

Olga Lopintsova, Kati Paloniemi, Katja Wahlroos

# Multicultural Education through Expressive Methods in Early Childhood Education

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<p>The main motivating reason behind the topic area of this thesis is the growing number of immigrants and immigrant children in Finland. Multiculturalism is a current phenomenon in today's society and it brings new challenges to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The objective of this thesis was to develop a practical implementation to the work-life partner, aiming at bringing multicultural education as a theme closer to the everyday reality by using expressive methods. The project was conducted in close co-operation with the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool.</p> <p>In this report we defined theories considering early childhood education and multicultural education as concepts. Expressive methods being the main methods applied, we introduced some relevant theories in support as part of the theoretical framework. When working with children expressive methods are a low threshold way of bringing the above mentioned themes closer to children's experience of the world.</p> <p>The functional part of the implementation was a weeklong project for five-year-old children. Our goal was to raise the children's world awareness through expressive methods. We were hoping for active participation that would lead to increased self-understanding. Our work-life partner introduced the need for grouping, which then became one of the objectives.</p> <p>Multicultural education is a current topic, in particular in the field of ECEC and increasing knowledge and skills about multiculturalism among the educators is extremely vital. Our aim was to bring forward the theme of multiculturalism both with the children and with the professionals working with them. During each session of the project multiculturalism was presented to the children in different ways. We hope that our work life partner will be able to use the report as an inspirational tool in the future.</p> <p>The well planned sessions turned out to be successful, although raising children's world awareness, self-understanding and grouping are especially large concepts and quite difficult to measure. We were able to create a positive and an inspiring environment for the children that can enhance learning. Some concerns that emerged during the process were the lack of literature on multicultural education and instructions regarding preschool's everyday challenges. We hope that in the future our project will awaken interest, foster further discussion and research about this current fascinating topic.</p>	
Keywords	early childhood education and care, multicultural education, expressive methods

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<p>Tämän opinnäytetyön taustalla olivat yhteiskunnan muuttuminen monikulttuurisemmaksi ja monikulttuurisuuden tuomat haasteet varhaiskasvatuksen kentälle. Opinnäytetyö toteutettiin toiminnallisena projektina, jonka tavoitteena oli tuottaa käytännön toteutus työelämäkumppanille. Tarkoituksenamme oli tuoda monikulttuurisuuskasvatusteemaa ilmaisullisia menetelmiä käyttäen lähemmäksi päiväkodin arkea. Yhteistyökumppanina toimi Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön teoriaosiossa selvensimme varhais- ja monikulttuurisuuskasvatuksen käsitteistöä. Päämetodina sovelsimme ilmaisullisia menetelmiä, joiden teoriaperusta toimi osana viitekehystämme. Lasten kanssa työskennellessä ilmaisulliset menetelmät ovat helppo tapa tuoda kyseiset teemat lähelle lasten kokemusmaailmaa.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön tuotos oli viikon mittainen projekti 5-vuotiaille lapsille. Tavoitteenamme oli avartaa lasten maailmankuvaa taiteen keinoin. Toivoimme lasten aktiivisen osallistumisen opetustuokioihin lisäävän heidän itseymmärrystään. Ryhmytymistarve nousi esille yhteistyökumppanimme aloitteesta ja siitä tarpeesta muotoutui yksi tavoitteistamme.</p> <p>Monikulttuurisuuskasvatus on ajankohtainen aihe erityisesti kasvatuksen alalla, minkä johdosta on äärimmäisen tärkeää lisätä kasvattajien tietoisuutta ja taitoja monikulttuurisuusasioista. Toiveenamme oli tuoda monikulttuurisuusteemaa enemmän esille sekä lapsille että varhaiskasvatuksen ammattilaisille. Monikulttuurisuusteeman esittely lapsille tapahtui opetustuokioiden muodossa. Jätämme opinnäytetyöraporttimme yhteistyökumppanillemme, jotta kasvattajat voivat halutessaan tutustua siihen.</p> <p>Suunnittelemamme opetustuokiot olivat onnistuneita. Koska lasten maailmankuvan avartaminen, itseymmärryksen lisääntyminen ja ryhmytyminen olivat laajoja käsitteitä, niiden toteutumista oli melko mahdotonta määrittää. Koemme kuitenkin onnistuneemme luomaan positiivisen oppimisympäristön lapsille opetustuokioissamme. Puute monikulttuurisuuskasvatuksen kirjallisuudesta ja ohjeiden puute päiväkodin arjen haasteisiin koskien monikulttuurisuutta nousivat esille opinnäytetyöprosessin aikana. Toivomme opinnäytetyömme herättävän mielenkiintoa ja keskustelua tästä ajankohtaisesta teemasta tulevaisuudessakin.</p>	
Avainsanat	varhaiskasvatus, monikulttuurisuuskasvatus, ilmaisulliset menetelmät

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## 1 Introduction

“Multicultural Education through Expressive Methods in Early Childhood Education” is the central theme of our final thesis. One of the main motivating factors for the choice of our topic is the current situation in Finland, more specifically the growing number of immigrants and immigrant children; and the challenges multiculturalism brings to early childhood education. The functional project that we conducted in spring 2012 involved practical implementation, in the form of five continuous activity sessions, which were supported by theories considering our theme and aims. The main aims were to raise children’s world awareness, self-understanding and grouping abilities by offering them more knowledge and experiences in creative ways to support the formation of their own world view.

Our work-life partner was the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool. We had several discussions with the Head Teacher considering the plan of our functional project, which was then approved by her and the Montessori Preschool Board Members. Our aims for this project support the Montessori curriculum and values. The laws and National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care are at the core of our project. Our work-life partner found the concept and the methods being used during the sessions inspiring and believed that the target group (five-year-olds) would benefit from this type of a project before the preschool year starts. We kept these concepts in mind when conducting our project and included relevant theories in support.

Our common areas of interests, prior experiences and knowledge built the base for the theme of the project. We were also inspired by two other developmental projects about multiculturalism in early childhood settings conducted by Socca – The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area and The Multicultural Children and Adults in Day Care (MUCCA), which we will shortly introduce in this report. As part of the theoretical framework we will also explain the basic concepts of multiculturalism, as well as multicultural education.

In order to organize activities for the children it is essential for one to be able to comprehend the theories that are linked to the development of the age group of children in

question. In our report we have introduced some important developmental theories. One of the main aims of our project was to increase children's world awareness; we feel that good self-understanding helps one to understand others better, which can lead to greater world awareness. At the age of five children already begin to acknowledge that there are different cultures apart from their own, in other words their cultural awareness is developing.

The choice of using expressive methods is based on the fact that they are an international language and do not necessarily require any previous knowledge or skills; in addition to play it is one of the most natural ways for children to express themselves. Arts are low threshold methods that can enhance learning and support child's development as an individual and as a member of a group. Another method that we used in our project was story crafting. Since the planning phase of our project we were inspired by this method in combination with expressive methods. We felt that it would also help the children to develop their own self-understanding and create more personal and fruitful learning experiences for them.

In our report we briefly describe the main concepts of the functional project, but more importantly explain each element of our project in detail. Included is description of sessions with the children, our aims, methods used, as well as an explicit assessment of the implementation. Throughout the process we have used ethical consideration and it has guided our way. During the project we collected feedback by using different techniques and sources, which enabled us to have a more objective eye for little details, being able to pay special attention to different elements that were essential while evaluating each session. In the discussion and future studies chapter we will elaborate on the project as a whole and discuss matters and issues that emerged throughout the process, including both positive and negative aspects. Conducting this entire project and experiencing each step of the process has been a vital part of our professional growth.

## **2 Description of the Project**

In spring 2012 we conducted a series of art circles for a group of seven five-year-old children in the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool as a part of our functional final project. Multicultural education was the main theme of the sessions. Since

multiculturalism is a current issue in Finland and we all have had an interest toward the topic, as we all have spent longer periods of time abroad; this was a natural decision for us. The other reason for choosing this subject was the fact that there were many children from multicultural background in the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool. We decided to use the expressive methods as means, since we felt like they are an inspiring and a low threshold way to promote creativity, to awaken imagination, and to enhance learning. Throughout the process we had been constantly cooperating with our work-life partner. Our final project's report will be passed on to our cooperation partner for them to get ideas and inspiration for the future.

The target group for our project was a group of five-year-olds, as was suggested by Päivi Kuutsa, the Head Teacher of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool. The reason for facilitating this particular group arose from the existing need to unite the next year's preschoolers, since the children have been in separate groups before the preschool year. Additionally our project was especially appealing to them, because of our focus being on using expressive methods throughout our project; considering that the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool would wish to enrich the curriculum with more creative art activities in the future.

The leading aim for our project was to increase children's world awareness and their self-understanding, which would in turn lead to understanding others better. The need for grouping was introduced to us by the Head Teacher of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool; therefore it was one of our main concerns as well.

The two central elements of our project were multicultural education and expressive methods. We wanted to provide a variety of different types of activities with a connecting theme to stimulate children's imagination and to support their development and learning by experimenting and expressing themselves through art. We stressed the importance of the process over the product, meaning that we planned the sessions so that there would be enough time to experience each activity fully. Some of the subjects for the sessions with children were: introduction to different continents and cultures (and flora and fauna of those continents); learning something about children's own and other cultures; encouraging the children to understand themselves better; creating a positive learning environment, where all the children are appreciated and valued as they are; supporting the development of the children; and in general helping them to develop their own world view by freedom of creative expression.



### 3 Work-life Partner

Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool is a private kindergarten that was established in 1993. Kindergarten offers Montessori Education, Day Care, and Preschool Education in English language using applied immersion method. Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool offers care to 40 – 45 children between ages of 3 to 7. Majority of the children attend a full-day program, but there are some, who stay only for a half-day. The teaching is conducted in English language and only six-year-olds have Finnish language lessons once a week. Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool is governed by the Parents Association. The Preschool is in cooperation with Helsinki City Office of Social Affairs (Helsingin kaupungin sosiaalivirasto), more specifically with Kampinmalmi- Lauttasaari branch. (Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, 2008.)

As the name suggests, the kindergarten, where we conducted our project is a Montessori kindergarten. We were familiar with the kindergarten, Montessori pedagogy, and Montessori materials from before. We saw a great opportunity and were able to use some of the Montessori materials to support children's learning during the sessions we arranged in the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool.

Crucial difference between mainstream methods of teaching and Montessori approach is that the adult's role in Montessori classroom is to guide children, rather than teach them. The initiative has to always come from the child. The guidance is provided only when the child is ready for it, not before or after. Moreover, when the Montessori teachers observe the child well, they know exactly when and what materials to provide him with. (Parkkonen, 1991, p. 37.) The role of an adult is to offer stimuli, when the child so requires. The child needs to feel that he is respected as an individual. It is essential to be able to analyze and understand the reasons behind the child's behavior, in order to have an appropriate reaction to the behavior. At the same time child needs to be taught to be respectful towards others. (Parkkonen, 1991, pp. 12, 13.)

One of the characteristics of the Montessori Approach is so called prepared environment. The stage of child's development is taken into consideration, when preparing different tasks for child's independent work. All of the materials and furniture are cus-

tom made especially for children. Montessori materials and other prepared exercises are placed so that the children can easily reach for them, use them, and return them to the same place. (Parkkonen, 1991, p. 31.)

The areas that a Montessori classroom is divided into are the following: practical life, sensorial material, language, mathematics, and culture (Hayes, Höynälänmaa, 1985, p. 65). In our project we have used some of the Montessori materials, all of which were from the culture area. However, we wanted to give a short description of all of the areas, since it is very important to have a complete picture of the Montessori curriculum.

Practical life exercises are an important part of Montessori pedagogy. The exercises play a crucial role in daily functions; as they help the child to care for the environment, take care of oneself, learn to work independently, make own choices, to learn to concentrate better, and to learn to respect others. Practical life exercises take roots in the situations and the activities of everyday life. This way child learns to do different tasks by and for himself, without the interference from an adult. It is essential that the child has an opportunity for repetition of an exercise, in order to master the skill. (Parkkonen, 1991, pp. 39, 40.)

Sensorial materials are another part of the Montessori classroom. Senses are the gateway for taking in the information from the surrounding environment. Visual sense involves recognizing sizes, shapes, colors, and light. Auditory sense allows an individual to hear and distinguish different sounds and their quality. Tactile sense allows an individual to feel the differences in temperature, sizes, shapes, and the surface qualities. Olfactory sense involves recognizing different scents. Gustatory sense helps to distinguish between different tastes. Experiences through senses are absolutely necessary in order for the child to grow and develop. Montessori classroom provides materials for a child to explore all of the senses, to name them, and to recognize and compare differences within them. (Parkkonen, 1991, pp. 100, 101.)

Culture area includes geography, biology, history, other sciences, and arts. Children are introduced to this area, when they begin to show interest in it. Some of the geography materials that are presented to the children are: globes, maps, flags, etc. Arts include introduction to different artists and their works. (Hayes, Höynälänmaa, 1985, pp. 70, 71.)

Language in Montessori classroom is supported by such materials that increase vocabulary, teach written language and reading, and expressing oneself in the language in question (Hayes, Höynälänmaa, 1985, p. 68).

Mathematics area is divided into different categories - starting from introduction to numbers and gradually guiding the child towards abstract thinking (Hayes, Höynälänmaa, 1985, pp. 69, 70).

Parkkonen (1991, p. 22) argues that Maria Montessori, the founder of the Montessori pedagogy, has truly understood the meaning of childhood. The respect for the child is at the very core of her pedagogy. She emphasized that above all one needs to support child's growth towards independence, responsibility and spiritual balance. (Parkkonen, 1991, p. 22.)

Our cooperation partner, the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, uses an applied version of immersion method, as the teaching language at the kindergarten is English. We also used English throughout our project to support our work-life partner's curriculum. In the following paragraphs we will first explain the meaning of language and then we will continue with stating the main elements of the immersion method.

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000, p. 20) state that the language plays a crucial role in children's lives. The language can be understood not only as a rich vocabulary and a proper grammar use, but also as a tool of expressing oneself and communicating with people in a suitable way. As Gonzales-Mena (1998 cited in Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000, p. 20) defines language: "the formation and communication of information, thoughts and feelings through the use of words".

The initial idea of the immersion method was to teach the majority language to the minority. Essential to this method is that language is seen "as a mean rather than an aim" (Lehtimäki, 2001, p. 3). All educational goals are the same as defined in the curriculum of the majority culture. The aim of the method is to teach a second language to children, but not to make them bilingual, "i.e. the immersion language should develop at no expense of the native tongue" (Laurén cited in Lehtimäki, 2001, p. 3).

Programs can be called either total or partial immersion programs; depending on what position does the native tongue have in the beginning of the program. (Laurén cited in

Lehtimäki, 2001, p. 4.) “In total immersion the new language is the language of instruction, though the children will be also instructed in their mother tongue later, if a need arouses. Partial immersion uses both mother tongue and the new language.” (Buss and Laurén cited in Lehtimäki, 2001, p. 4.)

At the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, there are children from multicultural backgrounds. Even though we used English language throughout our project, considering that the group of children we conducted the project with was multicultural and some of the children were bilingual, we felt that expressive methods as a media would be the best way to help the children to feel safe and comfortable in the unfamiliar situation. Kuusisto (2010, p. 57) states that no Finnish language skills are required in order to succeed in experiencing arts and crafts and art education. Sense of equality is achieved in those kinds of group activities, since the language of arts is universal. (Kuusisto, 2010, p. 57.)

## **4 Multiculturalism**

In the chapter on multiculturalism we will first discuss current situation of multicultural families in Finland, as it is one of the reasons that motivated us to conduct this project. Then we will define some of the terms related to multiculturalism and the concept of multicultural education, in order to provide a perspective to understand the topic on a larger scale. We feel that it is of utmost importance for any educator, who is working with people, who are coming from multicultural background, to acknowledge the impact multiculturalism has on them.

### **4.1 Current Situation**

In 2008 Stakes published results of the statistical survey on the subject of municipal social services and their users. Day care and amount of immigrants using municipal day care services were subjects that were mentioned in the report. According to Stakes (2008) around 8 500 – 9 000 children with an immigrant background were using municipal day care services in 2007 – 2008. This means that children with an immigrant background make up about 4 – 5 % of all children who are attending municipal day cares. (Stakes, 2008.)

National Institute for Health and Welfare (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos) published its results of the statistical survey on the subject of municipal day care services in 2011. Results on the amount of children from immigrant background seemed to differ very much from the results of Stakes statistical survey from 2007 – 2008. In 2010 there were about 12 000 – 12 500 immigrant children using municipal day care services; this was about 6 % of all children, who went to municipal kindergartens. (Terveyden ja Hyvinvoinnin Laitos, 2011.)

As one can see from the statistical survey results introduced in the previous paragraphs number of children with an immigrant background in Finland has definitely increased and will continue increasing in the future. Examples given in this report do not cover private sector. However, it seems that the results received from the public sector show enough information to support an argument of whether number of immigrant children has grown in Finland. Next we will present some of the projects and projects' findings, which were conducted in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, in order to present the current situation more in detail.

In 2005 – 2007 Socca – The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area introduced the Moniku project, which aimed at providing better standards for multicultural education in early childhood education to different kindergartens of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. In 2007 – 2009 the results of the research on Moniku project were published. The results of the research were gathered by Tuulikki Venninen. (Venninen, 2009.) In the summary of the results she stated that lack of trainings, study visits, and different kinds of consultations were some of the issues that emerged in the findings of the research. The respondents felt that more emphasis should be put on teachers' trainings on multiculturalism. The respondents also showed an interest in getting additional education on different cultures and religions. The demand for practical solutions to everyday challenges and different materials on multiculturalism and multicultural education was found to be urgent as well. (Venninen, 2009, pp. 29, 30.)

The Multicultural Children and Adults in Day Care (MUCCA) was another project, which was developed in collaboration with the City of Helsinki Social Services Department and Helsinki Research Centre for Early Childhood and Elementary Education (ECEE) in 2008 - 2010. The main goal of the project was to find and develop practices for eve-

ryday activities at day care centers, so that the aspect of multiculturalism would be considered and supported, and children's, employees' and children's families' needs would be met (MUCCA.)

MUCCA research and project results were published in "Diversity of Cultures, Languages, and Worldviews in Kindergarten: Challenges and Opportunities" report by Arniika Kuusisto (2010, p. 96). It is mentioned in the text that one can find children and adults in Helsinki kindergartens, whose mother tongue takes roots in one of over 70 different language groups. In Helsinki kindergartens there are 2 600 children, whose mother tongue is other than Finnish, Swedish or Sami. Moreover, all in all there are over 50 people working as carers at 38 Helsinki kindergartens whose mother tongue is other than Finnish. (Kuusisto, 2010, p. 3.) According to Kuusisto (2010, p. 42) children nowadays are exposed to multiculturalism in their everyday life and that is why they are accustomed to experiencing diversity in all senses of the word. However, defining the ethnicity and a sense of belonging to a certain group can still be seen challenging on some occasions. (Kuusisto, 2010, p. 42.)

In the MUCCA project results report it is stated that multiculturalism brings with it not only positive aspects, but also challenges; challenges for both the immigrant and Finnish families. Kindergartens are facing changes, since the principles and rules that worked before, might not be applicable anymore. Kindergarten employees need to have skills to be able to adapt to those changes. (Kuusisto, 2010, p. 129.) The report showed both positive and negative points to the multiculturalism (opinions of kindergarten employees, families, and children themselves at times): multiculturalism was considered as an aspect contributing to the child's identity in a favorable way; at the same time children with an immigrant background were seen as a possible limitation to kindergarten's everyday routines, e.g. limitations in what child can eat, do, hear or see can cause limitations in kindergarten routines; communication with a family from an immigrant background was viewed as one of the biggest challenges at present time; staff felt that there is not enough support provided in dealing with the obstacles caused by multiculturalism issues. Possible solutions were provided: extra staff, extra resources, more education, and smaller group sizes. (Kuusisto 2010, p. 96.)

Our project was conducted during the spring term of 2012 in a private kindergarten, the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool. We gathered information on the number of multicultural children at that kindergarten. During the school year 2011 -

2012 the total number of children in the kindergarten was 45, from which 10 were from multicultural background; this makes up around 22 % of the whole number of children in the kindergarten. The group of seven children we conducted our project with also included two multicultural children. (Kuutsa, 2012a.) As one can see the percentage is fairly high and that is why we feel that we made a right decision, when we chose this kindergarten, considering the topic of our final project.

As multiculturalism is gradually becoming a more widespread topic, there is an urgent need for changes to take place in terms of multicultural education. Not everything is done yet for supporting children's development, more specifically the development of children from an immigrant background.

#### 4.2 Multiculturalism as an Umbrella Term

World awareness and self-understanding were some of the main goals of our project. We believe that it is crucial to understand the meaning of multiculturalism and the concepts related to it, in order to gain knowledge of the topic and to use it to conduct a successful project. In this chapter we will first introduce Socca, the Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, and their development project on multiculturalism. Then we will define some of the essential terms that are connected to multiculturalism, in order to give a more detailed picture of the topic.

Socca – The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area is a network organization that develops new working methods, produces new knowledge on different aspects of social field, and conducts work life oriented research. (Socca, 2012.) Multiculturalism in early childhood education was one of the development projects of Socca – The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. In 2005 – 2007 they introduced Moniku project to 21 different kindergartens of Helsinki Metropolitan Area. (Venninen, 2009, p. 2.) The task of the project was to decide on specific definitions of different concepts of multiculturalism. At the present time concepts that are used in early childhood education field are those that are determined by the Ministry of Labor. (Socca, 2007, p. 6.)

Now we would like to define some of the terms that go under the concept of multiculturalism, an umbrella term. The Ministry of Labor, as stated in Moniku project paper

(Socca, 2007, app. 2, pp. 23, 24) defined the word “immigrant” as a general term to describe people, who have moved to the country in question, while a “refugee” is an individual, who had to flee from his country of origin due to some level of persecution and who is presently staying outside of his country of origin. A process, in which immigrants are exposed to country’s political, economic, and social structures is called “integration”; the preconditions for it are for immigrants to adapt to the new environment and for the majority population to accept them. “Exclusion” is explained to be a term opposite to integration: it can be either alienation from one’s own culture or being left out from the society of the country in question. “Tolerance” is nonprejudiced and open attitude towards others as well as respect for others’ opinions and customs; preconditions for tolerance are healthy self-esteem, understanding and acceptance of one’s own culture, and the ability to embrace unknown in a critical way. (Socca, 2007, app. 2, pp. 23, 24.)

Children, whose mother tongue is other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami, are called “multicultural children”. However, nowadays the word diversity is used more often than the word multiculturalism, when referring to coexistence of representatives of different cultures. The term cultural diversity can be associated with both minority groups and immigrants that bring with them their traditions to the society. Individuals, who have moved to Finland, can be referred to with a variety of different terms that are not officially defined or necessarily accepted. Nevertheless, the term “immigrant” has to be reevaluated, since the second and third generations of immigrants in Finland view themselves as Finnish, rather than immigrants. (Socca, 2007, p. 6.)

In this chapter we wanted to discuss the concept of multiculturalism as an umbrella term, with the help of some online publications done by Socca, the Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. It is crucial to understand the basic concepts, which are related to multiculturalism, in order to succeed in our project.

### 4.3 Multicultural Education

In this chapter we aim to explain the concept of multicultural education. We try to present the terms that are associated with the multicultural education as links to our project and also to the other theories, which we introduce in other chapters. We will also attempt to give grounds for choosing multicultural education in early years as one of our main themes.



Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000, pp. 2, 3) in their book "Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years" stress the importance of the multicultural education in early years. They argue that it is crucial for each individual in the modern world to live in harmony with others, knowing where they themselves and others originate from. Adult's behaviour directly influences the formation of a child's world view – if the adult wants the child to be accepting of others, he must be accepting of others himself. (Siraj-Blatchford, Clarke, 2000, pp. 2, 3.)

According to Gay (1998, p. 9) the core of multicultural education lies in bringing excellent education and its implementation in alignment with human qualities and contemporary society. Considering the above mentioned statement, one must acknowledge the fact that cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity affects society on all levels. Multicultural education aims at influencing both society and education in general. As Banks (1991/92 cited in Gay, 1998, p. 10) explains the goal of multicultural education: "close the gap [sic] between the Western democratic ideals of equality and justice and social practices that contradict those ideas, such as discrimination based on race, gender, and social class". Gay then goes on stating that there is no infinite truth, when discussing multicultural education. She stresses the importance of looking at multiculturalism from different angles and thinking critically in all situations. (Gay, 1998, pp. 9 – 11.) In the text Gay discusses the meaning of multiculturalism in U.S.; however, since Finnish society is becoming more multicultural (THL, 2010), we believe that her ideas can be applied to Finland as well.

Pai (1984 cited in Gay, 1998, p. 13) suggests that culture cannot be separated from people's behaviours, thus culture in itself and multicultural education have to be parts of human rights policy everywhere. Turkovich (1998, p. 27) also acknowledges the importance of multicultural education. She explains that as the globalization takes place and as monoculturalism is gradually disappearing, people all over the world need tools and knowledge to understand their own culture and other cultures better. In her article "The Present Situation and Future Challenges of Multicultural Education in Finland" Räsänen (1998, p. 35) states the fact that Finns are in need of multicultural education as well. She goes on describing how Finns are not only part of their own ethnic group, but also citizens of the world. Therefore, they need the multicultural education preferably starting already in the early childhood. Räsänen (1998, p. 32) also argues that childhood is the time, when the basis for our world view is starting to form and it is

proved to be difficult to reconstruct that view later in life. Consequently it is essential to start to gain knowledge on multiculturalism as early on as possible. Pitkänen (1998, p. 43) also reminds us that one of the goals of multicultural education is to become more acceptant of others and to recognize the fact that there is no only one right way of doing things.

NAEYC (1996, cited in Lewin-Benham, 2008, p. 15) is the National Association for the Education of Young Children in the United States of America, which develops curriculums, provides tools and information for appropriate assessment and developmental programs, and assists children and their families and early childhood educators. Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) were developed by NAEYC to guide early childhood education. Some of those principles are: when observing and assessing the child, an early childhood educator needs to include such main influencing factors as family, culture, and society; and dignity and uniqueness of a person are to be advocated at all times. (NAEYC, 1996, cited in Lewin-Benham, 2008, pp. 15, 16.) Multiculturalism in early childhood education was one of the development projects of Socca – The Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area. In 2005 – 2007 they introduced Moniku project to different kindergartens of Helsinki Metropolitan Area. In 2007 – 2009 the results of the research on Moniku project were published. The results of the research were gathered by Tuulikki Venninen. (Venninen, 2009, p. 2.) The research showed that many respondents felt that the Moniku project does not concern them, since there were no multicultural children in their day care groups. However, the concept of multiculturalism concerns all of the people living in the Helsinki metropolitan area. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the subject of cultural education, in order for the Finnish children to grow to become open-minded and tolerant. Cultural education aims at increasing participation level and preventing exclusion. When multicultural education is seen to be affecting all then no educator can withdraw from the responsibility of teaching about multiculturalism. (Venninen, 2009, p. 36.)

According to Ramsey (2004, p. 6) multicultural education guides children to recognize different issues within multiculturalism and situations that are associated with it and to resist discrimination. Ramsey (2004, pp. 10, 11) then continues explaining some of the goals of multicultural education. Firstly children need to know themselves well, in order to understand the culture they live in and the world around them. Secondly a sense of belonging must be established. Thirdly children need to learn to question and to analyze matters that concern them. Fourthly children need to believe that they are active

members of their community and that they are able to influence the decision making. Fifthly education must be available for all children. Lastly all children should be encouraged to use their imagination and creativity to improve the quality of life. (Ramsey, 2004, pp. 10, 11.)

Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000, p. 70) explain the meaning of “culturally responsive curriculum”. They suggest that early childhood educators, who show their appreciation of children, including their culture and mother tongue, on a daily basis can have an impact on the attitudes and beliefs that children learn. Through the respect that teachers show, children can learn to accept themselves as they are and to adapt to new situations and to foreign cultures easier.

We feel that the concept of multicultural education is very broad and that we have only introduced very few theories and concepts related to it. However, the main goal of this chapter is to support our project and its implementation with the theories that are most useful for us, and we believe that the information presented here was enough to serve the purpose.

## **5 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**

### **5.1 Definition of ECEC**

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and the guidelines and principles guiding the practice, which are laws and National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care, are at the core of our project. One cannot conduct a high-quality work without comprehending the concept of ECEC and the documents linked to it. In this chapter we will first introduce our work-life partner, the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, and their mission. Then we will present some of the central laws and some of the core principles of National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care.

The Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool is a kindergarten, where we conducted our project. The leading idea of the kindergarten is to offer an opportunity for the children to learn English language in a learning environment, where teachers actively use the language in daily activities and teaching, and where children are encour-

aged to use English as much as possible. (Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, 2008.)

The core values of Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool are the following: to raise independent and active children, who are considerate of others; know good manners; are balanced and have good self-esteem; and are able to appreciate their success and experience the joy of learning. (Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, 2008.)

The Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool followed both the National Curriculum Guidelines of Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet) and the Helsinki City Preschool Curriculum Guidelines (from 2005), when their Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Plan was made. (Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, 2008.)

According to Stakes (2005, p. 7) National Directives for Early Childhood Education and Care that were approved by Finnish government 28.2.2002 serve as basis for the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland. The guidelines include the central principles and areas of development in ECEC, which are organized and monitored by the Finnish society. (Stakes, 2005, p. 7.)

ECEC Plan is prepared in every municipality and every unit and can be understood as a guidebook for all kinds of forms of activities in ECEC in the municipal and private sectors. Municipalities use the original ECEC Plan as a tool for evaluating ECEC services provided in a specific municipality and to determine the concrete goals for their own customized ECEC Plan. (Stakes, 2005, p. 8.)

The aim of the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland is to enforce equal realization of the plan, to control the development of the contents of the plan, and to develop general requirements for good quality ECEC throughout the country. (Stakes, 2005, p. 7.)

The goal of the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC in Finland is to increase professional awareness of the day care workers, parents' participation in the day care services, and multiprofessional cooperation between the services that are provided for children under school age. Together with preschool and elementary curricula ECEC

Plan forms an entity that supports children's welfare, development and learning. (Stakes, 2005, p. 7.)

Care, education, and teaching constitute ECEC. These dimensions are emphasized differently depending on the age level of the child and on the situation at hand. By providing the above mentioned practices as a whole child's positive self-image, good expression and interaction skills, and thinking are developed. (Stakes, 2005, pp. 15, 16.)

National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC also include content orientation, which forms a framework for the ECEC personnel of the phenomena that the children need to be exposed to in order to learn about the world. Content orientations are: mathematical, natural science, history and social studies, aesthetics, ethics, and religion and philosophy. Using content orientation in ECEC does not however mean that children are to learn the subject matter throughout, but rather to acquire tools, which they can use in order to learn about the diverse world. (Stakes, 2005, p. 26.)

As it is stated in Varhaiskasvatussuunnitelman perusteet (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care) developed by Stakes (2005, pp. 8, 9) ECEC Plan is managed through national and municipal documents. On municipal level ECEC Plan management is diverse and the headings of the documents vary greatly depending on the municipality.

As it is mentioned above the National Curriculum Guidelines of Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland are regulated by the Finnish laws. We wanted to include some of the fundamental acts of laws that are connected to the Early Childhood Education and Care. The next paragraphs will give an overview of the chosen acts of laws.

The Child Care Act (451/1990, 1 §) covers children's day care services which are offered in day care centres, private day care, communal playground activities and other day care functions. For this purpose children's day care services can be provided in a specific space that is called kindergarten. In the Child Care Act (304/1983, 2 §) it is said that a desirable age group qualified for the services is children, who are under school age or when special circumstances so require and when the care cannot be organized otherwise. The latter applies to the older children as well. The day care services provided must be organized so that it meets the needs of children in terms of

appropriate place and continuous care during the hours needed. (Child Care Act, 1973.)

According to the Child Care Act (304/1983, 2 a §) the aim of day care is to support children's families in the upbringing of their children and contribute to child's personality development and maintain its balance together with the family. Day care needs to provide continuous, safe and warm relationships for the child. Day care activities need to support child's development in a versatile way and to maintain learning environment, which stems from the idea of child-centeredness. Day care needs to provide services that would meet the needs of the child in terms of age and individual requirements, taking the cultural heritage into consideration. It needs to contribute to child's physical, social and emotional development and to support child's aesthetic, intellectual, ethical, and religious education. Religious education means respecting child's parents' or guardian's religious beliefs. In furthering child's development day care needs to support child's growth towards communal responsibility, peace, and the respect for the environment. (Child Care Act, 1973.)

In this chapter we attempted to introduce some of the core principles that guide the practice of Early Childhood Education and Care. We aimed to show how the laws affect the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care, which in turn influence the unit's ECEC Plan (e.g. the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool ECEC Plan). We tried to show the connection between the laws and regulations and our work-life partner's function.

## 5.2 Theories of Development

The target group for our project was five-year-old children. It is essential to have an understanding of children's physical, cognitive, and emotional development, when working with them. In order to organize activities for the children, one needs to be able to comprehend the theories that are linked to the development of the age group of children in question. In this chapter we aim to introduce early childhood as a concept and list some of the main early childhood and development theories.

As stated in Child Development book by Santrock (2009), early childhood means "the developmental period that extends from the end of infancy to about 5 to 6 years of age, sometimes called preschool years". During the early childhood years children grow

upwards and slim down through time as they get taller. The development of the brain and of the nervous system happens dramatically during childhood and adolescence. This rapid development helps children to do such tasks as to plan their actions and to respond to different stimuli from their surroundings; and their language skills advance further. Motor and sensory development progress. Three year-olds are capable of doing such movements as: hopping, jumping, and running. Four year-olds practice their gross motor skills even more, and when they reach the age of five, children develop further, but they are still polishing the skills acquired earlier. Throughout the ages of three, four, and five, children gradually develop their fine motor skills, starting with the development of pincer grip and continuing refining that skill. (Santrock, 2009, pp. 119, 129, 160.)

According to Piagetian theory, as cited in Santrock (2009, p. 185), there are four stages of cognitive development of children, which are: Sensorimotor Stage (0-2 years), Pre-operational Stage (2-7 years), Concrete Operational Stage (7-11 years), and Formal Operational Stage (11-15 years). The Preoperational Stage focuses mostly on kindergarten age children and it will be the one that we will discuss. The following citation introduces Preoperational Stage in more detail as stated by Santrock (2009, p. 185.)

The child begins to use mental representations to understand the world. Symbolic thinking reflected in the use of words and images, is used in this mental representation, which goes beyond the connection of sensory information with physical action. However, there are some constraints on the child's thinking at this stage, such as egocentrism and centration.

In the next paragraph we will be presenting Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development as stated in Santrock (2009). In his theory Vygotsky stressed the importance of the social side of learning. One of the main terms introduced by Vygotsky was "Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)". By this term he meant the fact that children, who are not skilled enough to perform a task alone, can master it with the support provided by an adult or a more skilled child. The other important term that is linked to ZPD is "scaffolding". Scaffolding means the level of support provided by the more skilled person with the consideration of the child's development level; the more skilled the child is himself, the less support he needs. (Santrock, 2009, pp. 200, 201.)

"Absorbent mind" is one of the essential concepts, which was introduced by Maria Montessori in the Montessori pedagogy. The absorbent mind is present during the first six years. The mind absorbs all of the information from the surrounding environment, without any effort. (Hayes, Höynälänmaa, 1985, pp. 23, 32.) When the child has

reached the age of three, he has entered a stage, where he has a desire and an ability to receive guidance. In the earlier stage (0 – 3 years of age) the child's natural way of learning was to absorb all of the information from the surrounding environment. In the later stage (3 – 6 years of age) in addition to the absorbent mind that the child still possesses, he now starts to take in the information consciously. Furthermore, at this stage the child starts to request more guidance and explanations. At this point child goes through various sensitive periods: sensitive period for language, for order, for fine and cross motor skills, for social behavior, for small objects, and for refinement of the senses. Montessori teaching aims at providing children with knowledge of concepts, in order for them to observe, classify, and organize their experiences and the information about the surrounding world. The more knowledge the children have, the better tools they possess for making accurate observations about their environment and constructing their world view and their own place in it. (Parkkonen, 1991, pp. 21, 22.)

As described in Montessori pedagogy, during the early childhood (0 – 6+ years of age) a child goes through a series of sensitive periods. Sensitive period can be seen as an increasement in sensitivity towards a development of a particular quality (intellectual or skills-related). A sensitive period involves a faster learning of a specific skill that cannot be learnt later as effortlessly after the period has passed. It is typical that during a sensitive period the child absorbs all possible information from the surrounding environment that is related to a sensitive period in question. This way he constructs his knowledge of concepts and his own world view. (Parkkonen, 1991, pp. 12, 13.) According to Parkkonen (1991, pp. 14, 15) the child shapes his own world view by applying his cross and fine motor skills and using all of his senses. Depending on the sensitive period in question, child absorbs large amounts of information that concern the particular sensitive period. However, sometimes it can be found difficult to identify a particular sensitive period; thus, the adult needs to observe the child in order to prepare a stimulating environment and help him with his task. During the sensitive periods child favors repetition and by doing that he acquires improvement in his skills. (Parkkonen, 1991, pp. 14, 15.)

As one of the main aims for our project was to increase children's world awareness, we felt that it would be necessary to discuss the development of the child in terms of the development of their cultural awareness. In her book Louis (2009, p. 157) describes some of the main characteristics that are distinctive to children of ages 4 to 5. Some of them are: children begin to acknowledge the fact that there are different cultures apart



from their own; they start to associate themselves with the people and the culture that surround them, which in turn triggers the above mentioned realization. (Louis, 2009, p. 157.) Five-year-olds were the most appropriate group for our project and we truly appreciated the opportunity to work with this age group during our project.

According to Louis (2009, pp. 5, 6) cultural awareness and own world view develop through practicing many different skills, therefore it is a subject that is difficult to assess. As cited in Louis (2009, pp. 5, 6) Piaget sees childhood as a period, where learning takes place through concrete experiences. In those experiences children involve all of their senses in order to analyze and interpret the world in their own way; therefore their own world view is starting to form. (Louis, 2009, pp. 5, 6.) In “Supporting Children’s Learning in the Early Years” Miller, Cable, and Goodliff (2010, p. 9) also suggest that “... learning occurs as a result of active involvement with the environment...” Also Takala and Takala (1988, p. 135) explain that the child forms his world view through his experiences. The perceptions of oneself and of the environment are built through active participation with the environment. Learning is a continuous process; therefore the view of the world is developing constantly. The image of the world is formed as a mental structure, through which the child classifies and interprets his new experiences. (Takala, Takala, 1988, p. 135.) For our project we chose such materials that would provide a chance for the children to use all of their senses in our sessions, in order for them to learn better.

In the Development Theories chapter we have discussed some of the theories that are related to early childhood education, more specifically Piagetian theory, Vygotsky’s theory on ZPD, and theory that is connected to the development of the cultural awareness. We believe that it is important to understand these different approaches, in order to make connections between theory and practice.

### 5.2.1 The Self

One of the main aims of our project was to increase self-understanding. It is fundamental, since through acquiring good self-understanding, one learns to understand others, which then leads to greater world awareness. In this chapter we wanted to stress the importance of self-understanding and good self-esteem.

According to Santrock (2009, p. 339) self-understanding is “a child’s cognitive representation of the self, the substance and the content of the child’s self-conceptions”. The development of self and self-understanding happens through experience; therefore it cannot just be delivered or taught to the children by the people surrounding them. Santrock (2009, p. 345) then continues on with defining self-esteem: “the global evaluative dimension of the self; also called self-worth or self-image”. The self-esteem that an individual possesses does not always indicate the reality of what the person is like. For example, one can possess high self-esteem, even though he or she is lacking many qualities that are prerequisites for success. (Santrock, 2009, p. 345.)

In her book Keltikangas-Järvinen (1994, pp. 17 - 22) describes the meaning of good self-esteem. She recognizes six different elements that create good self-esteem. Firstly, self-esteem is a feeling of being capable. Self-esteem is good, when positive qualities rule out the negative ones in an individual. The self-image of a person with good self-esteem is however realistic; the person realizes and accepts his weaknesses as well as his strengths. Secondly, self-esteem can be also called self-respect or it can be described by the person’s ability to trust and believe in oneself. Thirdly, self-esteem is viewing one’s own life as valuable and unique. Fourthly, self-esteem is an ability to respect and value others. The person is able to admire other human beings, without becoming dependent on them or seeing them as a threat. Fifthly, self-esteem is being able to solve problems independently and believing in oneself. Lastly, self-esteem is being able to face failures and disappointments. (Keltikangas-Järvinen, 1994, pp. 17 - 22.)

In our project we aimed to promote children’s self-understanding and well-being and to support the development of their positive self-esteem. As the development of a good self-esteem is a continuous process, we only attempted to encourage the children to express themselves freely through art and to help them to feel safe throughout our project.

### 5.2.2 Grouping

The need for grouping was introduced to us by our work-life partner and consequently it was one of our main goals as well. Next we would like to introduce the concept of group and the stages of group formation. When conducting our project, we kept these concepts in mind, in order to promote children’s group formation.

Vygotsky (1982), as cited in *Tast from Suomen Sosiaalipedagoginen Seura Ry* (2007, p. 30), saw children's interaction among peers as an essential element of human development. In his article Durkin (1996) supports the above mentioned statement. He names one of his chapters "children as social beings from birth", stating that opposite of what had been stated earlier by behaviourists, a child is not in a state of tabula rasa at birth. He explains that social development cannot take place without mutuality in communication, in other words child only develops through interacting with others. (Durkin, 1996, pp. 49, 50.)

Charpentier (1981 cited in Niemistö, 2007, p. 16) states that in social psychology, group is a concept that is more specific than a "random large amount of people". General features of a group are: specific size, meaning, rules, interaction, work division, roles, and leadership. Normally in a group there are 2 to 20 members, however, the amount of a group can never be strictly predetermined. Charpentier (1981 cited in Niemistö, 2007, p. 16) then argues that a group can only become a group, when individuals interact among each other, have a common goal, have some rules, and when they distribute work among themselves. A group is a unit that has both a visible (following the official and mutual goal) and an underlying (feelings and emotions) sides. The latter involves conscious, as well as unconscious communication. (Niemistö, 2007, pp. 16, 17.)

Another author, Homans, (1950 cited in Kauppila, 2000, p. 85) gives a definition of a group: a group is a unit of individuals, who communicate time and again. The group needs to consist of a rather small number of people, in order for them to be able to be in interpersonal contact with each other, meaning face to face communication. (Kauppila, 2000, p. 85.)

In the next paragraph we would like to introduce different stages of group development by Kauppila (2000). First stage is the group formation stage, where members are careful with, distant from, and observant of one another. The second stage is called a conflict stage, where the group members start to express their opinions more freely and that can lead to conflicts. The third stage is time, when cooperation among the members is established. At the fourth stage each member of the group has found his place and the role he is playing. The fifth and the last stage is a group termination stage, where the work has been completed or the group has reached its goals. (Kauppila, 2000, pp. 97, 98, 99.)

Group formation is a complicated process, which requires time and a lot of interaction among the members of the group. It is very important to understand the terms group and group development, in order to conduct a successful project, where group formation takes place.

## **6 Expressive Methods**

The main expressive methods we chose to use when implementing the functional part of our project are connected to art, creativity and self-expression, as well as the natural way children express themselves through play. We would like to offer the reader a view about expressive methods and some theories and concepts that are essential and related to our project.

### **6.1 Holistic Meaning of Art**

There is no simple definition to the concept of art. Art is a complex concept that many wise men and women have tried to define with no specific answer. Read (1970) in his book "Education Through Art" explores the subject suggesting that art exists in everything that pleases our senses. Read continues on by saying that all of our senses are very universal, constantly connecting to different directions, intertwining and open to different kinds of impressions which all make the concept of "art" even harder to define. Something that is common in all works of art is form (Read 1970, p. 15). In an article for the Creation Spirituality magazine (1993) Natalie Rogers describes expressive methods as movement, art, drawing, painting, writing, music, improvisation and sound, which can all be used in a supportive setting to experience and express feelings. Similarly to Rogers (1993), also Read (1970, p. 15) explains that art can take "form" or shape in variety of ways, for example in music, paintings, movement, sculptures, literature, and pictures. It is also important to mention at this point the ancient idea that the perception of beauty is subjective and when thinking about art, what pleases one may not please someone else, since we are all unique individuals.

Another important aspect of art is color and according to Read (1970, p. 22) "Colour is the superficial aspect of form". In other words, form is perceived as color and they can-

not be separated, because color is the way rays of light react to the form of an object and how we perceive it. Since color directly affects our senses, it plays a very special part in art. In their book "Color" Zelanski and Fisher (2006, p. 7) support the above mentioned concept and highlight the idea that it is possible to use color as a powerful tool that can intensify and stimulate many of our senses. When one gains more knowledge about how colors can affect us, he or she will be able to use it in many creative ways. Some psychological effects of color are universally accepted and can have an effect on our emotions, for example orange and red may have a stimulating tendency and blue and green might give us a feeling of peacefulness. Considering the phenomenon of how colors can instantly affect us in different ways, it is logical to suggest that using colors is also an excellent way to express emotions or awaken them. (2006, p. 37)

Eiseman (2006, p. 6) also argues that when it comes to different forms of non-verbal communication, using color is a method that can transfer meanings and information in a flash, which makes it a great communication tool. Color can stimulate our senses; helping us to identify different objects, animals, vegetables and so on. Experiencing with different colors we can express our fantasies and let our imagination flow. This experimenting can symbolize something abstract and create an aesthetic or an emotional response.

From infancy on human beings start developing feelings associated with different colors and as Eiseman (2000, p. 13) also explains, some experts believe that the way our brain relates to colors, shape, space and form go back to the beginning of time. He continues by explaining that infants already prefer colorful objects rather than non-colored ones and are less interested in form. Another important factor about color is how it stimulates and improves the development of the brain. One may not even be aware of the affect seeing color has on them or be able to make a conscious connection to a specific matter, but the emotional response is already "recorded" in the brain. Some generalizations can also be made about the way we respond to different colors that are universal and in some ways innate, but as mentioned before, naturally we are all individuals and our reactions can also vary greatly. (Eiseman, 2000, pp. 15-16.)

When we started planning the functional part of our project (the art sessions with the children), we thought it would be a great idea to begin the art activities by painting with the color blue. We wanted to create a pleasant atmosphere from the start, where the

children would feel comfortable and have a chance to get acquainted with each other in a natural way. The inspiration for this idea came from the theories we had previously collected about the effects the color blue can have on us in general. The type of free painting we used during the first session is also something that all the children of our group could easily engage in, it did not require any special skill, but could awaken creativity and imagination. The whole activity of painting was also organized as a team work, which supported one of the main aims (grouping) that was very important to our work-life partner and us.

Zelanski and Fisher (2006, p. 38) suggest that we mainly associate color blue with water and the sky and it has a cooling quality to it. Eiseman (2000, pp. 39-41) also states that the color blue is a calm color and can make us feel restful and relaxed. In addition, it can help us concentrate better, it pleases the eye and is easy to approach. Some people consider blue to be a “male” color, but many researchers oppose that idea and believe instead that color blue is actually the least “gender specific” color and equally attractive to both males and females. Naturally there are different hues of blue that may have a different effect on us and when talking about the color blue in general, one can wonder what tone of blue is in question. Eiseman (2000, p. 63) gives examples to some of the most dominant responses to different hues of blue as follows; sky blue being restful and happy; light blue being calm and peaceful; bright blue being vibrant and energetic; and aqua being healing and refreshing. Before and during the painting session, the children were encouraged to experiment with mixing different shades of blue to their own liking.

## 6.2 Children and the Arts

In the book “Children and the Arts” Hargreaves (1989, pp. viii, ix) discusses how vital it is to educate children in the arts, he believes that for the development of personal qualities such as natural creative expression, self-esteem and social and moral values arts can provide unique opportunities that other areas of a curriculum may not. He also states that amongst many educators and researchers there is a general agreement that arts are often neglected in relation to such areas as math and science, and the questions raised from this issue are of universal importance.

According to Tritten (1965, p. 11) in his book “Art Techniques for Children” he suggests that up until the age of eleven children create entirely from imagination, which is based

on experiences and the development of imagination should therefore be one of the main concerns, when using creative expressive methods with children. He emphasizes on the idea that children's hunger for experiences in order to adapt themselves to the surrounding environment, as well as their want to master reality urges them toward self-expression. When using arts or creative methods with children, they can gain experiences from inside and outside of their personalities.

It is also especially important when working with children that the facilitators do their best to create an atmosphere and projects that will enable children to gain experiences that will develop their imagination. Keeping organized and bringing meaning into different activities is also necessary. Tritten (1965) believes that the development of imagination can intensify one's sensitivity, which will lead to better comprehension and can strengthen children's ability to observe, memorize and fantasize. Facilitators should always remember this when choosing activities. It is essential to support each child's creative urges and give them freedom to make their own choices and create original pieces of work. Visible results are secondary compared to the experience and the creative process transforming into visible form and becoming part of being conscious. Another part of the creative process is learning techniques and choosing materials that the children can freely experience with. Getting familiar with and mastering something new will help them concentrate better, enjoy the activities and gain confidence. The subject or theme should also be the kind that will be inspiring and can spark the children's imagination where real and unreal come together and make a unity. As Tritten puts it: "Everything is part of a wider experience." (Tritten, 1965, p. 11.)

### 6.3 Story crafting

One of the methods that we used in our project was story crafting. In the planning phase of our project we got acquainted with different types of methods and we found that story crafting would serve our purpose best in terms of helping the child to develop own self-understanding and creating more personal and fruitful learning experiences for them.

Karlsson (2000, p. 23) mentions in her book on story crafting method, that human beings learn new, when they encounter things by seeing, listening, smelling, and trying them. We wanted children's experiences to be different and exciting, and that is why

we tried to use various ways of communicating with children in order to create a holistic experience.

One of the ways of communicating with children can be established through story crafting method. According to Karlsson (2000, p. 13) story crafting method is not an exercise that is done by adults for the children, but rather a reciprocal process between a child and an adult. Karlsson (2000, p. 13) also states that story crafting involves not just production or generation of something, but also perceptive receiving of thoughts and assistance in putting those thoughts forward. Karlsson (2000, p. 29) then continues on explaining how children's own culture is considered to be the books that are written by adults for children; theatre performances, where adults are entertaining children; songs and movies that are produced by adults for children. Therefore, Karlsson (2000, p. 29) argues that the actual children's culture has been hidden; children rhyme, tell, play, dance, perform, paint, but still nobody notices and does not document these important materials.

According to Karlsson (2000, p. 174) in the recent years story crafting has been used as a method of listening to and communicating with children in early childhood education in Nordic countries and some other countries as well. There is a number of positive qualities to story crafting. As Karlsson (2000, pp. 13, 20, 23, 50) puts them: the fact that story crafting can be done any place, any time (when child is playing, drawing...); the fact that story crafting involves sharing and listening, and both child and adult; and finally the fact that story crafting can improve child's self-esteem, when he realizes that he is being listened to and taken serious as well (child's words must be written down word-for-word; they cannot be changed). (Karlsson, 2000, pp.13, 20, 23, 50.)

Story crafting method has proven to be a method that can be used in multicultural education as well. It is easily applied in different settings. The connection between children of different cultures is created effortlessly, as children do not necessarily feel that the representatives of other cultures would be any different than they themselves. (Karlsson, 2000, p. 178.)

We saw an opportunity to use some of the stories, which were produced through a story crafting method, were collected from all over the world and were introduced in the book on story crafting written by Karlsson (2000). We thought that it would be beneficial for the children to hear how different the stories were, in order for them to see the dif-



ferences and similarities among the children from all around the world, who were involved in the story crafting project. We also applied the story crafting method with children themselves in one of our sessions to offer an opportunity for them to experience the method and through that to acquire a better self-understanding.

#### 6.4 Importance of Play

Our target group being five-year-old children, we feel it is essential to also have an emphasis on the importance of play. As Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2012p, p. 76) explain, play has the power to integrate and stimulate children's abilities to be creative, as well as increase intellectual, cultural, physical and social abilities, which is why it is an especially valuable element in early childhood education.

Each of the sessions we conducted with the children started with the same "beginning game" and "ending game". We felt that by doing this the children would feel more at ease with our project, with each other and with us. The games also provided different elements of play to our sessions and served as a low-threshold way to open communication. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2012, p. 79) suggest that when young children are learning English as an additional language, participating in interactive play is an excellent way to learn and practice language. One main reason why children seek to communicate with each other is to build relationships with others and the motivation that is provided through play is a great way to increase communication skills, which in turn leads to learning better English. (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2012, p. 79.)

Throughout the five sessions we organized, we could see this type of learning take effect. The children were communicating with each other mainly in English, learning new words, helping others in Finnish if one was not familiar with a particular word, someone else who knew it seemed pleased and proud to translate it. During the games (play) and different activities, the children also seemed to develop stronger relationships and bond with each other, especially when sharing their own stories and listening to others. From the perspective of developing their English language, Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2012, p. 81) add that as a result that happens while interacting and communicating with others, the children learn better listening skills, learn to take turns, as well as how to express themselves better at appropriate times. Even if the children know the rules of communication in their first language, through the conversations that take place while playing children can pick up cues that for example help them recog-

nize breaks or know how to add their own knowledge, which enhances their language development in new environments.

Kalliala (2012, p. 204) also supports the idea that play is one of the most important elements in early childhood education. She expresses that everyone is entitled to play at any age, but during the early years the meaning of play is especially significant and very essential in early childhood education. Kalliala (2012, p. 205) continues on by highlighting that in Finland play is the cornerstone in ECEC and is held in high respect. Another important area that goes hand in hand with imaginative play is art education. Just like play, art education belongs in the center of ECEC. As much as art education should be taken into account, the current situation in Finland is quite alarming and there are only some kindergartens in Finland who are dedicated to offering sufficient amount of art education in their curriculums. Kalliala (2012, p. 217) suggests that art education should be developed in qualitative and quantitative ways as a central concept in ECEC.

Kalliala (2012, p. 217) also believes that well planned art projects is the way to go when planning the yearly curriculum and the theme can be anything between the earth, sky and space. Children tend to get excited to be involved in projects and when the preliminary planning has been done carefully, the implementation will be smoother and the process more successful. We strongly agree with Kalliala about this matter, so before the implementation part of our project; we created an exciting coherent theme and planned each session in great detail. This planning truly proved to be helpful and made the overall process smoother and the results were successful.

## **7 The Project**

In spring 2012 we conducted a series of art circles for five-year-old children in the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool as a part of our functional final project. Multicultural education was the main theme of the sessions. The leading aim for our project was to increase children's world awareness and their self-understanding, which would in turn lead to understanding others better. The need for grouping was introduced to us by the Head Teacher of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool; therefore it was one of our main concerns as well.

As the aim of a functional final project is to guide, instruct, organize or rationalize functions in collaboration with work-life partner (Vilkka and Airaksinen, 2003, p. 9), we created a project that would be useful for our work-life partner in the future as well. The report of the implementation and the theoretical framework behind it will be passed on to our cooperation partner and they will be able to refer back to it and use it as a whole or parts of it for future inspiration. In the coming years they can apply the methods we used in our project in order to provide the five-year-olds with a smooth transition and a chance to get to know each other before the preschool year starts. The project we conducted proved to be successful, but if needed it could be modified to meet the needs of the client.

## 7.1 Functional Final Project

In this chapter we will shortly define the meaning of a functional final project. As Vilkka and Airaksinen explain in their book "Toiminnallinen opinäytetyö" (2003, p. 9) a functional final project is an alternative option to a research-based final project. The aim of a functional final project is to guide, instruct, organize or rationalize functions in collaboration with work-life partner. An essential factor in a functional final project is that it is a combination of practical implementation and reporting it in a research-oriented way. (Vilkka, Airaksinen, 2003, p. 9.)

Vilkka and Airaksinen (2003, pp. 41, 42) state that the practical implementation is not sufficient enough in itself, the project also needs to entail the following elements: professional theoretical knowledge connected with professional practice, critical argumentation about practical solutions, using theories and concepts that arise from them while developing one's own professional environment.

Important factors that need to be kept in mind throughout the whole process are also: ethical guidelines, legislation, and permission issues. Dialogue between the sources is an essential element of the final project, in other words authors and their perspectives must be compared and contrasted to one another, in order to create a critically justified entity. (Härkönen, Karhu, Konkka, Mikkola, and Roivas, 2011, pp. 24, 25, 26, 28.)

## 7.2 Methods Used

Each session of the five-day project had the same structure each time to create a comfortable atmosphere for the children. We developed a simple activity for the beginning and the end of each session. These activities included music and movement for the children to become more relaxed and focused for the upcoming session. These activities were encouraging for them to get to know us and each other in an enjoyable way. As stated in the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care by Stakes (2005, p. 20): child's typical behavioural patterns and thinking processes include play, physical activities, exploring, and expressing oneself through art. Child's natural way of behaving strengthens his wellbeing, self-image and increases his involvement in various activities. We aimed to follow the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC throughout our project and the methods chosen for the sessions were supported by it.

In several sessions Montessori materials (geography materials: globes and continent map) were used to connect the children's previous knowledge of the continents to our theme. As art has an essential role in the development of the child's whole personality (Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, 2008); we wanted to use arts as a mean to enhance children's learning and to support their development. Stakes (2005, p. 24) then further reinforces the importance of artistic expression: through experiencing and making art child develops as an individual and as a member of a group. Painting, drawing, making a collage, coloring, and printing were the art methods applied in the sessions. They are a low threshold methods and excellent ways to support learning and creativity. As art is also an international language, it does not necessarily require any previous knowledge or skills.

Children's cognitive development was an important element in our sessions; vocabulary enrichment (by teaching the children e.g. names of the fruits in the fruit printing exercise) was provided. As Stakes (2005, p. 27) explains the meaning of language: it is a tool for communication and interaction within all areas of content orientation, which is introduced in the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC as one of the central elements of ECEC Plan. That is why it is of utmost importance to speak to the children using clear and proper language and to provide children with the explanations on new concepts (Stakes, 2005, p. 27). We aimed at using proper language and providing explanations on new concepts at all times during our sessions. For vocabulary increase-ment purposes we used e.g. story crafting and reading a story book for the children. Story crafting was a method that was applied in our project, since it was familiar to us

from previous experiences in working with children and we were also very interested in it. Reading a story book to the children was another way to enhance the learning experience.

According to Santrock (2009, p. 422) “from infancy to adolescence parents can serve important roles in managing their children’s experiences and opportunities”. We felt that since family is an essential part of culture and child’s development, we wanted to bring more attention to the subject. In one of the sessions we emphasized the importance of family and since Mother’s day was approaching our work-life partner suggested we would devote one of the sessions for that theme. The children were also given an opportunity to make a Mother’s day gift. Story crafting and drawing were the main methods of implementation of the session.

In the fruit printing activity we introduced different fruits from around the world and children involved most of their senses during this session. As children learn by doing and experiencing (Miller, Cable, and Goodliff, 2012, p. 9), we felt that this kind of work would bring multicultural education to them in a more concrete way. We believe that elements of art and multicultural education formed a holistic experience for the children. Similarities and differences were explored in the last session by using story crafting and reading the stories from around the world. Viewing videos and discussing about the colorfulness of African art were applied to inspire children to use their creativity with colors.

Grouping was an important element that was emphasized by our work-life partner and we kept it as a central focus throughout the project. Since the group of children we were working with was small in size, it was easy for us to facilitate that group.

To conclude this chapter we would like to mention that we aimed at following the National Curriculum Guidelines on ECEC throughout the whole project. We tried to apply a number of methods and to provide a rich variety of activities, in order to enhance the children’s learning experience during the sessions. We believe that the methods we used served the purpose.

### 7.3 Sessions with Children

All of the sessions had the same structure, in order for the children to be able to predict the upcoming activities. Each session contained three parts: warm-up game, activity part, and the ending game. All in all there were five sessions and the themes of those sessions were interconnected to create an entity.

In the first session we introduced Montessori world globes and stressed the difference of different surfaces on the globe - smooth surface represented water and the rough surface represented land and the different colors representing different continents. The main theme of the day was ocean and the color blue. We showed the children how the color blue can be mixed with using white and black to make different shades of blue. Painting was the main art activity of the session.

In the second session we used Montessori continent map in order to give a concrete idea of the different shapes and colors of continents. We also used picture booklets of each continent from Montessori classroom to provide additional information on what are the common features of a continent in question. Then we connected the art work from the previous session to the second session's art project by showing the children the blue papers with continents glued to them. We divided the children into smaller groups and presented different materials: beads, small toys, pieces of puzzle, fabrics, jewelry, etc. to them. The next step was to collect a number of objects from the materials that were laid out by us in advance. Then the children were guided to a continent poster, where they had a chance to glue the objects they chose earlier to the poster.

The theme of the third session was "My Family". We had a book called "Mama Robot", which we read in the circle. After going through the story, the whole group discussed the different types of families and the persons that can be part of the family, like grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and even pets. We wanted to remind the children that word family can mean more than just the nuclear family. In the activity part of this session children were supposed to draw a picture of their family. At this point a story crafting method was used. One of us was enriching children's vocabulary and keeping them motivated, while the other adult was applying the story crafting method with the other group.

The main theme of the fourth session was fruit-printing. We introduced the fruits one by one, by telling the fruit's/ vegetable's name, country of origin, and by letting the children feel and smell the fruit. The fruits were cut in half in front of the children so that they

could see what the fruit looked like inside as well. Children were given a fabric bag to make the fruit print of their choice on them.

In the fifth and last session the children were divided into two groups. The other group watched a couple of short Tinga-Tinga videos, had a discussion about them and continued on to color different Tinga-Tinga character coloring sheets, which they got to choose themselves. The second group sat down in a circle and listened to four different stories from around the world written by other children, using the story crafting method. Their own stories and the other group members' stories about family, which were written a couple of days earlier using the story crafting method, were read as well. After listening to the stories, a discussion took place and the children were able to express their thoughts and feelings about them.

## **8 Evaluation**

### **8.1 Assessment of the Implementation**

Vilkka and Airaksinen (2003, p. 154) stress the importance of the evaluation of the functional final project. Evaluating the whole of the project is part of the learning process and it also needs to be conducted in a critical way. (Vilkka, Airaksinen, 2003, p. 154.) In this chapter we aim to assess the implementation part of our project from the early planning to final stages. Having conducted five well planned sessions, we believe that we reached our personal and our work-life partner's goals. We had planned a series of sessions in advance and presented our preliminary plan to the Head Teacher of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, who then approved it.

The planning of the project began in the beginning of 2012. We studied topics, related to our interests, such as multicultural education and creative expressive methods. After we had studied the topic areas and brainstormed, we decided to concentrate on a theme of world awareness using arts as a mean. Since we started the process early enough, we had adequate amount of time and plenty of theory to successfully organize the sessions.

Considering that all of us were familiar with the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool from either working or doing school projects there, it seemed natural to us to conduct our final project with them. We were given a chance to examine the existing materials and we were also offered an opportunity to use some of them in our sessions. Additional materials that we needed we either purchased (with the funds provided by our work-life partner) or collected from the warehouse of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre Ltd (Kierrätyskeskus). Both we and our work-life partner were very satisfied with the materials we had gathered for the project. The staff at the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre Ltd (Kierrätyskeskus) was very helpful and assisted us in finding suitable materials from the separate warehouse that is meant only for schools and kindergartens. All of the materials were free of charge, well-organized, of good quality, and the selection was extensive. We were truly inspired by the experience of visiting the Centre and we would also like to recommend it to everyone planning any kind of arts and crafts activities with children.

The Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool offered us to use their preschool room for our sessions. It was an appropriate space for the size of the group and for the activities that we planned to conduct. Some of the art materials required large working areas, so before each session we had organized separate areas for the beginning and the end and the actual activity of each session. The classroom suited our needs perfectly; we were able to conduct our sessions in peace and we did not disturb other groups' daily functions much.

Size of the group and the age of the children were defined during the meetings with our work-life partner. We were given a group of seven children, who were five-year-old and were starting preschool the following autumn. Although the children were of the same age; they were from separate groups and that is why we were asked to plan a series of sessions in order to bring them together, let them get to know each other better, and have this connecting experience before the preschool year starts. In our opinion the size of the group was good, since it gave us and the children an opportunity to interact more closely with one another. The activities were carried out smoothly, since we did not have to divide them into smaller groups in every single session. We did however divide them couple of times, due to the time frame of the sessions and the methods we used those days. As the children we conducted the session with were five-year-old, their developmental stage was already at the level, where they could manage more challenging tasks and were able to concentrate better. Therefore it was fairly easy for



us to plan and implement the sessions. Also at this age world view and world awareness are starting to develop, therefore this age group was a perfect choice for us.

Beginning and the end activities in our sessions were the same each time; this way children felt more at ease, because they could predict the upcoming session's structure. Each session we had a short introduction of the upcoming activities and as the beginning and the ending games remained the same, it created a familiar and safe learning environment. The games that we chose were simple, clear, and involved movement, which enabled them to get rid of excess energy and tension. Children were also excited, when they already knew what the games were about and seemed to express themselves more freely. The continuity seemed to work well and since the atmosphere was pleasant, all of us benefited from the learning that occurred.

As one of the main aims for our project was to increase children's world awareness, we planned our sessions around this idea. The themes we had were the following: the world, the continents, family, nature, people and different cultures. These topics created an entity and introduced different elements of the world to the children, in order for them to gain more refined world awareness. We used expressive methods, because they are a low threshold way to develop children's imagination and creativeness as well. Our target group being five-year-old children, we felt that it is also essential to have an emphasis on the importance of play. Play is the most natural way for children to express themselves and is a part of mostly everything they do. Play is highly imaginative, but it has the power to integrate and stimulate children's creativeness, as well as increase intellectual, cultural, physical and social abilities (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2012, p.76). Imaginative play and expressive arts go hand in hand and they are both central elements in ECEC (Stakes, 2005). Overall we feel that the themes and the methods we chose to use were valid, considering both ours and our work-life partner's goals. We believe that the overall experience the children had supported their learning and development.

According to Louis (2009, pp. 5, 6) cultural awareness and own world view develop through practicing many different skills, therefore it is a subject that is difficult to assess. We feel that the increasement of world awareness in children is impossible to measure in a concrete way. Päivi Kuutsa (2012b) also agreed that within the timeframe of our project assessing the children in terms of gaining world awareness was extremely difficult considering that it is a continuous process. She believed that the themes we

introduced were a valuable addition to the preschool's curriculum and she would like to carry on discussing these types of themes with the children.

Another goal for our project was to increase children's self-understanding. According to Santrock (2009, p. 339) the development of self and self-understanding happens through experience; therefore it cannot just be delivered or taught to the children by the people surrounding them. We used various methods during our sessions in order for the children to have richer experiences; and through those children had an opportunity to learn something new about themselves. Tritten (1965, p. 11) explains that it is essential to support each child's creative urges and give them freedom to make their own choices and create original pieces of work. Even though it is challenging to evaluate whether one's self-understanding has increased, throughout our project children seemed empowered during the activities. Therefore, we believe that we have provided a good environment in order for the children to gain a better self-understanding.

The need for grouping was introduced to us by our work-life partner and consequently it became one of our main goals as well. When planning the sessions we searched information on group formation and group dynamics and reflected on some of our prior experiences. We realize that a group formation is a complicated process; however, it seemed that during the five sessions children began to connect with each other and by the end of our project they became a closer unit. Through our observations we could see that the children were more comfortable with each other as the sessions progressed. Even though we had a limited amount of time, we felt that they benefited from our project as a group and they started to make stronger connections. We believe that the children will remember this experience and will have an existing bond, when they begin their preschool year. In retrospect we could have organized some of the activities in a different way. Although the group was small, there could have been more pair exercises for the children to get to know each other better and to feel more at ease. Also we could have used more introductory games during the sessions in general.

The works of art that were created were put on the display so that the children involved and others could appreciate them. The Mother's Day gift (stories told by children, drawings and bags with prints) was a wonderful way to involve the whole family in our project. Sharing and appreciating one's own and others' works are essential parts of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool values. (Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, 2008) The children also showed pride in and were excited to

discuss their works that were displayed. We were impressed by the creativeness the children showed throughout the whole project. It was great to see how involved and interested in the topics and activities children were during the sessions.

To conclude this chapter we want to express that we believe that this type of a project will benefit the work-life partner and the target group in the future. There has been a need for this kind of a project for a long time and we hope that our project was inspiring and that it could be implemented time and again. Our project can be used as it is or modified to suit the circumstances. Overall we feel that the implementation part of the project was successful and the experiences gained from it are valuable.

## 8.2 Feedback and Observations

In this chapter we will discuss different ways we collected feedback about the sessions. The children, the Head Teacher, and other members of staff were the sources for the feedback. In addition we gathered feedback by observing the sessions and having discussions among ourselves throughout the project.

Since children were our primary target group, we wanted to collect some instant feedback from them after each session. The ending game of each session was the time, when we received comments from the children on the session of that day. We planned an ending game, where children could give their opinions in a creative way. We asked questions about each activity of that day and children were to express themselves in a form of a movement, e.g. "jump if you liked drawing". Most of the time children responded by doing the actual movement, which was an indicator for us that the activity was exciting for them and that they appreciated the exercise. The reason for choosing this way of getting feedback was that it was fun and less intimidating for the children. After the last session we also collected additional feedback from the children about the whole project in a form of smile face/ frown face flash cards. We asked children different questions, concerning all of the sessions and the activities we had implemented. We were delighted to see that children felt safe to express their own opinions and that they remembered the sessions well. Overall the feedback we received was positive and the children were excited to share the things they have enjoyed. They seemed to be happy and content throughout the whole project and showed their personal interests in different elements of the series of sessions. Since it can be more difficult to collect

feedback from the children, than from the adults, we felt that the methods we used worked well.

We also had a feedback discussion with Päivi Kuutsa (2012a), the Head Teacher of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, right after the end of the last session. We wanted to go through our project in general as well as discussing some parts of the sessions in more detail to receive her professional opinion on the matter. Her overall view was that we created a nice planned project. She felt that it was good that we had several sessions with the children, since we did not know them beforehand and this way it was possible for them to get relaxed and to get to know us better. She explained how she appreciated the outcome of the sessions. She thought that the art works were great and it was a good idea to put them on display, as the children got an opportunity to reflect on their own art works and to share the experience with others. Kuutsa then pointed out that the painting activity was an excellent opportunity for the five-year-olds to practice team work skills as it is one of the important learning goals in Preschool. She found the fruit printing activity to be interesting, since we used fruits instead of stencils that they normally use and it made the experience to “come alive” and created a connection to nature. (Kuutsa, 2012a.)

Päivi Kuutsa (2012a) saw the connection between the sessions, but she felt that the sessions could have been more interconnected, e.g. we could have gone through previous sessions' activities and outcomes in the beginning of each session rather than introducing the new topic straight away. However, given the time frame, she supported the choice we made. Based on our previous experiences working with children, we decided it would be a good idea and more beneficial for them if each session would be a separate entity. In case some of the children were absent, they would still have an opportunity to start each session fresh, which would eliminate any chance of anyone feeling disempowered. All in all Kuutsa felt that the project was successful, since all of the children wanted to participate in all of the activities. Since Päivi Kuutsa is the preschool teacher, the sessions gave her some valuable information on the group dynamics of the five-year-olds, who will be next year's preschoolers. (Kuutsa, 2012a.)

In autumn 2012 we received additional feedback from Päivi Kuutsa in a form of “Working Life Project Evaluation Form”. In the paper she commented on different evaluation areas: the relevance of the topic, students' cooperation abilities, project's relevance to working life, and students' professional growth. In general her views on our project

were similar to the feedback we had received from before. However, as some time had passed, she recognized some other positive elements in our project. She mentioned arts, culture, and geography in combination with recycling as themes that they would like to carry on using for educational purposes in the future. She felt that assessing students' professional growth was challenging for her within this timeframe. Despite that she thought that the students had responded to the feedback given after each session and had adjusted the upcoming session accordingly. (Kuutsa, 2012b.)

During the feedback time, which we had among us after each session, we analyzed and discussed the outcome of the day; in addition we received some positive comments from the staff members, which we truly appreciated. During each session one of the staff members of the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool was always present to observe and to support the children, who might feel uncomfortable. Moreover, as we do not have the kindergarten teacher qualification nor we are members of the staff, we were obliged to have one of the staff members of the Preschool present at all times.

Fortunately there were three of us so while the other two facilitated the group activities of the day, one of us had the opportunity to observe and take notes in order to document each session. The person, who had the role of the observer, had a more objective eye for the little details that might have otherwise gone unnoticed, positive or negative. For example, in the first session we did not prepare the name tags beforehand, which slowed down the start of the session at hand; the observer noticed that and so at the next session we prepared the name tags ready in advance. The observer was able to pay special attention to such elements as general feeling or atmosphere, children's attention span, group management skills, group dynamics, and individual reactions during the sessions.

As a conclusion we feel that since this is a functional final project, the way we collected our feedback was sufficient, considering our goals. All in all the feedback that we have received during this whole project has been positive and empowering to us. We feel that this experience has been a rewarding learning process and we have gained more knowledge about the planning and the implementation of a project.

## 9 Ethical Considerations

During each step of our final project process we have taken into consideration different ethical questions and matters. We feel that the importance of ethical awareness and responsibility is especially vital when working with children, but in a similar respect anyone who may be in some way connected to our final project at any stage of the process. As Talentia (2012, p. 5) highlights in their ethical guidelines “the social welfare field has a special relationship with ethics and human rights” and behind all the activity is the Finnish Legislation. (Talentia ry, 2012, p. 5)

One of our main aims was to raise world awareness, which entails a variety of different aspects including multiculturalism, as well as learning about differences. We tried to plan our sessions in a way that everyone could equally take part in every activity and each decision we made was based on ethical consideration and sensitivity toward the children. As stated in the basic rights chapter of the Finnish Constitution; diversity and equality should be recognized and everyone should be equal before the law, including children who should always be treated equally as individuals whom are allowed to influence matters that involve them to a degree that corresponds with their level of development. (Suomen Perustuslaki, 731/1999, 6 §) Talentia’s ethical guidelines (2012, p. 9) bring forward the importance for social workers to always recognize and respect the ethical and cultural diversities in our society. During our project we kept these guidelines in mind and took into account the individual, family, group and community differences. (Talentia, ry, 2012, p. 9)

Multiculturalism is a broad concept and at times it can also be quite a sensitive subject. When considering ethical matters we believe that to begin with we needed to gain more personal knowledge about multiculturalism. Understand the meaning and basic concepts related to it better in order to conduct a successful project. We also wanted to provide the reader a more detailed picture of the topic by defining some essential terms that are connected to multiculturalism, as well as offering theories that are relevant and supportive. We believe it is important and ethical to give good grounds that support our choices, e.g. one of the main themes being multiculturalism. During the sessions with the children we chose not to use more complex terms and refrained from defining such matters as ethnicity. Our main focus was to increase the children’s world awareness, and considering the educators we wanted to develop activities that are practical and helpful when creating solutions for everyday challenges that may arise from the need of

introducing more multicultural education in kindergartens curricula. The methods we chose to use support children's learning and the materials we used during the sessions are easily accessible to all. We highly recommend using recycling, as it is an important part of taking care of the world.

We also paid attention to such matters as equally listening to all the children and made sure even the shyest ones were being heard and would feel comfortable being part of the group. In a similar respect we tried to describe and provide information about each session in a way that was clear enough for all to understand and still spark the children's interest. We wanted to offer them an environment that supported learning and creativity. The chapter on "Client's right for participation and self-determination" in Talentia Ethical Guidelines discusses minor's right for self-determination – With the consideration of children's age and developmental level, children need to be provided information on matters that concern them, children's interests must be established, and children must be heard (Talentia ry, 2012, p. 8).

Another important ethical matter is providing all the essential information to everyone who is connected to our project in different ways. For example our work-life partner, parents of the children, staff members of the organization and the supervising teachers. Since the beginning of our project we have practiced open and straight forward communication and shared all relevant information with all involved. In reverse we have listened and considered others suggestions and made decisions accordingly throughout the project. Some ethical questions were raised when we thought about our theme and the theoretical framework. In the beginning stages of the process we decided to stay quite neutral with the choices we made and not bring up for instance religious matters. We acquired the necessary permissions to be able to continue on with our project by sending a Letter of Permission to the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool, which was approved. We also sent an Info Letter to the Parents, in which we shortly described who we were, the activity sessions we were organizing and when it was taking place. If additional information was needed or anyone had any questions, they could contact the Head Teacher of the preschool, who would then contact us.

One of the central concepts in the social work field is confidentiality. When thinking from an ethical point of view, working on our final project we needed to consider confidentiality when co-operating with different people, as well as during each step of writing the report. Talentia ethical guidelines (2012, p. 8) explain the right to privacy as the

most essential factor that governs the social work field; a professional should always respect the confidentiality of the client relationship and protect their privacy (Talentia ry, 2012, p. 8). Our aim throughout the process was to provide accurate and reliable information about our project, which we were able to do without mentioning names in our report, other than when we had special permission to do so. Since our target group was children, we feel that the concept of confidentiality is extremely sensitive, because they are still minors. During the sessions when we observed the children and took notes, we refrained from recording such matters that may be identifying and concentrated on phenomena that were helpful for us when assessing our aims, the process and the project as a whole. Although we felt that it was essential to take pictures of the children's works to have as visual examples of our project, we made sure not to take any pictures directly of the children, only their "products."

In the introduction part of the Professional Ethics Guidelines done by Lastentarhanopettajaliitto it is stated that the kindergarten teacher could become an important person, which the child would remember throughout the years; as well as the fact that the kindergarten teacher is always posing as an example to the child. (Lastentarhanopettajaliitto, 2004). In our case, although we are not kindergarten teachers that are involved with the children on a daily basis, we feel that this is an important factor and applies to us as well. During the five continuous days that our project lasted we strived to offer the children memorable experiences and as adults we were still in a position of power and made sure to set forth by positive example. In relation to the above mentioned, Professional Ethics Guidelines (2004) also suggests that good experiences in the education and care can promote lifelong learning and serving children's needs first is a core concept. (Lastentarhanopettajaliitto, 2004)

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Code of Ethics (2012) states that professionals in social work must support and promote the welfare of a human being, so that all levels of it are taken into account – physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual. Another statement from the Code of Ethics that we also think is particularly important is: "Social workers should be prepared to state the reasons for their decisions based on ethical considerations, and be accountable for their choices and actions" (ISFW, 2012). Although the ISFW's Code of Ethics (2012) is directed to social workers, we find them to be relevant considering the entire social field. During our project we believe that we supported the children's welfare in all the above mentioned ways and we take full responsibility for all the choices and actions we have made. As described



throughout this chapter we have stated the reasons for our decisions and they are based on ethical consideration.

## **10 Conclusions**

In spring 2012 we conducted the implementation part of our functional final project. We organized a series of sessions with five-year-olds at the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool. The sessions' aim was to increase children's world awareness, their self-understanding and to improve group dynamics using expressive methods.

The process before the implementation involved a lot of theory collection and theory analysis, a search for suitable methods, and the planning of the sessions. We feel that the most challenging part was to select most relevant theories and methods for us. After having made our choices the process continued on more smoothly.

As the implementation part of our project was carefully planned beforehand, it was easier for us to conduct successful sessions. All in all we believe that based on the feedback we have received from the children, the Head Teacher, and the staff and based on our own observations and reflections; we had reached the goals we set for the project and the experience was pleasant for everyone.

We will leave the report of our project for our work-life partner so that they can benefit from it in the future as well, when planning and implementing similar kinds of projects. We hope that our project will serve as a source for inspiration not just for our cooperation partner, but for other kindergartens as well.

## **11 Discussion and Future Studies**

As human beings of a contemporary society we need to acknowledge the fact that the world is becoming more and more diverse and we need to start to fully understand what effects multiculturalism has on the whole society. Turkovich (1998, p. 27) explains that as the globalization takes place and as monoculturalism is gradually disappearing, people all over the world need tools and knowledge to understand their own culture

and other cultures better. Venninen (2009, p. 36) also argues that only when multicultural education is seen to be affecting all, then no educator can withdraw from the responsibility of teaching about multiculturalism. It is essential to teach children about multiculturalism early on in their lives. As Räsänen (1998, p. 32) puts it: childhood is the time, when the basis for our world view is starting to form and it is proved to be difficult to reconstruct that view later in life. Consequently, it is essential to start to gain knowledge on multiculturalism as early on as possible. (Räsänen, 1998, p. 32.)

Throughout the whole project we came back to the core documents that guide the Early Childhood Education and Care practice time and again – the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool Unit's ECEC Plan, the National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland, and the laws. All of the documents supported each other in terms of multicultural education.

According to Louis (2009, pp. 5, 6) cultural awareness and one's own world view develop through practicing many different skills. That is why we tried to apply many different methods in our sessions, in order to support the children's learning. As expressive methods are low threshold methods, we believe that those methods would suit best for dealing with such a sensitive subject as multiculturalism.

Even though we had prepared ourselves for the upcoming process - the planning and the implementing parts of the functional final project; it came as a surprise that there were so many different stages in the process and that it was challenging to find common time for our group to discuss and work on the project. We all had to practice group communication skills throughout the process, which has proved to be challenging at times. We believe that we have gained valuable knowledge on and understanding of the nature of doing project work. We feel that our communication skills have improved during the process, which supported our professional growth. The implementation part of the project went well with only minor difficulties, such as preparation arrangements. We feel that the sessions for the children were successful, because we have had experiences in conducting similar types of projects during our studies at the Helsinki Metropolia University of Applied Sciences.

In our opinion the strengths of our project stem from the following areas: the synthesis of knowledge of three people in our group and an opportunity to divide tasks among ourselves; the fact that we aimed at spreading awareness on multicultural education

not only for the children, but also for the early childhood educators; using expressive methods as means for conducting the project, as those methods are a neutral way to spark children's interest in any topic area; and also the fact that we have seen in a concrete way that we have inspired the work-life partner to use our ideas (e.g. they have applied one of our ideas in a fundraising project).

Some of the areas for further development of our project that we have recognized are: the topics of the sessions were broad and each topic could have been a separate long term project; there could have been a follow-up session in the autumn of 2012, in order for us to receive an additional feedback on how the project has influenced children in a long run; and as multicultural education and arts are both very important subjects and because there is a high demand for further studies of those areas in the early childhood education field, we would have wanted to organize a workshop for the early childhood educators on those topics as well.

We feel that it would be fairly easy to conduct a similar type of project as ours. Nevertheless it is important to keep in mind that organizing a project is a challenging process. Careful and detailed planning is extremely important and it will help with the actual implementation greatly. Reserving enough time at each stage of the process is essential in terms of succeeding in implementing the project. We found it useful to examine different arts and crafts books to get ideas and inspiration. We highly recommend using the warehouse of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre Ltd (Kierrätyskeskus) as it has rich variety of arts and crafts materials. When working with children, it is of utmost importance to have a back-up plan, since changes may occur at any time and the facilitators need to be prepared for that. Conducting projects with children is very rewarding and we encourage anyone, who is interested in early childhood education to conduct a similar type of project.

Throughout our project we have thought about the state of the early childhood education field in general and the role of multicultural education in ECEC in more detail. While collecting literature on multicultural education, we noticed that there is a lack of such literature for the early childhood education field. It came as a surprise to us, since as it was mentioned earlier in this report, it would be crucial to start teaching children on multiculturalism as early on as possible. That is why we feel that as one of the topics for future studies one could conduct a follow-up research on the attitudes of children on multiculturalism and the ways how to best educate children about multiculturalism.

As we have discovered, there is an urgent need for practical solutions and tools for the early childhood educators for everyday situations, which involve multicultural issues. We believe that even in children groups, where there are no multicultural children, educators need to acknowledge, understand, and teach children on multiculturalism. Since the society is no longer monocultural; this topic concerns all. Even though this is a subject that has been studied before, there should still be more research done in the future. Workshops for the early childhood educators concerning this topic could be a good option as well.

To conclude we would like to say that we feel content with the way our project went. We hope that it will act as an inspiration for others to do more research and to conduct projects on this subject area. We believe that multiculturalism is a topic that is not only fascinating, but also rewarding, because there is always something new that you can learn about it. Using expressive arts as a method to educate can enhance the children's learning, support their overall development, and create much more fruitful and meaningful experiences. All in all the experience of conducting our final project has been exciting, challenging, rewarding, at times exhausting, but most importantly vital for our professional growth. We have learned so much throughout the process, including theoretical as well as practical knowledge. Our individual and group work competences have developed and overall the whole experience has been empowering.

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## Info Letter to Parents at the Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool



Dear Parents,

We would like to inform you about upcoming activity sessions organized by three students from the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences: Kati Paloniemi, Olga Lopintsova and Katja Wahlroos. You may be familiar with Kati and Olga, since they have been members of the Montessori preschool staff. The theme of these sessions will be art and cultural education ("My world view"). The sessions will be held on the following days: 4.5.2012, 7.5.2012, 8.5.2012, 9.5.2012 and 10.5.2012 between the hours of 9:45-10:30. For more information please contact Päivi Kuutsa.

Have a wonderful spring.

Sincerely,

Kati, Olga and Katja

**Letter of Permission to the Helsinki English Language Montessori Pre-school**

Helsinki English Language Montessori Preschool  
Lapinlahdenkatu 13 B, FIN-00180 Helsinki, FINLAND

16.4.2012

Dear Montessori Preschool Board Members,

We are seeking your permission to hold our final thesis project sessions at the Montessori preschool on the following days: 4.5.2012, 7.5.2012, 8.5.2012, 9.5.2012 and 10.5.2012 between the hours of 9:45-10:30. Together with the staff at Montessori preschool we have decided that the group taking part will consist of seven children at the age of five. The themes of the sessions are art and cultural education. These sessions will be held by three students from the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences: Kati Paloniemi, Olga Lopintsova and Katja Wahlroos.

Thank You for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kati Paloniemi

Olga Lopintsova

Katja Wahlroos

Approved



Olli Sauntela  
vice chairman, Board



Heidi Puolitaival  
Chairman, Board

**WORKING LIFE PROJECT EVALUATION**  
IN THE DEGREE PROGRAMME OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Dear partner,

We would like you to assess the final project of our student, principally from working life perspective. His/her ability to co-operate with professionals in the field of social services is relevant as a basis for assessment as well as his/her ability to perceive developmental challenges in the field.

WORKPLACE/UNIT

Helsinki english Montessori preschool

STUDENT(S) TO BE ASSESSED:

Olga Lopintsova, Kati Paloniemi ja Katja Wahlroos

TOPIC/TITLE OF THE FINAL PROJECT:

Multicultural education through Creative Arts in ECE

**Evaluation areas:**

1. Relevance of the topic from the perspective of developing client-oriented professional work

The multicultural issues come up naturally in this kind of environment. The expressive methods are an easy way to introduce this topic to children of this age (5-year-olds).

2. The student's ability to co-operate in a constructive, innovative and productive way with working life representatives

The project was managed well as an entity. The students had planned the project in details and were able to bring it to practice independently.

3. How to use the final project in working life, how to use it for developing the field

As this project took place in a Montessori preschool, we have geography and culture materials in use already. After this project we can carry on combining recycling, arts, culture and geography for educational purposes.

4. The student's professional growth, his/her ability to have a reflective professional approach to work, his/her ability to recognise his/her own resources and developmental challenges

It's hard to assess the professional growth of the students in such a short period of time. However, the student were able to respond to the feedback received and adjust to suggested changes in some practical details.

Place and date: In Helsinki 10<sup>th</sup> September 2012

Working life representative:

Päivi Kuntta



Helsinki  
English-Language  
Montessori School

Lapinlahdenkatu 13, 00180 Helsinki

## Detailed Sessions Description

### *First Session - Friday 4.05.2012:*

We started off by welcoming the children to join the circle, and then we introduced ourselves and gave all the children their name tags. One of the children spontaneously expressed his observation that children's name tags looked just the same as ours, which we thought was a sign that they were feeling comfortable from the very start. Throughout the sessions we tried our best to respond to the children's actions and behavior to create best possible atmosphere for learning, creative expression, and freely using one's imagination.

After letting children know we were doing an art activity with them, we moved on to the warm-up game, which was shortly explained. One of us described the game: "When the music starts, you start moving/ dancing; and when the music stops, everyone freezes. Everybody is asked to say something nice and funny about a person's pose closest to them". We thought it would be good to begin by instructing children to move according to how we were moving, so that the first warm-up game would not be too intimidating. For the next round children were encouraged to move the way they wanted, while the music plays. Children were happy to follow the instructions, after which they started dancing freely and enjoying themselves.

Next everyone was asked to sit down in a circle on pillows and two different Montessori world globes were introduced. Children got to feel the globes. One globe had smooth and rough surfaces, representing land and water (sand paper and blue paint). The other one had different colors, representing each continent. The Montessori globes were of the same size, varying only in the surface. Children were very curious about the globes and enjoyed feeling their hands on them. Since the globes are part of the Montessori materials, children were already somewhat familiar with them. Together we discussed how many continents there are and how much water (color blue) there is all over the globe/ world. Then we went through the different colors of the other globe and the continents they represented. Children seemed very interested and repeated the names and color codes for each continent after us.

The main theme of the day was ocean and the color blue. We showed the children how the color blue can be mixed with using white and black to make different shades of blue. Children seemed extremely curious about the color-mixing and they were all given cups to mix their individual shades of blue. They enjoyed the process, while sharing thoughts, showing their shades to us and each other. Next the children moved on to the area where a long strip of paper was set up and they were instructed to paint all of the white area with their blue colors.

Throughout the session excitement could be seen in children's eyes. We felt that the background music during the painting was relaxing and enhancing the environment. There was positive energy in the classroom. Children sounded inspired when the shades of blue were blending together. It also seemed that the children were truly working as a team. In some sense they were so involved in the process of painting that a bit of arguing took place about sharing the different types of brushes and space. As we recognized this happening, we had an idea of dropping different shades of blue on the papers, so that the children would experience how the color can change. This motivated children to continue exploring the process of painting and complete the entire piece of art as a team. After finishing painting "the ocean" the children were happy with the end result. The Head Teacher was very pleased as well, inspired by the group painting activity, expressing how she would like to use the idea in the future.

To complete the first session we had developed an ending game ("Do this if you like..."). We introduced the game and showed examples of how it worked. E.g. "Jump, if you liked the music", "Go under a table, if you liked painting", "Touch your nose, if you liked dancing", etc. Children were watching and laughing. After seeing how the game worked, they were asked several questions about the first session's activities, like the ones mentioned above. And according to their actions, most of the children seemed to have enjoyed themselves and had fun doing each activity. When observing children's facial expressions, actions, behavior, energy, and body language, we felt that the first session was successful.

#### *Second Session - Monday 7.05.2012:*

The session started with the familiar warm-up game. The children appeared more relaxed than at the first session. They were expressing themselves more freely. We sup-

ported the children by giving positive feedback on the “freeze” poses, since we noticed some tension, when the children were supposed to individually comment on friend’s pose in front of others.

The actual presentation of the session’s theme started off again by connecting theme with the familiar material from Montessori classroom. We used Montessori continent map in order to give a concrete idea of the different shapes and colors of continents. We also used picture booklets of each continent from Montessori classroom to provide additional information on what are the common features of a continent in question. We placed the picture booklets next to continent posters, so that the children would have the opportunity to look at the pictures of a specific continent. However, the children were so involved in the process of making a collage that they did not use the booklets at all.

Then we connected the art work from the previous session to the second session’s art project by showing the children the blue papers with continents glued to them. We divided children into smaller groups and presented different materials: beads, small toys, pieces of puzzle, fabrics, jewelry, etc. to them. The next step was to collect a number of objects from the materials that were laid out by us in advance. Then they were guided to a continent poster, where they had a chance to glue the objects they chose earlier to the poster. As instructed earlier, children were to change to the next continent when they were told so. Given the time frame, unfortunately all the children did not have the opportunity to work on each continent.

After finishing the art project, the children were asked to go around and look at the end product. We recognized that some of the materials used, were not a match to the continent in question (e.g. Australian koala was placed in Asia). However, children were very thrilled about using different objects for the art project.

In the end we discussed how many different kinds of people, animals, cultures, things there are in the world and how empty the continents would look like if there was nothing on them, referring to the filling in the continents in our art exercise as well. One child commented that the activity was fun and that the continents looked much better filled with different objects. After a short discussion, it was time for the ending game, where the children were asked to do something if they liked the activity in question.

The continents with all the objects on them were then displayed in the corridor for all the children to see. The idea was to give the children an opportunity to reflect on the art project.

*Third Session - Tuesday 8.05.2012:*

The theme of this session was “My family”. This session started the same way as the previous ones – by warm-up game. Some of the children did not feel comfortable participating, but all of the children remembered the funny pose that someone did the day before, which was named: “egg” and many of the children wanted to freeze in that pose during the game. Everybody was asked to sit down in a circle.

We had a book called “Mama Robot”, which we read in the circle. Children listened intensively. Since the book was in Finnish, we translated it in English and used post-it slips for the translated text. The post-it slips were placed on the back cover of the book, so that the children had an opportunity to follow the story and look at the pictures better.

After the story we asked whether children enjoyed the book and whether they remembered the main points of the story. After going through the story, the whole group discussed the different types of families and the persons that can be part of the family, like grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and even pets. We wanted to remind the children that word family can mean more than just the nuclear family. During the discussion children had a chance to tell about their family and who or what belonged to it. Children were divided into two groups. Both groups were supposed to draw a picture of their family. At this point a story crafting method was used. One of us was enriching children’s vocabulary and keeping them motivated, while the other adult was applying the story crafting method with the other group. After a while adults switched places. Each child was able to participate and tell a story about their mother/ family and it was documented (story crafting method). Some of the children were not comfortable using English in this exercise; in those cases we used Finnish. The length of the story varied from one child to another greatly.

The children were asked to go back to the circle, where we went through all of the children's drawings and discussed them. Even the children, who had difficulties with expressing themselves in English wanted to share what they have drawn.

The children became quite restless in the end and we decided to end the session promptly with the familiar ending game.

*Fourth Session - Wednesday 9.05.2012:*

Fourth session started off with the warm-up game. Children felt at ease playing the game and many comments were made even without the adult's help. Some of the comments were: "R looks like she is going to pick something up, but cannot reach for it", "K looks like she is going to fall down", "J and K look like eggs", "R looks like she is holding onto something", etc. As the sessions progressed, we found that children got more and more relaxed and more creative with their poses and comments.

After the warm-up game children came back to the circle and we started with going through all of the continents by using Montessori continent map again. For the main theme of the session – fruit-printing – we had chosen eight different fruits/ vegetables. We introduced the fruits one by one, by telling the fruit's/ vegetable's name, country of origin, and by letting the children feel and smell the fruit. Fruits/ vegetables used were the following: pineapple from Ghana, bell pepper from Finland, kiwano from Israel, fig from Brazil, rambutan from Malaysia, apple from Italy, and sweet potato from North America. Children were familiar with some of the fruits, apple being the most familiar. The fruits were cut in half in front of the children so that they could see what the fruit looked like inside as well.

Then we guided the children to the art work area, where they were shown how to make a fruit print. After which each child got their own fabric bag, on which they wrote their names. Then the actual fruit-printing exercise began. Throughout the whole project we were encouraging and helping the children if needed. After the exercise was finished, children were asked to make a circle around the bags so that they could see others' works. After washing their hands, it was time for the last circle. Ending game followed the same pattern as earlier.



The prints that children made turned out to be very creative. Children as well as the staff of the Montessori Preschool were very inspired by the project and very much liked the end result.

*Fifth Session - Thursday 9.5.2012:*

The fifth session started in the same manner as the previous ones, with the warm-up game. When the warm-up game music started, the children got up and immediately began dancing, the game being completely familiar to them already. We all danced and froze and commented on each other's poses. The children started imitating each other and one round they were doing a crawling dance and on another they were on all fours spinning around the carpet. This gave us a great opportunity to introduce the theme of the day by saying they looked like wild animals. Part of the activities planned was connected to the African Tinga-Tinga animal characters that were familiar to many children from Yle's children's program "Pikku Kakkonen" from before.

After the warm-up game, the children were divided into two groups. The other group watched a couple of short Tinga-Tinga videos, had a discussion about them and continued on to color different Tinga-Tinga character coloring sheets, which they got to choose themselves. The second group sat down in a circle and listened to four different stories from around the world written by other children, using the story crafting method. Their own stories and the other group members' stories about family, which were written a couple of days earlier using the story crafting method, were read. After listening to the stories, a discussion took place and the children were able to express their thoughts and feelings about them. They found the other group members' stories quite funny and started sharing other things about each other's families that they knew from before.

Children were very interested in the videos; they had smiles, curious looks, and overall seemed quite concentrated while watching. At the story circle the children were also paying attention and listening well, but perhaps they were a bit more restless than in the video circle.

After watching the video clips the children chose their favorite Tinga-Tinga character sheet and were encouraged to use their imagination by coloring with a wide range of

different colors. There were different types of coloring tools available, e.g. felt pens, crayons and pastels. During coloring the children were discussing the different animals, for example two of them had chosen the chameleon, and they seemed quite intrigued about the way it changes its coloring, depending on the environment. One of the girls chose the lion and was coloring it to look quite realistic, rather than the way it appears on the videos.

When it was time to finish, all the children joined each other in the ending circle and together we discussed the day's activities. With two of us being the facilitators asking different kinds of questions, the children were glad to share their thoughts with everyone, e.g. which stories were their favorites and why. We also asked different types of questions about the previous sessions and the children were remembering all kinds of details from each day. Some of the favorite activities among them were painting with the blue that represented the ocean and gluing different objects on the continent shapes, which represented people and things that the world is filled with. Drawing pictures of their families and the Tinga-Tinga coloring were mentioned by most of them as well. Many of the children said that they enjoyed the fruit printing as an activity and being able to feel and look at the outside and inside of some of the fruits that they had never seen before. We also showed them the finished bags again and went through each fruit and vegetable. The children seemed quite impressed with the bags and were complimenting each other's designs on them.

The fifth session was concluded by using flash cards of a smile face and a frown face. Each child was asked what they thought of all the different things we had done during the five days. Everyone went with the smile face, but two of the children chose both.