



The implementation of thematic approach in preschool

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This thesis examines the world of preschool education through the lens of a reflective diary, centered on the thematic approach. The study aims to examine the theoretical concepts of the thematic approach and shows its practical applications in the context of preschool teaching. The primary objective is to empower educators to make use of different themes, transforming the classroom into dynamic environments where young learners actively participate in their own learning.

The study is conducted as a diary based thesis (10-week diary entries) with a group of preschoolers in a private preschool. Throughout the process of this diary thesis, my professional skills have been developed, also some insights are gained into how the thematic approach significantly influences the learning process of preschoolers. Additionally, the research highlights the critical role of educators in shaping this experience. This thesis provides an insightful exploration of the thematic approach, offering a valuable resource for educators, seeking to enhance the quality of preschool education as well as professional development.

Keywords: Thematic approach, Preschool, the role of educators

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1 Introduction

Currently I work as a preschool teacher in a private preschool, therefore, this is a thesis that documents my experience working in a preschool, using a diary format. The diary portion will encompass a 10-week period from August 28th to November 3rd, 2023. It will give descriptions on how I have achieved my responsibilities and tasks on a daily basis by implementing different themes in preschool, weekly analysis also is summarized at the end of each week.

In this thesis, I will examine the theoretical concepts of the thematic approach and show its significance in the context of preschool teaching. By tracking my daily teaching journey, I will also reflect on my role as a facilitator who is able to identify the strategies and best practices in making use of different themes, transforming the classroom into dynamic environments where young learners actively participate in their own learning. I will make analysis on how the thematic approach affects the implementation of the weekly activities.

2 Diary thesis background

I have chosen to write my thesis on the implementation of a thematic approach in preschool. This topic holds a deep personal significance for me, rooted in my passion for fostering meaningful and engaging learning experiences for young children. Throughout my career in education, I have been an active advocate for the use of themes as a powerful catalyst for individualized child learning. This choice comes from the understanding after experiencing with the Finnish ECEC that when educational content aligns with a child's interests and curiosity, their innate willingness to learn is ignited, and the learning process becomes not only enjoyable but also deeply meaningful (The national core curriculum for early childhood education and care, 2022).

In my experience, I have had the privilege of directly observing the remarkable and transformative impact that thematic approach can have on young learners. It has been a source of immense satisfaction to witness how, when children are fully immersed in a crafted thematic curriculum, they spontaneously exhibit a profound curiosity and boundless enthusiasm for exploring the multifaceted world that surrounds them.

As I embark on this thesis, my intention is to examine the theoretical underpinnings of the thematic approach and explore its practical applications within the context of preschool education. My goal is to uncover best practices that empower other educators to make use of

the full potential of themes, creating environments where young learners are not just recipients of knowledge but active participants in their own learning life.

I believe that a fun and enjoyable theme acts like a big magnet, pulling kids into a world of excitement and learning. According to the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2022), young learners have a strong sense of curiosity and a genuine desire to seek answers to their inquiries, they should be provided with enjoyable play and engaging activities. Young learners are not afraid to try new things and come up with cool ideas, and love solving problems in creative ways, it makes their learning feel like an amazing adventure, where they discover new things and grow as individuals (The national core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2022). It's all about the happiness of finding things out and feeling proud when they achieve something special.

Furthermore, I firmly believe that thematic approach has the power to transcend traditional subject boundaries in learning. In the realm of early childhood education, where holistic development is vital, themes offer a unique opportunity to weave together various learning domains (Ashokan & Venugopal 2016). Through carefully designed themes, educators are able to connect diverse subjects, from literacy and mathematics to science and social studies, into a cohesive narrative that captures a child's imagination (Retnawati, Munadi, Arlinwibowo, Wulandari & Sulistyaningsih 2017). This integrated approach fosters a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of knowledge and encourages children to apply their learning to real-life situations.

3 Theoretical framework

3.1 The child's development and learning

The development of young learners encompasses all physical, emotional, spiritual, cognitive and social aspects. According to the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2022), the children of today are coming of age in an interconnected and complex world that is characterized by cultural, linguistic, and ideological diversity. Young learners' learning no longer happens via subjects in the classroom, rather their learning primarily occurs through engagement with both their physical surroundings and the social interactions within their environment (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

In order to foster the best possible growth and development in children, it is essential to provide them with meaningful social and environmental stimuli that are tailored to their specific ages, interests, and abilities (Zin, Mohamed, Bakar, & Ismail 2019). Young learners are not recognized as all the same in their development; they are on unique journeys, each progressing at their own pace and in their own way (Salminen 2017). They all are naturally

curious beings, and their interests often serve as a compass guiding their learning journey. This means recognizing their needs and interests from the early stage of their learning will fuel their motivation and enthusiasm for exploration and discovery. In addition, interactions that they have with their social surroundings and the experiences they encounter within their physical environment should be carefully curated to align with their needs and personal interests as well (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

Playful, meaningful, and enjoyable preschool learning serves as a crucial step in a child's educational journey as it not only imparts essential skills but also establishes confidence and fosters positive attitudes that lay the foundation for a successful transition into schooling and lifelong learning (Zin et al 2019). Preschool provides a magical realm where young minds are free to explore, discover, and experiment. It's a very first place where academic learning initially comes to young learners' life through games, songs, and colorful materials, in other words, young learners are to be introduced with reading multiliteracy skills, writing skills, and also the competencies of self-confidence on expressing themselves, both verbally and creatively (Salminen 2017).

3.2 Preschool education

According to Zin et al (2019), conducting preschool education is a skillful pursuit, and its impact is significantly enhanced when teachers utilize appropriate teaching techniques and approaches. When educators carefully select and apply effective teaching methods, they craft an educational environment that not only provides a strong foundation for learning but also ignites a sense of curiosity and active engagement among their young learners. Hands-on activities, interactive discussions, and imaginative play become their tools for discovery, fostering not only academic skills but also the development of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and creativity as the transversal competencies of Finnish early childhood education and care (Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care).

In the Finnish education system, preschool education starts one year before attending a school, which children are at the age of six (Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care). Throughout the preschool year, children equip themselves with social skills by engaging in play, physical activities, exploration, and creative endeavors, and this process not only bolsters their self-esteem but also fosters their familiarity with concepts like letters, numbers, the natural world, and the urban environment (Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care).

In this nurturing setting, learning becomes an exciting journey of exploration, where students are not just passive recipients of information but enthusiastic participants in their own educational growth (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2022). The learning experience becomes an interactive journey where students experiment, and

collaborate with peers. They examine hands-on activities that encourage them to apply what they've learned, fostering not only comprehension but also the development of critical thinking skills (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2022). In return, this active participation cultivates a sense of ownership over their learning, empowering them to take charge of their learning path.

In this domain of educational practice, AKA preschool learning, an especially noteworthy method is the concept of theme-based instruction, also referred to as the thematic approach, which holds a central position in enriching children's personal learning as well as guiding educators towards a more immersive and engaging way of fostering development in the preschool setting (Zin et al 2019). Introducing themes into the learning process for young learners can effectively incorporate all subjects outlined in the national curriculum. This is because the activities surrounding these diverse themes are built upon the interests and questions of the learners themselves (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2022).

3.3 Thematic approach in learning

Research shows that employing a thematic approach is one of the instructional methods that leverages themes to foster engaged, captivating, and significant learning experiences (Ashokan & Venugopal 2016). That means, this approach employs the power of thematic integration to cultivate dynamic, stimulating, and profoundly meaningful learning environments for young learners. According to Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus (2018), the thematic approach is a pedagogical strategy where the curriculum is thoughtfully organized and designed, revolving around a central, overarching idea or topic.

Thematic teaching involves organizing the curriculum by centering it around a single theme, incorporating diverse subjects, teaching techniques, methods, approaches, educational resources, hands-on activities, and also other learning environments (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018). This approach aims to enhance the holistic development and skill-building of young learners. Ashokan & Venugopal (2016) also state that this approach involves structuring the curriculum around a concept or theme that aligns with the child's current context, interests, background, and developmental stage.

3.4 The significance of thematic approach in younger learners learning

Thematic approach pays attention to one theme/topic in a certain time period, and this period of learning leads to in-depth learning for learners, that is, young learners are to have time and space to dig deeper into their interested topics (Zin et al 2019). In addition, this focused approach encourages students to analyze, comprehend and reflect on the nuances

associated with the chosen theme. As a result, students are able to develop a comprehensive understanding that goes beyond surface-level knowledge of different topics.

Using thematic approach assists young learners in comprehending their learning by merging different subject areas together rather than isolating them as separate entities (Haas 2000). The introduction of a thematic approach is motivated by the fact that children's daily experiences outside of school are not divided into separate subjects, unlike the existing subject-based curriculum (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018). Therefore, the thematic approach aims to bridge the gap between the traditional subject-based curriculum and the holistic nature of young learners' lives. Thematic approach recognizes that a more interconnected and integrated approach to education can better equip students with the skills and insights needed to thrive in an ever-changing world (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

According to the national core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2022), the primary aim of the national core curriculum for ECEC is to provide guidance and direction for the implementation and improvement of ECEC services while also promoting the delivery of high-quality and equitable ECEC approaches, that is, it encompasses a systematic and purposeful approach that includes education, instruction, and nurturing, with a strong emphasis on pedagogy (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care, 2022). The use of the thematic approach is not only to encourage young learners engaging with learning, but also to advocate parents and guardians to participate in their learning (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

3.5 The role of teachers in thematic approach implementation

According to Retnawati, Munadi, Arlinwibowo, Wulandari & Sulistyarningsih (2017), the thematic approach is integrated into the education of young learners because it effectively sparks and cultivates their enthusiasm for learning. In the thematic approach, there is a process of connection between learning areas in a core curriculum and the interests of young learners, and the success of this connection relies on the roles of teachers in facilitating this integration (Retnawati et al. 2017). Zin et al (2019) also state that the successful implementation of the thematic approach is dependent on teachers who have a deep understanding of its content, pedagogical principles and competencies, and best knowledge of their learners, without these skills and essential knowledge in teachers, the possibility of achieving success in applying this approach is very little. In essence, the proficiency and expertise of teachers play a crucial role in determining the outcome of adopting the thematic approach in education.

In the context of implementing thematic learning, teachers should undertake the responsibility of crafting comprehensive learning activities, devising effective teaching methods, and designing assessments by taking into consideration learners' needs and interests

(Zin et al 2019). In other words, teachers' responsibility must be taken with a keen awareness of the unique needs and interests of the learners. Better observation on each learner helps teachers to craft themes and thematic activities. In addition, they should be capable of skillfully connecting various educational materials and resources to all domains of learning in ECEC, all within the context of a single thematic unit (Zin et al 2019).

4 Description of the initial situation

Currently, I work as a preschool teacher in a private preschool. It is a privately owned daycare center which is with Finnish ownership, and its main language is English. The curriculum of the daycare undergoes regular review and approval, making sure that it suits well to the highest educational standards. Throughout the school year, numerous real-world opportunities are offered to the preschoolers, allowing them to engage with diverse learning settings, such as captivating excursions to forests, libraries, museums, and concerts. These opportunities enrich preschoolers' learning experiences and play a role in their overall development. The preschool program places great emphasis on fostering independence, social aptitude, and the importance of collaboration and sharing.

As a preschool teacher in the field of Finnish ECEC, I recognise that my main role is to provide high-quality education and nurture the holistic development of young children. The curriculum of Finnish ECEC is highly focused on the child-centered and comprehensive approach, and the role of teachers is to interact well between individual learners and their learning by applying the following: 1) taking the responsibility of designing and implementing the curriculum in accordance with the national curriculum guidelines; 2) recognising that each child is unique, and applying different teaching methods to meet the individual needs and interests of each child; 3) creating a supportive environment where children can develop a strong sense of self-esteem, empathy, and social skills; 4) facilitating play-based learning experiences that encourage children to explore, experiment, and learn through hands-on activities; 5) engaging in ongoing teacher training and learning opportunities to stay tuned on educational research and practices (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care, 2022).

As I set my primary goal at work is to focus on my professional growth and playing the role of a preschool well in ECEC, some objectives can be set for how I hope my skills will be developed and evolved. Objectives include the following: 1) to enhance my ability to design and adapt thematic curriculum units that align with preschool learning goals and students' interests, 2) to strengthen learners' engagement in thematic learning and assessing their progress effectively, 3) to ensure that each student is not just a passive participant but an

enthusiastic and inquisitive explorer of the chosen themes, 4) to raise my self-awareness on cultivating a clear sense of professional direction and teaching practice.

Choosing a diary thesis format for this research allows me to engage in continuous self-reflection throughout my research journey by documenting thoughts, challenges, and successes in real-time. It offers me a unique opportunity to track my own development as an educator by capturing the authentic and nuanced experiences I shall encounter during the implementation of the thematic approach in preschool. By recording the diverse experiences that will be recorded during my exploration of the thematic approach in preschool education, I can trace my professional expertise and competencies. It also enables me to delve deeply into my daily interactions with students, colleagues, and parents, providing a richer and more comprehensive account of my work.

5 Diary report

This diary thesis is to examine the practical application of planned themes designed for young learners, specifically within the dynamic context of preschool education. The target age group for this thesis is preschoolers who are between 6-7 years old. The aim of the thesis is to assess the effect of thematic approach on preschoolers' motivation and engagement in specific learning areas, to examine the role of teachers in planning and executing theme-based projects within preschool environments, to identify and address specific challenges related to the implementation of theme-based projects within the context of preschool education, offering practical solutions.

This report presents how some educational themes are put into action, and captures some nuances of the reflective journey. This report also provides insights into the successes and challenges encountered in my professional experience. Moreover, it helps me grow from the valuable lessons learned from these experiences, offering a comprehensive view of how these successes and challenges have contributed to my growth and development within my profession.

This diary thesis report is a comprehensive record covering ten weeks, comprising two essential components: daily entries and weekly analysis. The first part reads much like a traditional diary, offering a day-by-day narrative of my life during this ten-week period. It captures the ordinary and extraordinary moments, the challenges and triumphs, and the emotions and reflections that accompanied each passing day. The second part, which is weekly analysis, highlights the reflection on the use of thematic approach and the connection with theoretical concepts.

In my diary entries, my primary focus will be on elaborating on my daily objectives, including the specific goals set for each day. I will provide insights into how I am applying planned activities designed for young learners, offering a glimpse into the practical aspects of their implementation. Furthermore, I will highlight the challenges I encounter and the successes I achieve throughout the course of each day.

Within my weekly analyses, I will engage in thoughtful reflection on the challenges that have emerged over the course of the week, examining the approaches and solutions employed to address them. Additionally, I will open up the knowledge and insights that have unfolded during the week, aligning them with the established theoretical framework and concepts, trying to be sensible for myself and readers as well.

6 Diary entries

I documented my personal diary entries over the next 10 weeks. During this period, I will closely examine how various educational themes are introduced to preschoolers and also the effect of thematic approach in individual learning. In addition, I will describe how theme-based activities are carried out with a focus on the child-centered approach, I also will explain how themes help preschoolers to stay engaged with activities throughout the day.

In terms of theme choosing, at the beginning of the academic year, preschoolers were asked to share what they would like to learn throughout the year. After sharing some themes in the group, a list of themes has been made for preschool learning based on their interests and preferences. The selection of themes was organized in accordance with the academic calendar, taking into account seasonal changes and preschool community visits. These themes, including Family, Transport, Ocean Animals, Halloween, and Sports, were introduced on a weekly basis during the implementation of the diary-based thesis.

My work life partner has played a crucial role in my research, providing invaluable support and constructive feedback on themed activities planning. Their effective communication and collaborative approach have facilitated the implementation of these activities, enhancing the overall quality of my research work. In the thesis writing process, their feedback and collaborative support have been instrumental in navigating challenges and achieving shared goals. I am grateful for their positive impact on my research journey.

I believe that the process of diary writing will serve as a record of my reflective journey, helping me to self-evaluate the teaching strategies I apply for during the process as well as the effect of theme implementation in preschool teaching. In addition, this report will provide insights gained from my professional experiences, highlighting both the successes and challenges that have been encountered along the way.

6.1 Family-themed Week 1

Day 1: Monday

The journey into our weekly theme of "Family" commenced with the familiar embrace of our circle time. To set the tone for the day, I started the theme with a small, engaging activity, along with our routine weather check. These rituals serve a dual purpose, helping the children focus on the planned activities ahead.

The day's activity was particularly lively and captivating. With a photograph of my own family in hand, I embarked on a journey of explaining the concept of family. Then, we listened to songs that celebrated the essence of family, also intending to remember the concept of family and some other vocabulary. A highlight of the day was a drama game that illuminated the various roles within a family. Through playful activities, the children gained insight into the dynamics of a family unit. As we concluded our first day delving into the theme of "Family," I could sense the children's growing connection to the subject.

My goal for today was to engage them with the themed activities, and practice their focusing and listening skills.

Challenge: Several children faced difficulties in staying engaged with the theme. Despite carefully designed activities tailored for their learning, a few struggled to grasp the concept of working in pairs effectively, they are not used to staying focused for a long time (about 20 mins), and it needs to be practiced little by little.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today was another exciting day at the preschool, filled with mathematical adventures. Our focus for the day was on mathematics learning, and I had prepared a set of engaging activities centered around the theme of "Family."

I started the day by introducing the concept of family and the importance of our loved ones in our lives. We discussed different family structures, emphasizing that families come in all shapes and sizes. Next, we worked on some fun math activities that would not only help the children grasp the concept of family but also introduce them to basic counting and logical pattern learning. I had carefully chosen activities that would be both educational and entertaining for our preschoolers.

The first activity involved creating a family tree. Each child was given a blank sheet of paper and asked to draw a big tree trunk. Then, they added branches to represent their family members. This activity not only allowed them to explore their creativity but also taught them

the fundamental idea of counting and grouping. They had to count how many family members they had and draw the corresponding number of branches.

However, as with any teaching experience, there were some challenges to overcome. Some of the preschoolers seemed to have difficulty with understanding the concept of representing family members with colors. To address this, we encouraged them to use different colors to represent each family member, like using blue for dad, pink for mom, green for siblings, and so on. It was heartwarming to see how they slowly grasped the idea and started coloring their family trees accordingly.

After the family tree activity, we moved on to a task involving shapes and patterns. We used various shapes like circles, squares, and triangles to create family members' faces. This activity helped them recognize and differentiate between different shapes while having fun designing their family members.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today was an eventful day filled with exciting science activities and creative letter writing. In the morning, we gathered around a table filled with art supplies, eager to work on our science adventure. The plan was to draw our family members on a plate, pour water over them, and observe what would happen. It was a simple yet intriguing experiment that triggers the children's interest.

The kids put all their artistic talents to use, and it was amazing to see how they expressed their creativity. Once the drawings were complete, it was time for the main event. We carefully poured water onto the plates and watched in amazement as the colours began to blend and merge. The children's eyes lit up as they observed the transformation. It was a moment of pure wonder and discovery.

Then, we engaged in some letter writing. Each child wrote letters/drew images to a family member or friend, expressing their thoughts, feelings, and love. It was a touching activity that allowed them to practice their writing skills while connecting with their loved ones.

However, there were some challenges we encountered throughout the day. Firstly, the kids were enthusiastic about drawing their family members, and they all wanted to do it by themselves. While this individuality is commendable, it caused a bit of chaos as we had limited art supplies and space. It might be a good idea to allocate more time and resources for future activities to ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate fully.

Another challenge was not having enough materials prepared in advance. We had to improvise and gather additional art supplies during the activity, which disrupted the flow and

enthusiasm of the children. In the future, I'll make sure to have a well-stocked supply of materials to avoid any interruptions.

Day 4: Thursday

At Albatross, Thursdays and Fridays are dedicated to Finnish learning for our preschoolers. My colleague and I take charge of this exciting role, dividing all preschoolers into two groups (Group A and Group B). Across these two days, we curate themed activities that are implemented in both groups respectively on Thursdays and Fridays, allowing each set of preschoolers to engage with the same captivating learning experiences. This approach ensures that all our young learners have the opportunity to explore Finnish language and culture in a fun and interactive way.

Today, we dived into Finnish learning, all while keeping our family theme alive. It was a day that both challenged and rewarded us in many ways. I began the day with a morning circle in Finnish and with some fun and interactive learning. We gathered and listened to educational songs on YouTube, specifically focused on teaching the preschoolers how to say "mom" and "dad" in Finnish. It was great to see their enthusiasm as they repeated the Finnish words with giggles and smiles.

For our main activity, I had planned a Finnish counting activity designed for preschoolers. The aim was to introduce them to numbers in Finnish while maintaining our family theme. I had prepared colorful cards with numbers written in Finnish and corresponding illustrations of family members, such as "mulla on kolme siskoa" (My mother) or "hänellä on kaksi veljeä" (big brothers).

However, this activity posed a few challenges. Firstly, I had intended to explain the activity in Finnish to immerse the children in the language, but I quickly realized that their level of Finnish proficiency was not sufficient to understand complex instructions in the language. This created some confusion and frustration among the preschoolers.

Another challenge was that, when faced with difficulties during the activity, the preschoolers tended to switch to English, which was more familiar to them. It's natural for them to lean towards their comfort zone, but it makes it difficult to maintain the focus on learning Finnish.

I learned to simplify the instructions and integrated more visual aids to make the activity more accessible. As I worked through the activity, I also gently encouraged the children to use Finnish whenever possible. I think it was important to create a supportive and encouraging environment to help them feel more confident in using the language.

The children had learned a few basic Finnish words and numbers. They have replied to me by the end of the day in basic Finnish by saying 'Joo, Ei, Kiitos, ja Moikka'. As we move forward,

I plan to incorporate more interactive and immersive language activities that help preschoolers' understanding while fostering their curiosity for Finnish.

Day 5: Friday

Today, I had another fun day learning Finnish with group B. In the morning, we started with a circle where we did exciting activities to learn Finnish. We watched videos on YouTube with songs that helped the kids learn how to say family members like "mom" and "dad" in Finnish. The songs were catchy, and the kids loved them. They were so happy and excited to learn a new language, and it made us all feel really happy too.

I have introduced all the same activities that we did yesterday with Group A, and different challenges I have encountered. Main challenge I encountered was adapting the activities to suit the diverse learning styles of the children. Some were more visual learners, while others expected hands-on experiences. Especially while watching some videos, it was difficult to balance these preferences and ensure the engagement of all group members to the content of the videos.

Despite these challenges, I have managed to make good progress throughout the day. The children showed enthusiasm and an eagerness to learn, which was truly encouraging. As we navigated these obstacles, I discovered the importance of flexibility in teaching.

Weekly analysis

Reflecting on the experiences and lessons learned during these days. In this week, we focused on the theme of family by integrating music/drama, science, math and language, also I have encountered both challenges and valuable insights.

Challenges included that preschoolers' desire for individuality and limited prepared materials highlighted the importance of adequate planning and resource allocation for future activities. Balancing creativity and structure will be a continued focus moving forward. Also preschoolers' language proficiency was not sufficient for complex instructions in Finnish. They preferred English when faced with difficulties, highlighting the need for patience and a supportive environment in language acquisition.

Facing these challenges, what would help is to change the role of educators, instead of delivering the planned activities to preschoolers, they can nurture curiosity through hands-on activities, flexible themed activities, and interactive learning games. As it is said, learning becomes an exciting journey of exploration in a nurturing setting, where students are not just passive recipients of information but enthusiastic participants in their own educational growth (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2022). Maintaining this spirit of exploration and inquiry will be crucial in future sessions. I reminded myself that

flexibility and patience are key when working with preschoolers, and also challenges are part of the learning process, and the ability to adapt and find alternative approaches is essential for success.

6.2 Family-themed Week 2

Day 1: Monday

This week we still continue our weekly theme as 'Family'. The day began with a group discussion about families. I encouraged the preschoolers to share about their own families, discussing who is in their family and what kinds of activities they enjoy doing together.

Then, the children were provided with art supplies to create a family portrait. This activity helped them identify and recognize family members, such as parents, siblings, grandparents, and sometimes even beloved pets. The children labeled each family member with their names, promoting early literacy.

Then we designed our personalized family diary entry. By supporting them, the preschoolers made their very first diary entry. They were encouraged to describe a recent family experience or event, such as a visit to the park, a mealtime, or a special moment. This initial entry allowed them to express their feelings and thoughts related to family experiences.

I have seen that the activity allowed the children to form a personal connection with the topic. They were able to relate their own experiences and emotions to the broader concept of family, making it more meaningful and relatable.

It also provided opportunities for language development by engaging the process of drawing and labeling family members and then writing about a family experience. The children practiced writing their names and describing their feelings and family events.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today I started with a delightful activity where each preschooler had the opportunity to share their diary entries from day one with the class. This not only boosted their confidence but also encouraged them to actively listen to their peers and learn from each other's experiences.

Then, the children engaged in a hands-on activity to create their family trees. Using colored paper, markers, and pictures, they depicted the different branches of their family, emphasizing their connections with parents, siblings, and grandparents. This activity helped the children understand their family structure and the generations within it.

As self-reflection on the activity implementation, I can see that sharing diary entries fostered improved communication skills among the preschoolers. They gained confidence in expressing their thoughts and feelings, and they actively listened to their peers, promoting a sense of community and understanding. It also can be a tool for emotional expression. The preschoolers were able to articulate their feelings about their family traditions and the value they hold in their lives.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today was all about celebrating and delving deeper into the various family traditions that make each child's family unique. I started the learning circle by encouraging preschoolers to think about and describe a new tradition they would like to start with their family. Whether it was a weekly game night, a nature walk, or a cooking adventure, they expressed their ideas and excitement in their diaries.

Then, I asked them to draw their family tradition story in their diary. These stories included experiences related to holidays, birthdays, family outings, or any cherished activities unique to their family. This activity encouraged peer learning and increased the children's appreciation of the diversity of family traditions.

Then, in order to celebrate the diversity of family traditions, I asked all kids to describe their favorite dish from their family tradition. It could be a special dessert, a savory dish, or a drink.

I can see that today's activity helped preschoolers relate to their own families and those of their peers, and also they developed a positive attitude toward learning and sharing experiences.

Day 4: Thursday

By focusing on Finnish learning, today was all about fostering gratitude and a deeper appreciation for the love and support that families provide. The day began with a gratitude circle. Each child was given a chance to express something they are grateful for in their family. Some common words were also translated into Finnish, like 'Joy - ilo'. This activity encouraged the children to think about the love, care, and support they receive from their family members.

Then, preschoolers worked on creating a new family portrait, focusing on expressing the emotions and gratitude they feel towards their family members through their artwork. Throughout the activity, some emotions were introduced in Finnish. By practicing colors in Finnish, they used vivid colors and symbols to represent their love and appreciation.

I can see that explaining activities by using Finnish was challenging to the children but cultivating gratitude for family members helped the preschoolers develop a positive attitude towards their family life, which is important for building strong family bonds.

Day 5: Friday

Today, I started the day by introducing the concept of the preschool family, in a way that we all are a family in preschool. I began with a family unity circle. The children held hands in a circle and talked about the importance of unity and togetherness in preschool. This activity encouraged them to understand that family is a source of support and love.

I have planned some games that emphasized unity and cooperation. They played games that required teamwork, such as building a tower with blocks or solving puzzles together. These activities reinforced the idea that working together is an essential aspect of family life.

I can see that The activities on this day helped the children understand the importance of unity and cooperation in family life. They learned that working together and supporting each other make families strong. Also, those planned games improved teamwork and their communication and social skills. They learned to collaborate with their peers and family members.

Weekly analysis

Throughout this week, we engaged in a thematic learning approach with preschoolers, focusing on the theme of "Family" using diary writing. They have a better understanding of their own families, creating personalized diaries, and drawing family portraits. The key takeaways include the development of a personal connection with the topic of family, early language development through labeling family members, and opportunities for emotional expression. The children eagerly embraced the concept of diary writing as a tool for self-expression and understanding.

By introducing the concept of gratitude for family members, they developed better emotional intelligence, communication skills, and a positive attitude towards family life. The children began to recognize the love and support their families provide.

The thematic learning approach engaged the children and allowed them to connect with the concept of family on a personal level. It encouraged self-expression, reflection, and a deeper appreciation for their family members. These all resonate with the statement that this approach involves structuring the curriculum around a concept or theme that aligns with the child's current context, interests, background, and developmental stage (Ashokan & Venugopal 2016). The involvement of families in the activities also created a sense of

community and support, reinforcing the idea that family is a vital and cherished part of the children's lives. As it is said earlier, the use of the thematic approach is not only to encourage young learners engaging with learning, but also to advocate parents and guardians participating in their learning (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

6.3 Family-themed Week 3

Day 1: Monday

Today was an exciting day at our preschool as I have continued the thematic approach focused on the theme of "Family." I believe that teaching children about the concept of family is not only important but also essential in their overall development. By exploring this theme, I hope to help our preschoolers build a sense of belonging, empathy, and a deeper understanding of their own family dynamics.

I started the day with a circle time discussion about families. I reminded the theme by asking the children about their families, encouraging them to share their family culture, traditions, and special moments.

Then, I read a storybook about different types of families, emphasizing that families come in all shapes and sizes. We used colorful illustrations to represent diverse family structures, including nuclear families, extended families, single-parent families, and more. The story helped the children grasp the idea that every family is unique and special.

I have reflected on how this thematic approach has engaged the children during the activities related to the family theme. They were enthusiastic about sharing their family stories and experiences, and they actively participated in discussions and activities.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today, we mainly focused on craft making related to the theme of 'Family'. I have designed a corner for preschoolers to make an individual family project, which was, the children created family portraits. We provided them with various materials like paper, crayons, markers, and stickers. It was delightful to see their creativity shine as they drew and decorated their families. The expected craft is not finished yet, we will continue the project tomorrow as well.

From today's activity, I can see that it allowed them to express their feelings and thoughts about their loved ones. The act of creating these family portraits also allowed the children to engage in meaningful conversations with their peers and adults. They shared stories of memorable moments with their families, like camping trips with parents, baking cookies with grandparents, or playing games with siblings. These discussions further emphasized the theme

of family and the unique bonds and experiences that each child treasures within their own family unit.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today we have finished the project from yesterday as it was planned for two-day long. Throughout these two days, it was incredibly amazing to observe the preschoolers' growth in various aspects. The theme of "Family" played a significant role in this development. The children displayed improvements in empathy, showing a greater ability to understand and relate to the emotions of their peers.

They became more attentive to one another's feelings, offering comforting words or gestures when a friend felt sad or upset. It was great to see them express care and support for each other, fostering a sense of unity within the classroom.

I can see how the preschoolers engaged during the thematic approach. They showed genuine interest and enthusiasm for the activity. And since the theme resonated with their experiences and family members, it unconsciously captured their curiosity.

Day 4: Thursday

Today was an exciting day of Finnish learning, and the theme we focused on was "Family". We began our day with a series of Finnish videos related to families. These videos provided a visual journey into the diverse ways families come together, live, and create cherished moments. Then I asked them to share their observations and raise Finnish questions about the families they saw on the screen. This interactive session encouraged them to speak in Finnish and use their verbal skills.

The main challenge that I had today was language barriers, especially when discussing family-related topics. Most of the preschoolers struggled to express their thoughts and feelings effectively in a new language, making it vital to provide additional support and resources for them.

Day 5: Friday

It is a day for Finnish learning. Today I have planned some games, like "Family Bingo", in which each child receives a bingo card with pictures of family members and associated Finnish words. Another one was "Family Puzzle", a collaborative game involving assembling a large jigsaw puzzle representing a diverse family. The puzzle pieces were marked with Finnish words related to family members and relationships.

The main goal of playing these games was to reinforce the Finnish vocabulary they've been learning over the past week and to create a playful and enjoyable environment for language acquisition. I can see that the children were not only expanding their vocabulary but also gaining confidence in using the Finnish words they had learned.

Weekly analysis

This week, the theme of "Family" has been introduced with activities and play. I can see that preschoolers engaged well with the theme, and have shown an interest in the theme. The thematic approach not only helped me to achieve my learning objectives but also strengthened preschoolers' learning interest for topics. As it is mentioned in the theoretical concept, thematic approach pays attention to one theme/topic in a certain time period, and this period of learning leads to in-depth learning for learners, that is, young learners are to have time and space to dig deeper into their interested topics (Zin et al 2019).

I have reflected on how the preschoolers showed signs of improved empathy, understanding of their emotions, and better communication skills. I can see that preschoolers are active in learning, and have motivation for completing different activities. This resonates with the study that the thematic approach is integrated into the education of young learners because it effectively sparks and cultivates their enthusiasm for learning (Retnawati, Munadi, Arlinwibowo, Wulandari & Sulistyaningsih 2017).

Also my role as a facilitator during the activity, I tried to encourage open conversations about their families, and was able to provide guidance and support for those who may have more complex family situations. As it is highlighted in the literature, in the context of implementing thematic learning, teachers should undertake the responsibility of crafting comprehensive learning activities, devising effective teaching methods, and designing assessments by taking into consideration learners' needs and interests (Zin et al 2019).

6.4 Transport-themed Week 4

Day 1: Monday

This week, our theme is transport. Today, I tried to immerse preschoolers in the captivating world of transport music, focusing on the preschoolers' imagination and passion by engaging in rhymes, songs, and the delightful experience of creating music as a group.

Our morning session began with an interactive rhyme dedicated to different modes of transportation. This lively rhyme not only engaged their bodies but also introduced them to the diverse forms of transportation in a playful manner. The highlight of the day, however, was our exploration of transport-themed songs. The preschoolers were captivated by the

catchy rhymes and vivid lyrics that brought various vehicles to life in their imaginations. Each song was accompanied by colorful visuals, including images of cars, buses, boats, and trains, projected onto a screen. This visual element helped the children connect the music to the modes of transport and enhanced their understanding.

To make the music experience even more interactive, I provided a variety of musical instruments such as tambourines, xylophones, and shakers. Preschoolers picked their instruments and joined in, creating a joint sound that echoes the rhythms of the transport-themed songs. I have seen that this collaborative musical activity not only promoted fine motor skills but also fostered a sense of teamwork and harmony among the children.

It feels that our transport-themed week was not only educational but also filled with moments of joy and excitement that would leave a lasting impression on these young learners.

Day 2: Tuesday

Our exciting week continues with the theme of transportation today! I began the theme by reading stories about cars, buses, trains, and boats, sparking their imaginations. To further enhance their understanding, I tried to engage them in discussions about their favorite ways to travel.

We began by discussing the various ways in which the preschoolers arrive at school. Some children come by car, others by bus, and a few even walk or ride their bicycles. This discussion not only highlighted the diversity of transportation modes but also encouraged the children to think about their own daily routines.

Next, I provided each child with a blank card, which they eagerly decorated with colorful markers, stickers, and drawings of their chosen mode of transportation. This creative aspect allowed them to express themselves while personalizing their learning experience. To practice counting, I asked the children to place a specific number of stickers or drawings on their cards. For example, they had to add four wheels to their car. Additionally, we incorporated logical shapes into the activity. The children were encouraged to cut out and glue geometric shapes like circles for wheels, rectangles for car bodies, or triangles for roofs. This exercise helped them recognize and differentiate between various shapes while enhancing their fine motor skills.

Writing their names on the cards was the final step, promoting literacy development. Each child carefully wrote their name with guidance from our educators. This practice not only

reinforced their name recognition but also encouraged them to take pride in their creations, as they now had personalized cards with their own names. This activity exemplified my main learning objectives and commitment to holistic and engaging learning experiences that encompass creativity, numeracy, shape recognition, and literacy, all while making the journey to preschool a memorable and educational adventure. I believe that my role in implementing these activities has been played as a facilitator instead of a teacher who teaches what to do in their activities.

Day 3: Wednesday

Continuing our exploration of the theme of transport, today was all about water transport and an exciting trip to the swimming pool.

To start the day, I gathered the preschoolers in a circle and engaged them in a lively discussion about different modes of water transportation. I showed them pictures of boats, ships, and submarines, and we talked about how these vehicles float and move on water. The children seemed curious and excited as they asked questions and shared their own experiences with water-related activities.

After this engaging discussion, we set off on a memorable adventure by walking to the local swimming pool. This journey, on foot, allowed the children to experience a different form of transportation firsthand while observing the various vehicles and pedestrians along the way.

Before they splashed into the water, we took a moment to emphasize the importance of water safety. We discussed pool rules and how to call for help if needed. These lessons not only enriched their knowledge but also ensured a safe and enjoyable experience. We talked about the concepts of floating and sinking, encouraged them to observe how their bodies moved in the water, and even introduced basic water safety skills.

As the day came to an end, we made our way back to the preschool. This immersive experience not only deepened their understanding of water transportation but also provided an unforgettable adventure that they would treasure for a long time.

Day 4: Thursday

Today was a special day for learning the Finnish language while exploring the world of transportation. We embarked on a fun and educational adventure to introduce the preschoolers to essential vocabulary related to transports in Finnish.

Our morning activities started with an engaging video session. The preschoolers gathered around as we played a video that introduced them to the pronunciation and usage of Finnish words related to various modes of transportation. They listened nicely, absorbing the sounds and rhythms of the Finnish language, which was both intriguing and exciting for them.

After the video session, I organized interactive activities to strengthen their newly acquired vocabulary. I used flashcards with images of different transport vehicles and their Finnish names, encouraging the children to match the pictures with the correct words. It seemed that this hands-on approach not only enhanced their understanding of the words but also strengthened their memory and cognitive skills.

As part of our Finnish language learning, we also revisited the transport tools commonly found in the Uusimaa area. We encouraged the children to share their own experiences and observations of these vehicles in their daily lives in Finnish. This interactive discussion helped them connect their language learning to real-world experiences, making it more meaningful and relevant.

Throughout the day, we continued to incorporate Finnish words related to transportation into our activities and conversations. By the end of the day, the preschoolers had not only expanded their vocabulary but had also gained a greater appreciation for the Finnish language and its role in their local environment.

Day 5: Friday

Today I began my day with Finnish learning. I had carefully planned a series of pair play activities that would encourage active participation and interaction among the preschoolers. The objective was to make learning Finnish not only educational but also enjoyable. The day began with our usual circle time, where the preschoolers gathered together. During this time, we incorporated Finnish songs and rhymes into our routine. It was amazing to see the children's enthusiastic response to the songs, as they clapped their hands and sang along.

Following our circle time, we transitioned into the pair play activities. Preschoolers were divided into pairs, and each pair was given various Finnish language-based tasks. These activities were designed to be fun and interactive, allowing them to practice their newly acquired language skills in a playful manner.

However, I have encountered the first set of challenges during the pair play activities. It became evident that when the children were in groups, they tended to revert to using English instead of Finnish. While some of them made efforts to communicate in Finnish throughout

the session, many found it more comfortable to switch back to English after using a few Finnish words.

I can see that 1) preschoolers demonstrated genuine enthusiasm and interest in learning Finnish, particularly during the circle time when songs were involved. This suggests that involving music and interactive elements may be a valuable approach in language learning; 2) children have their primary language when grouping them as pairs, it highlights that they seek for the comfort and familiarity in learning. This observation underlines the importance of creating a supportive and immersive environment for consistent language acquisition.

Weekly analysis

The whole week was to set the stage for the next week by introducing preschoolers to various modes of transportation. It has encouraged interactive learning through storytime and hands-on activities. The focus on creativity and imagination has helped children engage with the concept of transportation. This week included an exciting visit to a swimming pool, integrating it into the transportation theme. The craft activity has allowed children to express themselves creatively while reinforcing the day's lessons.

Activities in the week also brought music and rhythm into the transportation theme, making learning engaging and enjoyable. It has incorporated movement, songs, and instruments to enhance understanding and participation. As it is described in the theoretical framework, playful, meaningful, and enjoyable preschool learning serves as a key step in a child's educational journey as it not only includes essential skills but also establishes confidence and positive attitudes that lay the foundation for a successful transition into learning (Zin et al 2019).

The thematic approach has been used as a well-rounded approach to exploring transportation. Instead of having separate subjects, the thematic approach focused on combining creativity, music, science, and language learning to accelerate preschoolers' learning and promote their holistic development (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018). Each day has built on the previous one, creating a comprehensive educational experience.

6.5 Transport-themed Week 5

Day 1: Monday

Today, we kept our theme of extended transportation, with a special focus on fire safety. It also was an action-packed day filled with valuable lessons and engaging activities.

I started the circle with an essential discussion about fire safety issues. The preschoolers eagerly gathered around, ready to learn important information about staying safe in case of a fire. We discussed the importance of fire prevention, what to do if they ever encounter a fire, and how to raise the alarm to alert adults.

The highlight of the day was the hands-on rescue practice. The children were excited to participate in simulated fire rescue scenarios, where they learned how to "stop, drop, and roll" and how to crawl beneath smoke to safety. These practical exercises not only provided crucial life skills but also empowered the children to feel confident in their ability to respond to emergencies.

In the classroom, I included an exploration of the various signs and alarms that are present in our familiar environment. The preschoolers enthusiastically identified fire alarms, emergency exit signs, and fire extinguisher symbols. This exploration allowed them to connect fire safety practices to their everyday surroundings, reinforcing the importance of remaining vigilant and aware.

The preschoolers' engagement was particularly high during this exploration, as they felt a sense of ownership and familiarity with their classroom. They shared their findings and discussed the significance of these safety features, enhancing their understanding of fire safety on a practical level.

Day 2: Tuesday

Our day began with anticipation as we welcomed a group of local firefighters to our preschool. These brave community helpers not only shared their expertise but also brought with them their impressive fire truck and equipment.

The interactive session with the firefighters was an invaluable opportunity for the children to learn about fire safety from the experts. Following the informative session, we have transitioned to a creative craft activity. The preschoolers put their imaginations to work as they crafted their own trucks. The excitement in the room was palpable as they adorned their creations with vibrant colors and unique designs, solidifying their understanding of different modes of transportation.

Engaging with community helpers like firefighters not only enhances our learning but also instills a sense of respect and gratitude for those who dedicate themselves to our safety. The involvement of the community helpers into our theme made our learning very creative and alive.

I felt that these real-world experiences and hands-on activities will make our transportation and fire safety theme come alive in the most engaging and memorable ways. It makes a big impact on preschoolers' learning if the whole community participates in our learning.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today was all about "Me and My Community." The highlight of the day was our visit to the local fire station, a journey that had a profound impact on our preschoolers' understanding of their place in the world.

The purpose of this visit went far beyond a mere field trip. It was a deliberate effort to bridge the gap between our young learners and the community they are a part of. The theme of "Me and My Community" was brought to life as the children engaged with their local heroes, the firefighters.

As we arrived at the fire station, the fire trucks and the array of equipment were ready to explore. One of the primary objectives of the day was to emphasize the importance of community involvement and the roles that community helpers play. The firefighters have taken the time to explain their duties, have shown the various parts of a fire truck, and even have demonstrated how they respond to emergencies. The children got to try on real firefighter gear, hold a fire hose, and explore the inner workings of a fire truck.

The visit served as a reminder that our community is not just a physical location but a network of people who work together for the well-being of all its members. The children's engagement with these real-life community heroes left a profound impression, highlighting the importance of unity and cooperation.

The main challenges I have encountered during the exploration were 1) to ensure that the children remained safe throughout the visit, especially when exploring equipment and interacting with the professionals; 2) to manage the visit within a limited timeframe while ensuring that all planned activities and discussions took place required precise coordination, 3) to keep all preschoolers actively engaged during the visit since all children may have the same level of interest or understanding, so I needed to be prepared to adapt and address individual needs.

Day 4: Thursday

Today I was to focus on Finnish learning by reflecting on the visit at the fire station yesterday. Today was a day of linguistic exploration and hands-on activities, making the connection between language and real-world experiences more vivid.

The materials collected from our visit to the fire station, including flyers and craft papers, served as the foundation for our language-focused activities. To make the learning experience immersive, I decided to provide instructions in Finnish, encouraging the preschoolers to engage with the language in a practical context.

First, we distributed the materials and introduced the craft activity. The children were given instructions in Finnish on how to create their own firefighter-themed crafts using the materials from the fire station. Throughout the activity, my role was to guide and support the children in understanding the instructions and using Finnish vocabulary related to firefighters. This method of learning by doing helped them grasp the language naturally, making it more accessible and enjoyable.

In addition to the craft activity, I incorporated Finnish firefighter vocabulary into our discussions. The preschoolers learned words and phrases related to firefighters, equipment, and safety procedures in Finnish. By the end of the day, the preschoolers had not only created unique firefighter-themed crafts but had also expanded their language skills in Finnish.

However, introducing the Finnish language learning component can present some challenges, such as language proficiency and ensuring understanding. Preschoolers have varying levels of Finnish language skills, and introducing instructions in Finnish could be challenging for those who are not familiar with the language. It's important to confirm that the children understand the instructions given in Finnish, as misunderstandings could lead to frustration or confusion during the activities.

Day 5: Friday

Today was about a reflection day on what we did yesterday. To begin the day, I started with a brief reflection on what we had learned yesterday during our circle time. This provided an opportunity for the preschoolers to recall and reinforce the Finnish words and phrases they had encountered, fostering a sense of familiarity.

The main activity of the day involved the children working in pairs to create 'thank you' cards for firefighters. The objective was to introduce a practical and real-life context for using Finnish language skills. Each pair was provided with art supplies and encouraged to draw and write the word 'Kiitos' (which means 'thank you' in Finnish) on the cards.

I observed that preschoolers were highly engaged in the art and craft activity. They displayed creativity in their card designs and attempted to write 'Kiitos' in Finnish. This hands-on approach to language learning appeared to be effective in maintaining their interest. In addition, pairing the children for the activity promoted collaboration and teamwork. They not only practiced Finnish but also interacted with their peers, reinforcing the social aspect of

language acquisition. Also, the context of expressing gratitude to firefighters seemed to motivate the children to put effort into their cards and write 'Kiitos' correctly. Instead of teaching them how to write in Finnish some words, this real-life connection helps their language learning experience.

Weekly analysis

Throughout this week, I had a great journey with preschoolers that involved the theme of fire safety and community involvement. It was a well-rounded experience that balanced hands-on learning, practical knowledge, and language immersion.

We had an exploration by introducing the essential concepts of fire safety through discussions about fire prevention and safety procedures. We also had a remarkable highlight as we welcomed local firefighters to our preschool. Their visit not only brought the concept of community helpers to life but also underlines the importance of fire safety in our lives. The interactive activities and discussions with these real-life heroes have given us a great impression, deepening the children's appreciation for those who ensure our safety.

I had also put a focus on crafting, because it helped enhance the children's understanding and language skills. These activities fostered a unique connection between language and real-life experiences.

The theme of the week combined community engagement, fire safety education, language immersion, and hands-on activities into a cohesive and enriching learning experience. I can see that thematic approach has been practical in my career as it aims to involve organizing the curriculum by centering it around a single theme, incorporating diverse subjects, teaching techniques, methods, approaches, educational resources, hands-on activities, and also other learning environments (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

Challenges related to language proficiency can be addressed gradually through careful planning and educator support, as the role of educator in thematic approach is to be capable of skillfully connecting various educational materials and resources to all domains of learning in ECEC, all within the context of a single thematic unit (Zin et al 2019).

6.6 Transport-themed Week 6

Day 1: Monday

Today at the preschool, I extended the theme of transport through songs and drama, and it was a great success. One remarkable aspect of the approach was the use of thematic songs to

introduce different modes of transport. The preschoolers liked this method, and it kept them focused and engaged throughout the day.

By using themed songs, we made learning more exciting and interactive. The preschoolers weren't just memorizing facts; they were actively participating in the learning process. This approach not only taught them about various modes of transport but also kept their attention and enthusiasm levels high.

Following the musical session, we transitioned into a drama activity. I set up a scenario where a family was going on a car trip. The preschoolers fully immersed themselves in their roles and learned about feelings and emotions in a hands-on way. This thematic approach not only enhanced their understanding of the world but also encouraged them to stay focused and engaged in the learning process.

It's clear that this thematic approach to teaching is making a positive impact on our young learners. I'm excited to continue the theme with different activities and keeping the children's enthusiasm for learning alive.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today marked the second day of our thematic approach to exploring the world of transport with the preschool children. Building on our successful introduction of transportation-themed songs and drama, we delved deeper into the subject by classifying different modes of transport.

The day started with a continuation of our themed songs, but this time we focused on songs that highlighted the classification of transportation. We sang about land, water, and air transport, and the children were quick to catch on to the distinctions between these categories. The thematic songs not only entertained them but also served as an effective way to teach them about the various types of transport.

To improve this learning, I incorporated a hands-on activity. I provided the children with a selection of toy vehicles representing different modes of transport - cars, boats, trains, and airplanes. I encouraged them to group these toys according to their mode of transportation, reinforcing the concept of classification.

The children's engagement and enthusiasm were remarkable once again. This thematic approach not only made learning about transport enjoyable but also helped them retain and apply their knowledge in a practical way.

As an educator, it's truly rewarding to witness the impact of this thematic approach on the children's learning experience. I look forward to expanding the theme of transport with some other activities tomorrow.

Day 3: Wednesday

Our transport-themed preschool learning journey continued today, and I extended our exploration of transport classification into toy play for preschool.

Our classification exercise today was even more engaging and in-depth. The children, having already become familiar with the characteristics of each type of vehicle, were now able to delve into finer details. They discussed the differences between sports cars and trucks, passenger planes and cargo planes, speedboats and sailboats, and steam trains and modern trains.

As I reflect on today's activities, I'm reminded of the importance of hands-on, experiential learning and thematic play. This transport-themed week has not only enriched the children's knowledge but has also fostered their social and creative development. It's a joy to see them learn and grow in such an immersive and fun-filled environment.

Day 4: Thursday

Our theme for the day was "Finnish Numbers and Transport," and it was an enriching experience for preschoolers.

I began the day with a brief recap of what we had learned throughout the week about different modes of transportation. Preschoolers were eager to share their knowledge, naming various vehicles and explaining their functions. It was evident that our transport theme had made a significant impact on their understanding of the world around them.

To introduce the Finnish language, I chose to focus on numbers. I started with the basics and gradually progressed to more complex numerals. They seemed captivated by the idea of learning numbers in a new language.

To integrate our theme, I used toy vehicles to count and practice the Finnish numbers. It was great to see their counting toy cars, planes, boats, and trains in Finnish. They quickly caught on to the logic and were excited to share their skills on number counting.

The highlight of the day was a special activity where I combined numbers and transport. Each child received a set of vehicles, and they were instructed to count them aloud in Finnish. The challenge was to match the number of vehicles with the corresponding numeral card. The children completed this task with enthusiasm, eagerly counting their vehicles and then

finding the correct number card. They have not only expanded their understanding of the transport world but have also enjoyed the journey of language learning.

Day 5: Friday

As it's Friday today, our week of transport-themed learning came to a close with an exciting day filled with culture and creativity. We watched a captivating animated video presenting Finnish transport modes, and then the children teamed up for pair play.

The video presented us streets and transport rules in Finland, where we discovered various modes of transport like trains, boats, trams, and even reindeer-drawn sleighs. We learned the Finnish names for these vehicles, sparking interest in language and culture.

Then, preschoolers worked in teams, using toy vehicles to create imaginative scenes inspired by the video. They created imaginative journeys, fostering collaboration and applying what they had learned throughout the week.

Weekly analysis:

Throwback to last week, I can see that the transport theme captivated the children's attention from the beginning. Their enthusiasm for the topic was evident as they eagerly participated in activities and discussions. Therefore, it can highlight the importance of selecting themes that resonate with the children's interests. As it is mentioned in the literature, this approach involves structuring the curriculum around a concept or theme that aligns with the child's current context, interests, background, and developmental stage (Ashokan & Venugopal 2016). In thematic learning, young learners are to have time and space to dig deeper into their interested topics.

I can see that incorporating a range of activities, from hands-on play with real toys to watching an animated video helped preschool learning a lot. This approach was highly effective in implementing diverse learning styles and ensuring that the children remained engaged and active participants throughout the week. As it has been stated in the literature, this thematic approach encourages students to analyze, comprehend and reflect on the nuances associated with the chosen theme (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018). As a result, preschoolers are able to gain a comprehensive understanding that goes beyond surface-level knowledge of different topics (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018).

I have noticed that pair play was also very important for preschoolers as it allowed them to work together, communicate, and exercise their imaginations. This activity reinforced the importance of collaborative play in early childhood education and provided an opportunity for social skill development.

I have also realized the importance of regular reflection and adaptability in early childhood education. It gives me a reminder that flexibility and the ability to adjust activities based on the children's interests and needs are crucial for a successful thematic unit. I should focus more on the flexibility of rearranging activities based on contexts in a specific situation.

6.7 Transport-themed Week 7

Day 1: Monday

The theme for the day was "Learning About Inventors of transport," and it was the perfect way to set the wheels in motion for an exciting week ahead. I introduced some ingenious inventors who shaped the world of transportation like the Wright Brothers and Karl Benz, who pioneered the development of planes and cars.. Especially young inventors at the age of preschoolers.

As we discussed the history and achievements of these inventors, it was clear that this thematic introduction had captured their imaginations. It shows the power of storytelling in education, illustrating how the tales of inventors and their breakthroughs can inspire and motivate young learners.

After our inspiring discussions about inventors, they were given coloring sheets depicting some of the most iconic inventions in the history of transportation. It was a delightful way to enhance what we had learned and allow them to express their creativity. I have noticed that the invention-themed coloring sheets gave them a chance to bring these ingenious creations to life with their own artistic skills.

The combination of history learning and artistic expression was a great reminder for me of the power of hands-on experiences. It was evident that this creative activity allowed the children to realize what they had learned about inventors and their contributions to the world of transport.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today we still continued our transport-themed week, as we embarked on a hands-on exploration of shapes using building blocks. We had a hands-on activity that highlights the blend of shape learning and transport. They eagerly grasped the opportunity to construct their own mini masterpieces, which would soon transform into a set of vehicles in all shapes and sizes. The blend of transport and shapes had us on a creative journey.

The challenges of the planned activities were the following: some children had difficulty building shapes with blocks, and others had difficulty translating their imaginative ideas into

tangible structures. This presented a wonderful opportunity for problem-solving and spatial thinking.

For a few, working in groups presented an additional challenge. Coordinating ideas and sharing blocks required effective communication and negotiation skills. The children had to learn the art of collaboration, an essential aspect of early childhood education, as they navigated through creative differences and settled on a shared vision for their block-built transport.

I played the role as a facilitator to encourage them to give a go, trying different ways of building and tryings. The children worked together, sometimes with trial and error, to assemble their dream cars, planes, and boats. It was a reminder that learning often involves overcoming hurdles and learning from mistakes.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today was a creative journey that allowed the children to express their imaginations fully. It was all about personal transport projects, where each child was handed craft supplies and encouraged to design and create their very own modes of transportation. The excitement in the room was palpable, and they all were super excited about what was going to happen.

I printed out some pictures showing different transport modes, and asked all preschoolers what they want to create as individual projects. After choosing what they wanted to create, we talked about materials needed for projects respectively.

As they started the project, the challenge of transforming their ideas has appeared. Some found it tricky to shape and construct their modes of transport, resulting in a few moments of frustration. This provided an excellent opportunity to introduce the concept of problem-solving and persistence.

For others, working with scissors, glue, and various craft materials presented its own set of challenges, as they developed fine motor skills quite differently. These challenges highlight the importance of strengthening these skills in early childhood.

Nevertheless, they were fully engaged in their projects, each one unique and infused with the child's personality. These challenges became stepping stones in their learning journey, fostering resilience and a "can-do" attitude. We will continue our project making process tomorrow as well.

Day 4: Thursday

Today we continued our project-making process to transform their personal transport creations. With a sense of purpose and imagination, they engaged in coloring, painting, and carefully gluing to infuse life and personality into their works of art. Some chose to mix colors, while others selected precise shades that matched their creative vision. This phase allowed them to express their uniqueness, making each transport creation a reflection of their personalities.

As the children busily worked on their projects, my role during the process was to provide extra support for those who needed help developing their fine motor skills. I observed those who were facing challenges and offered assistance with patience and encouragement. For some children, holding a paintbrush or coordinating the use of scissors was a skill they were still working on.

I guided them in the process, showing them techniques to steady their hands and offering a helping hand when needed. This additional support allowed them to overcome hurdles and gain a sense of accomplishment. As the day concluded, the classroom was colorful and imaginative transport creations, showing the value of collaborative learning and the sense of belonging that comes from overcoming challenges.

Day 5: Friday

Today we had a visit to the library. Preschoolers had a chance to explore books about transport, from picture books about trains and ships to stories of adventurers and explorers. The library visit was a beautiful reminder of how learning can take us on a journey of imagination and discovery.

I think today's only challenge that I encountered was that while the children were encouraged to explore transport-related books, some were initially drawn to other subjects. Gently redirecting their attention to the theme and helping them find suitable books required guidance and patience.

Weekly analysis

This week's transport-themed learning journey has been a remarkable adventure. The week kicked off with a captivating exploration of inventors of transportation. The children displayed genuine curiosity and enthusiasm while learning about young inventors. The theme of the week was highlighted by working on a creative project where children designed their own modes of transportation. Children have realized that the sense of ownership over their projects. This objective has been resonated with what has been mentioned earlier that thematic approach is a pedagogical strategy where the curriculum is thoughtfully organized

and designed, revolving around a central, overarching idea or topic (Dzainudin, Yamat & Yunus 2018)

Children stayed closed with the creative opportunity to construct various vehicle shapes. Challenges of the week included fine motor skill development and collaboration, fostering resilience and teamwork. The transport-themed week also allows me to assess a child's progress and understanding within a specific context, observing how a child approaches and engages with these activities, providing valuable information about their understanding and skills development. It also has given me the responsibility of designing comprehensive learning activities, devising effective teaching methods, and designing assessments by taking into consideration learners' needs and interests, as Zin et al (2019) have stated in the literature.

This week concluded with a library visit focused on transport-related books. The library visit was marked by curiosity, exploration, and excitement as children browsed and selected books. It was a reminder of how learning can transport us on a journey of imagination.

As I reflect on our transport-themed week, it's clear that the combination of history, creativity, and exploration made for a dynamic and engaging learning experience. I have noticed that our transport-themed week sparks children's interest and curiosity, making learning more enjoyable. The thematic approach creates a sense of purpose and relevance, which motivates children to actively participate in the learning process.

6.8 Transport-themed Week 8

Day 1: Monday

Today, I began the day with our "Good Morning" song, and the preschoolers' enthusiasm was amazing. I then mentioned our theme for the day - transportation, and pointed out that our main learning is through music and sounds.

The highlight of the morning was our lively transport-themed songs and rhymes. We sang some songs related to transport, like "The Wheels on the Bus", "I'm a Little Airplane," and "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

Then I explained how the instruments could mimic the sounds of various modes of transport. When we played recorded sounds of different vehicles, the children used their instruments to recreate the sounds. The drum imitated a train's rhythmic chugging, and xylophones rang out like bicycle bells.

As I gathered the children for a brief reflection after music, I asked what they enjoyed most about our transportation theme today. Their answers were as diverse as their personalities,

reflecting their unique interests and preferences. I can see how music affects them to learn the theme of transport.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today we had math learning. Our morning discussion started with how shapes and numbers are intertwined with the world of transportation. I showed them pictures of vehicles, roads, and signs, pointing out shapes like circles (wheels) and rectangles (car bodies) and counting the wheels and passengers on buses. It was amazing to see the children engage with enthusiasm and curiosity.

Then, we played a "Shape Hunt" game where the children had to find and match shapes around the classroom - wheels, traffic signs, and more. This activity combined learning and physical activity, keeping the children both engaged and active.

We also introduced a "Count the Wheels" game, where the children counted the number of wheels on different toy vehicles and made a record. It was incredible to see how they used their math skills to solve these real-world problems.

Today was a success. We're making learning fun, engaging, and relevant, and the children are thriving. I'm looking forward to continuing our journey into the world of transportation.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today was a project day, and we continued our transportation-themed projects from last week. While the children were eager to add colors and pieces to their personal projects, I couldn't help but reflect on some of the challenges we face when implementing a thematic approach.

One of the challenges we encountered today was the availability of resources. Not all children had access to the same materials, which led to some inequalities in their projects. Finding a way to ensure that all children have access to the necessary resources is an ongoing challenge.

It's clear that the children have diverse learning styles. Some of them were very focused on adding intricate details to their projects, while others wanted to complete their work quickly. Balancing these different learning styles and paces is a continuous challenge.

Project days are wonderful opportunities for creativity, but time management can be tricky. Some children were so into their projects that they lost track of time, while others felt rushed. Striking the right balance is something I'm working on.

Despite these challenges, it was a productive day. The children had a great time working on their transport-themed projects. We'll continue our project next week, hoping I could have some solutions for the challenges I encountered today.

Day 4: Thursday

It's a day we focused on Finnish learning. We started the day with our usual morning circle time, but with a numerical twist. We counted from one to ten in Finnish to introduce the children.

We moved on to explore the world of numbers, with an emphasis on Finnish numerals. We had posters displaying numbers in Finnish. I can see that they were comfortable with counting and repeating the numbers in Finnish.

Throughout the morning, we played various counting transport games to reinforce the Finnish numbers. We ended our learning with a story called "Counting Adventures" that featured a journey involving various modes of transport, where the characters counted their way through exciting adventures. The children were fully engaged and were actively counting along with the characters in the story.

Weekly analysis

The week has been a blend of music, math, and language learning, all within the captivating theme of transport. Each day introduced our children to the diverse modes of transportation, instilling in them not only knowledge but also a sense of curiosity and belonging.

However, as we went through the week, challenges gradually appeared. The first challenge was resource availability. Ensuring that all children have equal access to the materials required for our activities is a continuous effort. This challenge reminds us of the importance of resource equity in thematic learning.

Moreover, the diversity in learning styles among preschoolers became noticeable. Some children embraced our activities, while others needed more time or support. It became evident that as facilitators, we must adapt and balance these diverse learning styles while managing our time effectively.

One of the key takeaways from this week is to seek innovative ways to keep them excited about the theme and eager to explore more. Also, my role as facilitator is not just to impart knowledge but also to adapt, engage, and inspire. As I look ahead, I will make use of these lessons to refine my approach.

6.9 Ocean animals-themed Week 9

Day 1: Monday

Today was an exciting start to our new theme of exploring ocean animals. I have started the morning with a colorful ocean-themed art project. The kids crafted their own sea creatures using paper, paint, and lots of glitter. It was a reminder of how simple activities can be both fun and educational.

After that, I gathered them in a cozy circle for storytime. The story of "Finding Nemo" seemed to be interesting as it sparked their interest in clownfish and their symbiotic relationship with sea anemones.

I can see that the preschoolers are very much curious about the theme. Their enthusiasm for learning about ocean animals reminded me of the importance of nurturing a love for the natural world from a young age. It's nice to be part of their educational journey with this little one.

Day 2: Tuesday

I started the day by talking about the importance of taking care of our oceans. The concept of keeping the ocean clean and protecting the animals' habitats resonated with the kids. They have mentioned some promises like "pick up trash at the beach" and "save the fishies".

Then I have planned the activity of 'Ocean Animal Picture Collage'. The kids were expected to use the materials of animal pictures to create an underwater world. This activity was a simple, creative way for preschoolers to learn about and explore ocean animals. It also highlights the theme of the week.

I have seen that by centering the activity, preschoolers can understand the subject matter. This focused approach allows them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic of ocean animals.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today I began the day with a colorful and engaging activity - "Ocean Animal Scavenger Hunt." I had hidden various ocean animal figurines around the classroom, and the children were given small baskets to collect these "treasures." Their enthusiasm was contagious as they embarked on their underwater quests, searching for dolphins, seashells, and other marine creatures.

This activity not only helped them learn about different ocean animals but also enhanced their observational skills.

We concluded the day with a group discussion about the importance of protecting the ocean and its incredible inhabitants. It was nice to see how much the preschoolers had absorbed over the past two days, as they enthusiastically shared their newfound knowledge and expressed their commitment to taking care of the ocean.

Day 4: Thursday

Today, we had our ocean-themed learning adventure with the Finnish language adding a new layer of linguistic understanding to our ocean-themed journey.

We began our day with a "Finnish Ocean Animal Song." The children learned a catchy Finnish song that incorporated the names of various ocean animals. Singing and dancing were not only fun but also a creative way to introduce new vocabulary in a different language.

Then, I have planned a Finnish ocean animal craft. Kids created their own ocean animals using colorful craft materials and were encouraged to label their creations with the Finnish names for these creatures. It was delightful to see the children try out new words and embrace this linguistic challenge.

Day 5: Friday

Today we also had Finnish learning in a way we stick to the theme of ocean learning. Before jumping to the theme, I played a Finnish song 'Pikkuiset kultakalat' to warm up the preschoolers with the sound of Finnish language. It's related to the theme and somehow it gave the comfortable feeling to children by engaging them with the language unconsciously.

Then we had a storytelling session, by reading a beautifully illustrated Finnish children's book about underwater adventures. The kids listened as they were immersed in the Finnish language, and they used the images to help understand the story. It was a great opportunity for them to experience a different culture while continuing to explore the ocean theme.

I have noticed that the children would feel more comfortable if visual support is given to them throughout the session. As Finnish is not their mother language, it's difficult for them to concentrate on the activity of storytelling.

Weekly analysis

The ocean theme has consistently engaged the preschoolers as it has been listed as a theme by them. It helps them to foster curiosity and enthusiasm for marine life. The incorporation of Finnish language added an extra layer of excitement.

Instead of introducing the theme as a subject, the theme was introduced and learned with different activities including hands-on tasks and storytelling. This type of learning leads to deep learning in a way that the children explore the theme deeper with their interests. As it is mentioned in the literature, playful, meaningful, and enjoyable preschool learning serves as a crucial step in a child's educational journey as it not only imparts essential skills but also establishes confidence and fosters positive attitudes that lay the foundation for a successful transition into schooling and lifelong learning (Zin et al 2019).

Preschoolers were engaged with the theme unconsciously and continuously. I can see that learning turns into an exciting journey of exploration, “where students are not just passive recipients of information but enthusiastic participants in their own educational growth” (National core curriculum for early childhood education and care 2022).

6.10 Two-themed Week 10

Day 1: Monday

This week is gonna be focused on two different themes, which are ‘Halloween’ and “Winter sports”.

Today we started the theme of Halloween. I started the day with a circle that was all about introducing Halloween to the preschoolers. I shared information about the history, traditions, and symbols associated with this holiday. With crayons, colored pencils, and markers in hand, the preschoolers decorated their given worksheet with grinning pumpkins, friendly ghosts, and whimsical witches. When preschoolers engage in drawing, they not only create beautiful pieces of art but also experience various developmental benefits, including improved motor skills and enhanced creativity.

Then, we had the activity of Halloween-themed bingo which created bingo cards with pictures of common Halloween items, like pumpkins, bats, and witches' hats. The activity was engaging and helped to improve their concentration skills.

It was also a day for Halloween party preparation. Looking forward to the party tomorrow.

Day 2: Tuesday

Today was a party day, including a costume parade and a mini Halloween show. The children dressed up in their costumes, displayed their makeup, and shared their Halloween stories.

The Halloween party featured themed games, crafts, and treats, all designed to celebrate their learning journey.

I noticed that the costume parade and Halloween party encouraged social interaction, confidence, and a sense of achievement among preschoolers. This final party allowed the children to express what they had learned and experienced throughout the week.

Day 3: Wednesday

Today we started the theme of winter sports. In the morning circle, I asked their favorite winter sports and why they need sports during winter. Then, we headed to the nearby rink for our skating lesson.

The lesson was fun and alive. I can see that they were super excited about skating and sharing their all skating gears to peers. The process of skating was engaging as it happened as real activity for preschoolers. Some of them struggled with walking, and others learned how to stand still on the rink.

I enjoyed this lesson very much, because I was also part of the lesson, and played with preschoolers on the rink. The thematic approach came to alive when the types of winter sports were introduced.

Weekly analysis

This week included two themes, the first theme as 'Halloween' not only engaged the children's interest but also enhanced their creative expression, language development, and understanding of cultural traditions.

Through the exploration of Halloween's various activities, the children developed creative skills. Thematic learning through halloween activities has proven to be a valuable tool in fostering the joy of learning and creative expression in preschoolers.

7 Discussion and conclusion

The thematic approach to preschool education is an innovative and highly effective method for engaging young children in the learning process. This approach goes beyond traditional subject-based teaching, recognizing the importance of integrating various subjects within a unifying theme (Haas 2000). Through my research and personal experiences, I've come to appreciate how themes can be a powerful tool for teaching preschoolers.

During the time of writing my diary thesis, I have come to understand that the thematic approach to preschool education is an innovative and highly effective method for engaging young children in the learning process. As it is mentioned in the literature, I have noticed that this approach goes beyond traditional subject-based teaching, recognizing the importance of integrating various subjects within a theme (Ashokan & Venugopal 2016).

I have also learned that preschoolers engage well with learning when learning happens through themes. As it is mentioned in the literature, unlike the traditional model which divides subjects such as math, science, and literacy, the thematic approach integrates these subjects into a coherent, real-world context that captures the interest of young learners (Zin et al 2019). Themes, such as "Transport" or "Family" make learning more relatable and enjoyable for preschoolers. It sparks their curiosity and encourages active participation in the learning process.

I have realized that documenting the entire process of thematic learning has emerged as a crucial aspect of my professional growth. By documenting the whole journey within a theme, I have created a valuable resource with preschoolers. It allows for in-depth reflection on the children's progress, interests, and areas of growth. Furthermore, this documentation improves my own professional development by offering insights into effective teaching strategies, areas for improvement.

As an educator, I've gained a deeper understanding of how to adapt better teaching methods to align with the children's needs and interests. Reflecting on the documented progress allows me to design instruction and activities more effectively, ultimately improving the quality of education I am to provide.

My work life partner has played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of my research journey. Beyond being a supportive colleague, they have been an invaluable source of inspiration and encouragement throughout the entire process. Their constructive feedback on themed activities planning has not only enhanced the quality of my work but has also ignited innovative ideas. Whether discussing the details of my research or brainstorming ideas for the themes of the thesis, their cooperation and communication have fostered a productive and enriching working relationship. This effective communication has significantly contributed to the overall success of the project.

It has been a great opportunity for me to reflect on my professional development. I can see that the thematic approach is an effective and engaging method for young learners. I have seen that the preschoolers respond more positively to themes than traditional subjects. I have witnessed that the themes introduced by activities not only seem interesting for them to trigger their learning but also ignite their passion to engage with active learning. I have also observed that the process of documenting thematic learning is not only beneficial for the

children but also instrumental in my own professional growth. I have gained insights of how I help preschoolers to stay engaged with their learning.

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