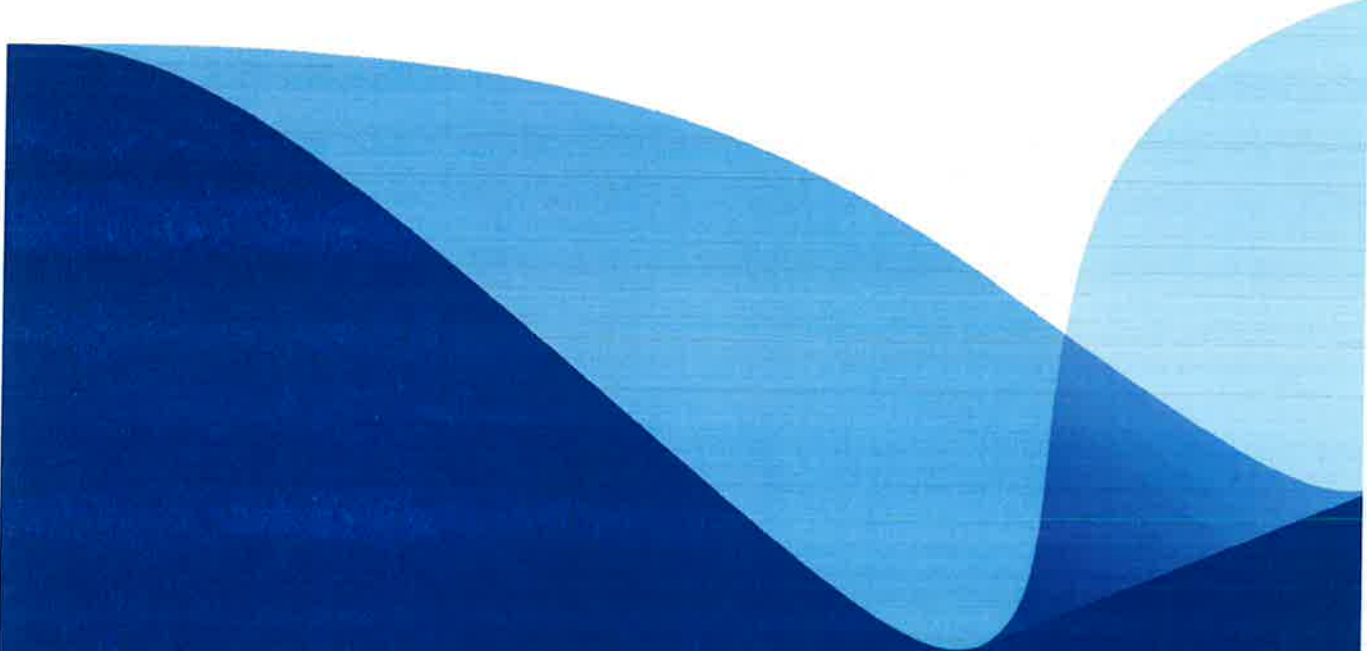




# **NATIONAL CORE CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE 2018**



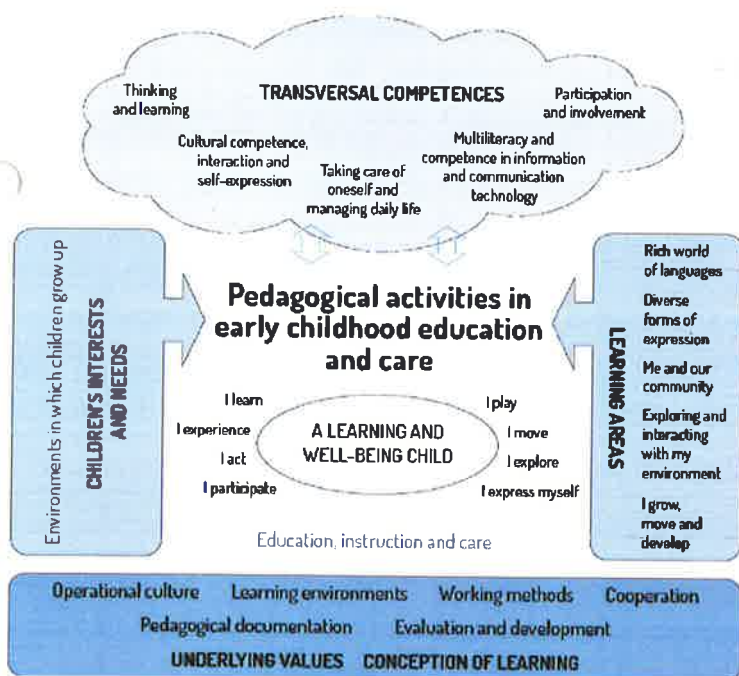
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Regulations and guidelines 2018:3c

## 4. Planning and implementing pedagogical activity in early childhood education and care

### 4.1 The framework for pedagogical activity

A holistic approach describes the pedagogy activities of early childhood education and care and their implementation. The aim is to promote children's learning and well-being as well as their transversal competence (Figure 1). Pedagogical activity is carried out in interaction and shared activities between children and personnel. Children's free activities as well as those that the children and personnel come up with together or that are planned and led by the personnel supplement each other. Pedagogy is emphasised in all activity.



**Figure 1. The framework for pedagogical activity in early childhood education and care**

The underlying values (Chapter 2.4), the conception of learning (Chapter 2.5) and the operational culture (Chapter 3) based on these as well as versatile learning environments (Chapter 3.2), cooperation (Chapter 3.3) and working methods (Chapter 4.3) lay the foundation for goal-oriented activities. The planning of the activities begins with the children's interests and needs as well as meaningful aspects in the environment where children grow up. The learning areas described in Chapter 4.5 are also used as a basis for the planning. The precondition for high-quality pedagogical activities is systematic documentation, evaluation and development (Chapters 4.2 and 7). The objectives of transversal competences also guide the planning of the activities (Chapter 2.7).

The local curricula for early childhood education and care shall specify the objectives and principles for the pedagogical activities. When specifying the objectives, the different forms of ECEC services, their personnel structures and other characteristics should be taken into account. The local curriculum for ECEC as well as the children's individual ECEC plans (Chapter 1.3) shall be used as a basis for planning the activities for the group of children. The activities shall be implemented so that each child has the right to progress in learning, ensuring that ECEC and pre-primary education form a continuum that is meaningful for the child.

### 4.2 Pedagogical documentation

Pedagogical documentation is an essential working approach in planning, implementing, evaluating and developing early childhood education and care. This documentation is a continuous process where observations, documents and their interpretation in interaction create an understanding of pedagogical activity. Pedagogical documentation enables the participation of children and guardians in evaluating, planning and developing the activities.

Pedagogical documentation produces concrete and versatile knowledge about the children's lives, development, interests, thinking, learning, and needs as well as the activities of the group of children. Individual documents, such as photographs, drawings or the personnel's observations make it possible to examine the children's development and learning together with the children. The knowledge and skills already acquired by the children as well as their interests and needs are made visible through pedagogical documentation and used as a basis for planning the activities.

The aim of systematic documentation is that the personnel get to know individual children, understand the relationships between the children as well as the nature of the interaction between the personnel and children in the group. The purpose of pedagogical documentation is to implement ECEC in a child-focused manner. The knowledge and understanding acquired through documentation is utilised for such purposes as continuously shaping the working methods and learning environments as well as the goals, methods and contents of activities to better meet the children's interest and needs. The individual ECEC plan of a child is part of the pedagogical documentation process (Chapter 1.3). Systematic pedagogical documentation is also required in assessing the children's needs for support for growth and learning (Chapter 5).

Documents collected over a longer period of time are an important part of the evaluation of pedagogical activities and self-assessment of the personnel's actions (Chapter 7.1).

### 4.3 Versatile working methods

The tasks and goals set for early childhood education and care and the age, needs, prerequisites and interests of children guide the selection of working methods. Working methods that are functional and promote the creativity and participation of children provide natural ways of learning. These include children's supervised and free play, exploration, physical activity as well as experience of and expression through art. Information and communication technology is utilised in the activities. Versatile working methods are not only a vehicle for, but also a target of, learning. It is therefore important for the personnel to guide the children to experiment with and use different working methods in groups of different sizes as well as independently. When working, children are encouraged to ask questions and express wonder as well as to explore and solve problems together.

Professional competence and sensitivity to identify pedagogical possibilities in different situations are required of the personnel. Among others, this is manifested as the personnel's ability to observe children's initiatives and emotions and redirect their own activities accordingly. The initiatives of younger children are often physical and non-verbal. Understanding and responding to these require sensitive presence and familiarity with the child.

Children participate in planning and selecting the working methods in line with their personal prerequisites. Children must have an opportunity to explore the world with all of their senses and their entire bodies as well as experiment with different working methods. The varying use of working methods provides the children of different ages learning in diverse ways with experiences of succeeding. Versatile working methods require versatile learning environments. The competence of personnel and children is utilised in using the working methods and new working methods are experimented with and developed.

## 4.4 Play as source of development, learning and well-being

Play is a key practice in early childhood education and care. The task of ECEC is to provide children with opportunities for different kinds of play and games. Play promotes the child's development, learning and well-being. While children learn by playing, they do not personally see play as a vehicle for learning but a way of spending time, living, and perceiving the world instead. Experiences that stimulate the children's emotions, curiosity and interest inspire them to play.

For the child, the significance of play lies in the play itself. Play produces joy and pleasure for the children. Children are active agents when they play: they structure and explore the surrounding world, create social relations and form meanings based on their experiences. Children construct ideas of themselves and others through play. Through play, children imitate as well as create new things and alter what they have seen. By doing so, they model and test their hopes and dreams. The use of imagination enables children to experiment with different roles and ideas which they could otherwise not carry out. Through play, children can process experiences that they find difficult. Play makes it safe to experiment, try and fail.

Play combines key elements that promote learning: enthusiasm, doing things together and challenging personal abilities. Play evolves and takes different shapes as children gain more experiences. Interactions between the personnel and children as well as among the children lay a foundation for the development of thinking, language and developing play skills. Children make observations, experiment and learn the rules of the community through play. When playing in a group, children learn to regulate their emotions and desires as well as to take the viewpoints of others into account. Play increases sense of community, which strengthens a positive emotional atmosphere.

Play is a key working method in early childhood education and care. In pedagogical activities, for example drama, improvisation or fairy tales can be combined in developing plots for play and constructing imaginary worlds. The personnel must acknowledge the significance of concentrated exploration, spontaneous creative expression as well as boisterous play and physical games on children's well-being and learning. Different situations may be enriched by introducing playful aspects to them. Nursery rhymes, wordplay, songs and playfulness strengthen a positive atmosphere, which supports learning and well-being.

The personnel has the duty to secure the preconditions for playing, supervise the play in a suitable way, and ensure that each child gets an opportunity to participate in playing together according to their skills and capabilities. The personnel must support the development of the children's play with a systematic and goal-oriented approach by either guiding it from outside or participating in it. The physical and psychological presence of the personnel support interaction among the children and prevent conflicts from arising.

The personnel must observe and document the children's play. Observation of play increases the personnel's understanding of children's thoughts and interests as well as their emotions and experiences. The observations are used in planning and guiding play and other activities. Subtlety, professional competence as well as gender sensitivity in detecting children's initiatives for play and responding to them in an appropriate way are required of the personnel.

Time, peace and space as well as appropriate toys and materials available for the children are necessary for sustained games and play. The learning environments must provide flexibility necessary for the play, as play and games can take place anywhere.

Knowledge of children's culture and media aimed at children help personnel understand the children's play. Different games and digital devices also provide diverse opportunities for play. In a learning



environment that encourages playing, adults are also learners. The personnel together with guardians discuss the importance of play and observations related to children's games and play together with guardians. This makes it easier for the same games to continue at home or in ECEC.

## 4.5 Learning areas

These learning areas describe the key objectives and contents of pedagogical activities in early childhood education and care. They guide the personnel in planning and implementing versatile and integrative pedagogical activities together with the children. Children are entitled to gather versatile experiences of the different learning areas. Rather than being independent entities that are implemented separately, the themes of the learning areas are combined and applied according to the children's interests and competence. The learning areas have been grouped into five entities as in the National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education<sup>86</sup>:

- Rich world of languages
- Diverse forms of expression
- Me and our community
- Exploring and interacting with my environment
- I grow, move and develop.

Integrative pedagogical activities enable broad-based examination and exploration of things and phenomena. Children's interests and questions serve as a key premise for the activities. For example, the themes may emerge from play and games, fairy tales, excursions or spontaneous interactive situations between the children and personnel or in the interaction among children. The ways in which the objectives of the learning areas are dealt with will depend on the selected themes, situations and the children's learning. The personnel have the task to ensure that the pedagogical activities promote the development and learning of children of different ages.

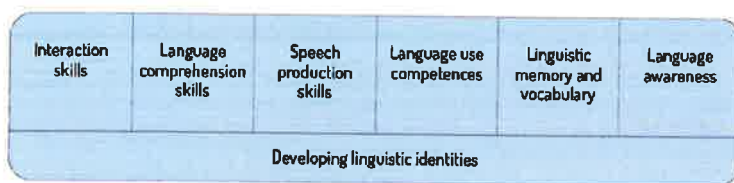
### Rich world of languages

The task of early childhood education and care is to strengthen the development of children's **linguistic skills** and **capacity** as well as their **linguistic identities**. ECEC strengthens children's curiosity towards and interest in languages, texts and cultures. Supporting linguistic development is connected to the development of the child's multiliteracy (Chapter 2.7). It is also connected to, among other things, transversal competence associated with children's cultural skills and interaction. The developing linguistic skills provide the children with new ways to influence and to participate actively.

Language is both an object of and a vehicle for learning for children. It provides children with means to manage different situations and things as well as interact with others, express themselves and acquire knowledge. A versatile language environment in ECEC as well as cooperation with guardians support children's linguistic development. In ECEC, children are provided with encouraging and consistent feedback on their language use and interaction skills.

Children can simultaneously acquire several different languages, which may develop and be used in different situations. ECEC takes into account the fact that children are growing up in diverse linguistic environments. The ways of using language and interacting vary between families, and several languages may be spoken in the children's homes. Linguistic and cultural diversity is made visible in early childhood education and care in cooperation with guardians. For its part, this supports the development of children's linguistic identities. Perspectives related to language and culture in ECEC are discussed further in Chapter 4.6.

It is important for language learning to acknowledge that children of the same age may be going through different phases in different areas of linguistic development. **Linguistic identities develop** as children are provided with guidance and support in the main areas of linguistic skills and capacity.



**Figure 2. The main areas of children's linguistic development in early childhood education and care**

For the development of **interactive skills**, children's experiences of being heard and getting responses to their initiatives are important. The personnel's sensitivity and responses to children's messages, including non-verbal ones, are essential. The development of interaction skills is supported by encouraging the children to communicate with other children and personnel.

Children's **language comprehension skills** are supported with abundant linguistic modelling. Verbalising activities in a consistent manner and discussions support children in developing their vocabulary. Descriptive and accurate language is used in different situations. Images, objects and gestures are used for support when needed.

The development of children's **speech production skills** is monitored and guided. Children are encouraged to speak in different situations, both with adults and other children. This helps children use and understand spoken language. The children's attention will gradually be drawn to different tones of voice and emphases.

Children's **language use skills** are guided and the use of language in different situations is reflected on together with the children. The aim is to strengthen language use with situation awareness. The children practise narrating, explaining and speaking in turns. Empathy, use of humour and learning good manners also strengthen children's language use competences. Familiarisation with different texts supports the development of language use competences and helps children to notice differences between spoken and written language.

Children diversify their linguistic expression as their **linguistic memory** and **vocabulary** expand. The personnel has the duty to consciously support this development. The development of linguistic memory is supported by, for example, the use of nursery rhymes and singing games. Playing with language, naming things and using illustrative words promote the development of children's linguistic memory and vocabulary. Discussions, reading and telling stories in an unhurried atmosphere provide opportunities for considering the meanings of words and texts and learning new concepts in their contexts.

Observing different languages in the immediate surroundings support the children's developing **language awareness**. The personnel have the task of attracting and encouraging the children's interest in spoken and written language and gradually also in reading and writing. Language is observed and examined to direct children's attention from the meanings of words towards the shapes and structures of language, including words, syllables and phonemes. Children are encouraged to playful writing and reading.

Rich and diverse texts are used in early childhood education and care. Children are familiarised with versatile children's literature. Stories are told to them and they are also encouraged to make up their own stories. Children's stories, nursery rhymes and verbal messages are documented. To support

multiliteracy, visual, auditory and audiovisual messages and texts among others are used alongside spoken language.

## Diverse forms of expression

A task of early childhood education and care is to support the development of children's **musical, visual** as well as **verbal** and **physical expression** in a goal-oriented manner as well as to familiarise them with different art forms and cultural heritage. A holistic approach and creative combination of different ways to express characterise children's expression. Artistic experiences and expression promote children's learning potential, social skills and positive self-image as well as their capacity to understand and structure the surrounding world. Children develop their thinking and learning skills as they explore, interpret and create meanings by practising different ways to express. The ability to imagine and evoke mental images is also key to the development of the child's ethical thinking. Familiarisation with cultural heritage, art and different forms of expression also strengthen children's competence in the areas of multiliteracy, participation and involvement.

Culture is an important part of the child's identity. ECEC provides children with opportunities to see and experience art and other culture diversely. The experiences related to art and culture strengthen children's ability to adopt, use and change culture. At the same time, the children learn to understand the meaning and value of art and cultural heritage.

Different forms of expression provide the children with means to experience and perceive the world in a manner that speaks to and inspires them. Artistic expression provides means for making observations, emotions and creative thinking visible in a way that motivates children. Children familiarise themselves with different forms of expression by using multiple senses, working methods and learning environments as well as the cultural offerings available in the local area. The aesthetic and inspiring qualities of the learning environments and versatile equipment and materials and sufficient guidance available in them are significant when children familiarise themselves with different forms of expression.

The arts education includes both spontaneous and planned activities. The processes of expression and learning emphasise experimenting, exploring, practising the different stages of doing things and documenting these. Each child's individual expression is supported and a sufficient amount of time and space is reserved for children's joint creative processes. Utilising special competence of the personnel, children and other actors enriches arts education.

The aim of **musical expression** in early childhood education and care is to provide the children with musical experiences as well as strengthen the children's interest in and relationship with music. Children are guided to immerse themselves in music and make observations on the sound environment. Children develop their capabilities for understanding music as well as the duration, volume, tonal colour and strength of sound through musical activities. Children sing songs and enjoy nursery rhymes, experiment with different musical instruments as well as listen and move to music together with the personnel. Children gather experiences of basic beat, rhythm in words and making music with their bodies. Children are encouraged to use their imagination and express their thoughts and emotions stirred by music, for example by explaining them verbally, visually or through dance. Children also gather experiences of creating music together as well as the processes of practising small-scale musical performances and the joy of success brought by the performances.

The goal of **visual expression** is to develop the children's relationship with visual arts, other forms of visual culture and cultural heritage. Children have an opportunity to enjoy creating images and gather aesthetic experiences through art. Children practise visual thinking, observation and interpretation of images through versatile visual expression. They develop their skills in producing images by using

multiple senses and by building connections with other forms of expression. Children experiment with various methods, tools and materials for creating an image, for example by painting, drawing, building and making media presentations. In addition to the images independently produced by children, artwork, contents in the media, objects and sites in the built and natural environment are observed with the children. Children are guided to interpret and explain their thoughts about visual messages. When examining images, attention is paid to such aspects as colours, shapes, materials, the artist, context of presentation, and emotions stirred by the images.

Planning skills and creative problem solving as well as knowledge of structures, materials and techniques are practised with crafting activities, such as clay modelling, building, sewing and wood-working. The goal of these activities and forms of expression is to bring to the children the joy of doing and experiencing things and making discoveries. These also provide joy in that children can see the result of their creativity and personal touch. Children are provided with opportunities to independently experiment with, explore and combine different soft and hard materials as well as to learn different techniques. Children get to produce and implement ideas for different kinds of artwork and objects. Crafting traditions related to the children's backgrounds as well as the local area can be observed and utilised in the children's crafting activities.

Children are encouraged to engage in **verbal** and **bodily expression**, for example through drama, dance and play. The aim is that the exercises and games offer children opportunities to versatile verbal and bodily experiences, expression and communication. Topics arising from children's imagination or things experienced and perceived by them are worked on together. Children gather experiences of both spontaneous expression and a jointly planned, implemented and assessed creative process. For example children's literature, literary art, different forms of theatre, dance and circus are utilised diversely in the activities.

## Me and our community

Children expand their living environment as they begin early childhood education and care outside their homes. In addition to the traditions, operating models, values and views of their homes, children come across different ways of thinking and acting. The mission of ECEC is to develop children's capabilities of understanding the diversity of the local community and practise acting in it. This topic is approached from the perspectives of **ethical thinking, worldviews, the past, the present and the future of the local community** as well as **the media**. For example fairy tales, music, visual arts, play, drama, different media contents as well as visitors, visits and events in the local area can be used diversely in the activities. The learning area of me and our community particularly supports transversal competences related to the children's cultural competence, interaction and expression as well as their thinking and learning (Chapter 2.7).

The development of **ethical thinking** skills is supported by reflecting together on ethical questions that arise in different situations or that concern the children. For instance, the themes may be connected to friendship, telling wrong from right, justice or causes of fear, sadness and joy. Ethical questions are discussed with the children so that they feel safe and accepted. The rules of the group and their justifications are also reflected on with the children.

**Worldview education** in early childhood education and care primarily focuses on examining together the religions and other worldviews present in the group of children. Irreligion is investigated alongside worldviews. The goal is to promote mutual respect and understanding of varying worldviews as well as to support the development of the children's cultural identities and worldviews. The children are familiarised with different worldviews and related traditions. For example, annual celebrations and events as well as daily situations, such as dressing or meals, provide natural opportunities for



examining worldviews. Room is given for the children's wondering, and life questions that puzzle them are reflected on together.

Worldview education is organised in cooperation with guardians, being aware of and respecting the background, worldviews and values of each family. Among others, worldview education supports transversal competences related to the children's cultural competence, interaction and expression as well as their thinking and learning (see Chapter 2.7).

By discussing **the past, the present and the future of the local community**, children's interest is geared towards historical matters and building a good future. Diversity in the children's growth environments is also observed.

Children are offered possibilities to immerse themselves in past events and situations. The children and their personal histories, members of the local community and its environments and artefacts are important sources of information. In addition, the expertise of the children's guardians in their cultural heritage may be utilised. For instance, the games and music from the childhood of the children's grandparents can be used in familiarisation with past times.

The presence is examined by discussing current topics that concern or interest the children. Diversity in the local community is also respectfully observed with the children. Among others, the diversity of people, genders and families is explored. The goal is to educate children to understand that people are different but equal.

In addition to the past and the present, it is important to reflect on the future and how we can influence the realisation of a favourable future. Anticipation of the future may be connected, for instance, to planning games for the coming season or personal learning environments. This can be done, for example, by constructing imaginary future worlds or talking about professions that the children find interesting.

The task of the **media education** in early childhood education and care is to support the children's possibilities for being active and expressing themselves in their communities. Children are familiarised with different media and producing media content is experimented with playfully in safe environments. The contents and reliability and truthfulness of media related to the children's lives are considered together with the children. At the same time, the children practise their developing source and media criticism. The children are guided in using media responsibly, taking into account their own and other people's well-being. Themes presented in the media may be dealt with the children, for example, through play with physical activity, by drawing or with the means of drama.

## Exploring and interacting with my environment

The task of the early childhood education and care is to provide children with a capacity to observe, analyse and understand their surroundings. The children are guided to explore and act in the natural and built environment. ECEC supports the development of the children's **mathematical thinking** and strengthens their positive attitude towards mathematics. ECEC also includes **environmental education** and **technology education**. Personal observations and experiences related to learning environments help children understand causal relationships and develop as thinkers and learners. Children's developing competence of naming phenomena and using different concepts promotes their multiliteracy.

The goal of early childhood education and care is to provide the children with joy of invention and learning in different phases of their **mathematical thinking**. Children familiarise themselves with mathematics and its areas through illustrative and playful activities. Children are guided to pay attention to the shapes, amounts and changes they come across in their daily situations and environ-

ment. Children are encouraged to consider and describe their mathematical observations by expressing and examining them, for example by using their body or different devices and images. Children are provided with opportunities to classify, compare and rank different things and objects and to discover and produce regularities and changes. They are also encouraged to discover, consider and deduce problems related to the learning environment and find solutions to them.

The development of the concept of numbers is supported diversely in interactive situations, such as by utilising play and materials that appeal to children. Children are encouraged to perceive numbers and amounts in their environment and, as they advance their competence, to join them to numeral words in writing and numeric symbols as permitted by their skills. Number sequencing and naming skills can be developed, for instance, with nursery rhymes and rhyming. Measuring is experimented with and the concepts of location and relation are practised with the children, for example through games involving physical activities, by drawing or using different instruments.

Different exercises are used to support children's perception of space and plane. Children are encouraged to examine objects and shapes and to play with them. In order to strengthen children's geometric thinking, opportunities for building, arts and crafts and clay modelling are arranged for them. The concept of time is explained, for example by observing the times of the day and seasons.

The goal of **environmental education** is to strengthen children's relationship with nature and ability to act responsibly in nature as well as to guide them towards a sustainable way of living. Environmental education comprises of three dimensions: learning in the environment, learning about the environment and acting for the environment. The local natural and built environments are not only objects of learning, but also learning environments.

Making field trips to natural and built environments and exploring the surroundings are an important part of ECEC. Through positive learning experiences, children learn to enjoy nature and the local surroundings, which strengthens their relationship with nature. Natural phenomena are observed through the use of different senses and in different seasons. They are discussed and examined. At the same time, children learn to use concepts connected to nature. Practice in identifying different plant and animal species strengthens children's knowledge of nature. Children learn to search for information on interesting topics. Nature can also be a place for aesthetic and peaceful experiences.

Children are guided to respect nature, its plants and animals. Environmental education promotes the children's growth into a sustainable way of living and the practice of skills needed in it. These practical skills include not littering while on excursions, learning moderation and being economical, responsibility related to meals, saving energy as well as decreasing the amount of waste by such means as recycling, repairing and reusing things. At the same time, children are guided to pay attention to the impacts of their actions.

The goal of **technology education** is to encourage children to familiarise themselves with experimental and inquiry-based approaches. Children are also guided to observe technology in the environment and to come up with their own, creative solutions. Children are encouraged to ask questions, find explanations together and draw conclusions.

Technological solutions that children come across in their daily lives are observed with the children. Children familiarise themselves with ICT devices and their functions. Particular attention is paid to the safe use of machines and devices. Children are provided with opportunities to carry out their own ideas, for example by building things out of different materials and testing how different devices work. Children are encouraged to describe the solutions they have made. The children solve problems and celebrate successes together. The goal is that their personal experiences help children form an understanding of the fact that technology is an outcome of human activity. Technological solutions

available in the surroundings, such as toys, can be utilised in the activities and their operating principles can be examined.

## **I grow, move and develop**

The learning area of I grow, move and develop includes objectives related to **physical activity, food education, health and safety**. The task of ECEC is to build a foundation for children's way of living which values health and well-being and promotes physical activity together with guardians. This learning area particularly supports transversal competences related to taking care of oneself and managing daily life.

A goal of early childhood education and care is to encourage children to be physically active in versatile ways and to experience joy of **physical activity**. Children are encouraged to spend time outdoors and engage in physically active play during all seasons. In addition to supervised exercise, it is ensured that children get plenty of opportunities for independent physical activity both indoors and outdoors every day. Physical education must be regular, child-focused, versatile and goal-oriented. Sufficient daily physical activity is important for the child's healthy growth, development, learning and well-being. Physical activity refers to various kinds of activity with different levels of physical strain, including playing indoors and outdoors, field trips and supervised physical activity. Physical activity in a group develops children's social skills, such as interaction and self-regulation skills. Physical activity must be a natural part of the child's day. Together with guardians, children are also encouraged to exercise in their free time both indoors and outdoors.

The task of early childhood education and care is to develop children's knowledge of their bodies, body management as well as fundamental movement skills, such as balance, locomotor, and manipulative skills. Different senses as well as equipment made out of different materials encouraging children to be physically active are utilised in the physical activities. Children's physical activities must be naturally versatile in terms of their duration, intensity and pace. Children must gain experiences of physical activity independently, in pairs and with a group. In ECEC, children gather experiences of different physical games, such as traditional outdoor games as well as moving to stories and music. Different seasons must be utilised so that children get opportunities for learning outdoors activities typical for each season.

Regular and supervised exercise plays a key role in children's holistic development and learning of motor skills. Therefore, it is important to observe the children's motor skills systematically. The personnel must plan the daily structure, indoor and outdoor environments as well as the contents of activities so that the children get an opportunity to enjoy physical activity diversely in different situations. Exercise equipment must be available for the children also during free physical activity and play. ECEC takes the safety of exercise equipment into account.

The aim of **food education** is to promote positive attitudes towards food and eating and support versatile and healthy eating habits. Children are guided to eat independently and to obtain versatile and sufficient nutrition. Daily meals are organised in an unhurried atmosphere where the children learn to eat without disturbances and with good table manners. They are also familiarised with a culture of eating together with others. Children familiarise themselves with foods, their origins, visual appearance, textures and tastes through the use of different senses and exploration. Discussions, stories and songs connected to food promote the advancement of the children's vocabulary related to food.

Issues connected to **health and safety** are considered together with the children in early childhood education and care. Children's capabilities for taking care of their health and personal hygiene are supported. The significance of exercise, rest and good interpersonal relationships to health and well-

being are discussed with the children. Children learn about issues connected to safety in everyday situations. These may include situations where children are getting dressed, eating, playing and spending time outdoors. Children practise safety in traffic in their local area as well as rules and customs related to safe mobility. The goal is to support the children's sense of security and to provide them with capabilities for asking for and seeking help and for operating safely in different situations and environments.

## 4.6 Special perspectives of language and culture

In the National core curriculum for early childhood education and care, perspectives related to language and culture are considered to apply to every child participating in ECEC. Children's varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds and capabilities are perceived to enrich the community in a positive way. In linguistically and culturally aware ECEC, languages, cultures and worldviews are integrated in all activity.

According to the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care, the municipality must ensure that the child can be provided with ECEC in his or her mother tongue if the language is Finnish, Swedish or Sámi. ECEC may be provided in sign language for children using sign language. ECEC may also be provided in the Roma language.<sup>87</sup> Also other languages can be used in ECEC, provided that this does not risk the achievement of the objectives set in the core curriculum. In such cases, it shall be ensured that the development of Finnish/Swedish as the child's mother tongue is also supported. Cooperation between personnel, guardians and different cultural communities supports the cultural traditions of children and families as well as the children's opportunities for demonstrating their cultural backgrounds. Children are encouraged to interact in bilingual and multilingual environments.

In ECEC, there are children who speak both **Finnish** and **Swedish** as their mother tongue. It is important for the development of these children's language skills and identities that both languages are supported and the children are encouraged to use them.

A special objective of the early childhood education and care of **Sámi children** is to strengthen the children's Sámi identity and awareness of their own culture and to provide the children with an opportunity to learn Sámi folklore and traditional skills. The Sámi people are an indigenous people whose right to their own language and culture is protected under the Constitution<sup>88</sup>. The immediate environment and cooperation with guardians and the Sámi community shall be utilised in the activities. When ECEC is organised in one of the three Sámi languages, its special objective is to strengthen language development, comprehension and use. The aim is to improve the children's capabilities for acting in a Sámi language environment, to learn the Sámi language and to learn in the Sámi language. The personnel promote the preservation of the Sámi language and Sámi cultural heritage in cooperation with the guardians.

In the early childhood education and care for **Roma children**, a particular objective is to support the positive development of the children's identity and their awareness of their own history and culture as well as to increase their participation in the society. The linguistic development of the children is also supported in cooperation with the guardians and the Roma community. Whenever possible, opportunities are arranged for the children to use and acquire skills in the Roma language. The personnel promote the preservation of the Roma language and cultural heritage in cooperation with the guardians.

Early childhood education and care for children using **sign language** can be realised either in groups for sign language users or in groups consisting of children using sign language and spoken language. Sign language may be the child's mother tongue, first language or second language. Children using



sign language may be deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing. The goal of ECEC in sign language is to support and strengthen the children's linguistic and cultural identity by providing them with an opportunity to use and adopt sign language in Finnish or Finnish-Swedish in collaboration with guardians. The aim is also to improve the children's capabilities for acting in different language environments and to strengthen the children's Finnish or Finnish-Swedish sign language expression and reserve of signs.

The language skills of **foreign language speaking and plurilingual children**, as well as the development of their linguistic and cultural identities and self-esteem, are supported in early childhood education and care. The development of Finnish/Swedish skills is promoted with a goal-oriented approach in different areas of linguistic skills and capacity based on the needs and capabilities of children. Versatile interactive situations and learning environments are used to provide the children with opportunities to use and learn Finnish/Swedish as a second language. Concrete everyday language and its resource of expressions are the starting point for learning the Finnish/Swedish language. Language comprehension and production skills develop in connection with one another. Children learn to make observations as well as express their ideas, emotions, and opinions in a manner that is suitable for the situation and natural to them. Some of the children only start familiarising themselves with the Finnish culture and Finnish/Swedish as they begin ECEC. Early childhood education and care supports the integration of children into Finnish society. Guardians are informed about the goals, contents and methods of Finnish ECEC. The family's linguistic environment, language choices, formation of plurilingual and multicultural identities as well as the stages and importance of the development of mother tongue(s) are discussed with the guardians.

Whenever possible, children are provided with opportunities for also using and learning their own mother tongue(s). Children's mother tongue and learning Finnish/Swedish as a second language lay the foundation for their functional bilingualism and plurilingualism. The family is primarily responsible for preserving and developing the child's mother tongue(s) and culture. If necessary, an interpreter should be used in the discussions with the guardians to ensure mutual understanding.

## **Bilingual early childhood education and care**

Bilingual early childhood education and care is organised by decision of the municipality or a private actor. The goal of bilingual ECEC is to utilise the children's early sensitive period for language learning by providing the children with language education that is more versatile than mainstream education. Children are provided with opportunities for acquiring language skills and using languages functionally and through play, thus building a foundation for life-long language learning. The objective is that acting in a multilingual environment will stir children's linguistic curiosity and desire to experiment. This will also enable diverse cultures to meet naturally.

Bilingual early childhood education and care is divided into large-scale and small-scale bilingual education and care. The aim of small-scale bilingual ECEC education is to stir interest in and a positive attitude towards languages in children. The aim of large-scale bilingual ECEC is to create capabilities for the children to act in bilingual and multilingual environments.

### **Large-scale bilingual early childhood education and care**

#### **Early total immersion in the national languages in ECEC**

Immersion in Swedish may be organised in early childhood education and care provided in Finnish and immersion in Finnish in ECEC provided in Swedish. Immersion in Sámi may also be organised in ECEC provided in Finnish and Swedish. Early total immersion in the national languages is a programme that begins in ECEC and continues until the end of basic education. The language of

instruction and the second national language or Sámi combine to form an entity. ECEC is mainly provided in the immersion language. The development of the children's skills in their mother tongue (s) is supported in cooperation with homes and guardians. The aim in the activities is that each member of the personnel consistently uses one language only: either the immersion language or the language of instruction of ECEC. While children are encouraged to use the immersion language, they must also have the possibility to be understood in their mother tongue. The objective is to provide children with capabilities for continuing in pre-primary education and further on to basic education implemented as immersion.

### **Other large-scale bilingual early childhood education and care**

Part of the activities (at least 25%) in other large-scale bilingual ECEC is implemented in a language other than the language of education and care laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. Some children may speak this language as their mother tongue. The activities are planned so that the different language groups receive the support for linguistic development they need. The groups may also include children who speak neither of the languages used in the education and care as their mother tongue. The ECEC provider decides on a case-by-case basis when these arrangements support the child's development by discussing the matter with the guardian.

The activities of bilingual early childhood education and care are planned so that the ECEC realised in two languages forms an entity where both languages are present and developed gradually through the modelling of the personnel and active participation of the children. If possible, each member of the personnel will actively use only one of the languages. Children must also have the possibility to be understood in their mother tongue, in Finnish or Swedish. Children are encouraged to use both languages. The objective is to provide children with capabilities for continuing in bilingual or Finnish/Swedish pre-primary education and basic education.

### **Small-scale bilingual early childhood education and care**

#### **Language-enriched ECEC**

Language-enriched early childhood education and care refers to ECEC in which less than 25% of activities are regularly and systematically provided in a language other than the language of education and care laid down in the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care. The goal is to support language-learning, motivate children and diversify their language choices. A further aim may be to continue studies in language-enriched or other bilingual pre-primary education or basic education or other early language instruction.

#### **Language nest**

In early childhood education and care, language nest activities refer to activities strengthening children's awareness of their own culture. They also provide children with an opportunity to learn an endangered minority or indigenous language. The principles of language nest activities may be similar as those of language immersion.

## **4.7 Issues subject to local decisions**

The local curriculum for early childhood education and care shall specify the following objectives and principles for the pedagogical activities, taking the child's age and development as well as the characteristics of the different forms of ECEC services into account. The objectives and contents of pedagogical activities in the different ECEC services can be specified in the local curricula.

The local curriculum shall describe and specify

- principles of planning and implementing pedagogical activities as well as related monitoring and evaluation practices
- principles and practices of pedagogical documentation in ECEC
- principles applied to selecting working methods and directing their use
- practices that support children's play
- goals and contents of learning areas
- ways of taking into account the children's interests and participation in planning and implementing pedagogical activities
- implementation of ECEC for different linguistic and cultural groups
- implementation of bilingual ECEC, if this is provided
- supporting foreign-language speaking and plurilingual children in learning Finnish/Swedish
- cooperation and practices related to the family's language choices and supporting their mother tongue.

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<sup>86</sup> National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education 2014

<sup>87</sup> Section 8 § of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care and p. 88-89 of HE 40/2018 and Sign Language Act (359/2015)

<sup>88</sup> Section 17(3) of the Constitution of Finland (731/1999)