Steering Documents and Types of Activities

Principal steering documents

The principal steering documents in pre-primary education are:

- The Basic Education Act and Decree (1998)
- The National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education (2014)

The general objectives of pre-primary education are outlined in the legislation governing basic education. The purpose of pre-primary education is to support children's growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life. Furthermore, the aim of pre-primary education, as part of early childhood education and care, is to improve children's capacity for learning.

Local curricula based on a national core curriculum

The National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education is a national regulation issued by the Finnish National Agency for Education (formerly Finnish National Board of Education). Education providers, most of whom are municipalities, prepare the local curricula in compliance with the national norm.

The current National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education was issued in December 2014. Local curricula based on the new core curriculum were introduced into practice in August 2016.

The core curriculum was prepared through a participatory and consultative process as part of a wider curriculum reform in general education. The core curriculum for preprimary education was outlined in multidisciplinary working groups including e.g. researchers, teachers and representatives of municipal administration. Education providers and other key stakeholders had opportunities to provide written feedback during the process. The process also included an open online consultation for the public.

The Finnish National Agency for Education that had the overall responsibility of the reform set a steering group to help to guide the process. The steering group included key stakeholders: ministries, Trade Union of Education and other relevant labour market partners, principals’ associations, various bodies representing minority groups, Finnish Parents' League as well as Finnish Book Publishers Association.

Education providers must ensure that pre-primary education personnel and guardians can participate in the development of local curriculum. Also children’s views must be heard and taken into account. Furthermore, the municipal officials responsible for social and welfare services are to be involved in
the curriculum work. The core curriculum also underlines the importance of cooperation with ECEC and basic education personnel in the development of the local curriculum.

The national core curriculum aims at equal implementation of high quality pre-primary education in the whole country.

**General goals of pre-primary education**

According to the national core curriculum, the mission of pre-primary education is to promote children’s prerequisites for growth, development and learning. An essential task for pre-primary education is to guarantee equal opportunities for children to learn and start school. Pre-primary plays a key role in early identification of support needs and for provision of support.

Pre-primary offer opportunities for diverse interaction with other people. It is also important to strengthen children’s healthy self-esteem with the aid of positive learning experiences and supportive feedback. Learning by playing is essential.

Through play and activity in versatile learning environments children expand their competence in different fields of knowledge and skills according to their age and preconditions.

The task of developing transversal competence is considered in all activities. Transversal competence refers to an entity consisting of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and will. The areas of transversal competence as defined by the national core curriculum for pre-primary education are:

- thinking and learning
- cultural competence, interaction and self-expression
- multiliteracy
- taking care of oneself and managing daily life
- competence in information and communication technology
- participation and involvement

**Joint objectives for instruction and learning modules**

Pre-primary education is based on integration of education. The core curriculum defines joint objectives for instruction which are grouped into five entities:

- Diverse forms of expression
- Rich world of the language
- Me and our community
- Exploring and interacting with my environment
- I grow and develop

The joint objectives are based on the goals emerging from different fields of knowledge and skills which are significant for pre-primary education, as well as on the goals set for transversal competences. Objectives with interconnected educational tasks have been collected in each entity. The joint objectives are goals that steer the work of the teacher.

There is no time allocation for pre-primary education. The implementation of pre-primary education is based on learning modules with different scopes and implemented in different ways. Children's interests and the joint objectives for instruction form the point of departure for implementing learning modules. The objectives and contents of different entities are combined in a pedagogically appropriate way when forming learning modules for pre-primary education.
Children participate in the planning of learning modules and evaluate their implementation under the teacher's supervision. The purpose of learning modules is to offer varying and inspiring learning experiences and appropriate learning challenges for each child.

A central aim is that the curricula for ECEC, pre-primary education and basic education should form an integrated whole where different levels of education form a logical continuum from the children’s point of view.

Basic Education Act (1998) [1]

National Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education 2014 [2] (in Finnish)

**Teaching Methods and Materials**

Teachers in Finland have extensive pedagogical autonomy in choosing the teaching methods and materials as long as they are in line with the goals defined in steering documents and support learning and well-being of children.

Working methods in pre-primary education are based on playful group and individual guidance stemming from each child’s level of development. The activities pay regard to children’s need to learn through imagination and play. For the children, the activities should be purposeful and challenging. The methods should be diverse.

Pre-primary education is to provide a learning environment, which will guide children’s curiosity, interest and learning motivation and give them opportunities for play, other activities as well as for rest and silence. The essential factors of the learning environment include interaction between the teacher and each child and that between the children, different operating methods and learning assignments.

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