

Early Childhood Education and the Care Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina



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Preface	1
1 What is early childhood education and care?.....	3
2 Educational goals of ECEC in Kaarina.....	3
3 Values of ECEC in Kaarina.....	3
4 Mission.....	5
5 Vision.....	5
6 Child-orientedness	7
7 Special features of learning in ECEC	8
8 ECEC partnership	8
9 Methods and procedures in ECEC.....	9
9.1 Everyday elements of ECEC	9
9.2 Language is an interaction tool.....	9
9.3 Playing.....	10
9.4 Physical activities.....	11
9.5 Artistic experiences and self-expression	11
9.6 Exploration	12
10 Learning and operating environment	13
11 Special day care in Kaarina	14
11.1 Provision of special day care	14
12 ECEC of children with different language and cultural backgrounds	15
13 Continuum of ECEC, pre-school education and basic education.....	16
14 ECEC partners in Kaarina	16
15 ECEC follow-up, evaluation and quality system.....	18

Preface

The task of drafting National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was assigned to Stakes (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health) by the Government Resolution Concerning the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care (2002). As a result, National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland were released in 2003 and revised in 2005. 'The Curriculum Guidelines aim to promote the provision of ECEC on equal terms throughout the country, to guide the development of the content of the related activities, and to contribute to improving the quality of such activities by introducing uniform principles for their organisation' (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland 2003, 2). On the other hand, municipalities were assigned the tasks of evaluating the implementation of their ECEC services and specifying the content and methods for different ECEC activities in their own curricula.

The preparation process for the local ECEC curriculum in Kaarina was initiated after the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC had been released. At that time, in April 2002, a working group on ECEC curriculum was established, which was assigned the task of mapping out the field of ECEC and its activities in Kaarina. This work was completed in May 2003, when Part I of the ECEC Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina was released.

The process continued without interruption. The following step was to begin a discussion of the pedagogical principles and main guidelines behind local ECEC activities. In autumn 2003, the working group on ECEC was accompanied by four separate workshop groups, each of which comprised five to seven workers from different occupational groups and different parts of the town, representing different forms of day care. The work carried out in Kaarina was innovative, opening up new ways of working. Each workshop began work on the assigned topics at its own pace, and the last working group meetings were convened in late winter 2006. At its greatest, the number of local day care workers actively working on the ECEC curriculum, in addition to their normal job duties, reached almost fifty.

Step by step, local day care units in Kaarina then started to work on their own ECEC curricula, alongside the corresponding ECEC work at town level. Due to the unit-specific work, day care managers became gradually committed to the town-level ECEC work. Since the spring of 2005, various ECEC issues were discussed at managers' forums on a monthly basis. At manager level, this was the first time they engaged in a systematic pedagogical discussion on the provision of ECEC, in addition to economic and administrative issues.

From the beginning, it was considered important that as many workers as possible actually committed to the process. Indeed, it has been evident from the beginning that the process itself outweighs the results. The basic idea was that the process would enable workers to evaluate their working methods automatically, and that the ECEC curriculum would provide corresponding, new guidelines. To support this change, workers were provided with systematic education to raise their awareness and knowledge of some key topics in ECEC. In addition to external education, there was a need for common discussion and the exchange of ideas. This resulted in events such as regional evaluation evenings, which served as a common forum for almost all workers in a single day care district, allowing

them to discuss issues related to the evaluation of ECEC together. There has been a clear need for these common meetings, and they will continue to be held even after the ECEC Curriculum is completed.

ECEC partnership was selected as one of the focus areas of the ECEC work in Kaarina. Parents were invited to participate in an ECEC partnership discussion evening at the Community Centre of Littoinen in the early days of the process. This event turned out to be a great success, and was continued in the auditorium of Hovirinta. Since the beginning of the unit-specific work on the ECEC curriculum, parents have had the opportunity to take part in the work in a number of unit-specific ways.

The discussion of the ECEC curriculum has not been limited to day care. During the process, the working group on the ECEC curriculum has met with various co-operation partners from the local congregation, child welfare clinic, social services, private day care sector etc. Fruitful discussions have regularised existing co-operation practices and planted new seeds for future co-operation.

The ECEC Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina contains promises to which workers are ready to commit. Draft work has been completed for now, but common reflection, discussion, internal education and other practices stabilised in the process will continue. Self-evaluation will form an important part of our job, and we are committed to receiving feedback from our clients and colleagues. The work on the ECEC curriculum continues.

Maija-Liisa Rantanen

1 What is early childhood education and care?

‘Early childhood education and care is educational interaction taking place in young children’s various living environments, aimed at promoting their balanced growth, development and learning’ (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland 2003).

Supporting the home care of children, publicly operated and supervised ECEC comprises care, education and teaching. ECEC is systematic and goal-oriented interaction and collaboration, where the child’s spontaneous play is of key importance. An interactive partnership between the child, educators and parents constitutes an essential part of ECEC.

ECEC is provided in co-operation with a wide network serving the needs of the child and parents. In Kaarina, most ECEC activities are organised in the form of municipal day care, but other organisations are also involved in the provision of ECEC, such as the private day care sector, the Congregation of Kaarina and various other organisations. As far as town administration is concerned, the ECEC network covers some other areas of responsibility within the Education and Cultural Services and within other branches of administration. ECEC with pre-school education forms part of this and basic education in Kaarina constitutes an integrated whole that ensures continuity in the child’s development. Morning and afternoon activities for school children are also included in ECEC.

2 Educational goals of ECEC in Kaarina

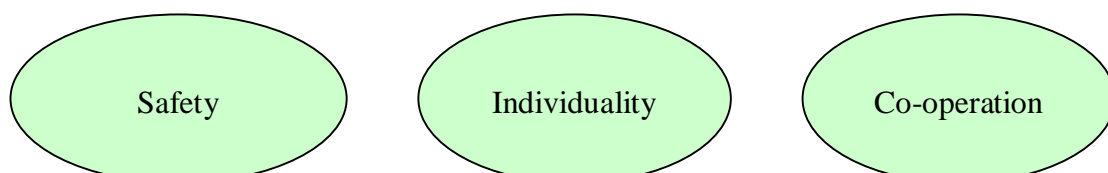
We regard childhood as an inalienable human right: every child has the right to childhood. A child’s overall wellbeing provides the best possible conditions for growth, development and learning. This ensures that the child is able to enjoy the company of other children and educators, experiencing joy and freedom of action in an unhurried, safe atmosphere. Children are interested in their environment and are able to direct their energy towards play, learning and everyday activities at an appropriately challenging level.

Since Kaarina is located close to nature, we want to raise our children to become adults who are able to enjoy and respect nature.

3 Values of ECEC in Kaarina

The ECEC curriculum defines the values and goals guiding ECEC work. Discussions in various day care units and with co-operation partners have dealt with the foundations of the work and the basic ideas behind it; questions on why and how work is done and what is considered important. The preparation process of the ECEC curriculum has involved discussions with parents on values at home and the expectations placed upon educators.

As a result of these discussions, the following values were introduced as the basic values of the day care sector in Kaarina:



Safety. This is what a 6-year-old has to say about safety: *‘ while mum and dad are at work, it’s safe to be in day care, you would die of hunger without day care, you would get lost, the nurse’s chatter is safe’.*

These thoughts express a firm grip on reality: first there is the home, parents and then a safe day care environment, where a familiar educator sets safe limits.

Educators have reflected on the physical safety of the child. How might children feel safe enough to dare to express their feelings? How might children feel accepted, or be loved as personalities of their own, and not left out? Children have a place amongst their peers, and there is active interaction between children and educators. All efforts are made to make the day care environment with its facilities, equipment and playgrounds a safe place for a playing child and his/her whole group of friends. It is in this way that the mental and physical dimensions of the day care environment form an integrated, safe entity.

Individuality. In a child’s words, individuality can mean that *‘everyone has something of their own, you may be quiet, or red-haired, you have friends even though you have freckles, not everyone can be good at, say, running’.*

This refers to the fact that in a child’s mind, everyone should be allowed to be their unique selves and be accepted with their weaknesses and strengths. Professionally trained educators are capable of encouraging and supporting the development of each child. Families and children are all individuals, and their individual needs and situations are taken into account whenever possible.

Co-operation. This is what children in an afternoon play group in Kaarina had to say about co-operation:

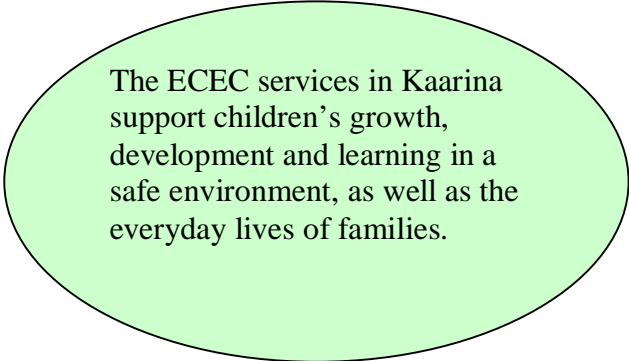
‘we help each other, clean up our mess, help if someone gets hurt, play by the rules’, and as the final statement, *‘if you can’t work together, you should become a scout’.*

Children associate co-operation with the functioning of a community, with seeking and receiving help, with everyone’s duty to take care of common issues, and with the ability to play by the agreed rules.

These general principles apply to well-functioning working communities too. Families are co-operation partners. The goal is to secure each child’s individual development and learning.

Day care is subject to regional co-operation. There are three day care districts: northern, central and western. There is also co-operation between different forms of day care, special day care and schools. Local planning meetings deal with issues such as day care applications, holiday arrangements and financial matters and day care forms part of various service networks, such as Education and Cultural Services, Social Services and Health Services. If needed, families are referred to other experts, requiring multi-professional co-operation within day care. Various day care workers with different educational backgrounds are commonly engaged in multi-professional co-operation in day care centres, working together for the benefit of the children.

4 Mission

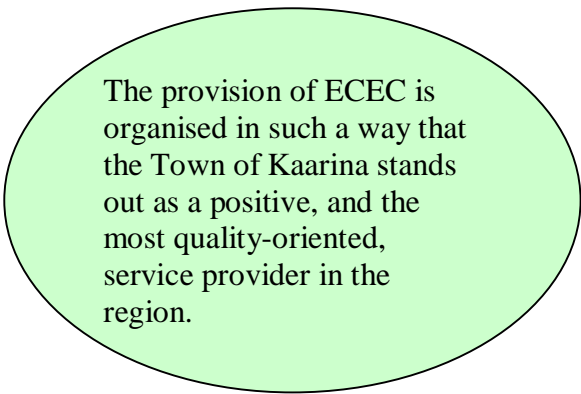


The ECEC services in Kaarina support children's growth, development and learning in a safe environment, as well as the everyday lives of families.

This mission defines the reason for the existence of day care in Kaarina and its purpose within the municipal service system. When organising day care services, the following aspects are important:

- With regard to location and other factors, the day care place is convenient for the child and family. There is sufficient flexibility to meet the different needs of families.
- Day care is based on a systematic and goal-oriented approach.
- An ECEC plan and/or pre-school educational plan drawn up for each child ensures support for individual growth, development and learning.
- ECEC is based on positive partnership in education and care.
- When needed, other types of expert help are used to support the child and family.
- Day care places are safe for children. Permanent and professionally trained educators create an emotionally and physically safe atmosphere.
- The professional skills of educators are maintained through training and other supportive measures.

5 Vision

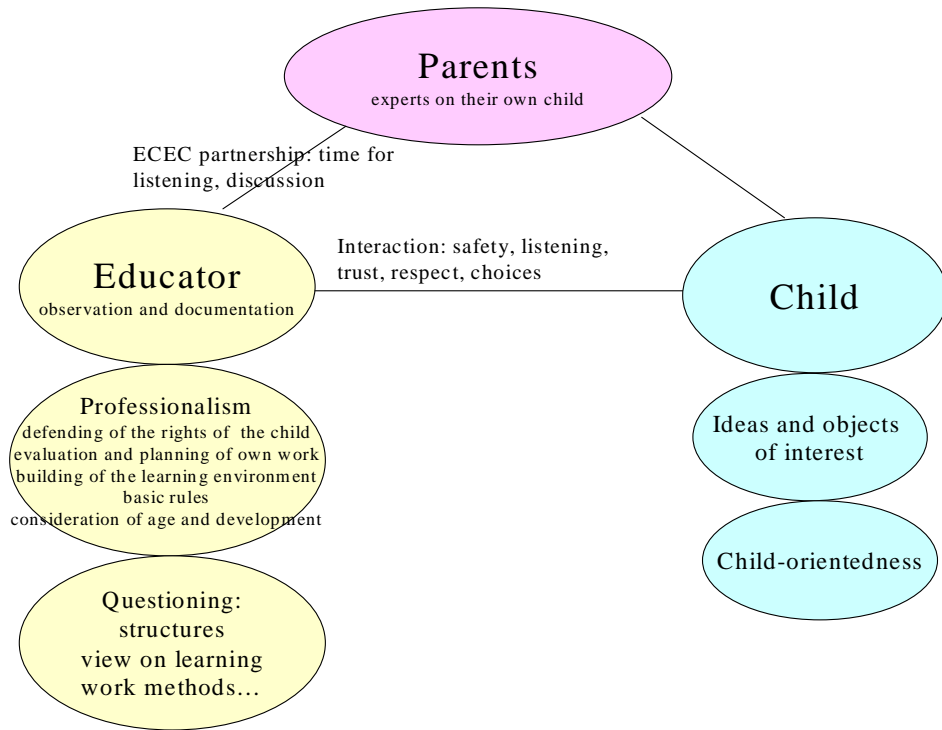


The provision of ECEC is organised in such a way that the Town of Kaarina stands out as a positive, and the most quality-oriented, service provider in the region.

The vision outlines the goals set for future day care in Kaarina, and extends to the year 2011. This is what day care in Kaarina will look like in around five years:

- The quality and evaluation system for day care is completed.
- The nature and geographical distribution of day care services are subject to demand.
- The structure of each day care group constantly complies with the Decree on Day Care.
- The occupancy rate in day care is reasonable without groups being too large.
- A child in need of special support or care is granted a place in a smaller group, or support of another kind.
- Small groups are favoured in all day care centres, group family day care centres as well as in morning and afternoon care.
- A skill survey for the entire personnel will have been conducted by 31 July 2007, and systematic education is provided on the basis of its results.
- If needed, day care personnel are provided with work counselling.
- Day care personnel are not allowed to smoke during working hours.
- A certain amount of time is invested in the pedagogical management of day care units.
- Another speech therapist is recruited for the needs of day care, and one special resource kindergarten teacher is recruited for each day care centre.
- Peripatetic kindergarten teachers increasingly focus on supporting schoolchildren, instead of pre-school education.

6 Child-orientedness



The principle of child-orientedness in the ECEC in Kaarina is based on the view of childhood as an intrinsic human right. The target is children's wellbeing. Children have the right to be children, whatever their age, appearance or personality. Children have the right to the care, education and support that is necessary in different situations. Therefore, each child is special.

On the basis of discussions with parents, an individual ECEC or pre-school education plan is drawn up for each child, and the implementation of the plan is assessed jointly at agreed intervals. Child-specific development files are compiled at the day care location, and their purpose is to describe the child's growth, development, learning, activities and interests. Parents have access to their child's file, which serves as a tool for ECEC and the evaluation of the child's development.

ECEC in Kaarina is based on interaction between the child and educators. In order to achieve fruitful interaction, it is required that educators genuinely be able to present and listen to the child. A self-evaluative approach to work enables educators to assess their ways of interacting with children. By listening to children, educators are able to build a safe growth environment in which children are accepted as individuals, and which encourages children to explore and learn. Small groups enable more personalised care and improved interaction between the child and educators.

7 Special features of learning in ECEC

Children learn by playing, moving, experimenting, talking, asking and exploring. Each child learns at his or her own pace. Children learn both by exploring their environment alone and in interaction with educators and other children.

The joy of learning arises from interest, involvement and pleasant, shared experiences. It is the task of the educator to serve as an encouraging supporter and a creator of a growth and learning environment that corresponds to the age and development level of the child. ECEC provides the child with the basis, abilities and motivation for life-long learning.

8 ECEC partnership

The realisation of the child's best interests and rights is the guiding principle in ECEC activities. ECEC partnership means the conscious commitment of parents and staff to collaboration aimed at supporting children's growth, development and learning. There is open interaction between the family and educators, which requires mutual trust and respect as well as equality.

From the child's viewpoint, it is important that the expectations directed at the child at home and in day care are not contradictory, and that there is mutual understanding on the corresponding objectives. Parents have the primary right to, and responsibility for, their child's education and care, and they also know their child best. On the other hand, educators have professional knowledge and competencies provided by their education and experience. Values, views and responsibilities in terms of ECEC partnership are discussed both within the educator community and with parents.

The aim of the ECEC partnership is to provide parents with support for the education and care of their child and to draw up an individual ECEC plan to support the child's growth, development and learning. Another aim is to enhance co-operation and networking between parents.

The following agreed procedures are included in the implementation of the ECEC partnership in Kaarina:

- Children are provided with a free excursion to their future day care place together with their parents.
- An ECEC or pre-school education plan is drawn up for the child (discussion in the autumn, evaluation discussion in the spring and whenever needed).
- Child's development file
- Daily discussions upon arrivals and departures
- Package Five
- Newsletters to families
- Parents' evening meetings
- Parents' groups
- Family events

9 Methods and procedures in ECEC

9.1 *Everyday elements of ECEC*

The principal aim of ECEC is the overall wellbeing of children. This is possible only when children feel safe. Such a feeling of safety is primarily fostered by a warm interaction between the child and educator, and an environment that corresponds to the age and development level of the child. The educator is able to recognise the child's individual needs by observing him/her. It is the process of meeting these very needs that creates the everyday contents of ECEC.

All basic care situations in ECEC are learning situations. The smaller the child, the more important it is to learn while eating, getting dressed etc. As the child grows and develops, his or her world gradually expands, and the number of things to learn increases. The principles according to which the child's growth is supported are created in co-operation with parents. It is possible to take the child's own environment and objects of interest into account with the help of the professional guidance of the educator. By introducing new elements to the child's play and other activities, the educator is able to widen the child's mind and enrich his or her world.

Seasonal changes and specific calendar events bring cultural content to ECEC, and these can be introduced to children in a variety of ways. Various orientations of ECEC make it possible to approach various phenomena from historical, mathematical, natural-scientific, aesthetic, ethical and religious viewpoints. The task of the educator in ECEC is to plan the child's everyday life in such a way that balanced growth and development are achieved.

9.2 *Language is an interaction tool*



The base of the Language Flower (Yellow Anemone, which is the town flower of Kaarina) denotes areas of language development that are practised in ECEC. Petals, on the other hand, refer to various methods for acquiring the skills related to language development.

Language is an interaction tool and supporting interaction means supporting the child's language development. Language also plays a vital role in the development of a child's personality. Young children express themselves by means of facial expressions, gestures and movements, and it is the task of the educator to react empathetically and encourage the child to interact.

Language is a tool for thinking which enables a child to imagine, absorb information, solve problems and think logically. ECEC environment supports the child's language development by providing a host of opportunities to learn concepts as well as produce and understand language. Fairytales, stories, poems and rhymes enrich language.

The ability to learn and the development of social skills are based on abilities related to the command of language. Language is used to support daily routines, in which talking and doing are combined. Active dialogue between the child and educator promotes language development. Children's confidence in their own capabilities and their courage to express themselves increase in learning situations. Children must also be provided with the opportunity to be quiet, alone or together.

The educator serves as the child's listener, conversation partner and model for language use. It is the task of the educator to make observations on the child's language development and to work actively to solve any problems by providing additional support or finding outside help. Day care in Kaarina utilises a variety of training and follow-up methods for supporting language development.

9.3 *Playing*

This is what a 5-year-old girl said about day care: *'It's like having fun and being with a friend'*.

Play is a powerful experience. It absorbs the player. It makes one want to try and imagine. It releases fears and tension. While playing, children explore the world around them and learn things and, through playing together, they make observations, gain experiences and create connections between thoughts and reality. Playing is based on make-believe, but for children, it is real.

Children start playing even before they become independent subjects. Lap play and jumping provide opportunities to encourage young children to interact. For very young children, the most important form of play is imitation. Young children use all of their senses to explore their environment. This tireless exploration actually serves as a foundation for the imagination and as a basis for future imaginative play.

Imagination frees children from the limitations of time and place, and enables players to plan their own activities. Imaginary play serves as a bridge between children's experiences

and their understanding of those experiences. Children, therefore, use their own play to understand things.

Play develops children's linguistic and physical skills and helps them to perceive their environment. It also improves children's ability to solve problems alongside their imaginative and social skills. Children need experiences provided by a variety of play activities. Sometimes they need to play alone and peacefully, while at other times it is better to play in large groups.

Educators' role in play is to observe children's development and things that matter to them at that moment. Educators may also be involved in planning the play and actually participate in it. In play, they may introduce beneficial patterns to promote children's learning. Educators must be familiar with the different developmental stages in terms of children's learning through play. When moving from one developmental stage to another, the child needs support. It is the task of educators to notice when play begins and arrange the time, place and equipment for play. A good educator has a sensitive eye for any need for support in identifying play ideas, role attainment, or improving negotiation skills. The educator respects the child by being interested in the child's play.

9.4 Physical activities

A 4-year-old boy summed up what family day care means to him: *'You get stronger and hungrier – then you eat and get wiser'*.

Physical activity supports children's overall development. When engaging in physical activities, the child learns to control his or her own body and becomes familiar with the environment. Awareness of his or her own body and skills makes the child more confident and encourages him or her to develop various skills further. The child has the right to enjoy physical activities without performance pressures. Regular physical exercise promotes the child's health and supports the development of a healthy way of life.

The educator provides the child with an opportunity to participate in a variety of physical activities on a daily basis, both inside and outside. Whenever possible, the educator ensures that the environment encourages physical activities, that there is a variety of equipment available for physical activities, and that the child is able to use such equipment in daily play. The educator encourages the child to exercise, taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the different seasons.

In Kaarina it is possible to arrange excursions to the nearby forests. Due to the short distances to excursion locations, Kaarina is home to a host of 'Metsämörri' activities, which aim to connect children with nature through personal experiences. A wide variety of venues for physical exercise, such as the Vapari Youth Centre, the indoor swimming pool, the ice stadium, Littoinen Community Centre, a number of playing fields and indoor exercise halls adjacent to schools and day care centres are available for ECEC purposes.

9.5 Artistic experiences and self-expression

As far as artistic experiences and expression are concerned, children do not find concrete creations that important. It is the doing itself that is important, as well as what happens during the process. Through art, children can make their thoughts and feelings visible for others, and are able to have experiences of different kinds. Doing and experiencing art gives pleasure and can create a feeling of safety. Children have faith in their own skills, in all areas of creativity.

The task of the educator is to provide the child with as many artistic experiences as possible. The educator shows respect for the child's work by showing genuine interest in it. In addition to pleasant experiences, art activities can be used to further the child's language development and logical thinking. It can also be used to develop the child's self-awareness, thinking, social skills and the internalisation of ethical and moral values.

In ECEC, children are familiarised with e.g. the following art forms:

In the visual arts, children can use their hands to do things and model shapes while familiarising themselves with the use of different materials and tools.

Music can be used in a variety of daily activities either spontaneously or systematically, from basic care situations to pre-planned celebrations. Musical activities include singing, playing and listening.

Different forms of literature provide children with various viewpoints on the world and also develop their language and imagination. Educators can provide children with enjoyable experiences with fairytales, poems, nursery rhymes and rhymes as well as with board, picture and educational books. The annual poem event, 'Minirunokaarina,' encourages children to create poems.

In drama, children are able to associate themselves with various roles and familiarise themselves with issues that interest them.

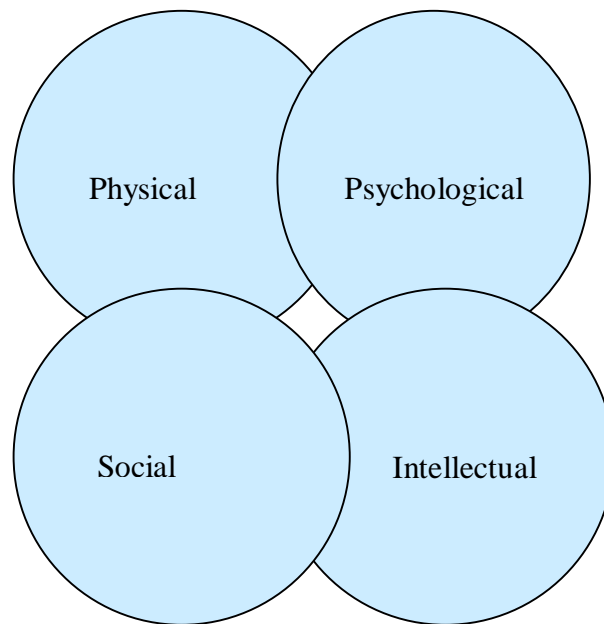
Dance is a physical activity filled with rich experiences, which combines music, physical exercise and drama.

9.6 Exploration

Children have an innate sense of exploration. Through exploring the surrounding world, they construct their individual selves. Exploration inspires children to compare and experiment - they learn by doing. Educators encourage children to use their senses and make sure that they have enough time to wonder, realise and learn through trial and error.

Educators listen to children and inspire their thinking by means of questions and discussions. The division between right and wrong is not always applicable. Children's choices and opinions are respected. Expeditions do not need to go too far: if the environment explored includes gardens, parks, forests and built-up environments in the children's immediate neighbourhood, it is still possible to cover each of the content areas of ECEC.

10 Learning and operating environment



The learning and operating environment can be divided into physical, psychological, social and intellectual environments. A good physical environment includes inside and outside facilities and the immediate neighbourhood as well as play and other equipment. Effective psychological environments consist of basic security, wellbeing and an approving, warm and encouraging atmosphere. Safety and peace are thus of special importance. Sound intellectual environments challenge and attract children to play and learn by exploring and experimenting. A constructive social environment ensures safe and stable relationships between educators and children as well as between children themselves. Children's wellbeing is based on an approving atmosphere which allows the expression of feelings and opinions both within educator communities and in the interaction between children and educators.

Upon entering ECEC, children bring the influences of their home environment to bear on the common learning and operational environment. That is why it is important that the ECEC partnership is used to create a confident and attentive atmosphere to support children's growth and development. The learning and operating environment is subject to continuous change. For example, changes in care group structures or educators, as well as of ECEC activities in general, affect children's growth and development.

Kaarina is a town close to nature. With its forests, sea and lakes, Kaarina provides a diverse learning and operating environment. The long history of Kaarina contributes to the cultural richness of the town, which is also reflected in the diversity of local day care facilities. Through different forms and units of day care, the entire learning and operating environment, or certain parts of it, can be utterly different. Indeed, it is the task of professional educators to take advantage of all the tools available. Educators take into account the age structure and development level of the corresponding care groups and change the environment in accordance with need. Children are also involved in the

building of learning and operating environments. The issues mentioned above are taken into consideration when drafting unit-specific ECEC curricula.

11 Special day care in Kaarina

The objective of special day care is to ensure the best possible conditions for children to work independently and as group members. Children may need support to be able to play, move, talk or make friends.

Children may have special needs for support, for example in the following areas:

- language and communication
- social interaction
- direction and/or paying attention
- intellectual area, e.g. learning difficulties
- motoric development
- support needs due to a disability or long-term disease
- need for child welfare support measures

Children may have support needs related to one or more developmental areas. In addition to day care support measures, children's support needs can be identified by examinations carried out by a doctor, psychologist, speech therapist, physical therapist, family welfare clinic staff or special healthcare staff.

An individual learning plan or pre-school education plan (ILP) is drawn up for each child in need of special support. An individual educational plan (IEP) is drawn up for those children subject to the extended, 11-year period of compulsory education. The plan is drawn up in co-operation between the child's parents, educators and other parties involved in the rehabilitation process. The individual strengths of the child and the need for support are the starting points for the pedagogical planning process. This plan describes how the learning environment needs to be changed and specifies the required support services. It also describes the corresponding evaluation and follow-up measures.

11.1 Provision of special day care

In Kaarina, special day care is provided in the form of regular day care groups in day care centres or family day care centres with the help of reduced group sizes and/or assistants and special day care staff. Special day care is also provided in integrated special groups (each group comprises 12 – 15 children, around five of which are in need of special support). A special kindergarten teacher working with the group is responsible for the provision of special ECEC for children in need of such support. At the moment, in Kaarina there are two special groups for children needing support in language development and communication, and one for children needing support for attention difficulties and social interaction.

As regards those working in special day care, peripatetic kindergarten teacher and day care speech therapist support staff work in day care centres, family day care centres and morning/afternoon activity centres. A peripatetic kindergarten teacher is responsible for

observing child groups in the corresponding district, evaluating children's support needs and participating in the provision of special ECEC. Peripatetic kindergarten teachers consult day care staff, refer children for the relevant examinations whenever needed, draw up an individual learning plan for each child in co-operation with parents and day care staff, and participate in extensive networking activities. They also conduct annual pre-school group examinations to determine children's readiness for school. The work of a day care speech therapist is devoted to the development of children's language, speech and interaction skills. Speech therapists work in co-operation with parents, day care staff, and e.g. health care staff. The objectives of speech therapy are the prevention of communication disorders, the earliest possible diagnosis and rehabilitation and, if needed, referrals for further examinations. In accordance with the care place specific district division in Kaarina, the health centre speech therapist provides services for certain day care children. A special resource kindergarten teacher works at the 24-hour day care centre, Rinkeli, responsible for the remedial teaching of children in need of special support and the related issues, in co-operation with families, the staff of the centre and other co-operation partners. Special day care personnel also include group and personal assistants supporting individual children or child groups.

In day care, it is possible to observe risk factors related to children's development and learning disabilities in the early years. Thus, it is possible to prevent the accumulation of difficulties and their worsening. With respect to day care staff, the consideration of children's individual needs in order to arrange sufficient support requires further education and the development of network co-operation with schools and Social Services. Co-operation partners may include the child welfare clinic, Social Services, Disabled Services, family welfare clinic, the school, special care district, Turku University Hospital and various therapists and psychologists.

12 ECEC of children with different language and cultural backgrounds

Linguistic and cultural minorities. Children with Swedish as their first language have a right to day care in their mother tongue.

In Kaarina there are three day care centres for Swedish-speaking children: Koivukulma / Björkhagen and two day care centres operating on an outsourced basis (Skogslängtan and Voivala Child House with its Swedish-speaking groups). ECEC activities provided by these centres take into account the Swedish culture and traditions in Finland and support children's Swedish language development. These day care centres are intended for children with Swedish as their mother tongue and for bilingual children. In addition to Finnish-speaking partners, the Swedish-speaking day care sector in Kaarina co-operates with the Swedish-speaking school sector in Turku, the Swedish Congregation of Turku and Kärkulla Federation of Municipalities.

Finnish as a second language. Children belonging to other language and cultural groups are provided with day care and pre-school education in regular, Finnish-speaking day care groups. ECEC for children from different language and cultural backgrounds supports the development of children's positive self-image by taking into account their own cultural backgrounds. Children with a language other than Finnish as their first language learn Finnish through natural interaction with Finnish-speaking children and adults.

The realisation of a multicultural working approach requires close co-operation with family providers. Due to the parents' different backgrounds, there is great variation in their ability to support their children's language development. When children enter day care, their families' language, cultural background and religious convictions are discussed with family providers. At the same time, they receive information on Finnish day care and pedagogical methods, and various cultural differences affecting the child's everyday life are reconciled. If needed, an interpreter is provided. An individual learning plan is drawn up for the child containing his or her personal short-term goals related to learning Finnish, support measures and other possible support needs. The importance of the child's mother tongue in learning Finnish is emphasised in the co-operation with the parents.

Special emphasis is laid on the development of Finnish language skills in such a way that the child first learns basic everyday vocabulary and is able to use the language naturally in different situations. In order to improve understanding, various supportive communication methods (pictures, gestures, over-pronounced way of speaking, key words) can be used in groups. It is important for the building of the child's identity that things peculiar to the child's culture are also valued and visible in everyday life in day care. The objective is to give the child sufficient Finnish language skills and the corresponding learning capabilities by the time he or she reaches compulsory school age.

13 Continuum of ECEC, pre-school education and basic education

Within day care, there is regional cooperation between different forms of day care. For example, some children in family day care have a spare, day care place in a certain group within a day care centre. In such cases, a special booklet provides the staff of the day care centre with useful basic information on the child. In each day care centre, a summary of the child's growth and development is drawn up around the time of his or her birthday. If a child is transferred from one day care centre to another, it must be ensured that the parents bring the child's individual ECEC plan, a summary of the child's growth and development, and the child's development file to the new location.

In Education and Cultural Services, there are three school and day care districts, within which schools and pre-school units co-operate on a local basis. Pre-school teachers, school teachers and special education teachers co-operate for example when forming classes for new intakes or reflecting on the needs of individual children.

14 ECEC partners in Kaarina

Private day care. When needed, the Town of Kaarina purchases day care services from private service providers. Outsourcing services serves as a flexible resource that can be used when the capacity of public day care services is insufficient and it is not possible or economical to use public resources for additional day care.

Home congregation. According to the Act on Day Care, one of the tasks of day care is to provide religious education. To a great extent, congregational child and youth work shares

the same basic values and vision as ECEC. In both cases it is considered important that children have access to caring people supporting their growth and development. Children are allowed to be the age they are and their individual selves, and they have the right to be members of a caring community. Religious education in ECEC offers children an opportunity to experience an atmosphere of devotion, silence and wonder, and to ask questions about religious issues. Religious education in ECEC focuses on the traditions and contents of the Church and Christian culture.

Co-operation with the home congregation materialises in the form of Sunday schools for day care children and various church events. These are planned by a specific working group that meets twice a year at the Church of Kaarina. The congregation provides support for day care staff in matters related to religious education. One of the challenges shared by ECEC providers and the congregation is the development of family work.

Child welfare clinic. Co-operation with child welfare clinics concentrates on all children under school age. Day care staff and health care nurses at child welfare clinics located in the same district co-operate on a regular basis to support the welfare of children and families. Package Five serves as a co-operation tool in the observation and developmental evaluation of children aged 5. Co-operation with maternity clinics includes regular information meetings for those participating in family education.

Family welfare clinic. The family welfare clinic focuses on children under school age. Its activities aim to support children and families in problem situations, by means of early intervention. Co-operation between family welfare clinic and day care staff usually comprises consultation provided for individual clients.

Health centre psychologist. The work of the health centre psychologist focuses on children's overall development or a special problem area, preparedness for school, parental support needs and help in various crisis situations. When needed, a health centre psychologist visits day care centres to observe children's behaviour and provides consultative help to day care staff.

The school psychologist participates in the child-specific assessment of preparedness for school and the appropriate type of school.

Psychiatric clinic for children and youths. Co-operation with day care is related to individual clients. When needed, day care staff may ask for consultative help.

Family work. The Social Services have nominated a specific contact person for day care services. Day care staff may ask for consultative help from social and family services. If a child is placed in a day care facility on the recommendation of the Social Services, parents, day care staff and representatives of the Social Services participate jointly in follow-up meetings to support the child's welfare.

The Leisure Services and health centre physiotherapist. Together with a special physical education instructor working within the leisure services of the Town of Kaarina, the health centre physiotherapist instructs a motor coordination group for day care children. Day care staff members recommend this group to children that need support to improve their motor coordination. When needed, the physiotherapist visits day care centres to observe children,

provides consultative help to staff and assists in the planning and implementation of rehabilitation.

15 ECEC follow-up, evaluation and quality system

The purpose of ECEC follow-up and evaluation is to support children's welfare and improve operations on a continuous basis. The ECEC Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina serves as the cornerstone for the quality evaluation of ECEC there.

In accordance with the general guidelines of the Town of Kaarina, each day care facility must have an up-to-date fire and evacuation plan, which also defines measures to be taken in exceptional circumstances. A risk management plan drawn up for each day care unit defines the unit-specific risk factors for wellbeing at work and measures to remove or minimise them. In the Town of Kaarina, an early support model is used to pre-evaluate potential stress factors at work.

According to the ECEC follow-up and evaluation plan of Kaarina (Appendix 3), the most important types of evaluation are child-oriented, interactive evaluation, the self-evaluation of the staff, working community and operating environment, as well as the evaluation related to ECEC partnership and parental feedback. The evaluation of ECEC is mainly qualitative and descriptive in character. The received feedback is analysed in order to draw the necessary conclusions.

ECEC partnership materialises e.g. in the form of an education discussion arranged in the autumn for the family of a new day care child. Here, the common methods and goals related to the child's growth and development, as well as the co-operation between home and the day care/pre-school centre, are agreed upon. Before the discussion, parents reflect on and record their own wishes, after which the implementation principles of care, education and teaching are jointly agreed upon. The child can participate in the discussion as agreed by adults. Issues agreed upon in the discussion are written down in the form of an ECEC plan or pre-school education plan, which serves as a basis for the child's ECEC and/or pre-school education. The child's growth and development are evaluated with regular documentation and discussions with the child and parents.

The ECEC partnership and the follow-up of the child's growth and development are implemented regardless of the child's age. In addition to jointly filling out a form entitled, "Observations on the child's growth and development", there is a more accurate observation designed for 5-year-olds, called Package Five, which is summarised in the form entitled, "Observations on the child at home and in day care". Both forms are sent to the child welfare clinic for information.

In January, pre-school aged children have an opportunity to participate in a preparedness for school group examination. In the spring, a form entitled, "Observations on the child at home and in pre-school in support of initial education" is filled out together with the child to help the future teacher, paying attention to the various wishes of the child and parents, possible support needs and individual strengths.

Daily interactive evaluation includes discussions with the child on group interaction and past events. Discussions with children include reflection on what they want to learn, what has improved and what could be done differently.

The child development file is one of the tools used in Kaarina. Child development files are used for the documentation of children's growth, development and learning, their thoughts, work and objects of interest. Different forms and units of day care utilise child development files in different ways, depending on their individual needs and experiences. Child development files encourage children to evaluate themselves, a purpose of which is to encourage children to understand themselves as learners.

ECEC staff members evaluate their own work in unit-specific ways. A uniform form to be used by all ECEC staff has been created both for the evaluation of pedagogical practices and that of the work of the day care community. Annual development discussions take place in each day care unit. Pre-school education staff members evaluate their own work and the realisation of the pre-school objectives in the form of an annual report.

If desired, parents in Kaarina may participate in the evaluation and development of the ECEC Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina as well as that of their own day care centre. ECEC and pre-school implementation in Kaarina is evaluated on the basis of feedback received from customers.

ECEC evaluation practices are developed on a continuous basis. By trying out different methods it is possible to identify the best ones and establish uniform practices for ECEC in Kaarina.

Members of the working group on the ECEC Curriculum during the preparation process:

Eija Birkman, Kindergarten Teacher, Kult anummi Day Care Centre
Satu Jääskeläinen, Activities Instructor, Morning and Afternoon Child Care Services,
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Maret Kosola, Special Kindergarten Teacher, Rinkeli Day Care Centre
Eija Lankiniemi, Family Day Care Manager (District IV), Head of Day Care Centre,
Rauvola Day Care Centre
Maarit Linnavuori, Kindergarten Teacher, Koivu ja Tähti Family Day Care Centre
Raija Mansikkala, Special Peripatetic Kindergarten Teacher
Merja Nilsson, Family Day Care Provider (District III)
Maija-Liisa Rantanen, Head of Day Care Centre, Kesämäki Day Care Centre

Workshop groups on ECEC Curriculum:

1. Child and learning in ECEC in Kaarina
Minna Ahde, Special Peripatetic Kindergarten Teacher
Tiina Huhtala, Special Peripatetic Kindergarten Teacher
Tiina Lehtonen, Outdoor Activities Instructor, Morning and Afternoon Child Care Services, Kaarina
Maria Nurminen, Children's Nurse, Littoinen Day Care Centre
Tarja Savioja, Kindergarten Teacher, Kultanummi Day Care Centre
Helena Takkinen, Family Day Care Provider (District III)
2. ECEC growth and learning environment in Kaarina
Marja Aaltonen, Kindergarten Teacher, Koristo Day Care Centre
Jaana Kalliokoski, Kindergarten Teacher, Kesämäki Day Care Centre
Saila Lind, Child Care and Education Worker, Rauvola Day Care Centre
Eila Lipponen, Family Day Care Provider (District I)
Tiina Loikas, Family Day Care Provider (District I)
Riikka Rantalaiho, Child Care and Education Worker, Rauvola Day Care Centre
Soili Sauhula, Family Day Care Provider (District IV)
Laila Tanskanen, Outdoor Activities Instructor, Morning and Afternoon Child Care Services, Kaarina
3. ECEC methods and practices in Kaarina
Päivi Kaittila, Kindergarten Teacher, Kesämäki Day Care Centre
Raija Kaukonen, Family Day Care Provider (District II)
Pirkko Keto, Outdoor Activities Instructor, Morning and Afternoon Child Care Services, Kaarina
Arja Rintala, Family Day Care Provider (District III)
Jaana Sinervä-Läpinen, Children's Nurse, Hovirinta Day Care Centre
Tuire Väisänen-Kivelä, Kindergarten Teacher, Rinkeli Day Care Centre
4. ECEC follow-up and evaluation in Kaarina
Heli Ali-Eskola, Children's Nurse, Littoinen Day Care Centre
Sirke Jäppinen, Kindergarten Teacher, Poikluoma Day Care Centre
Terttu Kokko, Outdoor Activities Instructor, Morning and Afternoon Child Care Services, Kaarina
Kaarina Kosola, Kindergarten Teacher, Kuovinkatu Day Care Centre
Katja Kunnas, Children's Nurse, Rinkeli Day Care Centre
Margita Kylkis, Child Care Assistant, Björkhagen Day Care Centre
Anne Seppälä, Family Day Care Provider (District III)
Petra Varttinen, Kindergarten Teacher, Kesämäki Day Care Centre

Object of evaluation	Method of evaluation	Evaluator	Time/frequency of evaluation
A Follow-up and evaluation of the child's growth and development	1. Education discussions with parents	Staff and parents (and child)	1-2 times per year, whenever needed
	2a. Child's individual ECEC and pre-school education plan	Staff and parents (and child)	1-2 times per year, whenever needed
	2b. Individual Learning Plan (ILP) / Individual Education Plan (IEP)	Staff and parents (and child)	Whenever needed, at regular intervals
	3. Child Development File	Child, parents, staff	As agreed in different day care units
	4. Interactive evaluation with child	Children and staff	On a daily basis
	5. Package Five	Parents, staff, child	Around the time of child's 5th birthday
	6. Observations on the child in day care	Staff	Around the time of child's birthday, in co-operation with child welfare clinic, if needed
	7. Observations on the child at home and in day care to support initial education	KT responsible for pre-school education, parents, child	In April-May
	8. Tests on phonological awareness	KT responsible for pre-school education	In autumn and spring
	9. Controlled Drawing Test	KT responsible for pre-school education	In autumn
	10. School readiness group examination	Staff	In January
B ECEC implementation evaluation	As agreed in unit	Staff	As agreed in unit
C Pre-school implementation evaluation	Drawing up of annual pre-school report (T-file/pre-school education/annual reports)	KTs responsible for pre-school education	In June at the latest
D Educator's self-evaluation	1. Evaluation of pedagogical practices	Employee + supervisor	As agreed in unit, at least once per term of office
	2. Development discussion	Employee + supervisor	In accordance with the schedule provided, at least once per term of office
E Implementation of ECEC partnership (parents' involvement in ECEC)	As agreed in unit (e.g. discussion / thematic evenings)	Parents and staff	As agreed in unit
F ECEC and pre-school education customer satisfaction	1. Customer satisfaction inquiry	Parents	In May
	2. Feedback from parents on pre-school education	Parents	In February, in connection with discussions on school readiness

In addition to theoretical expertise on ECEC and developmental psychology, the ECEC Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina is based on the following documents:

- Act on Child Custody and Right of Access 361/1983
- Act on Children's Day Care 36/1973
- Act on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals 272/2005
- Act on Services and Assistance for the Disabled 380/1987
- Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients 812/2000
- Amendment of Social Welfare Act 50/2005
- Basic Education Act 628/1998
- Basic Education Decree 852/1998
- Child Welfare Act 683/193
- Child Welfare Decree 1010/1983
- Convention on Children's Rights 1991
- Core Curriculum for Morning and Afternoon Activities for Schoolchildren 2004
- Core Curriculum for Pre-School Education in Finland 2000
- Decree on Children's Day Care 239/1973
- Decree on Teaching Qualifications 986/1998
- Equality Act 21/2004
- Government Decree on Qualification Requirements for Social Welfare Professionals 608/2005
- Government Resolution on the National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care 2002
- National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland
- Pre-School Curriculum of the Town of Kaarina 2001
- Programme for Children's Services in Kaarina 2005-2010
- Strategy of Kaarina 2004-2008