



A Substitute's Guide to Early Childhood Education

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The aim of this thesis was to support the quality of substitute work in Early Childhood Education. The shortage of workers in early childhood education has been talked about in the media for a long time, in addition, the tight personnel situation of daycare centers is noticeable in the work shifts (SEURE 2021.).

The theoretical part of this thesis was done by using working life partner Seure's orientation material, the Early Childhood Education plan, the Early Childhood Education act and other theories related to the topic.

The aim of this thesis is to support work quality in daycares and to provide support for Early Childhood Education. The target group for this thesis is substitutes and other personnel in Early Childhood Education. The aim is to support the well-being of children and educators in Early Childhood Education by providing practical tips in a form of a simple and easily accessible leaflet. This thesis was done using the development-based method.

The theory part of this thesis shows that work orientation is undeniably important to prevent the deterioration of the quality of Early Childhood Education. In addition, the importance of acknowledging and operating by the law and regulations of Early Childhood Education. Raising awareness and educating educators including substitutes, supports the Early Childhood Education quality. Cooperation between substitutes and ECE workers is essential for guaranteeing the well-being of children.

Keywords: Daycare, Child's Support, Work Orientation

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1 Introduction

Interest in this topic began while working as a substitute through a private rental company, Seure in January 2021. During the work in daycares, various observations were made and thus the idea of supporting the Early Childhood Education work quality was born. The writers began pondering many aspects that are essential in supporting the work quality in the field, several issues that seemed to have caused hasty work environments, poor communication between employees etc. In addition, the writers chose this topic because it is current and interests them personally.

The current situation in Early Childhood Education has attracted attention in the media, issues such as the shortage of personnel and how it is affecting the quality of early childhood education. There have been discussions concerning the coping and well-being of early childhood education workers, furthermore, the writers have noticed during their work as substitutes that there is an increasing need for substitutes and their influence in the field is wide.

This thesis aims to support the cooperation between substitutes and other personnel in early childhood education, in addition, to supporting the well-being of children and educators. This thesis aimed to highlight the importance of matters that are essential when working as a substitute.

This thesis aims to support the early childhood education work quality by providing a simple and easily accessible leaflet. The leaflet consists of important tips that the writers have chosen based on Seure's orientation material and other theories related to early childhood education. The theory part of this thesis contains significantly important aspects that are based on the laws and regulations concerning Early Childhood Education.

Early childhood education is based on laws which include the early childhood education plan, in addition, The Board of Education prepares the basics of the early childhood education plan. (OPH- Opetushallitus 2022.) Educators must operate by these rules and regulations.

The topic of this thesis is important and necessary because of the current situation of early childhood education, in addition, the writers want to emphasize the importance of complying with the laws and regulations in early childhood education.

2 Background of thesis

In this section, we will go through the background of our thesis and explain the chosen method. The impact that early childhood education has on children's life is lifelong. The effects of early childhood education are particularly great for those children who have problems in development and learning or whose living conditions are difficult. (OPH 2022.)

Our focus is to provide an information package and a leaflet to support substitutes in their work in early childhood education. In early childhood education work substitutes become part of the staff for a day or a few. Whenever someone becomes sick or is absent for any reason the permanent worker must be replaced by substitute.

Based on the early childhood education situation in the media we concluded that there could be some benefit in producing a simple leaflet and with the permission of our working life partner Seure we used their materials in this thesis the focus was on using their tips for early childhood education work, translating them into English and adding a few parts from our own work experience as substitute workers. We added the part of using the Seure name badge, changing the work unit (moving from one daycare to the other), interaction, language and cultural diversity (supported by the national core curriculum for ECE 2022).

As mentioned previously the current early childhood education situation in the media indicates that substitute workers are in high demand. While planning our thesis topic and doing research we found out that early childhood education needs support in various ways. Furthermore, we found that one form of supporting early childhood education was to produce useful tips and write about them in a plain matter.

We thought about different development ideas and concluded that the most suitable way for us is to create a useful thesis and attach a simple leaflet with the most crucial issues in the substitute work.

In Yle article Kaisa Ylikarpo writes about how daycares are suffering from staff shortages. Our work experience as substitute workers allowed us to think deeply and ponder about matters that affect the well-being of children and educators in the field. Furthermore, we wanted to bring a different perspective to the matter, not much research is done on substitute work in early childhood education.

There are many continuous discussions about what effects well-being at work, wellbeing at work means that the work is safe, healthy, and pleasant. It stimulates good and motivated management and the workplace atmosphere and professionalism of employees. It also impacts on coping at work.

Wellbeing at work increases productivity and commitment to the job, and it reduces incidents of sick leave. (Ministry of social affairs and health, 2022) There are different dimension about well-being and how it affects the working community.

2.1 Development thesis

The development-based thesis is a method where students may do development work (former title functional thesis. The development work aims to guide actions in practice. From the field of education, the output can be a guide or instructions for professional use, such as an orientation guide. (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2004, 9)

According to Airaksinen (2009) depending on the field of study functional thesis can for example be an orientation guide, safety instruction, which includes planning and implementing. In addition, it can be done as a project, it can also include a portfolio. However, there should always be a product or a report. In our thesis, we explained, in theory, some important parts we found relevant while working as a substitute, in addition, the leaflet was created in a simple manner so that a person can read it in a short time.

The method has two parts, the functional part (the product) and the documentation of the process as the final thesis. (Airaksinen 2009,8) When searching for different methods, it appeared that the functional-based method, development method and activity-based method have quite a similar process.

2.2 Aim and Objective

We aim to research essential things related to daycare work from the early childhood education act and plan. The leaflet will contain rather basic and useful information that a person can read while going to work as a substitute in a new workplace. The leaflet is part of the thesis and in which we share the most crucial aspects from a substitute worker's point of view.

The objective of our theory part is to bring out issues which are important when working as a substitute and what should be considered when someone goes into a new group for example issues such as orientation and its importance in a workplace. We will also discuss what methods are good to consider while working from a child's perspective and well-being in early childhood education.

3 The company Seure

In this part we will introduce our working-life partner, in addition, there will be a brief explanation of the different roles in the workplace.

Seure was founded in the year 1990, they have 1700 employees daily and 14 200 active employees. Seure has 5600 work locations, 5100 new recruits and 5 100 000 hours worked by the employees. (Seure 2021.)

Seure is a non-profit personnel service company, that provides labor from one-day substitutes to months-long employment relationships. In addition to hiring labor, Seure also assists its customers in other personnel matters, such as recruiting and optimizing human resources. (Seure 2021.)

Due to the company form, they only offer services to their owner-customers. Seure operates in the cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Kauniainen, as well as the hospital districts of Helsinki, Uusimaa and Central Uusimaa. (Seure 2021.)

Seures' largest industries are social and health care, early childhood education, teaching, and food service and sanitation. Seure's employees work in hospitals, health centers, kindergartens, service centers, home care and schools. (Seure 2021.)

3.1 Employer's (Seure's) role and responsibility in the leased employment relationship

Seure acts as the employer in a temporary employment relationship and gives the employee an explanation of the key terms of the employment relationship and a written employment contract in longer (more than 16 days) fixed-term employment contracts. (Seure 2021.)

Seure abides by the current legislation and collective agreements, to take care of the salary payment of his employees and other obligations of the employer, such as statutory occupational health care. In addition, it is responsible for the general implementation of occupational safety, such as ensuring the employee's professional skills and accident insurance. (Seure 2021.)

Seure takes care of familiarizing their employees with Society's practices and the employment relationship. In addition, if necessary, they are responsible for ending the employment relationship and issuing possible sanctions. (Seure 2021.)

3.2 The role and responsibility of the user company (workplace) in the leased employment relationship

The user company is the workplace where the Seure employee works, for example, school, daycare, hospital ward etc. In a leased relationship the work management in the workplace has the employer's right of work management and supervision. The employee is obliged to follow the instructions and regulations given. (Seure 2021.)

The manager of the workplace can direct the Seure employee to move to another workplace or group during the workday. When the employee changes the workplace in the middle of a shift, the distance should be reasonable, and the transfer should not cause costs for the employee. (Seure)

The user company is responsible for familiarizing the Seure employer in the workplace for example about the workspaces, practices of the work, work tasks and tools. In addition to guiding and instructing the employee, as well as supervising the employee's work and informing about possible harmful and dangerous factors. The user company is responsible for occupational safety, ergonomics and offering any protective equipment needed at work. (Seure 2021.)

3.3 The employee's role and responsibility in the leased employment relationship

The employee must comply with the key terms of the employment relationship and follow instructions and regulations given by the supervisor of the workplace (for example daycare). When the employee is not able to do the gig (substitute work) for example because of sickness, they must inform Seure and the workplace immediately. (Seure 2021.)

The employee must comply with the duty of confidentiality. The obligation of confidentiality applies to all employees of Seure and each work shift separately. (Seure 2021.)

4 Theoretical framework

In this chapter, we will explain the base of Early Childhood Education, to make it more understandable why some issues are so essential when thinking about the quality of Early Childhood Education. Early childhood is a significant stage of life, a child lives and grows as a part of the community and the surrounding society. (Finnish national agency for education 2022)

There are a lot of experiences that children gain in the day-care, so it is important that the educators in early childhood education can have sensitive interaction and know how to build a good learning environment for children. The overall effect of these factors creates meaningful learning experiences that produce contribute to children's well-being. (OPH 2017.)

4.1 Early childhood education in Finland

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is part of the Finnish education system. (OPH 2022.) Early Childhood Education is based on Finnish law, ECEC law and Un conventions on the rights of the Child. Early Childhood Education is defined as the whole of the child's planned and goal-oriented upbringing, teaching, and care, with a particular emphasis on pedagogy. (Early

Childhood Education Act 540/2018.) The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the overall planning, guidance and monitoring of early childhood education and care.

According to the Family's needs, they can choose any of these three options. Early childhood education and care are provided as centre-based early education activities, family-based daycare activities and open early childhood education and care activities. (The ministry of culture and Education)

Early Childhood Education is many families' first contact with society and the social system. Early childhood education aims to support the family so that everything occurs in the best interest of a child's well-being. According to the act on Early Childhood Education and Care section 3§ together with the child and the child's parents or other persons who have custody of the child for the benefit of the child's balanced development and holistic well-being and support the parents or other persons who have custody of the child in their task of bringing up the child. (Early childhood education and care, Chapter 3, section 10). Parents or the person who has custody have primary responsibility for the child's upbringing. The Early Childhood Education work supports parents' upbringing and assists to do what is best for a child's well-being.

Working in the daycare environment requires the information of knowing what kind of guidelines there are to guide the workplace. The daycare is one of the most common places where substitutes and part-time workers are needed. Furthermore, there have been discussions in society concerning Early Childhood Education and work motivation, the work pressure might have had effects on the current permanent teachers' motivation to work in the field.

Staffing refers to how many educators are needed per group of children in early childhood education. The Early Childhood Education Act and the Government Decree on early childhood education are responsible for the correct ratio in daycare. (Tehy 2022.)

One group may have no more than three educators in relation to the number of children (If necessary, there can be more educators). It means that practically:

- a group of children under the age of 3 can have a maximum of 12 children (1 educator / 4 children)
- in the group of over 3-year-olds, a maximum of 21 (1 educator / 7 children)
- In part-day care for children over 3 years old, 1 educator / 13 children.

When unexpected sick leaves occur during the same day, a substitute must be arranged as soon as possible. When organizing early childhood education, taking care of children's safety is of primary importance. A sufficient number of qualified educators is a basic condition for

guaranteeing children's safety and for realizing the objectives of the Early Childhood Education Act. (Tehy 2022.)

4.2 The Early Childhood Education Plan

National Core Curriculum for ECEC obligates and guides Early Childhood Education. The renewed National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care is drawn up by the Finnish National Agency for Education and entered into force as of March 2022. ECEC providers updated the local curricula according to the National core curriculum and will implement them in August 2022. (OPH 2022.)

The Early Childhood Education plan has three levels. It consists of national early childhood education plan basics, local early childhood education plans and children's early childhood education plans. (National Core Curriculum 2018.) The key change in the new early childhood education plan is its legal obligation (Ahonen 2019.)

The Early Childhood Education plan work as a guidebook for educators to implement and build the day activities accordingly to ensure that everything is included. The new early childhood education emphasizes that child's growth, development and learning shouldn't be observed only by age. Quality and equal early childhood education and to take into consideration that development happens differently at the individual level and learning can be supported in different methods (Ahonen 2017.)

The educator in the group must have some knowledge about a child's development and familiarize with the children. The learning community is constructed by adults and children of the group. (Ahonen 2017.)

The value base of early education consists of the following parts

- **The absolute value of childhood**, which means that Every child is unique and valuable just the way they are. Every child has the right to be heard, seen, considered and to be understood as himself and as a member of his community (Varhaiskasvatuksen perusteet 2018)
- **Growing as a person:** The staff is supportive of children's growth into humanity, which is characterized by the pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty as well as justice and peace. The staff guides the children to act in accordance with the value base and to discuss values and ideals. In early childhood education, bullying, racism or violence are not accepted in any form and from no one. (Varhaiskasvatuksen perusteet 2018.)
- **The rights of the child:** The child has the right to express himself, his opinions and thoughts and to come to be understood with the means of expression he has. Every child has the right to good teaching, care and encouraging feedback. A child has the

right to play, to learn while playing and to enjoy what he learns, and to build an understanding of himself, his identity, and the world according to his own starting points. The child has the right to community and group membership. The child has a right get information in a variety of ways, deal with emotions and contradictions, and try and learn new things. (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Varhaiskasvatuksen perusteet,2018)

- **Equality and Diversity:** Personnel must create an atmosphere that respects diversity. Early childhood education is structured to the diverse Finnish cultural heritage, which continues to be shaped by children, in their interaction with their guardians and staff. (Varhaiskasvatuksen perusteet,2018)
- **The diversity of families:** Professional, open and respectful approach to diverse families and families' different languages, cultures, viewpoints and religions, traditions and views on education creates conditions for good educational cooperation. Children's family identity and family relationships are supported in such a way that every child can feel that their own family is valuable (Varhaiskasvatuksen perusteet,2018)
- **A healthy and sustainable lifestyle:** The task of early childhood education is to guide children to activities that promote healthy and well-being lifestyles. Children are offered opportunities to develop their emotional skills and aesthetic thinking.

The quality of early childhood education is measured in many ways; the early childhood education plan is one of them. The Daycare center can follow how all these values are implemented in their unit, and the child's plan as well. The Finnish education evaluation center (Karvi) develops tools to support early childhood education quality management. According to Karvi the quality of early childhood education is relative and connected to those values, which are considered important in society at any given moment. For this reason, the model for evaluating and developing the quality of early childhood education is not interpreted as permanent, but as a starting point for the factors that define good and desirable early childhood education.

4.3 Importance of work orientation

When working as substitutes we had the opportunity to think about the issues which need development in Early Childhood Education work. One of the things that attracted our attention is the orientation at the workplace. According to Section 14 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (2002/738), the employee must be adequately familiarized with her work before starting work.

While working as substitutes we had different experiences, some places were inevitably better compared to other places. We found some common phenomenon, the places with good orientation and open communication were places we prefer to go again. Everyone has been

in the role of a new employee in the early stages of their career and has experience in orientation and being orientated. Orientation is an important aspect in the workplace, which benefits both the employee and the organization itself. (Haavisto 2020.)

The importance of orientation cannot be ignored when beginning to work at a new workplace. In terms of occupational safety and the well-being of children and adults in early childhood education, every employee must know how to act in the workplace appropriately. Common operating methods create certainty in doing things and enable the smoothness of everyday life. (Annika Heikkinen & Julia Kemppinen, 2021)

According to early childhood education act 540/2018 § 3, the aim of early childhood education is to ensure a developing, learning-promoting, healthy environment for every child and a safe early childhood education environment. To ensure this every early childhood education professional should be sufficiently familiar with their duties at the workplace to achieve a safe early childhood education environment which is possible for everyone. (Heikkinen & Kemppinen 2021.)

Daycare work differs in many aspects from other workplaces, usually in other professions, a person gets the responsibility gradually after starting to work. However, the work of a teacher is seen differently; the purpose is to immediately move to a full legal position in the new workplace and pedagogical responsibility. (Tynjälä, Heikkinen & Jokinen 2013, 38.)

The permanent employee can affect substitutes' work efficiency in daycare by communicating clearly. Every child is unique, so talking briefly about the children in the group, mentioning if there are any children with special needs in orientation. It is important to train professionals about the culturally sensitive approach in the working community to prevent misunderstandings. Usually, there are orientation materials, but it might be very difficult if the worker comes from an immigrant background and does not speak Finnish fluently. A proper way to begin the work orientation is to clarify the responsibilities and duties. There should be enough time set for familiarization, in addition to work duties and a brief introduction should be provided about how to operate in the daycare center.

5 How to support substitute work in Early Childhood Education

There are 10 rules and guidelines that every educator should follow, and they are based on the Early Childhood Education Act in Finland. Here are the first three objectives of these guidelines and rules.

1) to promote comprehensive growth, development, health, and well-being according to the age and development of each child (Early Childhood Education Act 540/2018.)

2) to support the conditions for the child's learning and promote lifelong learning and the implementation of educational equality. (Early Childhood Education Act 540/2018.)

3) to implement versatile pedagogical activities based on the child's play, movement, arts, and cultural heritage and enable positive learning experiences. (Early Childhood Education Act 540/2018.)

A substitute's role in daycare is to replace the group's absent educator and follow the guidelines we have previously mentioned. We will go through three important concepts that we have chosen thoroughly to share and emphasize in substitute work in early childhood education based on the rules and regulations concerning the early childhood education. The first one is interaction, the second one is language and the third one is cultural diversity.

5.1 Interaction

Interaction is defined as a dialogue between two or several people. Dialogue is born when receiving occurs and when responding, this is when two or several people have exchanged ideas and thoughts together. (Alila, Kirsi & Parrila, Sanna 2011, 110.) Interaction can be words, speech, gestures, facial expressions, vocalizations or looks.

Good interaction skills play an important role in substitute work. We humans have the need to belong and be accepted in a group, it is essential to understand that when a child's behavior is challenging, there usually is a logical reason behind it. In general, the reason behind the child's behavior is that they have no other way to act in a stressful situation. In other words, the child's social-emotional skills have not developed enough for the child to solve a challenging situation in a constructive way from an adult's point of view. (Ahoenon 2019.)

According to our work experience as substitutes in different daycares in the capital region, there is a significant number of children in need of support. This means that the substitute worker is required to have good interaction skills and proper means of communication to work

with the children. According to Weissberg et al. (2015, p. 6-7), the developmental tasks of the child's socio-emotional area include e.g.

1. self-knowledge and self-awareness (ability to recognize one's own emotions, personal goals and values and evaluate one's own behavior)
2. self-regulation (the ability to regulate one's own emotions and one's own behavior)
3. social awareness (the ability to recognize and understand the feelings of others and to put oneself in others' position and recognizes the point of view of others, the ability to feel and show empathy and understand behavior, social norms of fulfilment)
4. interpersonal skills (ability to create and maintain balanced and rewarding social relationships)
5. responsible decision-making (ability to make constructive own behavior and interaction decisions regarding

According to research socio-emotional skills define how well children adjust to their environment and how much they achieve in their lives. The development and support of these skills are important for the well-being of individuals, and wider communities and societies. The ability of children to adapt as citizens, be resourceful, respect and work well with others in the future and take personal and collective responsibility is essential in creating a well-functioning society. (OECD 2017.)

We can now conclude that all children need social-emotional support and learn social and emotional skills primarily through interaction with their social environment. This means both adults and peer group members play a major role, and the adult is always a mirror for a child. The way an adult looks at or touches a child, and the way an adult speaks to a child, define the child's personality. A child learns social-emotional skills directly from an adult's example, the adult's way of expressing their own feelings, talking about other people or to other people, as well as the way of resolving conflict situations, define for the child how to act in the society, how to treat other people and how to stick to one's own boundaries. (Ahonen 2019.)

It is important to understand that socio-emotional skills develop individually. Some children need more support with their social-emotional skills, just as some need more support with their language or motor skills. Children in need of social-emotional support represent many children in need of support in early childhood education. (Ahonen 2019.)

A warm interaction style allows the educator to commit and deeply interact with the child. This way the educator knows how to adapt his or her own actions to the child's needs, and the expectations of the child's behavior and actions are realistic. The adult can sensitively

recognize when the child needs more intensive support either in regulating his actions or his emotions. And this allows the child's strong feelings to be answered with empathy, and the child becomes aware that showing all feelings is allowed, and the child does not have to be afraid of being left alone with his big feelings. The warm way of interaction is reflected in the child's emotional well-being, when the child with his needs and feelings is heard and seen from the beginning, challenging situations fade away before they even have time to rekindle. (Ahonen 2019.) This interaction style is positive and effective when working with children.

According to early childhood education plan, educators should encourage children to play and interact, in addition, recognize the importance of play for a child's well-being and learning. Children and educators are encouraged to be inventive, use their imagination, express themselves and be creative. Children's playing can be seen and heard, play initiatives, experiments, focusing and experiences are given space, time and peace.

There should be cooperation between educators and interaction with guardians and the surrounding environment. In addition, community members respect each other, and children are encouraged to interact well and act as members of a group. The personnel should support the development of children's peer relationships and nurtures friendships. In a safe daycare community, conflicts are addressed and constructive ways to resolve them are learned with the assistance of adults. It is essential that the development of children's interaction skills, their experiences of being heard and that their initiatives are supported by educators. Educator's sensitivity and reaction to children's non-verbal messages are central, in addition, the development of interaction skills is supported by encouraging children to communicate with others. (Varhaiskasvatusuunnitelma 2022)

Positive interaction allows children to gain experience when the child is listened to, and their needs and initiatives are responded to sensitively. (Pihlaja, Päivi & Viitala, Riitta. 2018) This is achieved for example when a substitute reads books, offers singing lessons, rhymes or story moments for the children. Simply by showing interest towards the child and their presence, positive interaction is born.

5.2 Language and Plain language

Children begin as early as the age of two months to use all the sounds that the human voice can produce. These sounds are not yet learned but are based on a reflex action. Children begin to babble between the age of 3 and 4 months. At the beginning stage of learning a language it is mostly done by imitation, at the age of approximately 3 months, the child imitates the vocal expression they hear and vocalizes responses to parents' speech. (Rajala, Pertti & Virtanen, Hannu. 1986)

Children begin to babble long answers at the age of 6 months and imitate speech voices approximately between the age of 10 and 11 months old. Children understand speech before they start to speak; the first word appears approximately at the age of 12 months and approximately at the age of 18 months forming two words into a sentence develops. At the age of approximately two, the child begins to form multi-word sentences and normally at the age of four, the child has achieved versatile language skills. (Rajala, Pertti & Virtanen, Hannu. 1986)

According to Michael Halliday, language helps people grow as a member of a community, language development is described as satisfying needs. Children learn language by perceiving that it can be used to do different things and it can be used for many things.

He divides the needs, and the functioning of language as follows:

1. Instrumental usage, this is when the language is used for the fulfilment of materialistic needs for example: "I want".
2. Regulatory usage, this is when the language can be used for directing human behavior for example: "Do this".
3. Interactive usage, this means that the language serves the area of linguistic interaction for example: "Hey listen".
4. Personal usage, this is when the language user describes their own essence for example: "I am very mad"
5. Heuristic usage, this is when perceptions of the outside world are formed for example: "Why?".
6. Imaginative use, this is when a human expresses their feelings, imagines, tells stories etc. with language for example: "Let's imagine".
7. Informative task, this is the adult person's most important area

From this, we can conclude as Katri Sarmavuori writes in her book *Lasten kielen oppiminen* that: "The development of a child into a person and a social being depends on language".

Strengthening the development of children's linguistic skills and abilities as well as their linguistic identities is the task of early childhood education. In addition, strengthening children's curiosity and interest in languages, texts and cultures in early childhood education should be done. Supporting language development is connected to the development of the child's multiliteracy (chapter 2.7 in vasu 2022). In addition, it is connected, among other things,

to children's cultural competence and interaction with wide-ranging competence. Developing language skills opens new means of influence for children, opportunities for participation and extensive agency. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2022)

Children use language as both an object and a tool for learning, in addition, they take charge of different situations and things and interact with others, express themselves and acquire information. Children's language development is supported by a versatile language environment in early childhood education and cooperation with guardians, in addition, children are given encouragement and consistent feedback about their language use and interaction skills. Children grow up in different linguistic environments, and they can acquire several different languages at the same time, which should be considered in education and teaching. Usage of language and interaction vary, and several languages can be spoken in children's homes. (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2022)

It is important to be aware that children of the same age can be at different stages in language learning and different areas of language development. Children are guided and supported by educators in key areas of the development of linguistic skills and capabilities.

Interaction skills	Language comprehension skills	Speech production skills	Language skills	Linguistic memory and vocabulary	Language awareness
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Figure 1: Key areas of language development in the Basics of the Early childhood Education Plan (2016)

In plain language, the language has been deliberately and systematically changed to make it easier to understand both structurally and content-wise. Typically, a message in plain language is aimed at a limited population group, those whose receptivity is known to be limited. This is because a message in plain language must affiliate solidly with reality, where the recipients live. Plain language can be divided as shown in the table. (Rajala, Pertti & Virtanen, Hannu. 1986)

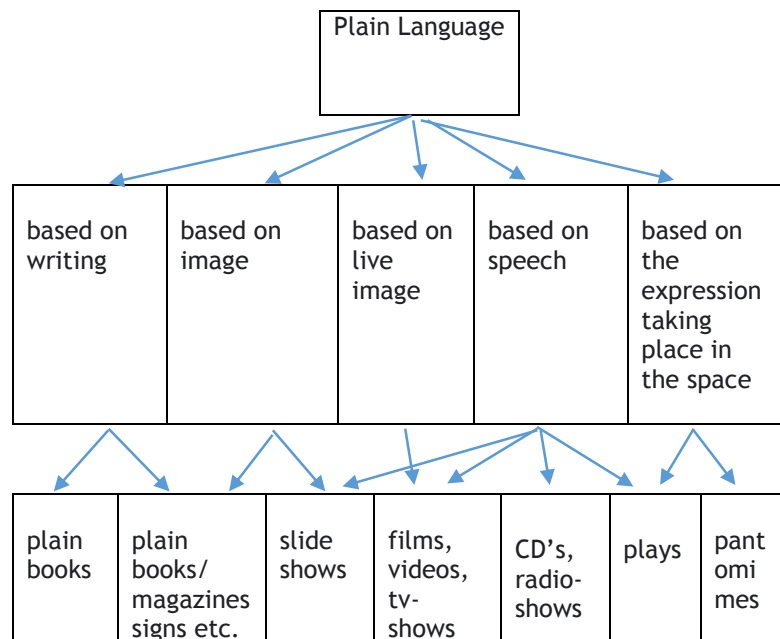


Figure 2: Plain language

People who need plain language are the ones who lack language skills, this makes it difficult for them to cope with everyday situations, studies and working life, as well as participate in the activities of the society. The need can be due to many reasons for example people with intellectual disabilities, people on the autism spectrum, people with amnesia, aphasia, or people with neurological diseases or immigrants. According to the Selkokeskus estimate (2019), approximately 650,000-750,000 people in Finland need plain language, in other words, more than ten percent of the population. (THL 2022.)

There are instructions that apply to spoken plain language and interaction in a speaking situation. Controlling one's own speech in a conversation can be challenging, that's why the most important instruction for speaking in plain language is to boldly find a working way of speaking with the listener. (THL 2022.)

Many features of language use can also be practiced, explanations of words or a suitably calm rhythm of speech. Natural, clearly spoken language is usually the easiest to understand and avoiding the usage of speech that resembles written language is necessary. When there are major language problems, it can be difficult to understand a person's speech; difficulties in understanding can be raised kindly, but clearly. The usage of gestures and facial expressions can assist speech, clarifying things by drawing or pointing and using support signs also help to understand. (THL 2022.)

According to THL (2022.), there are ten general guidelines for speaking plain language:

1. Using general, familiar colloquial vocabulary, explaining foreign or conceptual words, and emphasizing the core words of one's message.
2. Favoring short phrases and colloquial structures.
3. Avoid speaking about several issues at the same time, instead focus on one thing at a time.
4. Give concrete examples if the topic is abstract or new.
5. Often, a difficult point can be solved better by discussing and asking questions than by lecturing.
6. Start from what the listener already knows; check their background information if necessary.
7. Speak at the coming tempo, but don't slow down your speech unnaturally. Take an appropriate break.
8. Repeat the word that caused the difficulty.
9. Try circular expressions if repetition doesn't help.
10. Aim for a language suitable for the age and development level of your listener.

5.3 Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is defined as various identities, languages, religions, and views that coexist and interact with each other. In a learning community, domestic internationality is an important asset. The surrounding cultural, linguistic, religious, and ideological diversity, the country's cultural heritage and national languages are valid and utilized by the community. In addition, it is also highlighted that minorities are important in Finland, the community develops understanding and respect between individuals and groups, as well as a responsible action. The right to one's own language and culture is a fundamental right. We will get to know cultural facts, the basic way of thinking and acting, and build and create new ways of working together. (OPH 2022.)

All community members should be prepared to deal with different language speakers, and those with different cultures, religions, and opinions. In early childhood, education diversity is dealt with in a positive manner by educators. Effective interaction with people from different cultural and ideological backgrounds requires understanding and respecting one's own and others' cultural and ideological backgrounds. The Games, meals and parties offer opportunities to share experiences of appropriate traditions and customs in early childhood education. The experiences, knowledge and skills gained from cultural heritage strengthen the child's ability to absorb, use and change the culture. (OPH 2018.)

In the education system, children need to grow up understanding that their language environment includes people who speak differently. Everyone is a native speaker of a language, sometimes two or more. The language spoken even as a mother tongue includes different variants such as dialects and language varieties with different degrees of formality. Everyone is a learner of different languages to varying degrees, in one situation, a proficient language user may need support with another language, language type or expression. Native speakers of the language can be of support to those learning it. (OPH 2018.)

Language awareness allows for multilingualism, which is one manifestation of cultural diversity. Every community and community member are multilingual. In early childhood education, the personnel are also acting as linguistic models for the children, in other words, early childhood education must be language aware. The basics of the early childhood education plan emphasize the importance of language awareness. In language-aware early childhood education, it is understood that languages are present constantly and everywhere. The personnel understand the central importance of language in children's development, learning, interaction and cooperation. Language also plays a big role in building children's identity and belonging to society. Making multilingualism visible supports children's development in a culturally diverse world. Children are encouraged to use language in many ways and are given time and opportunities for different language-use situations.

The key areas of children's language development are explained in the basics of the early childhood education plan. They are in early childhood education as follows: language awareness, linguistic memory and vocabulary, language skills, language comprehension skills, speech production skills and interaction skills. (OPH 2018.)

Making multilingualism visible supports children's development in a culturally diverse world. The educators in ECEC should be aware of the usage of their own language and encourage the children to use the language in a variety of ways. Children's linguistic starting points are considered, and they are given time and opportunities for varying language use situations. (OPH 2022.)

6 Implementation

In this part, we will go through the implementation of our thesis and how it was carried out. The thesis is done by using working life partner Seure's work orientation materials. We chose Seure because one of the writers has been working through their company for approximately two years as a substitute in the field of Early Childhood Education.

The idea for our thesis topic was created while one of the writers was working as a substitute employee, from the observations that she had made the objective became to support Early Childhood Education by providing a simple and easily accessible leaflet. The current cooperation between educators and substitute workers in the ECE field is important and rather visible.

The idea was to create a leaflet and produce valuable and important aspects of the substitute work in Early Childhood Education while working and writing at the same time. The thesis work in its entirety acts as a guide, however, the focus is on the leaflet. The theory part of this thesis is based on laws and regulations concerning early childhood education, in addition, the leaflet is mainly based on Seure's materials and other tips that we wanted to include based on our personal work experience as substitutes. Furthermore, the tips we included in the leaflet were based on feedback that was given to us from the Early Childhood Education workplaces.

The idea for this topic has been in consideration for a long time, however, the active thesis writing process began in the autumn of 2022 and the schedule was rather tight. All in all, the thesis and the leaflet are equally important, and they were completed in the end. The planning stage of the leaflet was rather short, and it was partly based on our discussions, in addition to Seure's working tips. It was important to sort out first which areas we wanted to focus on. We wrote down our thoughts and had a discussion based on them.

We wanted the leaflet to be simple, clear and to include easily followable instructions for any substitute worker. The main objective was to support a substitute worker who is going to work in daycare by providing essential information concerning the early childhood education environment. The leaflet is one page long and written in a concise manner, it has the most crucial aspects of working as a substitute in early childhood education from a substitute's point of view.

7 Feedback and Evaluation

In the planning phase of our thesis, we sent Seure our thesis topic and the objective via e-mail and asked for permission to use their materials, Seure asked us to send them the finished thesis later. In this phase, we are thinking of asking them for feedback about the thesis and if we manage to get it on time, we will share it with others. In addition, there have been other educators interested and supportive of our topic and asked for sharing it with them. The oral feedback for the thesis topic during the making process has been very supportive and positive.

Sometimes the circumstances of our life can affect our performance in a positive matter, at times it allows us to realize the importance of listening to ourselves and being merciful, understanding our capabilities. We as individual human beings are capable of different things and that is perfectly fine. When we teamed up for making this thesis, the main idea was to keep it as simple and practical as possible. Furthermore, the objectives and target group of our

thesis were clear to both of us. Our experiences as substitute workers in early childhood education are one of the things that we have in common, it allowed us to share our experiences and have interesting discussions and develop ideas during the thesis writing process.

8 Conclusion and Discussion

In the end, we chose the topics which mattered the most from a substitute's point of view, in addition, we noticed that there is not that much research conducted about this topic. In the theory part, the importance of work orientation was based on our experiences as well.

The thesis process has been very instructive and when we discussed and pondered about the topic, we had many good conversations. We also noticed while working on the thesis that many things we had learned at the University of Applied Sciences, such as project planning and its implementation, have also helped in this thesis work. We noticed how important peer support is when we were working on the thesis. We both have very similar life situations which helped us to be understanding and patient towards each other.

The reflection made during the writing work has deepened our learning about early childhood education. It has also helped us to grow professionally. While writing and sharing our experiences and observation we felt that our professional identity also started to shape. The entire thesis process gave us confidence about our future work.

The aim of this thesis was to support early childhood education by raising awareness about important issues that are part of high-quality Early Childhood Education. As future early childhood education professionals, we wanted to highlight the importance of operating by the laws and regulations concerning early childhood education. We wanted to produce a simple and easily accessible leaflet that can be of use for supporting the field of ECE.

Our objectives for this thesis were explained in a clear and simple manner, in our opinion we have achieved our goals and even more. Furthermore, we wanted our thesis to be plain and easily understandable for it to serve its main purpose which is to act as a guide for the present and future substitutes in early childhood education. Based on the discussions that we have had with educators in the field our thesis and its objectives are very interesting and topical.

Our thesis journey has been rather interesting, our life experiences have affected our choice of method for this thesis. Furthermore, future suggestions and developing ideas could be for example using the research method for conducting a survey for daycares or substitute workers to bring more awareness to this topic and to get diverse perspectives regarding the current situation in early childhood education.

We have learned a lot as substitute workers and grown professionally, furthermore meeting different educators in the field has allowed us to develop as future early childhood education teachers. The field of early childhood education is very rewarding, a person grows and constantly learns new things from colleagues and children, it is truly a calling.

Early childhood education is the future, and for it to be bright, we should invest in it. The importance of substitutes in the current early childhood education situation is definite. Furthermore, the importance of having proper work orientation in early childhood education is one aspect of achieving quality early childhood education.

9 Leaflet

When working with children keep in mind:

Interaction

Language

Cultural Diversity



**TIPS FOR
SUBSTITUTES IN
ECEC**

- Remember to use your Seure name badge In the workplace!
- When entering the group, introduce yourself to the other employees of the group, the children and the supervisor, if possible. When bringing children to daycare, it is good to meet the parent bringing the child as well, if it suits the situation.

A thesis work
by

**Nuura Dalgamoni
Mst. Jebun-Nesa
Khanam**

**A Substitute's
Guide to Early
Childhood
Education**



- Check out the name list of children. Ask about the day's program and the customs of the children's group and make sure you ask about something if you don't know. Tell them that you can always be told if you don't remember to do something or if you do something different than what is wanted.
- The faster you learn the children's names, the more comfortable it is to advise and help each child individually. Children often also know how certain routines work, so you can safely ask them too.
- Learn how to play with children, to sing a song or nursery rhyme, you might have to organize a morning or lunch circle.
- Contact the children, get down to their level and be interested in them. For example, hold the child if they want, play, read and help with dressing. Smile, speak nicely and treat children and other employees with kindness. With a cheerful attitude, you will also receive a happier reception yourself.

- If you are new to the daycare, ask if any children need special attention. Also ask if there are any special considerations regarding safety, facilities, rules or individual children or families. For example, the rules for playing outside can also vary in daycares.
- Don't stay in the background, act quickly and be helpful. Your most important task is to be with the children, focus on them, not so much on other adults. For example, when going out supervision requires responsibility.
- Do not try to take the rules learned elsewhere, they may not work! When asked to move to another group or daycare unit, do it positively!



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