



FinlandWay[®]
BETTER BEGINNINGS

Pedagogical Guide 2020
FinlandWay[®]

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FinlandWay®

BETTER BEGINNINGS

FinlandWay® model

Early childhood education starts from 2 (minimum of 1,5) years and continues until child enters primary school.

FinlandWay® includes classes from Nursery (1,5-2 year old children), Kindergarten 1 (3 year old children), Kindergarten 2 (4 year old children), Preschool (5 year old children) [and if required, Preschool 2 to 6 year old children depending on the national curriculum for primary school).

The school year is divided into 5 thematic periods (each 6 weeks) (total 30 weeks). These thematic periods are built around content specific themes that contain aspects of the main goals presented earlier.

In thematic periods the content, learning orientations (such as math, language, natural sciences, history and society, artistic and ethical issues) and everyday experiences of children are linked together in shared pedagogical (play based and participatory) interaction.

Each Period includes:

- The Starting week, introducing a new thematic topic
- 4-5 weeks of different content and activities within the theme of the period
- the evaluation week, documenting and evaluating the new competences and skills and
- Optional project learning week (designed by the teachers)

Teachers role

In early childhood education a teacher is a guide and enabler of learning for young children. Children have the potentiality and competence for learning and they are normally curious towards their environment and other human beings.

When teaching, the teacher in fact guides the children to the opportunities of learning and lets them explore, make connections and participate in shared meaning making with teachers and their peers.



Plan

Teacher observes the interests, developmental level and needs of children in her class. Teacher uses the FinlandWay® materials and adapts them for her class. Teacher prepares additional materials (books, craft materials, toys) to support children to be involved in the learning topics and objectives.

Support

Teacher uses the FinlandWay® materials and extra materials planned for her class. She aims towards systematic and structured implementation and promotes children's active learning and participation in the learning process. Teacher ensures there is enough time for children's personal inquiries and exploration as well as enough time for play-based activities for children to strengthen their conceptual development and practice the new skills in class.

Document

Teacher observes and participates in children activities. She asks children to explain their thinking processes and show their initiatives. She supports children not only to show their learning of products but actively encourages children to pay attention to the learning processes. She writes notes, takes pictures and videos of these processes and reports them daily to learning portfolios of children to strengthen children's, their parents and her own understanding about the holistic learning process.

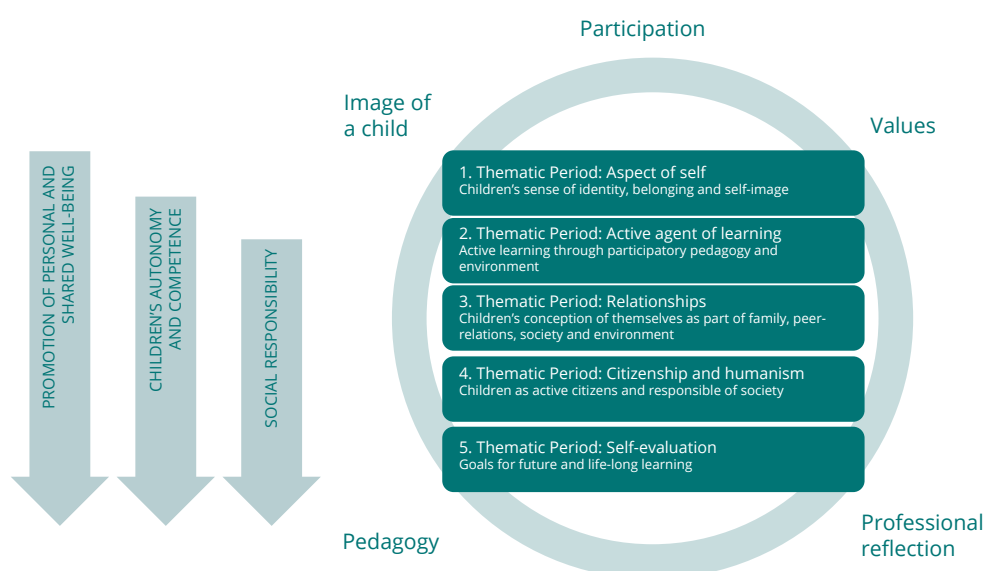
Structure of the year

FinlandWay® school year is based on five thematic periods.

In thematic periods, the content, learning orientations (such as math, language, natural sciences, history and society, artistic and ethical issues) and everyday experiences of children are linked together in shared pedagogical interaction.

FinlandWay® approach follows the theoretical phenomenon of the learning bridges in early childhood education. The bridges support children to connect and adapt new knowledge and skills to the holistic picture of learning and developing. Learning is based on interaction, collaboration, meaningful learning and on educators' support for these elements. The process of building the learning bridges is pedagogical and psychological know-how about children's learning and development, and practical knowledge about how teachers can scaffold that. Bridges are also an apt metaphor for building connections between different learning environments and the learners and experts in them. Bridges are then viewed as pedagogical pathways.

Overview of the FinlandWay® yearly program and thematic periods



The first thematic period focuses on aspects of self and aims to promote children's sense of identity, belonging and self-image. The key question is "Who am I?"

During the first thematic period the pedagogical focus is on each child's individual skills, strengths and learning capabilities. The educators' role is to get to know children in their class, help them to feel the joy of learning, build shared and individual learning goals with children and their families for children's ECE year, and support children in their developing identity and self-image activities.

The second thematic period focuses on the active learning through participatory pedagogy and environment. This period aims to enhance children's competence as active agents and promotes their independent initiatives, behavioural skills (such as self-regulation and resilience), sense of purpose and positive learning experiences. The key question is "What can I?"

During the second thematic period the pedagogical focus is on scaffolding children's competence and learning when they are practicing new cognitive, social and physical skills and abilities. Teacher's role is to design activities that enable children's active agency in play, creative self-expression and exploration of the environment.

The third thematic period focuses on relationships and aims to support children's conceptions of themselves as part of family, peer-relations, society and environment. The key question is "Who am I among others?"

During the third period pedagogical focus is on social activities, rules of the class (community), sharing, negotiating and creating shared ECE goals and cultural items for the class.

The role of teacher is to participate in social interaction, help children to understand their feelings and others' perspectives and support children to practice responsible relations between peers, adults and environment.

The fourth thematic period focuses on citizenship and humanism. It is based on idea of children as active citizens and responsible members of society, and it contains aspects of well-being of others and sustainable development. The key question is "What is my responsibility of others and environment?"

During the fourth period pedagogical focus is on democratic education, sustainable development and critical learning. It aims to promote children's membership in the society and support them in responsible behavior and help them to understand views of others.

The fifth thematic period focuses on self-evaluation and setting goals for life-long learning through reflection and feedback skills. The thematic period collects the goals and achievements of the past school year. The key question is "Who we want to become in the future and how can we reach our goals?"

During the fifth thematic period, the pedagogical focus is on participatory learning and social responsibility, decision-making skills and democratic skills of negotiation. Children will learn to set goals for further learning and development.

Yearly Schedule

The year is organised through five (5) periods each with a specific theme (see above) and topic for each class. Each period contains six weeks of active learning. One academic year is total of 30 weeks of pedagogical and structured activities and continuous learning.

A period starts with an introduction week and ends with an evaluation week.

FinlandWay® package also offers projects of two or three weeks. These projects can be organised between the periods, during summer school or at the end of school year.

FinlandWay® teachers are supported to organize, plan, implement and evaluate the national traditions and festivals following the FinlandWay® weekly and daily structures.

Period outline	
Start week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic introduction to the theme • Setting the scene and raising children's curiosity • Introducing the characters and main concepts • Question: What do the children know about the theme?
Weeks 2-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing new concepts and sub-concepts • Exploration and adventures around the theme • Learning about the concepts • Building the joy of learning
Weeks 4-5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building understanding and emphasizing the creativity of children • Meaning-making process with teacher and peers • Creating conclusions
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and reflection • Celebrating the learning goals • Exhibitions or performances to parents

Weekly structure

In Finland, early childhood education **orientations replace school subjects**. This is the basis of phenomenon-based learning approach that supports students to focus on the learning theme, not individual schoolbooks.

The Orientations include:

- Language and literacy (vocabulary, letters, syllables, stories, poems, rhythms of the language, communication and self-expression)
- Exploring the world (math, science, media, culture, history)
- Arts and music (visual arts, music, rhythm, melodies, playing instrument, painting, drawing, moulding, crafting, building 3-dimensional models, preformation skills, dancing, expression of self)
- Physical education and well-being (health education, fine- and gross motor skills, body balance, understanding space, controlling movements, taking care of self and others, nutritional education, mindfulness, relaxation)
- Social skills (participation, taking care of others, belonging a group, being a member of a society)

Teaching focus shifts every day from constructive learning approach to social learning approach.

Each week follows the weekly structure of FinlandWay®, focusing on a selection of daily guidelines which make sure that learning experiences will be balanced, varied and all learning guidelines will be approached appropriately.

Weekly Routine



Storytelling

Language & Literacy (letters, vocabulary, poems, stories, songs), fine arts and science



Exploration

Natural science, Math, Environmental studies, Cultural studies, Media education, Fine Arts and Crafts



Arts and Music

Music (songs, playing instruments, melodies, rhythms), fine arts (drawing, painting, etc.), crafts (moulding, 3-dimension arts, etc.), science, physical education & motoric exercises



Wellbeing

Physical education, motoric exercises, music (songs, rhythms), crafts (molding, 3-dimension arts, etc.), food and health education, science and wellbeing studies



Recap

All above. Teacher and children evaluate and reflect on the learning. They have opportunities to return weekly activities and/ or finish school works. Teacher can also guide those children who have issues in orientation or need special support.

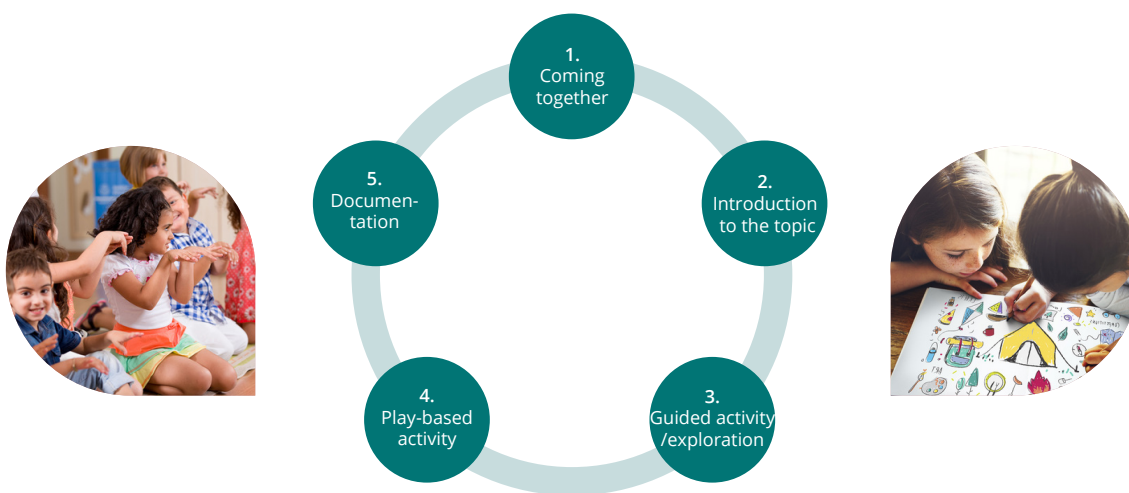
Daily Activities

The Orientations form a basis for the daily activities in FinlandWay®.

Daily activities emerge through phenomenon-based learning and support the participation of children and their active agency.

Each day follows the daily cycle of FinlandWay®, including 5 pre-designed activities, scripted in teachers' platform. Teachers receive daily learning objectives and documentation instructions so they can reflect with the children and report learning goals, skills development, and knowledge gained at the end of the day, week and the thematic period.

Daily Routine



During playful and participatory activities FinlandWay®'s instructions guide and support the teacher to:

- Acknowledging each student, raising curiosity/motivation about daily theme
- Introducing the learning theme for the day, support students to realise their starting level knowledge
- Guides pedagogical activities for deepening the understanding about theme, supports students to explore, negotiate and create understanding
- Help students to build a play/game/creative activity, observe students, support individual students and enhances participation and involvement
- Gather students' ideas and initiatives to form a basis of shared meaning-making during documentation phase.

The purpose of the evaluation

In Finland the goal of evaluation is to understand learning of children through assessment methods of observation, documentation and discussions. It focuses on both learning and teaching and provides information for improving and supporting further learning. Children and parents are normally part of this assessment process. Children's own experiences and voices are included in assessment by asking children themselves about their learning.

Assessment is carried out to develop the pedagogy in order to have high-quality early childhood education, to develop regular activities

Furthermore, assessment is implemented:

- To improve the prerequisites of children's development and learning.
- To follow children's skills and competences related to learning objects and goals

Evaluation and documentation in FinlandWay®

Documentation at FinlandWay® has two different meanings:

For the children's documentation:

- Offers learning possibilities,
- Improves children's skills for meta-cognition and self-regulation
- Serves as a document for later assessment process.

For the teachers' documentation

- Offers possibilities to reflect on pedagogical skills for professional development
- Creates understanding about children's interests and competencies
- Improves the quality of education in class.

The traditional assessment lists are harmful for young children: they are aimed only at reporting separate academic skills and ignore that learning in early years should be approaching the whole child. Traditional evaluation scales are replicating those from primary education and even secondary education where the goals are mainly cognitive. In many systems the learning targets are not reflecting children's development and learning, but only the pages of their schoolbooks.

In Finland the assessment for early childhood education aims to focus on learning rather than testing. There are no national tests for pupils in early or basic education. Instead, teachers are responsible for observing and giving assessments in their respective areas of learning included in the curriculum.

In FinlandWay® we focus on promoting the child's wellbeing, competence and skills for learning. This means that the teaching is not focused on narrow subjects or single skills that are traditionally easy to test. That is why we document daily children's activities that reflect their cognitive, artistic-motoric and social development more deeply. This gives more accurate information about what the child can already perform and which skills he/she is still practicing. Parents can also support the development by asking their child about what they did today, which skills they practiced this week and how they felt about the learning. For children it is essential to view themselves as active learners and feel that they are loved for one's value and the caregivers and educators respect the process of learning and not just the scores.

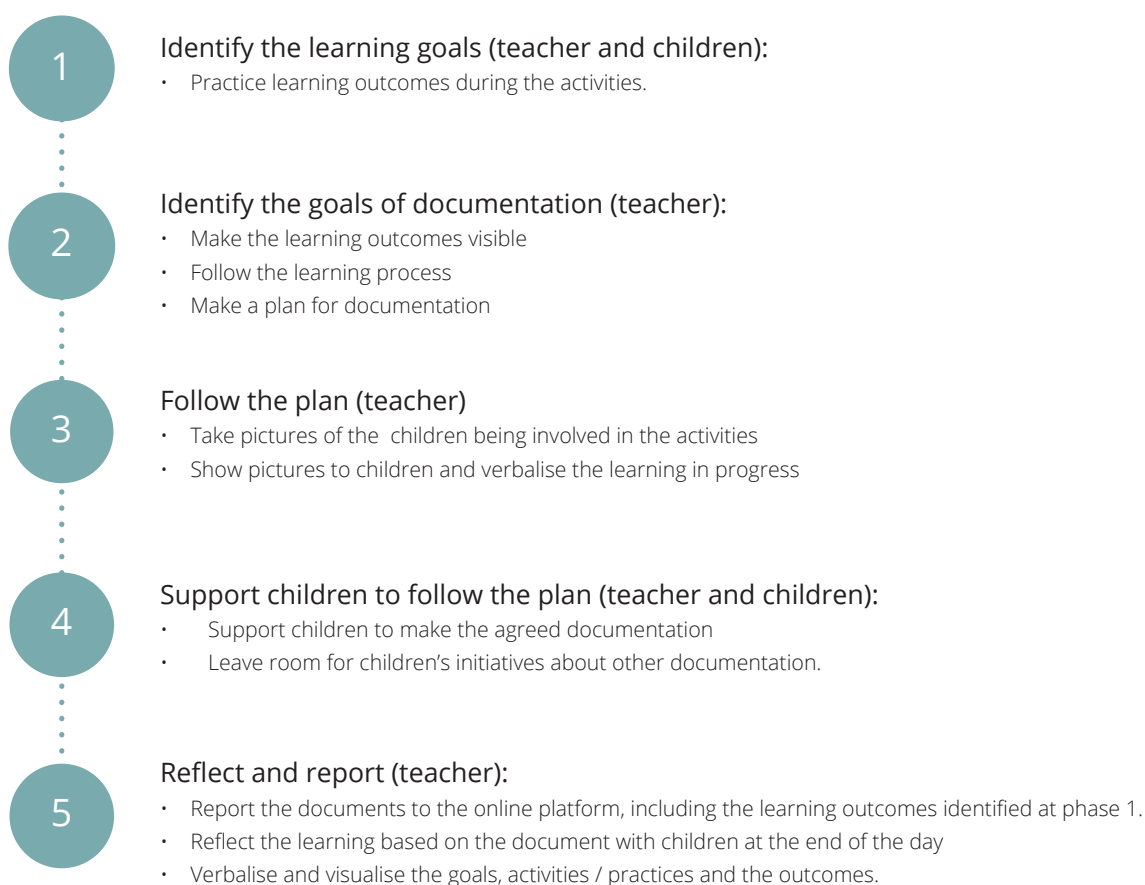
The purpose of assessment in Finland is quite simply to improve learning.

It is about guiding and encouraging children.

Assessment process in FinlandWay® is an integrated part of everyday education. Assessment can be seen as an on-going and interactive process that goes hand-in-hand with daily activities. Children learn to document and reflect their own performance and processes during activities. The learning becomes visible through visual works, photos, story crafted reports and stories and other objects that children produce.

The documentation process is facilitated by the digital platform for teachers and app for parents, which allows information sharing and monitoring of the development of the child's holistic learning.

Documentation in practice



Pedagogical documentation

Photos, videos, texts...



But also!

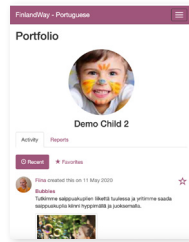


Not only...

Information of the whole class/school

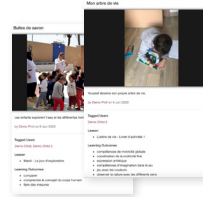
- Photos
- Messages

NOT PERSONALISED



Individual student portfolios Foliettes (daily)

- Specifying the individual student (tag)
- Identifying programmatic learning activities and targets
- Semi-automated selection of students and learning targets facilitate observation and reporting



Regular reports (every six weeks)

- Collection of foliettes of key moments forming a learning path of a thematic period
- Digital or PDF
- INDIVIDUAL EVALUATION FOR EVERY CHILD



Examples of the daily teacher instructions for documentation

Nursery (1.5-2 years)

The 1st theme period "Water"

Activity:	Making rain-instruments (play based exercise)
Orientations:	Music, Exploring nature, Senses, Math: Comparison
Instructions:	<p>Support children to make their own rain bottles with sand, gravel and small stones (help the one-year-olds not to eat the sand!). You can help children to close the bottle and test the voice, then open it again and add some more material inside.</p> <p>Show children an empty plastic bottle and put some gravel in there. When you shake the bottle, it sounds like rain.</p> <p>Let children fill and empty their bottles several times. They can also listen to the rain noise of gravel, sand and stones in plates or on a table. Let them drop the gravel from their hands to the plate to make the sounds of rain. Guide children to listen to which noises are loud and which are quiet. Support them in speaking in loud and quiet voices.</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Handling small objects, making sounds and rhythms, exploring quiet and loud noises, Comparing noises from different materials

The 1st theme period "Water"

Activity:	A little wave
Orientations:	Language and literacy, Exploration of nature, Colour blue, Movement, Math: Directions, sizes (big and small), and numbers
Instructions:	<p>Sit in a circle with children with a basket full of blue scarfs. Tell children that you are going to tell a story about a little wave [put a scarf in the middle of the sheet, bobbing along in the ocean and dancing. He's enjoying the wind and the fresh air and making small swings: Up and down [show the movement] Up and down.</p> <p>Another wave comes to meet him [rise a second scarf up]. Oh, how funny that looks, I also want to dance in the waves [put the second scarf next to first one on the sheet] and there are two waves enjoying the fresh air and bobbing up and down. Up and down. Up and down. Another wave comes to meet him [rise a third scarf up]. Oh, how funny that looks... [Continue until you run out of scarves]. Third, fourth, fifth, sixth wave...</p> <p>Then all the little waves were playing together and they were not just small waves anymore. They were the great ocean! [Ask children to grab the edges of the sheet and move it up and down to make the ocean wave.] Finally, say the poem of the waves whilst waving the sheet. Say it quietly with small waves, then loudly with big waves.</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Expressing directions with movement, expressing size with movement and vocabulary, following a storyline, counting one to five with teacher, visualising concept of many, exploring different shades of blue.

Kinder 1 (3 years)

The 3rd theme period "Fairy tale land"

Activity:	Dragon's treasure
Orientations:	Math: Shapes and Patterns, Colours, Designing, Creativity, Comparison
Instructions:	Tell children that in the dragon's treasure there are different jewels of many shapes. Children make jewel patterns (let them use a plastic pattern grid card or make jewel shapes from cardboard) by drawing the shapes on a paper. Let them colour the jewel shapes or use colourful papers. Practice making shapes by size and colour. Children can compare which jewel is biggest or smallest, is the yellow triangle bigger than blue pentagon, or are there more blue stones (sapphires) than red stones (rubies)?
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Exploring and naming basic shapes (circles, triangles, squares), Exploring and naming colours, drawing shapes, comparison of shapes and sizes and verbalizing comparison

The 2nd theme period "Animal town"

Activity:	Shoe for an elephant (play based exercise)
Orientations:	Math: shapes and patterns, Colours, Designing, Creativity, Comparison
Instructions:	<p>Ask the children to think what is the best shoe for different animals in the Animal town. Show the toy animals to help them focus. Name the animals with children.</p> <p>Divide children in small groups and give each of the group set of animal toys. Ask them to decide about the different shoes these animals would need. Children can choose the shoes from the real shoes or they can use the pictures.</p> <p>Sit with each of the group and ask the children to explain their choices. Children can place the animals (and their shoes) in the order of size (bigger animal needs bigger shoes) or the place of inhabitant (tortoises would need rubber boots so that their feet won't get wet).</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Memorising and naming familiar animals, exploring natural environment of different animals, comparing sizes and shapes, explaining choice making, working in co-operation with peers.

Kinder 2 (4 years)

The 2nd theme period "Stories of Urban life"

Activity:	The first day in a kindergarten
Orientations:	My day, Concept of time, Expressing opinion, Language: Explaining about activity and writing about it, Designing a picture
Instructions:	<p>Tell children that this is the first time that Lucio the dragon has come to your kindergarten. Let's tell him about our life in the kindergarten! Let children one by one explain to Lucio about the everyday activities in kindergarten.</p> <p>Ensure that every child gets turn to tell. If a child looks shy/unsecure, encourage him/her to talk. Ask every child to answer Lucio's question: What is best thing in the kindergarten.</p> <p>Ask children to draw a picture about the best activity in the Kindergarten with crayons.</p> <p>Let them work and discuss their drawings. Ask every child what she/he wish to write in the drawing. Help those who can't write by themselves.</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Memorising and explaining everyday activities, Concepting time of day, Explaining about activities, Forming an opinion, Designing and drawing a picture

The 2nd theme period "Stories of the Urban life"

Activity:	Guess where I am
Orientations:	Gross motoric movement, Body balance, Following rules, Language: Recognizing symbols and letters, Giving instructions, Explaining causes
Instructions:	<p>Put the new signs on the wall and start to give new kind of instructions for running:</p> <p>In here I can learn (the kindergarten), in here are tasty fruits to sell (the market), in here I can heal (the doctor), from here I can have money (the bank), in here I send a letter to my grandmother (the post office), here they are making new apartments (the construction site).</p> <p>After a round ask one or two children to come and act as the leader. They have to decide what else you can do in these places and shout it to others.</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Concepting abstract activity and link them with places, Controlling movement and body balance, Making decision, Recognizing symbols and letters, Verbalising instructions for movement

Pre-School (5 years)

The 1st theme period "Elements of the Earth"

Activity:	Adventures on deserted islands (Play based exercise)
Orientations:	Language & literacy: Creating a story, Exploring the world; Creativity; Shared play
Instructions:	<p>Divide the children into four groups. Each group is going to build one island in the classroom, so there will be four islands. This play is a good opportunity to mix with new friends!</p> <p>Agree together on how you are going to divide the classroom into four deserted islands. Could you use the hallway as well? Use furniture and other equipment in your class to build the islands. Help the children according to their initiatives. Your assistant can help the children as well. Support the children to solve any possible disputes by discussion and compromise. You don't need to solve the conflicts for them but assist them to find acceptable solutions.</p> <p>When any of the islands are ready, ask that group to sit down with you. Tell the children that you are now going to make a story using the storycrafting method. The group is going to send a message in a bottle to another island. "What do we want to say in the message? Is it going to be a story?" Agree on the purpose of your message. Start crafting the story by coming up with a beginning. Let the child next to you continue from where you left off. Write down the story exactly as it is told to you. Go on like this until everybody has had their turn and the story/message is ready. In the end read it aloud. Let the children make any modification to their own part of the story if necessary. Get the signatures of all the storycrafters under the message. Now you have crafted a story together!</p> <p>When the message in the bottle is completed, send it in a bottle or a box to another deserted island. Your assistant can help the children to read and interpret the message they receive. Continue the play according to children's initiatives.</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Concepting the space and equipment, Designing and building a structure with peers, Understanding a storyline, Creating/crafting a meaningful story, Using symbolic functions, Writing a letter (communicating with symbols).

The 1st theme period "Urban life in the City"

Activity:	How to share a pizza?
Orientations:	Math: Division and Problem solving, Social skills: Inviting friends, Negotiation, Sharing.
Instructions:	<p>Show the children the boy doll Toucan and three friends he wants to invite to visit his home. How can Toucan divide one pizza so that there will be one big slice for each child? How many people there are going to be eating? Count the dolls together. Discuss the different possibilities of sharing the round pizza. Let children cut printed paper pizzas according to their ideas. Can you divide the pizza equally? Put Toucan-puppet and three other puppets to sit in a circle. Give each a slice of pizza. Come to an agreement about an equal manner of cutting a pizza into four slices.</p>
Documentation goals for the teacher:	Practicing inviting a friend, Understanding number of members, Practicing the division skills with a pie, Negotiating and finding different solutions, Verbalising the solutions



Contact

For more information on the Finnish pedagogical approach and the FinlandWay® Early Childhood Education program.

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