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Supporting Peer Interaction in Early Childhood Education and Care through Dramatic Play

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences

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Contents

Abstract

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The purpose of this development work was to support peer interaction in early childhood education and care. This was achieved through the review of socio-cultural learning theory and implementation of creative methods such as storytelling, drama, and arts and crafts. Activities containing these methods enhance the opportunity to practice social skills such as interactive play, participation, and communication.

The theoretical foundation for this work supports interactive play as a crucial component in developing peer interaction. The Finnish National Early Childhood Education and Care Curriculum emphasizes the importance of play in ensuring child's well-being. Therefore, early childhood education units must provide learning environments that create opportunities for children to interact and play. Educators must also facilitate and encourage interaction and group membership between children.

This study was conducted in two private English-speaking early childhood education units in Espoo and Helsinki. Qualitative research methods were used to collect data, including implementing activities, observing the target group's children, and questionnaires for the educators. The outcome of the thesis was the presentation of the results to the working life partners.

To encourage peer interaction, four workshops for groups of children were created, inspired by two popular children's books. The workshops involved dramatic play, which allowed for the practice of social skills in scenarios involving conflicts within the stories. The activities were designed to foster an understanding of friendship and develop empathy towards other children's feelings and participation.

The study's findings support the developmental task, as the drama play encouraged the children to interact with their peers. Children participating in dramatic plays and storytelling sessions demonstrated conversation, communication, and support for their peers, which are essential elements of friendship.

Keywords: early childhood education and care (ECEC), peer interaction, drama play, play, creative methods, storytelling.

Abstract

Tiivistelmä

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Tämän kehittämistyön tarkoituksena oli tukea vertaisvuorovaikutusta varhaiskasvatuksessa ja päivähoidossa. Tämä saavutetiin tarkaistelemalla sosiokulttuurisen oppimisen teoriaa ja toteuttamalla luoviin menetelmiä perustuvaa toimintaa, kuten tarinankerrontaa, draamaa sekä taidetta ja käsityötä. Nämä menetelmiin lisäävät mahdollisuuksia harjoitella sosiaalisia taitoja, kuten interaktiivista leikkimistä, osallistumista ja kommunikaatiota.

Tämän työn teoreettinen perusta tukee vuorovaikutteista leikkimistä keskeisenä osana vertaisvuorovaikutuksen kehittämistä. Varhaiskasvatuksen opetussuunnitelma korostaa leikin merkitystä lapsen hyvinvoinnin turvaamisessa. Siksi varhaiskasvatuksen yksiköiden tulee tarjota oppimisympäristöjä, jotka tarjoavat lapsille mahdollisuuksia vuorovaikutukseen ja leikkiin. Kasvattajien tulee myös helpottaa ja rohkaista lasten välistä vuorovaikutusta ja jäsenyyttä ryhmissä.

Tämä tutkimus toteutettiin kahdessa yksityisessä englanninkielisessä varhaiskasvatusyksikössä Espoossa ja Helsingissä. Aineiston keräämiseen käytettiin laadullisia tutkimusmenetelmiä, kuten toiminnan järjestämistä, kohderyhmän lasten tarkkailua ja kyselylomakkeiden laatimista kasvattajille. Opinnäytetyön tuloksena opinnäytetyön tulokset esiteltiin työelämäkumppaneille.

Vertaisvuorovaikutuksen rohkaisemiseksi toteutettiin neljä työpajaa lasi ryhmille kahden suositun lastenkirjan innoittamana. Työpajoihin sisältyi draamaapohjaista leikkiä, mikä mahdollisti sosiaalisten taitojen harjoittelun tilanteissa, joissa tarinoihin kuului konflikteja. Toiminta oli suunniteltu edistämään ymmärrystä ystävyydestä ja kehittämään empatiaa toisten lasten tunteita ja osallistumista kohtaan.

Tutkimuksen tulokset tukevat kehitystyötä, sillä draamapohjajnen leikki rohkaisi lapsia vuorovaikutukseen ikätovereidensa kanssa. Draamanäytelmiin ja tarinankerrontaan osallistuneet lapset kävivät keskusteluja, kommunikoivat toistensa kanssa ja tukivat ikätovereitaan, jotka ovat olennaisia ystävyyden elementtejä.

Avainsanat: vertaisvuorovaikutus, draamapohjainen leikki, leikki, luovat menetelmät, tarinankerronta

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Tämän opinnäytetyön alkuperä on tarkastettu Turnitin Originality Check -ohjelmalla.

1   Introduction

The purpose of the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland is to support, provide, implement, and develop the service of early childhood education by providing a systematic and goal-oriented early education. Prioritizing, instruction, and care are based on pedagogy, high quality, and equality. (The Finnish National Agency for Education 2022:5.)

The motivation for carrying out this development task is to review theories of learning that support the use of drama play to enhance children's peer interaction in early childhood education. Several researchers have studied the role of children's play in early childhood education for promoting children's development and learning (Bruner, Jolly & Sylva 1976; Szumski, Smogorzewska & Karwowski 2015; Chatzipanteli 2022).

Chatzipanteli (2022) identified the significance of structured play activities in the holistic development of children, with a specific focus on their social abilities. She concludes that such structured activities can lead to children's social skills development. Vygotsky's notion of proximal development serves as the basis for engaging children purposefully by teachers through play, seen as "the leading activity in early childhood" (Hedge & Cooper 2018: 3). Teachers are responsible for moving from passive observers at the periphery of play to being active participants with children during and inside play. Interactive play is an instrument for developing productive and comprehensive aspects of social interaction with peers. My interest is to support children's peer interaction and active play by utilizing creative methods, such as storytelling, drama, as well as arts and crafts in the classroom.

The practical activities of this development task took place in two different private English early childhood education and care (ECEC) units in Helsinki and Espoo. These two ECEC units are independent of one another. Nevertheless, both provided me the opportunity to implement my developmental plans and collect the necessary data to compile the results of my study. The background of my developmental implementation is supported by the literature in this work and the Finnish National Core Curriculum, 2022.

2   Background of study

2.1   Early Childhood Education System in Finland

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), municipalities are obligated to provide early childhood education and care services that meet the needs of their residents. Private service providers must meet the same standards as municipally organized activities. Early Childhood Education is an integral part of Finland's education system and serves as a basis for continuous learning throughout life (Finnish National Agency for Education 2022). To deliver Early Childhood Education and care in Finland, FINEEC (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre) provides guidelines and recommendations for professionals and early childhood education centres (FINEEC 2019). ECE must involve the fostering of communicative, collaborative, and creative abilities, which are significant for children's development, and participation in children's creative thinking abilities and social orientations in Finnish early childhood education and care (Nikkola, Reunamo & Ruokonen 2020).

Children growing up in a culturally, linguistically, and ideologically diverse world require social and interaction skills and cultural competence. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is crucial in promoting these skills and attitudes. Children are encouraged to interact with others from diverse backgrounds and learn about different languages and cultures. Activities based on cooperation and perspective-taking are used to develop social skills and the ability to solve conflicts constructively. Facilitating the development of children's sense of community through activities that foster a spirit of group cohesion is crucial since it enhances children's engagement. ECEC also supports children in building cultural identities and creating a positive relationship with their diverse environment by modelling respect and familiarity with diverse cultures and worldviews. Play, meal breaks, and festivities are activities that provide opportunities for such interactions. (The Finnish National Agency for Education 2022:22.)

Participation and involvement are crucial for building a democratic and sustainable future. An individual's willingness and skill to participate in community activities and trust in their ability to make a difference are necessary for this. The right to be heard and involved in matters affecting one's life is an important aspect of children's rights, which must be respected and supported by ECEC. Early Childhood Education and Care aim to

cultivate children's participation and involvement skills gradually, encouraging them to take the initiative, plan, implement, and evaluate their actions with the guidance of personnel. Engaging positively with children, listening to their views, and responding to their initiatives enhances their ability to participate, develops their self-image and confidence, and shapes the social skills required for life in a community. (The Finnish National Agency for Education 2022:24.)

Drama exhibits optimal support for play when characterized by openness and flexibility, providing children with great opportunities for creative expression, peer interaction, and great engagement, so supporting enriched experiential participation. The importance of play for a child's well-being and learning is recognized in an operational culture that encourages play. Personnel are aware of factors that limit play and work to create learning environments that promote play. Both children and educators can experience the joy of playing together and using their creativity and imagination. Play is an essential component of ECEC since it serves as a crucial factor in facilitating children's growth, learning, and overall welfare. Play is not only a way for children to learn but also a way for them to spend time, discover the world, and create social relations. Through play, children can experiment with distinct roles and ideas, construct meanings based on their experiences, and process difficult experiences in a safe environment. There are studies conducted in Finland with a focus on early childhood social interaction enhancement using play-based activities.

Kyrönlampi, Uitto & Puroila (2021) explore the complex relationship between children's sense of belonging and their interactions within a pre-primary educational context in Finland. Employing "photo-telling," a method enabling children to express their experiences and perspectives, the study investigates how children establish a sense of place and belonging. The findings indicate the significance of children's engagement with peers, their involvement in school activities, and their impact on the physical environment in shaping their sense of belonging. The research emphasizes the mutual influence between children and the structural and cultural aspects of the school, indicating that schools play a crucial role in the development of a child's sense of belonging. Furthermore, the study suggests that photo-telling is a valuable tool for both research and pedagogical practice, with the potential to deepen understanding of children's sense of place-belonging and guide child-centric educational approaches. Overall, this research contributes insights into fostering children's sense of belonging and agency within educational environments.

In a study by Arvola et al. (2021), the challenges faced by children with non-Finnish cultural or linguistic backgrounds in social interactions within the early childhood education (ECE) context in Finland are examined. The research aims to clear up the social roles typically assumed by children in ECE and the types of activities and play popular among children with Finnish and non-Finnish backgrounds. Utilizing systematically sampled large-scale observation data containing 1147 children and 22,149 observations of 5–6-year-olds, the study determines that children with diverse backgrounds are more inclined towards non-social roles and less participative actions compared to their Finnish peers. Notably, children from diverse backgrounds exhibit greater involvement in rule play but display less participation in role-play. The findings suggest the importance of play-based interventions and the promotion of shared cultural creation in addressing the social participation of culturally and linguistically diverse children in ECE settings. This study clarifies the potential strategies that ECE educators could employ to foster inclusive environments and enhance the social integration of children with diverse backgrounds.

These studies underscore the crucial role of social interaction, engagement, and inclusive practices in fostering a sense of belonging and facilitating positive experiences for all children within educational environments.

My choice to investigate the improvement of children's peer interactions and active play through creative methods like storytelling, drama, and arts-crafts originates from a strong desire to promote inclusive educational environments. The background studies by Kyrönlampi, Uitto, and Puroila (2021) and Arvola et al. (2021) are very helpful for my thesis as they explain how children interact with each other in school, emphasizing how important it is for everyone to be included and engaged.

By combining these findings with my research focus, I aim to contribute to the development of effective strategies that support children's peer interactions and active play while promoting social integration and positive experiences for all ECEC children.

Target Group and Working Life Partner (WLP)

This developmental work was conducted at two English private early childhood education and care units (Happy Toddlers) and (Finnish American Daycare), where English is used as the main language of communication.

The working life partners are early childhood education and care providers situated in Espoo and Helsinki, Finland. The ECEC units place a major emphasis on play-based learning, which is intended to promote children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. The curriculum is based on the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care, and it is implemented in collaboration with the children's families. The ECEC centers provide a wide range of activities and experiences, including arts and crafts, music, physical education, and outdoor play. The facilities are designed to be safe, interesting, and child-friendly, including several classrooms and outdoor spaces. The personnel at ECEC units are highly expert and experienced in early childhood education and care, and they are committed to creating a supportive and caring environment where children can learn, grow, and develop. The ECEC units additionally highlight sustainability and environmental responsibility, concentrating on reducing waste and sustainable practices. (The Finnish American Kindergarten & Happy Toddlers 2018) Overall, ECEC is a welcoming and inclusive learning community that offers high-quality early childhood education and care to families in Espoo and Helsinki.

This thesis discusses peer interaction among children during drama playing. The target group consists of 21 children (14 girls, 7 boys) aged 5 to 6 in two English private early childhood education units. The objective of this thesis is to support the development of interactional skills among children in the ECE age group."

2.2 Supporting Peer Interaction as the Purpose and Developmental Task

The main purpose of this study, conducted in collaboration with working life partners, is to support peer interaction through utilizing creative methods. Children can engage in imaginative play by creating and acting out scenarios which require communication and cooperation with their friends. Through this type of collaborative method, children may develop trust and mutual understanding. Additionally, dramatic play assists children to explore different perspectives and roles, presenting their capability to relate to and

interact with others. Children may establish significant connections with peers through drama-playing activities, which can lead to the creation of long-lasting friendships.

The main thesis task in this study is as follows:

How does utilizing creative methods like arts and crafts, drama, and story-telling support peer interaction in Early Childhood Education and Care?

3 Theoretical framework

To establish the foundation for developmental work, an exploration of the chosen theoretical framework will be presented. These frameworks play a crucial role in understanding the developmental task that will be discussed in the present thesis. The focus of the study is concentrated on several key areas: sociocultural theory, the zone of proximal development, peer interaction, creative teaching methods, social interaction and play, and drama play.

To address the thesis task, the Researcher will investigate the theoretical frameworks of these topics in more detail and examine their connections to the developmental task.

3.1 Sociocultural theory

Most of the research in early childhood takes a sociocultural theoretical approach to better understand children's development. Vygotsky believed that development occurs simultaneously in several ways and that learning and development occur firstly in a social context and later become internalized (Vygotsky 1986).

The notion of daily learning happens in relationships which are dynamic and dialogic institutional contexts, such as families (Hedges & Cullen 2015:923). Based on such theories, children's development occurs by participating in everyday activities. Also, the engagement of children in the classroom via activities such as drama and storytelling can improve peer interaction. Teachers are required to choose an interesting story for children to encourage them to be active during the play and participate in the planned activities. And this peer interaction can influence their lifelong learning.

According to Hedges and Cullen (2015), Peers who are knowledgeable and adults can support children to gain and create new "understandings, knowledge and skills". Also, peer interaction and creative methods which make children more engaged can help them to enhance their learning as well as their social interaction.

This emphasizes the fact that according to Vygotsky (1986), teaching concepts directly is not possible or useful (Hedges & Cullen 2015:150). He believed that learning should be related to everyday life, which is authentic and involves children's practices in societies or cultures.

3.2   Zone of Proximal Development and Peer Interaction

There are two notions mentioned by Vygotsky which are useful for mixing learning and play, the second of which is the notion of the zone of proximal development (Hedge & Cooper 2018). This notion emphasizes the fact that development in children's learning is stimulated by being in contact with adults, peers, and the environment. There are two different approaches to play: free play choice that paves the way for a child's own experience as an individual without adults' interference and adult-led didactic teaching by making use of structured programs (Hedge & Hooper 2018). According to Singer & De Haan (2018), teachers can significantly affect the quality of how children communally play. This can be done by creating a "we-feeling" with a child individually.

Early peer interactions offer children unique opportunities for reciprocity, effective sharing, and conflict resolution (Hartup, Willard, Moore & Shirley, 2017). The theoretical framework on peer interaction, dating back nearly 70 years to Jean Piaget, posits that children's interactions with peers differ from those with adults (Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk & Wojslawowicz, 2005). Piaget suggested that peer interaction allows children to encounter conflicting ideas, engage in conversations about diverse perspectives, and make decisions about compromise or rejection of peers' ideas (Rubin et al., 2005:470). Peers may influence each other's behaviour, potentially leading to behavioural changes. In conclusion, understanding the dynamics of early peer interactions is crucial for promoting positive social development and fostering effective communication and problem-solving skills among children.

According to a study done by Sluss and Stremmel (2004), there are benefits in mixed-gender groups. Regarding the fact that girls experience growth and development during social interactive activities with peers who are more knowledgeable during play, it is necessary to provide chances that engage boys and girls to behave more collaboratively and show different levels of play behaviours. (Sluss & Stremmel 2004:303.) Coelho, Torres, Fernandes, & Santos (2017) also concluded that social acceptance and friendship development are determined by how children interact in the early years, as play comes before the advent of language, it is a form of language because it involves symbolic representation (Coelho et al. 2017). Play is used as an instrument in developing comprehension and production aspects of language (Barnett, 1990).

According to Vygotsky (1978), both imagination and creativity are essential for an individual's thinking and development. This integration can be seen in all individuals, including children, especially in their play. (Nilsson, Ferholt & Lecusay 2018.) Vygotsky (2004) defines play as an image that is embodied in the material world. When a child plays, it is not just reproducing what he or she experiences; it is also reviewing her or his impressions. Combining these impressions creates a new imaginary reality that can meet a child's requirements and wishes. Creating an image is the first step to freeing oneself from the limitations of the situation. Before pretend play emerged, experience through objects could be confined by objects themselves. (Nilsson, Ferholt & Lecusay 2018.)

In summary, Vygotsky's perspective highlights the crucial role of imagination and creativity in an individual's cognitive development, particularly evident in children's play. As Vygotsky suggests, play serves as a means for children to embody and review their impressions, creating new imaginary realities that transcend the limitations of their immediate environment. This notion aligns with my research focus on supporting children's peer interactions and active play through creative methods like storytelling, drama, and arts crafts in the classroom. By leveraging these creative approaches, educators can provide children with opportunities to explore and express their imagination, fostering not only their cognitive development but also enhancing their social interactions and collaborative skills through play. Thus, understanding and harnessing the power of creativity in play can significantly contribute to creating enriching and inclusive learning environments for children.

3.3   Social Interaction and Play

Children often have a natural inclination to define play, regarding its status within educational principles of early childhood is problematic, especially when it comes to how play can lead to specific objectives (Chesworth & Wood 2021: 8). The kinds of play that are deemed acceptable in early education are often determined by curriculum frameworks set by educational institutions and government agencies (Ginsburg 2007). In Finland, nursery rhymes, drama, songs, and storytelling can help promote a positive learning environment in early childhood education and care. These activities can create a joyful atmosphere that fosters learning, thus engaging students more deeply and improving their performance.

Structured play can take on many forms, and typically involves physical or mental challenges through which children learn new skills (Bodrova & Leong 2007). The goal of structured play is to combine enjoyment with education and to keep children engaged and active during the learning process.

to learn through play and experimentation, and structured play can provide a structured environment for them to do so. While playing and interacting with others, children can spontaneously respond to their interests and attempt to improve their understanding of the world around them (Hedge & Cooper 2016).

As Wood (2013) suggests, adults can play an important role in planning and facilitating structured play. By allocating time and space for play and considering children's needs and interests, adults can help to create an environment that fosters learning and development.

In conclusion, the discussion underscores the multifaceted nature of play in early childhood education, influenced by both institutional frameworks and the natural desire of children. While structured play aims to combine enjoyment with education, fostering engagement and skill development, it's essential to recognize the role of creative methods like storytelling, drama, and arts-crafts in enhancing children's peer interactions and active play. By using these creative approaches, educators can create a joyful learning atmosphere that not only promotes positive peer interactions but also deepens children's engagement and understanding of the world around them. As adults play a central role in planning and facilitating structured play, integrating creative methods into

educational practices can effectively support children's holistic development, fostering both social interaction and cognitive growth in the classroom.

3.4   Creative teaching methods

Kyrönlampi, Uitto, and Puroila (2021) examined the importance of creative teaching approaches in developing children's sense of belonging in preprimary school settings. The researchers highlight the importance of place, peers, and play, demonstrating how creative teaching methods, such as storytelling, drama, and arts and crafts, may assist in developing inclusive learning settings. Using innovative approaches such as "photo-telling," educators can provide children with the opportunity to share their emotions and opinions, allowing them to establish meaningful relationships with other people and peers. This demonstrates the need to use creative items in teaching methods to increase children's engagement and sense of belonging in ECEC settings.

Similarly, Arvola et al. (2021) study how play improves the participation and social responsibilities of culturally and linguistically diverse children in Finnish Early Childhood Education (ECE). Their findings demonstrate that play is an important factor in creating inclusive environments in which children from different backgrounds can interact with their peers. Creative methods of teaching, such as role-playing and storytelling, can help culturally diverse students express themselves, make peer connections, and manage their identities in the classroom. This emphasizes the necessity of including play-based methods in pedagogical plans to assist the social integration and positive experiences of all children in ECE settings.

Te Whariki, the national curriculum framework for early childhood education in New Zealand, emphasizes the importance of authentic play-based learning. According to Te Whariki (n.d.) and (Cowie & Carr 2009:105) authentic play-based learning occurs in socially and culturally constructed settings and relationships with people, places, and things serve as mediators. Therefore, adult-led didactic teaching or structured programs are designed to teach developmental understanding (Hedges & Cooper 2018).

Structured play activities such as playground games are crucial for children's enjoyment and development. These can include chasing games or verbal games that are highly interactive if they follow specific rules. Both, structured and unstructured games are

necessary for a child's development. Classroom activities that are structured, cooperative, and integrated, using appropriate rules and a student-centred teaching approach, can help children develop qualities, such as courage, patience, diversity, tolerance, and friendship (Chatzipanteli & Adamakis 2022:16). Playing together, children learn to cooperate and build strong bonds. They get to know the value of friendship and being accepted by others. These in turn will lead to the development of social skills.

Overall, the findings of Kyrönlampi, Uitto, and Puroila (2021) and Arvola et al. (2021) highlight the transforming power of creative teaching approaches in early childhood education. Educators can create active learning environments that promote children's sense of belonging, social engagement, and cognitive development by including elements of storytelling, drama, and arts and crafts in their teaching methods. This demonstrates the necessity of using creativity in classes to promote the entire growth and well-being of children from different backgrounds.

3.4.1   Drama

According to Vygotsky (1978), plays, especially sociodramatic plays, are major ways of learning as they provide children with a way to practice social activities of an adult world. Vygotsky believed that imaginative and symbolic play enables children to understand real-life behaviours in particular cultural settings, by making use of imaginary characters' behaviour and the objects which are used in the situation of play. Through sociodramatic play, children engage in the human roles, thinking, and activities that they do, thereby providing them with knowledge that is culturally based. This is consistent with sociocultural perspectives, which suggest that play provides children with meditational ways to interact with their peers and other adults, allowing them to build identities, as well as develop skills such as literacy and numeracy.

To encourage teachers to be active and thoughtful partners in children's learning and knowledge building, the Early Years Education Framework (EYEF) emphasizes the concept of "intentional teaching". However, as Hedge and Cullen (2017) note, specific teaching strategies associated with this concept are not outlined. One potential strategy for intentional teaching is acting out a story, which can provide several benefits for children's learning. Firstly, it engages the child in the experience rather than simply hearing words. Secondly, it allows the child to create a mental image of the events. Thirdly, it promotes social interaction as the child coordinates their role with others. As

Bernett (1990) notes, play is a form of language that involves symbolic representation. By using play as a teaching strategy, teachers can promote active learning and knowledge-building among young children.

3.4.2   Roleplay

Starting from a more general point, play is a fundamental childhood occupation that is crucial for the child's development, creating friendships with mutual respect and values and maintaining health and well-being (Bundy & Dunn & Woodrow 2012). Role-playing is a technique employed by instructors where participants are assigned various roles. This method facilitates collaboration among children, aiding in the development of social and communication skills. By assuming specific roles, each member of the group also cultivates a sense of responsibility, thereby increasing their commitment to achieving the group's objectives.

According to Bodrova and Leong (2017), role play, and friendship are crucial for the social and emotional development of young children. Play provides children with opportunities to explore, experiment, and learn about the world around them in a safe and supportive environment. Through play, children also develop important social and emotional skills such as empathy, communication, and cooperation. By engaging in imaginative play with their peers, children learn to understand and respect each other's perspectives, which in turn supports their social and emotional development.

Zowghi and Paryani (2003) propose a method employing role-play to enhance students' skills. Their findings indicated that these activities facilitated the development of empathy and provided students with multiple perspectives on requirements extraction processes.

 Al-Ani and Yusop (2004) also utilized role-play in group settings, assigning two problems to each group and alternating roles between customers and developers. While group work contributed to knowledge confirmation, the effectiveness of role-play and peer review techniques remained resultless.

Sindre (2005) used role-playing in his research, with groups acting as consumers and developers for their peers. The findings highlighted the advantages of learning through case development. In a different research, Portugal et al. (2016) described a teaching method in which student teams engaged and collected data. Each team took on the roles

of client, builder, and auditor with two other teams, changing between Client/Builder, Builder/Client, Builder/Auditor, and Auditor/Builder. The results suggested that teaching goals linked with the client and builder roles were almost achieved, while those related to the auditor role (quality control) were only partially noticed.

4 Methodology

This developmental task will examine the data collection methods and how theoretical knowledge was implemented to obtain the most comprehensive and precise data.

4.1 Method

In this study, I acted based on the suggested model by Metropolia University of Applied Sciences for writing my thesis, which includes the following steps:

1. Defining research questions

2. Finding and reviewing relevant literature that matches the thesis task

3. Analyse collected data.

4. Presenting results that relate to the study's topic.

For this study, I used two qualitative research methods: observation and a questionnaire. Observation involves directly watching and recording behaviour and events in a natural setting. I chose to use a questionnaire as the secondary research method for my thesis on utilising creative methods in early childhood settings to facilitate socialisation. This was a strategic choice for the study's objectives, as suggested by Neuman (2003).

The questionnaire allows for effective data collection from a wide range of participants, including many teachers from various classrooms or even schools. The questionnaire method provides an excellent basis for studying the complex structure of teaching practices and their influence on socialisation in early childhood education. (Leonard & Mitchell & Barnes-Johnson & Unertl & Outka-Hill & Robinson & Hester-Croff 2018).

The researcher chose two techniques to gain a better understanding of the societal issues being studied. These techniques aimed to provide both broad and deep knowledge of the subject. Throughout the data-collection process, the researcher used theoretical knowledge to ensure the most comprehensive and accurate results were obtained. This involved using existing theoretical frameworks and concepts to guide observation and questionnaire design, as well as to influence data analysis. By incorporating theoretical knowledge, the study was able to provide better-informed data interpretations and a thorough examination of the social reality and cultural meaning being studied.

Observation is a data collection method in which the researcher is physically present in the study setting to firsthand experience and witness various aspects of the context. The researcher may watch actively as a participant or from a distance, with or without knowledge of the persons under observation. (Mason, 2002.) In the present study, the target group of children was aware of my presence during the observation.

According to Mason (2002), observing how children interact with other children can provide important insight into their social, emotional, and cognitive growth. There are numerous methods to observe children interacting with their peers. This study employs structured observation, which provides a particular play situation or activity, enables teachers to evaluate specific play settings or activities, and observes how children interact. Structured observation allows for a stable method of data collection, making it easier to analyse and compare results.

4.2   Participants

All participants volunteered to engage in the study when the study's objective was presented to them, and consent letters were received from the 21 children's parents. The study included 21 children from two private English early childhood education units in Helsinki and Espoo. The children were five to six years old. It is important to note that in Finland, five-year-olds are often not considered preschoolers, but rather part of the early childhood education program. The children who participated in the research had different backgrounds in language and culture. The participants' teachers all had a degree in early childhood education, as required by Finnish legislation, with at least a higher degree

(based on the University of Applied Science) in early childhood education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2021).

4.3 Procedure

To conduct this study, the researcher followed a rigorous process to obtain permission. First, they contacted private English ECEC units that provide ECEC services and requested a research permit from the head teacher of the centre. Once a positive response was received, they invited the teachers at the centre to collaborate on the study. Next, the teachers approached the parents of the children and requested their informed consent for their children to participate. The researcher provided the teachers with a consent letter that explained the research aim and procedures and emphasized confidentiality and anonymity for both the children and their families. It also stated that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw their child at any time. The participation of the children and their parents was entirely voluntary and conducted with their informed consent.

The procedure of obtaining study permission follows ethical guidelines typically used in social research. For example, the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018) provides ethical conduct for research involving children, requiring researchers to obtain informed permission from parents and describe the research purpose and methods in an easy-to-understand manner. By following these guidelines, the researcher guaranteed that the research was carried out ethically, about the rights and autonomy of the participants and their families.

5 Implementation

The drama performances were selected to observe how children interact with each other during creative activities such as storytelling, drama play, arts, and crafts. The workshop was held for four days and began with an introduction to narrative by reading a story. This was followed by arts and crafts activities, and a two-day drama workshop.

To ensure that the research was conducted systematically and carefully, a mixed-methods approach was applied. Qualitative data was collected through observation and

by sending questionnaires to early childhood educators. Additionally, the drama workshops were used to collect more focused and specific data. The drama workshops were designed to provide a particular play situation or activity, which allowed the researchers to observe and analyse the children's interactions in a more structured setting.

Reading, writing, drama, dance, music, and exploration are some of the methods used to increase cooperative play (Garvis and Pendergast, 2011). According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2018), these activities may assist children improve their language, communication, social and emotional abilities, and creativity.

Research has also demonstrated that story and drama tactics are useful for improving children's play. Hakkarainen et al. (2013) discovered that storytelling techniques can improve dialogical communication among children with diverse language abilities. Loizou, Michaelides, and Georgiou (2019) proposed that drama methods like teacher-in-role and creativity can help scaffold and improve children's play.

Incorporating these methods into early childhood education can support children's overall development and provide them with meaningful learning experiences.

During the past year, I have taken part in a training programme with a team of educators committed to enhancing children's educational experiences via creative teaching techniques. As part of the training programme, I have been studying several ways to engage children's curiosity and creativity. The implementation of narrative and drama in the classroom was identified as a particularly effective strategy. It was demonstrated directly how this strategy may captivate children's imaginations and make learning more participatory and enjoyable. During quiet times, educators usually read favourite children's books to the children. The narrative is loaded with attractive characters and an interesting plot that keeps children wanting more. It has become popular among children. I have been inspired by some prior work on narrative and drama. I have decided to base the implementation planning on the children's stories "The Gruffalo" and "The Rainbow Fish". I researched numerous thesis themes connected to story and drama and discovered useful knowledge on how to apply these aspects to improve children's learning experiences. Following much preparation, the researcher designed a workshop that used the story as a teaching tool. The programme was created to assist children

improve their social skills, interaction abilities, collaboration, and communication skills via creative and interactive activities that included storytelling, drama, and arts and crafts.

5.1 Storytelling workshop

The teacher in each ECEC unit, read the children the Gruffalo and Rainbow Fish story and instructed them to remain silent unless they had previously read or heard it. The group was seated on the circle and each child had his or her place within the circle as the story was read aloud. The circle was the optimal shape for listening to the story.

The Gruffalo is a famous children's book written by Julia Donaldson and drawn by Axel Scheffler. It is about a smart mouse who outsmarts different animals that want to eat him in the deep, dark woods. Along the way, the mouse meets a fox, an owl, and a snake, all of whom want to eat him. To get away from them, the mouse thinks up a creature he calls the Gruffalo and describes it as a scary monster with horrible features. The mouse leads the Gruffalo through the woods, where they meet other dangerous animals. When the mouse and the Gruffalo finally get to a clearing, the mouse tells the Gruffalo that he made him up. The Gruffalo feels stupid and threatens to eat the mouse, but the mouse outwits him again by telling him to be afraid of the mouse's imagined friend, the "big bad mouse". The Gruffalo is now scared and runs away quickly. The story teaches kids about the power of wit and intelligence and how important it is. (Donaldson, 2004)

In the second ECEC unit, I decided to use a big screen to show an online story to the children. The Rainbow Fish is an interesting children's story with a unique plot about the underwater world, which evokes the children's imagination to discover the secret life under the sea. The Rainbow Fish is a story about a beautiful fish with shimmering scales. At first, the Rainbow Fish is proud of his beauty and doesn't want to share his scales with anyone. But when the other fish in the sea start to ignore him, he learns that true happiness comes from sharing and being kind to others. He gives away his scales one by one until he is just like every other fish in the sea, but he finds that he is now the happiest fish of them all. Marcus Pfister used a character development plot for the Rainbow Fish story. It involves the Rainbow Fish learning a lesson and going through a transformation as he grows and changes throughout the story.

Image 1.   Stoy-telling time.

5.2   Drama-Play workshop

During the introductory workshop, the teacher first explained to the children what a "story" was and then asked them to share their understanding of it. Before attending play rehearsals, the children had the opportunity to decorate the stage to create a more engaging environment for the drama. The children were excited to participate in the decoration process and they used a green colour inspired by the forest to decorate the stage.

To add structure to the narrative, the teacher attempted to ask questions to the students during rehearsals. This process helped the children to better understand their roles in the drama and to create a more cohesive storyline. Before the drama was performed, the children discussed and established the rules for their characters with the assistance and encouragement of the teacher. This helped to ensure that the children were fully engaged in their roles and that they understood the motivations and actions of their characters.

Throughout the rehearsal sessions, the children were divided into two groups of four. Each group provided pictures of the characters in the drama and each student chose one of the drama characters they were interested in acting. The students themselves selected a narrator for each group to guide and suggest role performances and dialogues

to use. This process helped to develop the children's creative skills and provided a sense of ownership and agency over the drama production.

During the drama performances, the researcher observed some interesting behaviours that shed light on the children's interactions. For example, when one student forgot their line, another student quickly jumped in to prompt them. This showed a high level of collaboration and support between the students, as they worked together to ensure the success of the overall performance.

Furthermore, the process of selecting a narrator for each group allowed for leadership skills to emerge among the children. The children were given the responsibility of guiding their peers and helping them perform their roles effectively. This not only helped build confidence and communication skills but also fostered a sense of friendship and pride at the end of play.

Overall, this approach to incorporating drama and storytelling into the classroom not only engages children's creativity and curiosity but also helps develop valuable skills such as collaboration, friendship, and communication. An example of a story that could be used as a basis for this type of activity could be "The Three Little Pigs." The students could each take on the role of one of the pigs or the wolf and work together to create a performance that incorporates dialogue and movement.

Image 2.   Drama workshop

6 Observation results

6.1 Engagement

In the storytelling activity, everybody listened carefully to the story "Rainbow Fish" on YouTube video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOnuVm4OrCc), and they showed interest during Storytime. The children watched the pictures of the characters, which were printed by the researcher. Child A noticed the picture of the starfish was upside down in the researcher's picture, and asked:

> Child A: "Teacher, why is the picture of a starfish upside down?

> Child B: Starfish can be in different colours e.g. orange or yellow.

Child C thought the Octopus looked different in the picture of the researcher.

> Researcher: How does human hair look different every time in different environments?

> Child C: yes, my hair sometimes looks like a lion.

Children participated in an arts and crafts workshop to use colour, glue, glitter, cardboard, and scissors to make a crown. They listened to instructions carefully and looked at the module that the teacher showed them. They were interested in colouring quickly and some of them asked for another colouring task that they could use later in the drama play decorating the scene. Child D showed her glittery work to her friends and said:

> Child D: Look my Rainbow fish is so beautiful.

> Child E: Can you share the colours with me too?

The drama workshop was conducted in two workshops. In the first workshop, the teacher and children practised the drama. Children listened attentively to the teacher's instruction

at the beginning of the workshop and interacted with the teacher by making comments. Children were participating nicely and trying to repeat what the teacher was telling them.

6.2   Verbal Interaction

While the children listened to the story two children were talking in their mother tongue when the teacher asked about being kind and sharing with others.

Children were actively participating in the discussions by answering the questions about the story. The children were able to understand the topic of the story which was the main aim of this activity.

> Teacher: what does sharing mean?

> Chid F: My siblings did not want to share the food when my mother asked.

> Chid E: He felt upset when a close friend took a tablet from him.

There was a shy child in the group who had less participation in discussions. The researcher tried to ask a few questions for example which colour shade of rainbow fish children remember, and a child answered green, and others continued purple, red, blue, and orange. They were carefully answered when the teacher reminded them about Rainbow fish colours, children responded there was not any black or grey.

While working in the arts and crafts workshop, children communicated during the activity by showing the used colour in their work e.g. One child called her friends several times and said "Look, look, how my Rainbow fish looks beautiful".

Verbal knowledge skills were highly visible when the children answered the questions about the story. The director (researcher) read the texts to the children, and they act their roles. The children were able to follow the sequence of the story with the help of the director and they completed the performance. During these exercises, the children asked for clarification when they did not understand some words, for example:

> Child A: what does character mean?

Child B: It could be an animal or fish in the story.

Empathy

Children felt empathy for the characters of the story because Rainbow Fish did not give them any of her beautiful scales. Three children were thinking Rainbow Fish was happy after sharing scales with others and having more friends. Some children have thought that Rainbow fish felt sad when she gave away her beautiful shiny scales. The children also mentioned that other fishes were feeling happy after receiving one scale.

Sharing and taking turns.

Children shared their positive and negative thoughts during the story. Most of the children answered they felt well about sharing and only one child mentioned she never wanted to share. I also asked them why kindness and sharing are important. All the children said they were important because they would find more friends.

In the art activities, children were told to share the markers glue and scissors because there was not plenty of the material. They practised waiting for their turn to use the material, also the children learned about sharing and its importance. One child asked, "What should I do while waiting for a marker and I told the child to help a friend.

During both rehearsal and final drama workshop the children were waiting for their turn to come into the scene and play their role. They share the space by moving in the background when they play their roles.

6.3   Collaboration

After the storytelling, we discussed the meaning of sharing. One of the children believed sharing is not important. This was an opportunity for group discussion. Then we adapted a scene from the story where one who did not share was ignored by others. To help this child understand the importance of sharing in daycare. In this way, children helped each other to build a collaborative practice in the group.

Creative workshop activities needed different skills such as colouring, cutting, and glueing. I noticed a few of them had difficulty cutting the cardboard's small adages and their friends were trying to help them with little assistance. For decorating crowns, they received glittery glue and some of them said that they had not used it earlier, but some children who had used it before showed others how to put the glue on the cardboard.

6.4   Problem-solving

At the end of the story, we had a group discussion and I asked How Rainbow Fish found a friend at the end of the story? Some printed pictures from the story were shown to help the children remember the moments the Rainbow fish was sad and alone, then she started to ask other fishes like Starfish and Octopus what to do to feel happy. Children were starting to think about the story and retelling it to find out how Rainbow Fish decided to share her scales with others.

For the crown decoration part some of the children used a lot of glue on the cardboard and made it so sticky and quite wet during the creative workshop. One child asked me how to remove some of that, I told the child to think about it and discuss it with others too. I noticed after that the child was using a napkin to clean the glitters and she was telling the others to do the same.

In the last practice day of drama, the child was absent, and the children worked collaboratively to cover that character role. I changed one role and the child agreed to act in that role nicely, and other children were not confused with that replacement. In this way, we solved the problem together with some extra support and explanation for a new character.

6.5   Emotional Responses

Children were excited to listen to the story on the big screen TV and some had open mouths, put their hands on their heads, and put fingers to their mouths during story time. Few children were trying to sit on their knees and often they moved from one foot to another. Their emotions were mostly expressed through facial gestures and moving in the sitting position. One child was so excited, and her excited voice made it hard to follow

her and she was told to put a name on her people and in this way, others could listen to her easier.

The children were so excited to colour and make a crown and then decorate it with glitter while participating in the creative workshop. Some of them had difficulty in cutting a small edge and using glitter for the first time which made them feel tired or bored. One child said, "I do not know how to cut it with crying tunes". I have motivated them to practice more and ask for a little help from other friends.

The children showed their joy and interest during the dramatic play. When they asked, to dance and be happy, they played that scene perfectly then they moved to the corner of the classroom and provided the space for continuing our drama.

6.6   Body Language

One child was leaning on the floor in the corner of the class while listening to the story. When I asked a child, why you don't like to share things with others, she made a face gesture while thinking about my question. Few children had an open mouth when they were surprised. One boy did a funny thing and pretended that his slipper was speaking on behalf of him. All children used eye contact while they were speaking and communicating with each other.

Some of the children showed their happiness in colouring and using glitter for decorating their crowns with facial gestures of being proud of each other during the creative workshop.

The children had eye contact with each other when they played their role, even a shy child in the group. They provide nice body movement according to the scenario of the story. While they were waiting for their role in the corner of the classroom, they were quiet and did not make any noise according to the rules that we had defined in the rehearsal session instead some of them were leaning on the floor and watching their friends,

7   Professional questionnaire's result

The first question was related to the evaluation of children's peer interaction in the group and ECEC teachers evaluate children's peer interaction through observation in different daily situations such as activities and playtime. They tend to pay attention to communication, behaviour, and inclusivity between children. Some teachers write notes about specific events to recall during conferences with parents, while others prefer to document planned activities and include children's interests in those activities. Evaluating through observation also allows teachers to recognize areas that need reflection or change. For instance, some teachers highlight how children interact with different people, how they react to certain unexpected situations and what kinds of repetitive behaviour are being shown. Through observation, teachers can understand each child's strengths and areas for improvement and create activities that require interaction considering individual children's interests.

Teachers' support for peer interaction in the everyday lives of children in ECEC is effective because of their understanding of the importance of supporting peer interaction in everyday life to create a positive learning environment for all students. They recognize that children may have different comfort levels when it comes to interacting with their peers and allow them to work on creating bonds at their own pace. For example, a teacher may notice a child who is typically quiet and shy in group settings but more talkative when paired with one or two other children. The teacher can then intervene and create activities or games that involve these children together to support their growing bond. In addition, teachers encourage parents to observe their child's challenges and offer support as needed to enhance peer interaction. For instance, a teacher may ask a parent to help their child socialize outside of school to promote positive peer interactions with their classmates. Teachers also model positive behaviour such as politeness, good manners, and non-verbal communication. For example, a teacher may use "please" and "thanks" when interacting with their students and guide them on how to communicate with their peers politely and respectfully. Overall, these efforts create a safe and comfortable environment that allows children to participate in activities and build relationships with their peers, ultimately enhancing their social and emotional development.

The teacher's support to develop children's interaction is highly valuable for the improvement of children's peer interaction. They recognize the importance of educating

themselves about each child's individual needs, as there is no common method for every child. For example, a teacher might observe a child who is hesitant to interact with others and consider ways to help them build confidence, such as setting up activities that align with the child's interests or introducing them to new friends who share similar hobbies. Additionally, teachers acknowledge that the busyness of everyday life in daycare can sometimes lead to a lack of observation and reflection. One teacher suggests that they often do things in a rush, not leaving enough time to observe the children while they play and interact. This can lead to missed opportunities to intervene and support children's interactions when needed. To improve, teachers may need to create more opportunities for observation and reflection, such as setting aside specific times each day to observe and take notes on children's interactions. Finally, the teachers recognize the need to continuously develop and reflect on their actions, as well as be open to changing their views or planned activities with children. For example, if a teacher observes that a certain activity is not engaging the children or leading to positive interactions, they may need to re-evaluate and change their approach to better support the children's needs. In short, these teachers recognize that there is always room for improvement in their support of children's interaction and are willing to adapt and grow to better support their students.

The teachers' responses show that they are committed to improving their support for children's interactions by continually seeking new knowledge about how to best support each child. They realize the importance of being flexible and adapting their approach as needed by incorporating new methods, new ideas, and different materials into their teaching. Observation, reflection, and communication with children are also considered critical to ensure they do not miss opportunities to intervene and support children's interactions. Lastly, the teachers acknowledge the importance of being aware of their behaviour and modelling positive behaviours themselves, ensuring they support children's interactions by setting a good example. In summary, the teachers are committed to continuous learning and development and are willing to take active steps to improve their support for children's interactions.

According to teachers' cultural diversity is an important aspect of the groups they work with children. They take active steps to ensure that every child's cultural background is respected, and their needs met. For example, one teacher noted that they try to help children settle in by using their mother tongue when they do not speak English. Additionally, the teachers celebrate different events and important days, teach children about different languages and traditions, and ensure that each child's culture is valued.

As another teacher put it, "Cultural diversity is not a problem since we always include everybody, and it does not matter where we come from." This quote emphasizes the teacher's belief that cultural diversity should always be viewed as a positive aspect of the classroom environment, one that provides an opportunity for learning, growth, and mutual understanding. Therefore, the teachers aim to create an inclusive and respectful environment that celebrates diversity and fosters growth and learning, where cultural diversity is a natural part of their daily lives.

Teachers stated that drama is a very important aspect of communicating with children and can be used in everyday activities to express ideas and engage children in learning. For example, the teacher notes that "while doing any activity any element of drama can be used to communicate and express." Similarly, Teacher D believes that drama can be a resource to talk and work on different topics, such as children's interactions, and uses pretend play and music to create a fun and inspiring environment where children can actively participate and develop communication and imagination skills.

On the other hand, some teachers expressed embarrassment over not using drama as much as they would like, while others such as Teacher C admitted to not using drama as a pedagogical tool yet. Nonetheless, most teachers recognized the value of drama in early childhood education and care, and some like Teacher E and F used different drama methods such as roleplays, table theatre, or Forum Theatre to enhance social skills, peer interaction, and critical thinking. For example, Teacher F stated "During the activity, the main thing is that it should be fun and inspiring so that children could be actively participating, and it supports communication skills and thinking, imagination. Sometimes even play out some bookstore characters or someone is the baker and all other children's muffins and then there is some story, music, movement included." This quote illustrates how drama can be integrated into everyday activities to make them more engaging and fun for children while also promoting social, emotional, and cognitive development.

Overall, the teachers had varied approaches when it came to using drama as a pedagogical activity within their groups. Some teachers emphasized the importance of reading stories, singing songs, using different materials to make crafts, and using big pictures and technology to find information together. They also created dialogue during circle time to learn about different topics and facilitated play in areas such as construction, role-playing, and drawing. Other teachers used specific-creative methods such as storytelling, music, or puppet shows, while some identified body language, voice,

and way of expression as elements of the visual narrative method which could be used in everyday activities to engage children in learning. Additionally, many teachers focused on creating activities based on children's interests and used different materials, technology, and dialogue to facilitate learning.

Based on the teachers' responses, it appears that children respond best to activities and projects that they are interested in, whether that be through storytelling or music, or by participating in the planning of activities or projects together. For instance, as noted by Teacher D, "Children always respond well to activities and projects that they are interested in. They will always be more interested in projects they have participated in since the beginning, so since they have created their idea." By encouraging children to create their projects and interests, they may also develop a stronger desire to learn and become more committed to the activity. Additionally, music can be a fun and engaging way to support language development, as noted by Teachers F and G. Overall, by incorporating children's interests and involvement in the planning and creation of activities and projects, teachers can create a more engaging and enriching learning environment.

8   Conclusion

How does utilizing creative methods support peer interaction in early childhood education and care?

Drama plays utilizing creative methods and role-playing proved to be an effective tool for engaging children in imaginative play and fostering social interaction. By incorporating children's voices and perspectives, assigning roles, and providing support, the activity promoted engagement, learning outcomes, and social-emotional development. The children demonstrated qualities such as support, teamwork, empathy, communication, engagement, verbal collaboration, sharing and waiting for their turn are crucial for building strong connections. The collaborative approach to learning and the shared narrative created a sense of community and improved social skills. However, individualized support and interventions may be necessary for children who struggle with focus and following the rules. Overall, this activity showcased the potential of dramatic play and role-playing in enhancing social-emotional learning and positive peer relationships among children.

The activities presented in both ECEC units were successful. However, to achieve pedagogical goals one must take the following factors into account: choosing the correct creative methods, choosing the age-appropriate story, considering the children's interest, having a well-developed plan and specific learning goals and material at hand. Understandably, a single activity does not lead to life-long learning, but it is to be continued to achieve the goals.

The teachers need to plan and continue with the plan that I drafted during the implementation of the developmental task.

Observation of children's peer interaction by ECEC teachers during the study played a crucial role in evaluating and supporting children. The teachers emphasized the importance of being flexible and adapting their approach as needed, with continuous learning and development being a priority. They also highlighted the significance of respecting cultural diversity in the classroom and creating an inclusive environment that fosters growth and mutual understanding.

The teachers expressed that they prefer to use drama as a pedagogical activity though they are not using it as much as they would like to in the daily life of children in ECEC, as a tool to enhance social skills, peer interaction, communication, and creative thinking. The teachers agreed on the importance of creating activities based on children's interests and involvement in the planning process, and to identify areas that require reflection or modification, resulting in more tailored activities that suit each child's interests and needs.

In summary, the responses suggest that an active and flexible approach, continuous learning, and development, and respecting cultural diversity are significant factors in supporting children's peer interaction in group settings. Additionally, the interaction of drama and activities based on children's interests can significantly enhance their learning experience.

9   Discussions

The objective of this study was to assess the efficacy of implementing a drama program as a means of promoting peer interaction among young children in early childhood

education. The outcomes indicated that the drama program had a positive impact on improving social relationships among children in the ECEC. These findings highlight the potential of utilizing the drama tool as a pedagogical activity to facilitate children's social skills development in early childhood education settings.

To effectively incorporate and apply a drama-based instructional approach aimed at improving peer interaction requires committing additional resources, including allocating sufficient time to plan drama sessions with teachers and educational staff members. Additionally, it is recommended to use the program regularly and for an extended period for both children and teachers to understand the drama methods and maximize benefits. In this regard, teacher training and development programs are proposed as potential proper programs for relating introductory drama pedagogical education. Continued future research is necessary to further evaluate the effectiveness of the drama tool in promoting peer interaction and social relationship improvements among young children in early education settings.

10 Ethical Consideration and Reliability

Following the ethical principles for research studies preserves the rights and respect of the group of participants who participated in a study. (Silva & Neto & Costa & Souza & Monteiro 2021)

Names, birthdays, social security numbers, and other information that could be used to identify children were collected. In addition, no information about parents/guardians or teachers was collected. Each child and child group were assigned a number for use in the analyses. The physical integrity of the children was not compromised in any way during the observations. The training of the observers emphasized reverence for the children's emotions and rights.

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Appendix 1. Consent Form for Parents

Dear Parents,

I am Sima Ataee. I am writing my thesis about "Supporting Peer Interventions of Children in Early Childhood Education through Drama Play". The main purpose of the thesis is to study children's peer interaction and the teacher's role in supporting children's peer interaction.

I am using a qualitative research method and research data collection methods are observation and questionnaires. I will observe children and observation times are 4 times during planned activities and free playtime. The observation takes 60 minutes. No child identification information is collected during the study and all the collected material is processed anonymously. After the end of the research, everything related to the collection of data and the material is destroyed.

Attached is a consent form for the guardian to fill out and you can put a check in the first place if you want your child to participate in one or another study if your child is not allowed to participate in the study.

Best regards,

Sima Ataee

Child's name: _____

⊙ My child may participate in the study.

⊙ My child is not allowed to participate in the study.

Guardian's name and signature _____

Appendix 2. Questionnaire for professionals

1. How do you evaluate children's peer interaction in your group?

2. In what ways could teachers support peer interaction in everyday life?

3. Do you consider that your support to develop children's interaction could be improved?

4. If so, how would you do it?

5. How is cultural diversity considered in the group?

6. Do you use drama as a pedagogical activity within your group? And how?

7. Which creative methods do you use the most to develop your pedagogical activities?

8. Which of them do your children respond the best to?