematics • Practice fine and gross motor skills • Use technology • Learn about the environment

Planning Background

- Group
- Theme
- Pedagogical aims
- Materials you need
- Development / Execution
- Observations
- Children's individual response
- Personal reflection

One Day Planning - August

Theme of the day:
Movement

Outdoor time

Play a song abut movements and follow it with the children
Action Songs for kids | The Singing Walrus - YouTube
Play Freeze dance
Party Freeze Dance - The Kiboomers Preschool Songs & Nursery Rhymes - Circle Time Game – YouTube

Outdoor time is mostly free play for children

Circle time

Good morning song
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFVjU-dsIM8
- Register, make a game to call children present and note who is absent
- Calendar, Month, day, and number
- Story online, for example, Eric Carle, From Head to Toe, a story about movements I can do.
- https://youtu.be/liMuGN-NJ6o

Activity time

Painting: use a piece of paper that children can share to contribute to completing a big project or provide individual pieces of paper of reasonable size for children to experience hand movements. Children can paint using their hands, or they can use a brush or a sponge.
The idea is about the movement. Let them independently produce their pictures according to their creativity.

Evaluation form

Name of the activity	Goal definition:
Children's response:	Personal evaluation

VASU and HYVE

- Vasu. Individual Development plan for the child.
  Make regular observations about each child to prepare your development discussions.
  There are about two meetings per year per child unless you or the parents request more.
- Hyve. Development description of the child for Neuvola when the children turn four years of age.
  Parent's have the responsibility to request this form from you but can prepare it in advance.

Remember to support children with the opportunity
to practice
self-determination and own agency

Play is the work of
childhood

Jean - Piaget