



Empowering Immigrant Women through the Neighborhood Café



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EMPOWERING IMMIGRANT WOMEN THROUGH THE NEIGHBORHOOD CAFÉ

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Abstract

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The Neighborhood Café project was implemented in the fall of 2009 in the premises of the housing association Ankkuri in Herttoniemi. Another network partner and the sponsor was 4V-project. The purpose of the Neighborhood Café project was to organize and implement sessions for immigrant women where they could improve their Finnish language skills through different activities and themes. The project was implemented in the framework of anti-oppressive practice and empowerment theory. The ideas for the activities came from the participants and the general aim of the project was to see how a low threshold setting such as a Neighborhood Café can empower immigrant women. The project consisted of eight meetings that took place between August and December of 2009. The topics varied from cooking and cultural exchange to Finnish conversation.

The evaluation question was "How does the Neighborhood Café empower immigrant women?" and the study method was action research. The means for evaluation of the project were active observation, a diary, and evaluative discussion with the network partners and questionnaires filled by the participants. Content analysis was used to analyze the data from the diary and the evaluative discussion.

The most significant findings were that the Neighborhood Café empowered the participants through the useful skills they learned and the new knowledge they gained. The mutual learning and trust that developed between the students and the participants also generated empowerment. The participants liked the Neighborhood Café project very much, because they could practice their Finnish and meet other women there. The participants felt that their Finnish language improved through their participation in the Neighborhood Café.

Keywords: Neighborhood Café, empowerment, immigrant women, Finnish language

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Naapurikahvila projekti toteutettiin keväällä 2009 asukastalo Ankkurin tiloissa Herttoniemessä. Toisena yhteistyökumppanina sekä rahoittajana toimi 4V hanke. Naapurikahvilan tarkoitus oli järjestää maahanmuuttajanaishille tilaisuuksia, joissa he voisivat parantaa suomen kielen taitojaan erilaisten toiminnallisten tuokioiden ja teemojen kautta. Projektin perustana oli sironvastainen sosiaalityön käytäntö (anti-oppressive practice) ja valtaistamisteoria. Toiminnallisten tuokioiden aiheet tulivat osallistujilta ja projektin yleinen tavoite oli selvittää, miten Naapurikahvilan kaltainen matalan kynnyksen projekti valtaistaa maahanmuuttajanaisia. Projekti koostui kahdeksasta tapaamisesta, ja se kesti elokuusta joulukuuhun 2009. Tapaamisten aiheet vaihtelivat ruuanlaitosta ja kulttuurivaihdosta suomen kielellä käytyihin keskusteluihin.

Arviointikysymys oli: "Kuinka Naapurikahvila valtaistaa maahanmuuttajanaisia?", ja tutkimusmenetelmä oli toimintatutkimus. Projektin arviointiin käytetyt välineet olivat osallistuva havainnointi, päiväkirja, verkostokumppaneiden kanssa käyty arvioiva keskustelu sekä osallistujien palauttamat kyselylomakkeet. Päiväkirja ja arvioiva keskustelu analysoitiin sisällönanalyysillä.

Tulokset osoittivat, että Naapurikahvila valtaisti osallistujia eri keinoin. He saivat uutta tietoa sekä oppivat uusia hyödyllisiä taitoja. Moleminpuolinen oppiminen ja luottamus, joka kehittyi opiskelijoiden ja osallistuneiden maahanmuuttajanaisten välille myös edistivät valtaistamista. Osallistujat pitivät paljon Naapurikahvilasta, koska siellä he pystyivät harjoittelemaan suomen kieltään sekä tapaamaan muita ihmisiä. Vieraanvarainen tunnelma toivotti osallistujat tervetulleiksi Naapurikahvilaan ja rohkaisi heitä puhumaan suomea. Osallistujat kertoivat suomen kielen taitojensa kohentuneen Naapurikahvilaan osallistumisen myötä.

Avainsanat: Naapurikahvila, valtaistaminen, maahanmuuttajanaiset, suomen kieli

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1 Introduction

According to Population Register (Väestörekisteri) there were 155,705 foreigners living in Finland in the end of 2009 and the number increases every year (Statistics). Out of those 155,705 immigrants, approximately one third live in the capital region of Finland (Haikarainen & Pajari 2008, A3). In fact, Helsinki has become a multicultural city, and one tenth of its residents have an immigrant background. Therefore the wellbeing of immigrants has become a concern within the Finnish society. Immigration and issues related to immigration have been discussed extensively in the media. For example the nation's foremost newspaper Helsingin Sanomat has frequently carried in depth articles concerning immigrants and looking at the family culture of immigrants, schools, neighborhoods, shopping centers to politicians' positions on immigration.

Immigration to a new country can cause depression and a feeling of hopelessness. The sudden changes break social networks and alter the everyday lives of immigrants. Their close relatives and friends may move to a different country or might stay in the homeland. This transition may leave a person disempowered and unable to affect the different aspects of his or her life (Joensuu & Rustanius 2005, 6). According to Helsingin Sanomat in its series on challenges in immigration (Vainio 2009, A6) immigrant families face changes from the customs of their home land as the children learn the language and customs of the new country, but the parents are often left outside the society.

Our thesis project takes place at a central neighborhood of Helsinki, in Herttoniemi, which also has a substantial immigrant population. It is a small quest to seek to find connections between immigrant women and Finnish society. The idea for the thesis began during our anti-oppressive practice course in the spring of 2009, where the theme was to produce a project with a working life partner at a facility connected with immigrants. The members of our thesis group linked with the 4V-project, a network partner of Laurea, which is a project for improving and developing urban living in the capital region. Herttoniemi Housing Association Ankkuri in turn was one of 4V-project's network partners.

Two students from our thesis group worked around a format of Neighborhood Café and one of us arranged a health day at housing association Ankkuri. The participants for both activities were immigrant women from Herttoniemi region. The interaction between the women and our group members worked so well that after the projects were finished all three of us wanted to pursue a thesis project working together with immigrant women at the premises. The name Neighborhood Café, which was established in the original project, derived from the idea that the café could be a place that would bring together women from around the neighborhood. Housing Association Ankkuri is used by immigrant women on Mondays and Tuesdays

from 10-14 a.m. and we were given an opportunity to use the facility for the Neighborhood Café on Tuesday mornings from 11-13 a.m. starting in the beginning of fall 2009.

The idea of our thesis was to continue the interaction with the women and to integrate their ideas and interests within the Neighborhood Café. The aim was to provide an open social environment in order to facilitate empowerment among immigrant women through different functional activities that the women chose themselves. A central goal was that these activities would generate an atmosphere where the immigrant women could improve their Finnish skills. According to many studies on immigration, learning Finnish is often seen as the most important factor in the success of the integration (Ekberg-Kontula 2000, 23; Kirjanen 2008, 16; Ekholm 1994, 93, in Huuhtanen 2009, 36). The background theory for the Neighborhood Café came from the empowerment theory of anti-oppressive practice.

A study by Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (Etno, 2003) reveals that loneliness and isolation are usual amongst immigrant women in Finland. One proposed solution for the problem could be activity arenas that would enable a mutual dialogue between the women and that would allow immigrant women to become active members in the Finnish society (Ministry of Interior 2010). Thus, there is a definite need for projects helping immigrant women. This thesis provides valuable information on how low threshold activities planned and implemented in a café setting can empower immigrant women.

This study was an action research. The evaluation of the project was based on active observation documented in the diary that we wrote after each session, on an evaluative discussion with the working life partners and on a questionnaire (Appendix 2) filled by the participants. The diary and evaluative discussion were analyzed by means of content analysis.

2 Housing Associations and 4V-project

Housing association refers to a common resident premise, which shares common locality, resident oriented approach as well as political and religious independency (Housing Associations). Housing associations or community buildings were established in the beginning of the 1990s. In east Helsinki they were started through deliberate planning in hopes to bring together the whole area. The community buildings have been places where people can meet, and also a forum for local influencing, for electronic media, cultural activities and sports. (Korhonen, Malin & Saavola 1998, 9.)

Ideally the premises also have a great social significance because they act as channel for interaction between the neighbors. They also decrease conflicts between for instance rental and homeowners and also between people of different ethnic origins by creating a feeling of toge-

therness. (Korhonen et al 1998, 91.) According to Korhonen et al's (1998,91) studies the residents in east Helsinki area felt that common resident premises should become activity centers that bring together all the neighbors regardless of ethnicity, age, nationality and gender.

There are many immigrant groups that use these communal housing association units. The immigrants find the premises to be important for them. This is because their families are usually large and their houses are small and therefore the meeting possibilities in the homes are quite limited. Community buildings have offered an opportunity to meet with fellow countrymen and women. For example for Somali women housing associations have provided a common living room and a channel for mutual interaction. (Korhonen et al 1998, 113.) The Housing Association Ankkuri also acts as a common living room in which the immigrant women can gather together for meaningful dialogue.

2.1 Housing Association Ankkuri

The housing association Ankkuri (Herttoniemenrannan Asukastaloyhdistys Ankkuri ry), was founded in 1998 to enhance well-being and cooperation amongst the residents of Herttoniemi region. It offers different kinds of courses and activities for its residents of all ages and a place to organize events, family parties or meetings. Bringing people together from all walks of life, in attractive surroundings, is Ankkuri's ambition. Ankkuri shares a facility together with the youth department of Helsinki. The youth department occupies the facility after 14.00 during the week, and Ankkuri can rent out weekends and evening hours for prospective users.

The association is run by an executive board chosen once a year in a yearly meeting, and it has one paid employee, the director of Ankkuri. Private citizens, associations or businesses from the Herttoniemi region can become members of Ankkuri. (Asukastalo Ankkuri)

The annual report from 2009 reveals that there had been 13 500 visitors to Ankkuri that year. Regular users have been for example: Taichi association, Dance association of Helsinki, The Mannerheim League regional club, Music club for children, Family café, AA-group, Neighborhood Café, Naisten Kammari (women's guest room). Herttoniemi as an area is enriched by a very multicultural population and so for example the main attendees for the Neighborhood Café and Naisten Kammari were immigrant women. (Asukastalo Ankkuri)

2.2 4V-project

4V refers to these four verbs starting with letter V in Finnish, *välitä*, *vaikuta*, *viihdy ja voi hyvin* loosely translated as "Care about your living environment, Influence in the decision

making, Enjoy life and Feel great.” (4V-project) The 4V-project is a joint project of the Helsinki Metropolitan Area Reuse Centre with three cities of the capital region, Espoo, Helsinki and Vantaa. The project operates for three years starting in April 2008 and lasting until the end of March 2011. 4V-project receives funding from the Uusimaa Regional Council and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). ERDF has allotted funding for projects that deal with competitiveness and employment in Southern Finland.

The 4V-project’s central goals are to develop models for sustainable, attractive, responsible and participatory urban living and as well to strengthen already existing systems and networks that are working towards similar goals. The project promotes environmentally friendly ways of living as well as tries to enhance community solidarity and provide more opportunities for residents to have influence in residential planning of activities, especially in city owned rental units. A common thread of the projects is to create more enjoyable living atmosphere in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area.

An integral part of the 4V-project is to test and develop different environmentally sustainable methods that strengthen the community spirit. Together with the residents and different actors in the area, the staff of 4V organizes for example: events, initiatives, trips and courses. The 4V-project also offers guidebooks and other publications that support empowerment and ecological living. For example 4V-project published a guidebook about the basics of living in an apartment rental unit. In the guidebook there are tips guiding with the use of public space such as the laundry room, garbage bins, the common sauna space etc., tips on how to save water and electricity and how to take other residents into consideration. Such a guidebook can be very useful for immigrant residents who are unfamiliar with Finnish housing customs.

The 4V-project workers cooperate with residents, organizations, rental housing units, schools and day care centers in pilot areas. These chosen pilot districts in each of the three participating cities are Leppävaara, Suvela and Kirkkojärvi in Espoo, Mellunkylä, Roihuvuori and Herttoniemi in Helsinki and Korso and Länsimäki in Vantaa including some neighboring areas as well. The starting point for the activities was researching the needs of residents and other local actors.

Here are some of the partners of 4V-project besides the three cities involved. There are educational associations such as Suomen Ympäristökasvatuksen Seura (The Finnish Association for Environmental Education), Vantaan luontokoulu (The Nature School of Vantaa), Villa Elfik, Luonto-Liitto ry (Nature Association), Hesani Nuorten Ääni (The Voice of the Young In Helsinki) as project partners. Julia 2030 is a 3-year-long environmental project aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the Helsinki region. Then there are project partners connecting

with secondary education such as our university Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Hyria koulutus Oy a regional education unit for professional learning in 10 units and Opetushallitus (Finnish National Board of Education) and some others. (4V-Project.)

3 Immigrant women in Finland

A significant factor when considering immigrant women living in Finland is integration. According to a publication of Ministry of the Interior (2010) integration means a process and an interaction of how an immigrant manages to locate and use the services offered in this country. The attempt is to have a society, where there is equality and no discrimination. Integration involves both the society and the immigrant to adapt to new situations, which come with the phenomenon of immigration. Successful integration would mean that the individuals that have come to the country and that represent different ethnicities could simultaneously be equal citizens in the society and keep their own ethnic identity and culture (Huttunen 2002, 42-43, in Harakkamäki 2008, 380)

Integration is a process that can take a long time, even a person's whole lifetime in the new country, and there is a wide sector of variables that influence in this process such as person's age, education, the country of origin, mother tongue and cultural background. The society supports the process of integration mainly during the first three years after an immigrant arrives to this country by arranging language education and providing a special support funding to those attending such programs. (Ministry of the Interior.)

There are many circumstances that influence on how well a person adapts to a new culture and a country. Women face more risks in integration than men in general, and there is a danger from the very beginning that especially refugee- and Muslim women are being victimized. It is important to note that different women's own resources and abilities play a role in coping in the process of integrating to the main culture. (Martikainen & Tiilikainen 2008, 24.)

Pikkarainen and Wilkman (2005, in Heikkilä 2005, 32) state that foreign wives usually suffer from loneliness and experience trouble in marriage because of language-, cultural- and wide age differences. Also many foreign wives are unaware of where they can find information concerning their rights or whom to turn to in need. (Heikkilä 2005, 32.) According to Harju-Tolppa (2004, 21) immigrant women also face difficulties meeting Finnish women unless they have a job outside home, because there are very few places where they can meet with each other. Harju-Tolppa (2004, 33) also mentions that practical nurses have noticed that immigrant mothers are lonely.

According to studies (Ahmad 2002, in Harakkamäki 2008, 380) work can play a significant role in immigrant women's integration into Finnish society. Finnish society has a higher proportion of women in the work force compared to other European countries. It influences immigrant women as well to strive to find employment. However, it is difficult for immigrants to find permanent jobs, though their situation is seen improved the longer they have stayed in the country (Harakkamäki 2008, 380, 381.) Language is also a major issue in working life. Especially immigrant women with experiences in the working life have emphasized how high the language requirements are in most jobs (Tiilikainen 2008, in Aaltonen, Joronen & Villa 2009, 90). Since one of the aims of our project is to improve the Finnish language skills of our clients we hope that through this they can also be empowered to find work and therefore become more integrated into the Finnish society.

3.1 Somali Women

The main participant group in this project was Somali women. Therefore it was an integral part of our project to study aspects of their history and their culture so that the project would be truly empowering and so that we could build a common ground from which to work from.

The civil war in Somalia begun in 1991, during which, the whole country went into complete chaos. It is estimated that around one million Somalis fled from their country during that same year and there has been major migration from the Somalia to all countries of the world. (Human Development Report Somalia 2001, 58, Tiilikainen 2008, 268.) The first Somali refugees started arriving to Finland in the late 1980's. In 2007 there were 8 500 living in Finland, who spoke Somali as their native tongue, and half of them were women. (Tiilikainen 2008, 268-269.)

For many Somali women child rearing, cooking, cleaning, going to the store, visiting the social office and the maternity clinic are part of their everyday life much like for many Finnish women. Everyday life can be quite lonely for many immigrant women. Most of the immigrant women come from cultures where social networks are an integral part of their life. They are used to having a network of female relatives and friends around them helping them cope. (Harju-Tolppa 2004, 7.)

Transnationalism is a very important aspect of many immigrant women's and especially Somali women's lives. Transnationalism refers to the links and the contacts between the immigrants and their family members around the world (Pehkonen 2006, 27). Transnational social spaces form economic, social, cultural, religious and political connections that affect the lives of the immigrants and the family members they are in contact with. (Tiilikainen 2008,

266) This transnationality is an important coping mechanism for the Somali women because it keeps them in contact with their culture and therefore acts as their own empowerment tool. Somali women living in Finland seek for support, advice and practical help from these transnational networks.

3.2 Islam in the lives of immigrant Muslim women

Islam is an integral part of many immigrant Muslim women's lives in several different ways. The prayer schedule and the Islamic calendar bring about a familiar routine to their everyday life. The women avoid alcohol, swine and blood products as is stated in Islam. Also code of conduct between sexes, dress code, child rearing and health related issues are drawn from Islam and show in the lives of most of the immigrant Muslim women (Tiilikainen 2008, 269-270). Often among the Muslim women the worship is focused mainly at home and is private. The everyday of the women is kind of leached by the values and practice linked to Islam and as well Islam and interpretations concerning the religion are affected by the experiences of Somali women in their everyday life in Finland. (Tiilikainen 2003, 17.) Islam offers Somali women continuity, resources, explanations and possibilities (Tiilikainen 2003, 283).

Baumann (1996, 14-17) has stated that often when talking about Muslim immigrants, one might assume all of them to share the same kind of "Muslim culture". However, Islam as a religion combines very different populations and nations (Räty 2002, 70). According to Dassetto and Nonneman, the meaning of religion varies from generation to generation but also inside one generation. The factors dividing the attitudes are expressed through talk and ideas as well as Islamic behavior and practices. (Dassetto & Nonneman 1996, 195-203.)

We also noticed in practice when talking about different issues with the participants, that they had different interpretations about their religion and they implement it in different ways. This is important to remember in general as well, when talking about people, in this case immigrants who share the same cultural or religious background. Individuals have different life experiences that shape their worldview. They experience also the belonging into a certain culture group in different ways. The worldviews and lifestyles are a significant part of each culture (Räty 2002, 43) and it is important to understand that when working with immigrants.

4 Empowerment and anti-oppressive practice

The purpose of the activities arranged in the housing association Ankkuri was to create a group empowerment environment drawing substantially from the wishes and expertise of the participants. We used anti-oppressive practice as the framework through which we wished to

empower the immigrant women. Therefore from anti-oppressive practice the most important aspect in terms of our project was the empowerment theory.

4.1 Anti-oppressive practice

The idea behind anti-oppressive practice is to provide services that are not resource driven but instead focuses on the needs of the clients (Burke & Harrison 2004, 133). The main aim throughout our project was to focus specifically on the needs of the participants rather than come up with the activities ourselves. Anti-oppressive practice is also based on the belief that social work should make a difference, so that those who have been oppressed may regain control of their lives and re-establish their right to be full and active members of society by taking into account the clients' agency, knowledge and skills (Dominelli 2002, 185). "To achieve this aim, practitioners have to be political, reflective, reflexive and committed to promoting change" (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 48). Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 48) further clarify that "reflexivity is about being aware of who we are as practitioners and the impact that we have on others and that they have on us." This reflection happens through open dialogue and through building a cooperative relationship with the clients. The idea is to promote a change that can be brought about by the clients themselves. Reflexivity also demands that practitioners take into account how much their own worldviews and identity affect their actions and the information that they gather about the participants of a project (Burke & Harrison 2004, 135).

One important thing to remember is that "anti-oppressive practice equates with the fundamentals of good social work practice: the pursuit of equality and justice" (Doel & Shardlow 2005, 214). The goal of anti-oppressive social work is to diminish or abolish discrimination and oppression in all levels and forms present in society. Social workers need to actively improve and change the practices that are oppressive or discriminative in nature and also to work in wider societal structure for social change. (Thompson 1997, 33.) Within a small project such as ours we cannot influence the society at large, but we aim at "social change" by making an effort on being at the same level with the participants and considering this project as a mutual learning point.

As our working method we used partnership, which is also a central part of the process of anti-oppressive social work. According to Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 132) the term partnership entails that each partner is countable of the project and dedicated in developing the common cause. In a broader sense, though, partnership can be understood as building an atmosphere of acceptance and teamwork, which recognizes each person's contribution in a particular project (Trevithnick 2005, 230). Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 132) remind us that cultural differences have to be taken into consideration in partnership.

Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 109) quote Ann Farmer, a social worker that saw her commitment to empowerment practice as an attempt “to work from an equality perspective in unequal circumstances”. Equality as a guideline can assist in building partnership. Nevertheless, “the skills of patience, commitment and perseverance are needed” when, in the process of partnership, the parties involved may come with their own history of distrusts and self-interests. (Miller 2004, 157, in Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 133.)

Mostly we want to promote a change that can be brought about by the participants themselves. The partnership that we aimed to achieve is created through, “a climate of inclusion and collaboration, which acknowledges everyone’s contribution to the process” (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 133). We took a lot of time to discuss about different cultures with the participants and that brought us closer to becoming equal partners in our project.

Unless clients are considered as true partners, cultural sensitive care is not being achieved. To do otherwise only means that professionals are using power in an oppressive way. An equal partnership involves trust, acceptance and respect. (Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 56.) We valued and considered all the feedback and ideas provided by our participants and working life partners, and the partnership was also reflected in the fact that we called the individuals that took part in the Neighborhood Café participants rather than clients. As Dalrymple has stated, in true partnership the service users, in this case the participants, “should be included as far as possible as fellow citizens in the decision making processes which affect their lives” (Dalrymple 1995, 64). We worked with the participants in partnership also by involving the participants in the decision making by enabling them to choose the subjects and content for each session. These aspects of decision-making also stimulated aspects of empowerment.

4V-project was an important working life partner for us. We strived to take their opinions and needs into account during our project thus we aimed at working in true partnership with them. Our project was first started through the mutual interest with 4V-project, Ankkuri and including ourselves. Since 4V-project’s aim is to promote an environmentally friendly way of living we adopted the same principles in our project. We bought organic products as well as products from fair trade companies for the cooking and baking sessions. Ankkuri was quite well equipped in terms of recycling since they recycled tin, cardboard, plastic, biodegradables and other trash. Thus a lot of the participants as well as us students were already aware of the proper waste containers for different kinds of garbage. We thought also of promoting reuse centers by providing some information on recycling during our project, but it turned out that the participants were not interested in the subject.

4.2 Definition of empowerment

The term 'empowerment' is a much-contested term. It means different things depending on the individual using the term (Lishman 2007, 269.) "There is an uncertainty and even vagueness as to what it actually means in practice" (Lishman 2007, 269). According to Rappaport (1984, 3) it is easy to define empowerment in its absence yet it is very difficult to define its presence because it takes on different forms in different people and in different contexts. It is therefore important to define the meaning and the practical use of the term for the Neighborhood Café.

For our group empowerment means a partnership and a collaborative process between our group members and the participants. We have also focused on the housing association Ankkuri as the source of empowerment where informal social networks can get together and empower each other. We have also looked at empowerment as a dynamic, synergistic, ever-changing and evolutionary process that is interactive and multi-dimensional. (Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 111.) Another baseline for empowerment is that it stems from the person himself and thus it cannot be simply given to a person. The central aspect is to enable the process of the client recognizing, creating and channeling his or her own resources. (Juujärvi, Myyry & Pessa 2007, 194.)

One issue that our group found very important throughout the project was that we tried to focus specifically on women's empowerment, which focuses on change and the processes surrounding it. It also focuses on "greater equality, or greater freedom of choice and action" (Malhotra & Schuler 2005, 72). Another significant factor in women's empowerment is agency, "in other words, women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change that is being described and measured" (Malhotra & Schuler 2005, 72).

To understand empowerment one also has to understand the many issues surrounding the concept "power" because it forms the core of empowerment. Feminists have defined power as something that is "created and recreated through negotiations between and amongst people" (French 1985, in Dominelli 2002, 16). Power has also been defined as a "force that arises from a combination of different factors and can be endlessly extended and recreated through interpersonal interactions that are embedded within particular social institutions" (Foucault 1980, in Dominelli 2002, 16). Power operates on two different levels: personal and structural. It is "influenced by social, cultural, economic and psychological factors" (Burke & Harrison 2004, 133). For empowerment to take place we must believe that power is fluid and that it can change. The change in power should happen both at personal and at structural levels. It is essential "to understand how the differential access to power shapes and determines relationships on an individual, group, community and societal level" (Burke & Harrison

2004, 137).

Quite often in our society people express *power over* relations. These *power over* relations are used by the dominant groups in society through "zero sum ways to normalize their particular view of the world, thereby defining who is included and who is excluded from the group considered 'normal'" (Dominelli 2002, 17). *Power to* relations can be used to fight against *power over* relations. In fact, "*power to* relations indicate people's potential to take action to achieve certain ends, that is, enact transformative power" (Dominelli 2002, 17). *Power to* relations can be used both individually and collectively; however, there is a danger that *power to* relations can turn into *power over* relations if they are used incorrectly by certain more dominant individuals in a group. In our project we focused more on *power of* relations because it draws on "collaboration or collective action amongst members of a similar identity groups to achieve a common objective" (Cleaver, 1971, in Dominelli 2002, 18). The Neighborhood Café is therefore a place to exercise *power of* relations because it brings together women from similar backgrounds in an attempt to achieve a common objective. This common objective in our case is to learn Finnish and to be empowered through different activities. These types of activities which engage in *power of* relations help women feel less fragmented, uncertain and isolated and therefore empowers them as individuals to redefine who they are and change their situation for the better (Dominelli 2002, 18).

Thompson (1997, 156) quotes Mullaly for further clarifying that empowerment, "is not a technique but a goal and a process. As a goal, it will not be reached overnight, just as the oppressive conditions within our current social order did not suddenly appear." This process of empowerment is an ongoing one and it follows the major premise that people are not objects that should be exploited, controlled or oppressed but instead we should view people as subjects "with inherent dignity and worth that should not be conditional on race, gender, class or any other characteristic" (Thompson 1997, 156).

Juujärvi et al (2007, 195-196) explain about the position of the social worker in empowerment process. The worker acts as a facilitator and as someone who walks side by side with the client. The process of the empowerment allows the client to reach critical consciousness on his or her situation and ability to influence on his or her life. Workers' own values are part of his or her ethics and an essential part of the worker's professionalism is the need to reflect on whether the aim and goals towards changes in clients' lives are present.

4.3 Model of the process of empowerment

Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 116-117) clarify empowerment through a model of the process of empowerment. In their model they divide empowerment into three different levels that are

at the level of feelings, ideas and activity (Figure 1). This model is influenced by many different empowerment theories, which make it quite comprehensive. It can further help explain how a person can achieve an increased sense of consciousness and understanding of the society thus assisting in turn to focus on the things that one can do and change.

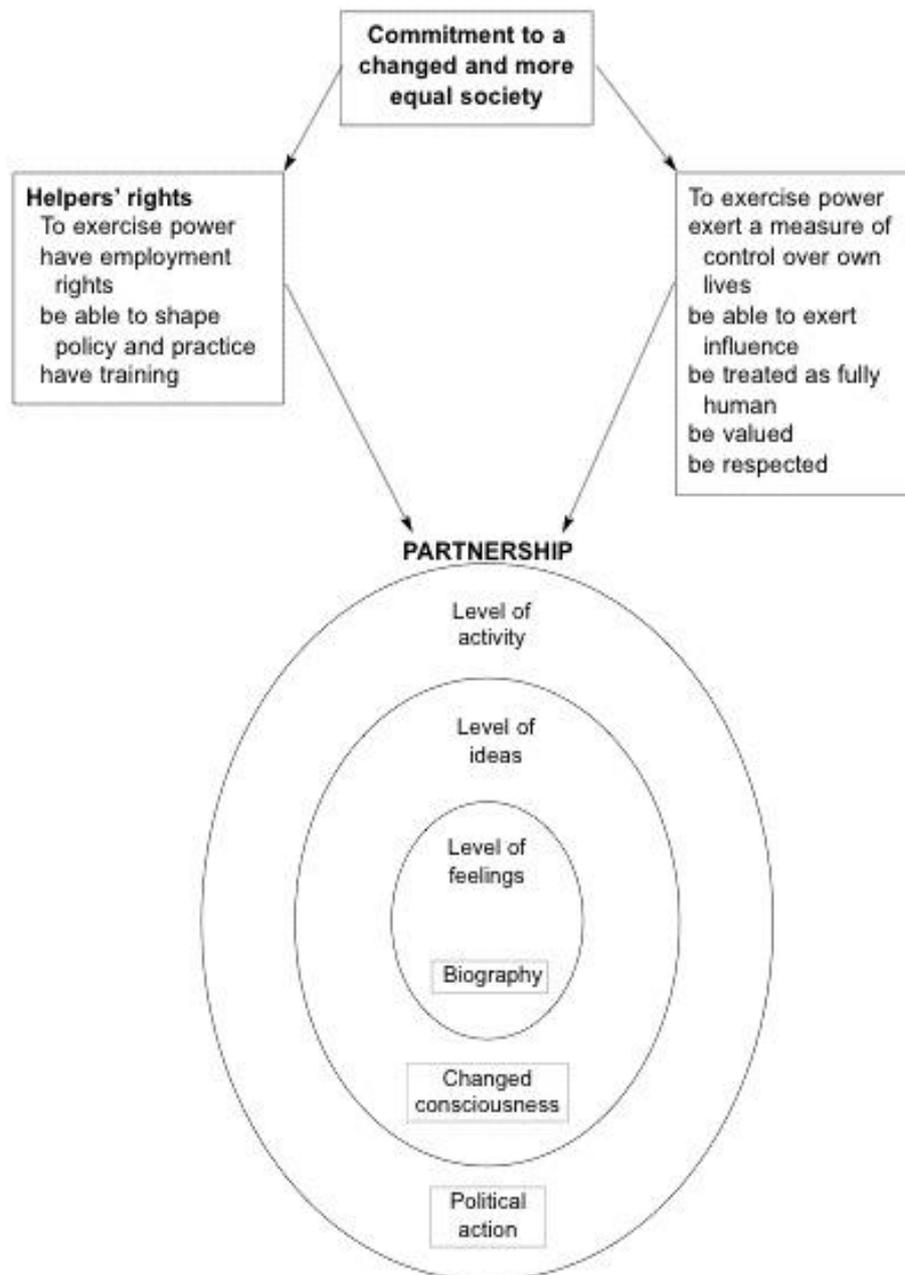


Figure 1: The process of empowerment (Dalrymple & Burke, 119)

Glenmayer' (1998, in Sehgal 2005, 295) expresses that women's self-worth and self-esteem are affected by internalized negative and inferior feelings. These negative feelings can lead

to an alienation from the self. Alienation from the self refers to estrangement from your real self and allowing “oppressive factors such as stereotyping, cultural domination and sexual objectification” to rule your life (Sehgal 2005, 295). The empowerment model gives insight into how a person can find their real self and therefore decrease the feelings of negativity and inferiority.

According to the empowerment process the level of feeling is the nucleus of the three elements of feeling, ideas and action. The level of feeling concentrates on personal experiences of the one who feels powerless and by telling his or her life story, it allows a person to situate his or her real self and begin the process of change. (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 117.) Kolb-Morris (1993, 100 in Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 8) expresses that, “by telling our own stories to each other we have engaged in the first step in freeing oneself from oppression”. Thus, by telling a story to someone a person can experience being important and being taken seriously. In this way, one gains confidence, which is empowering (Dalrymple and Burke 2006, 117). Therefore the participants telling about their lives in the Neighborhood Café can start the process of empowerment within their individual lives and hence can enable a person further to free themselves from their oppressive circumstances.

The second level, which is the level of ideas, continues from the level of feelings. However, the level of feeling only touches the more basic aspects of sharing your own experiences or your own ‘biography’ (Rees 2003, 35) whereas the level of ideas involves the intrinsic aspect of, “continuing process of self-conscious struggle, which in turn leads to a changed consciousness - self-knowledge, self-actualization, self-definition” (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 117.) Therefore the process of sharing your biography leads to a changed consciousness, which conversely results in an increased self-respect and also leads to decreased self-blame and an increase in self-worth. Gaining self-knowledge, at level of ideas, can also abet in an improvement of the skills of a new language. (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 117-118.) Rees (1991, in Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 118) defines that language is not only a tool for communication; instead, he sees it as “a means of creating social relationships and realising the self involved in those relationships” (Rees 1991, 95). Such communication takes place through the process of sharing stories or biographies with one another within a group of people. This process of sharing enables one to gain new words therefore new language that in turn develops power for the person involved (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 118).

The third level is the level of action. It can refer either to changing policies or legislation, where the idea is to work with others in the society to change social institutions. Thus an important part of the empowerment practice is the “need to facilitate organizational change” (Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 55.) Raised awareness of political and social action in society can evoke change. However, the objectives can as well be of a smaller scale, such as

reaching changes that “may affect the life of one individual, which in Rappaport’s terms means making a difference in the world around us” (Rappaport 1985, in Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 55). Our project involves only a small number of people yet it can be significant for these participants and can empower them in the social level and induce change in their lives.

All these three levels, however, do not work in any specific order. Instead, they affect each other, and more importantly if there is a change in one of the levels then this will in turn cause a change at the other levels (Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 54). Empowerment is not something one achieves at one instant but as an alternative it is a, “continual process of growth and change which can occur throughout one’s lifetime” (Freire 1972, Kieffer 1984, in Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 55). Once an individual has become empowered, this empowerment can be extended even to a whole group, which the individual is connected with. Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 113) explain that, “in turn, the increase in group power can enhance the functioning of its individual members.” One of our aims for the Neighborhood Café was to enable group empowerment, which would arise from the participants themselves through the process of sharing and reflecting their personal biographies.

Solomon indicates that instead of giving the clients power, social care practitioners “aim to help reduce the powerlessness that individuals experience” (Solomon, 1987, in Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 52). Gutierrez (Rees 1991, in Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 53) also indicates that powerlessness can lead to depression and immobilization, which the participants in Neighborhood Café might for example experience by being bound to home and assenting to their weak position in the society.

It is important to find a common ground with the participants from which we can work from. For us the common ground in our thesis work is the fact that we are all women; however we have to acknowledge that we have different experiences and backgrounds. Dalrymple and Burke (1995, 8) state that women in the society are treated differently according to what their skin color, age, sexual preference etc is. For example, “black women are treated differently from white women, lesbian women are treated differently from heterosexual women, disabled women are viewed differently from able-bodied women and older women are viewed differently from younger women” (Dalrymple & Burke 1995, 8). These differences are not always viewed positively in our society. For our project we found it important to understand these differences and to view them positively and not negatively and that these points of difference can provide a chance for self-exploration for all of us. Also anti-oppressive practice requires that we commit to, “ethical principles which value difference and diversity and to a form of practice which is both self-aware and others-aware” (Doel & Shardlow 2005, 214).

Empowering the women through small ways such as facilitating the improvement of their Finnish language can improve their trust in themselves. Through the process they might also realize that the problems are due to the existing power relations in the society. One idea that we had behind our thesis is also to find ways that could induce their integration into Finnish society. Learning about Finnish culture and Finnish language are both ways to help in the integration process. According to anti-oppressive practice it is important for the participants to learn how to balance between their own culture and the Finnish culture, which is why we also hoped that the women that took part in Neighborhood Café would provide us with information about their culture and that we could have dialogue and be mutually enriched.

4.4 Café concept as an empowerment tool

The concept of a women's café came originally from the director of Ankkuri during our first project at Ankkuri in the spring 2009. Our working life partners, 4V-project and Ankkuri wanted us to plan activities that could interest women in a more informal setting such as a café. We thought of the name 'Neighborhood Café' for this project, because our intention was to bring together women from different backgrounds and around the Herttoniemi neighborhood in a low threshold setting. Low threshold functions are places that are easily reached and it provides the customers social contacts and pleasant activities and functions. (Vuorinen 2005, in Huuhtanen 2009, 17) We also hoped that it would function as a kind of peer support setting that would enable social networking amongst the women in the neighborhood. Social support and networking are vital for well-being and integration of immigrant women. According to Joensuu and Rustanius (2005, 6) this type of setting helps to form friendships and thus partially mends and replaces the networks that were broken during immigration.

A similar concept to our Neighborhood Café is the women's café concept which has become a popular method for improving Finnish skills amongst immigrant women. Café Chili in Kontula, for example, is a project of the social office of Helsinki and EU that concentrates on providing information and facilitating social integration by offering language courses and teaching about social skills (SOVAKI) at Café Chili in Kontula. (Chili project)

Another low threshold project for immigrant women is MoniNaisten Talo (Multicultural Women's House) that has centres in Helsinki as well as in Mikkeli run by MONIKA, a multicultural national women's organization. (Moninaisten Talo 2010) Moninaisten talo in Helsinki provides a low-threshold meeting place for immigrant women in a vulnerable situation, offering Finnish classes, counseling and different kinds of functional activities (Moninaisten 2009, in Lily Huuhtanen 2009, 20). Through projects, such as the Chili project and Monika Naiset, immigrant women can find self-confidence for all aspects of their life and they can find a place of empowerment and a way to better integrate into the Finnish society.

Our aim was also to increase the participants' know-how and give them a boost of self-confidence in a similar way that the Chili project and Moninaisten Talo have done for their participants. We hoped the participants would feel comfortable and empowered and enjoy themselves within the Neighborhood Café context and that this empowerment would extend to all other aspects of their lives.

5 The Neighborhood Café project

We started our preparation for the project in a thesis workshop at Laurea in May 2009, where 4V-project was one of the working life partners and a prospective thesis partner at our school. All three of us were interested in working with immigrant women and to extend the original Neighborhood Café project (Naapurikahvila) held in Ankkuri, where all of us felt that we could have a meaningful experience both being able to offer something valuable for immigrant women and at the same time to learn about intercultural co-operation.

We agreed with the director of Ankkuri in May that we would continue Neighborhood Café in the fall of 2009 starting with a planning meeting on August 25th. The common thread of our project was to use anti-oppressive practice and empowerment approach as our guiding principles. Thus we did not want to plan and decide the topics of the sessions beforehand, but instead decided to wait until we meet the participants for them to have a say in the content of Neighborhood Café project.

We advertised with the same flyer design (Appendix 1) for planning the meetings of Neighborhood Café, which was also used during the spring for the original first three sessions of Neighborhood Café. We liked the flyer, and felt that it would remind the old participants that Neighborhood Café was back, as well as attract new participants for the first gathering on August 25th. We delivered flyers in the vicinity of Ankkuri Asukastalo, advertised at Herttoniemi area's local homepage as well as put the leaflet on the information board of Ankkuri itself. Yet we thought that perhaps the most effective way for letting people know about the meetings is by word of mouth. In any case we needed to make some effort for making sure that as many people as possible were aware of the program ahead of time. Naturally we were fortunate to organize our project in a place that has been a meeting place for immigrants in the neighborhood for over 10 years. Ankkuri has some regular visitors, whom we were counting on as prospective participants. In addition there were regularly immigrant women interns at Ankkuri, who could also use their networks for advertising Neighborhood Café to their friends and associates.

5.1 First meeting, 25 August 2009

There were two participants besides us and the director of Ankkuri at the first meeting. One of them was an intern working at Ankkuri. One was a regular visitor of Ankkuri, a Somali woman with two children. The major intent of the first meeting was to discuss about the activities our participants would wish to do during the future sessions. When asked what they were interested in doing they came up with: conversational Finnish, cooking, physical education, health and sewing as topics of interest. Based on their response we decided to have conversational Finnish as the topic for the next time.

We agreed that we would organize Neighborhood Café every second Tuesday starting on September 15th. We wanted to have activities every week, but due to the overlapping schedule with school classes we had to reduce the meetings to take place bimonthly. We had also previously talked with the director of Ankkuri concerning the time frame of each session. Taking in consideration that participants rarely arrive before 11.00, a good time to start each session could be 11.00. We had school classes in the afternoon, so we had to leave at the latest by 13.00. Also Tuesday morning was the only free spot in Ankkuri's weekly schedule. The Helsinki Youth Association took afternoons.

Ramadan coincided with our project and from experiences from previous years during Ramadan our working life partner predicted that this Islamic tradition of fasting for one month during the day could decrease the number of Muslim attendees. The Muslim attendees were practically the only group of participants. Thus we were prepared for a very small show up until Ramadan ended on September 19th and due to its occurrence we postponed cooking for the future gatherings and chose conversational Finnish as the theme for the next time. We also met with a representative from the 4V-project, our second working life partner and received assurance from her that 4V-project could sponsor us with the expenses relating to Neighborhood Café program.

5.2 Second meeting, 15 September 2009

It was still the month of Ramadan, so we did not expect many participants. There were three interns, though, at Ankkuri who participated. All of them were Muslim women. Additionally the same woman with two children who came also on the first time arrived, so we had four women all together.

Our plan was to discuss useful ways for immigrant women to learn Finnish. Our purpose was to offer valuable knowledge or experience for the participants in interesting and easy-going atmosphere. We chose a newspaper as a tool and source for our discussion in Finnish for many

reasons. First, newspapers publish most current information that is being discussed in the society. Secondly, newspapers are generally well written, so they can provide a challenging and interesting text at the same time. Thirdly, reading newspaper articles can lower the threshold for immigrants to try to read newspapers themselves. On the other hand, immigrants might have difficulties in reading newspapers because of their versatile language.

We prepared three different choices for potential source materials. Our women did not express strong wish for any of them, so we chose an article from the *Helsingin Sanomat* the day before with the headline *Pihi on kitsas kaikessa*. The text dived into the various aspects of behaviour and feelings connected to avarice commonly known to be integral part of human mentality or at least common to Finns. The article provided juicy vocabulary for the universal subject. We ended up collecting several synonyms for the word stingy in Finnish such as: *pihi, nuuka, säästäväinen, kitupiikki, itara, kitsas, pummaaja*. Also the text provided a united topic for the conversation and prevented some participants from chatting extensively to their neighbor and thus watering the purpose for our gathering. We were able to find many common ideas on the term stingy since it is a universal theme.

Also we discussed virtues of saving resources and not wasting material. We tried to provide space for the comments and experiences from the participants that they might have a chance to express themselves and catch new words, ideas and expressions.

5.3 Third meeting, 29 September 2009

During our previous meeting on the 15th of September one of the participants suggested that it would be nice to bake a regular coffee cake. Due to the fact that our whole project is based on the clients' wishes, we planned to bake coffee cakes. Nevertheless, we had to consider the time limitations of our program and practically spend one hour for baking and the second hour was reserved for sharing and tasting the cake with coffee or tea, as would be natural to do at a setup of a café. Therefore we had to modify the recipe to fit for the time frame, so that we could finish baking within one hour. Instead of making a traditional coffee cake, which takes 40 minutes to bake in the oven alone we decided to bake a Swiss roll (*kääretorttu*) which takes only 7 minutes for one to bake and is a very typical treat at the Finnish coffee table. One of us knew a delicious recipe for a carob roll cake with vanilla cream and cloudberry jam inside. So we felt that the change of original plan was justified and baking a carob roll cake could substitute well the original idea of baking a coffee cake.

We prepared ahead of time all ingredients and recipes at two separate workstations. We wanted each participant to be able to partake in every phase of baking as well as have a chance to converse in Finnish as much as possible. This time we were expecting more partici-

pants to come since Ramadan was over. We were very relieved, when several women, some with children, started showing up.

We went together through all the ingredients and utensils used in baking in Finnish, so that participants could catch new words. Then we divided into two stations and repeated the kitchen vocabulary. We also printed the recipe to all participants (Appendix 5), so that they could follow the whole process more easily and that they could also try to bake the cake at home. Some of the participants were quite young, and they had finished their secondary school in Finland. All of the women had participated in Finnish classes offered by the city or some other agent (NGO).

At one of the workstations we mixed sugar and eggs, and at the other one we mixed the dry ingredients. Then we switched the roles for the second cake, so that each participant could participate in all different phases of the baking. Eventually we had a third work station, when the baked cake sheet came from the oven, and needed to be rolled. We whipped a vanilla cream with a mixture, spread it along with cloudberry jam on the cake sheet, and then rolled the cake with a parchment paper at the third workstation.

During the baking process we discussed the participants baking habits, for example: how often do they bake, what type of cake do they usually make, in Finnish. Out of the four participants that took part in the baking process, none of them had ever made a roll cake before. We also started to discuss the article that we hoped to talk about later. The article was about two Somali women that hoped their brother would get asylum in Finland. He was going to be released from Guantanamo prison in January 2010. The women knew quite a lot about Guantanamo prison and they had a few comments on the subject.

More women dropped in as time passed, and in the end we had 14 participants (including 2 interns of Ankkuri) with 4 children. Some of them came late and only made it to the discussion at the coffee table. There was a party for ending Ramadan at Ankkuri right after Neighborhood Café, so there were people who came for the party instead of our program, and just enjoyed a drink and tasted the roll cake.

We were not able to discuss the article further because there were so many participants and they all wished to talk about the Neighborhood Café. We explained to all of the participants what the purpose of the Neighborhood Café was and when our next meeting would be. People were very interested in the project. There were women from many nationalities. There were participants from Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Finland and Somalia. They also seemed to enjoy the cake that we had baked.

With the participants we discussed the theme for our next meeting on the 13th of October, and a common wish from the participants was that they wanted to cook something that they have never tried before. For example two participants wished to learn how to cook Asian food (sushi, noodles) whereas a few of the other participants wanted to learn how to cook Middle Eastern food. We came to the conclusion that next time we would cook Jordanian food. The Jordanian participant agreed to be the teacher and she promised to send us the list of ingredients needed for the food she wants to teach. We concluded the event by making a list of participants, cleaned up and ended by thanking all the people that came and participated.

5.4 Fourth meeting, 13 October 2009

This time we had planned to cook Jordanian food, as on the previous café session one of the participants had suggested that she could teach others to make it. Although everything was ready planned and organized, when we arrived to Ankkuri it turned out that the person who was supposed to bring the food supplies (it was agreed to be easier that way because she would know the exact ingredients and amounts) and teach us, was not able to come. However, the participants had agreed among themselves that instead of Jordanian food one woman would come to teach us her home country's cooking. We learned from this that it is very important to make a backup plan on each session since one never knows what can happen.

This time the session consisted of making a full lunch Moroccan style, and the woman who was in charge, taught and showed us how she makes the food. During the cooking all the conversation took place in Finnish so the participants learned from each other some new words. While eating, we also discussed different topics in Finnish. We also wrote down all the instructions how to make the food and made a printed version of the recipe (Appendix 4), which we then gave to all the participants. All the women seemed very interested in how the food was made and the Moroccan lady was very enthusiastic to guide us in the secrets of Moroccan cuisine.

We spoke in Finnish all the time but it seemed that the participants translated a bit the language to each other from time to time (the ones who knew Finnish better helped the ones who did not). At one point the translation even changed so that the participants had to translate a joke that they made in their language to us. This brought us a nice feeling of mutual learning in terms of the language and culture.

There were eight participants attending and four children along with them. The children were under two years of age, so they did not cause any trouble; instead they were a natural part of the Neighborhood Café as during all sessions from the beginning. In fact, all participants took care of the children, so their mothers did not have to be stressed out and so they could at

least have more fun and so that they can concentrate on the dialogue.

Afterwards we all had coffee together and discussed participants' interests for the next session. The suggestions were: conversations about raising children or cooking for example Moroccan bread. We decided together that we would have the discussion on raising children as our theme for the next session.

We also got feedback after our previous session from the director of Ankkuri about how the participants had praised the way we deliver this Neighborhood Café, because they get to choose what they want to do. On this session it seemed like there was bit of more group feeling among the participants and us. It felt like everybody was starting to be more relaxed and open during these sessions.

5.5 Fifth meeting, 27 October 2009

Our plan was to discuss child care and education in different cultures according to the suggestion of one of our participants during previous session on 13th of October. When we arrived at Ankkuri, we had a surprise. The person who had promised to show us how to prepare Moroccan pastries for the next time had misunderstood and thought that instead of the next time she was supposed to do it on that very day. She had brought most of the ingredients for the Moroccan pastry with her and even an authentic tea set with a beautiful tray for serving original Moroccan tea with the pastries. Quickly we agreed on a change of plan, that we would do the Moroccan pastries this time. The lady who led this session had invited some of her friends to join; so many actually came to learn how to bake pastries instead of talking about child rearing. We learned how to make honey pastries in a frying pan. We also participated and tried out baking after making sure that all the participants had a chance to experiment at the baking spot (Appendix 5).

The director of Ankkuri mentioned in the end before we left that some women had commented about the topic of raising children in different cultures. They had thought that we were perhaps going to try to educate them about the topic and that their way of raising children was wrong. We were considering how to go about with the topic in a culturally and religiously sensitive manner. In a way we gained two more weeks to prepare for the next time, when we planned to have the discussion on child rearing. Also she mentioned that the language in our leaflet should be clearer, we should avoid using complicated or wordy expressions E.g. *Ilolla kutsumme keskusteimaan lasten kasvatuksesta eri kultuureissa*. We should have found a more precise expression using *selko kieli* (direct translation: clear language), as she expressed.

5.6 Sixth meeting, 10 November 2009

We decided last time to keep the child rearing topic in the schedule, because some of the women assured that they were really interested in it, in spite of the uncomfortable feelings among some. We prepared a simple text on the effects of touching for children. We based our information on an article in the *Vauva*-magazine (Appendix 3) dealing with latest research on the subject. We felt it could open up good conversation among participants and there is neither cultural nor national emphasis on the topic. The positive influence of touching is well established beyond borders and generations. We had also decided to make some vegetable patties for the participants as a side subject, because we had seen that the women really enjoy making food. We had prepared some of the ingredients at home for this time, so that we could cook faster, and still the participants would have chance to learn a quick and easy recipe.

We had invited a few of our classmates to Ankkuri because they were also involved in another project with 4V, and they wanted to talk with immigrant women about housing related issues. This time though, we had so few participants, in the beginning only 2 interns from Ankkuri, because of swine flu, and a snow storm, so we decided to arrange the couches and tables at Ankkuri so that we would have a closer contact with the participants (usually we sat around a large table). We brought the patties, coffee, cookies and *glögi* to the table between the couches and started an informal discussion.

We had decided to discuss around the topic of child rearing, but it seemed like it did not interest the interns working at Ankkuri, so we asked them about their views on housing and living, which our classmates wanted to talk about. We realized that because there were so few participants these two quiet participants got a chance to talk and be heard.

Meanwhile another participant arrived, and she was interested in discussing the topic of raising children. We naturally just divided into two groups of discussions and within one side of the table there was a topic based on the plan made for the day and the rest around the couches and talked about issues related to living and housing.

These participants once again requested to learn more recipes and learn more kitchen vocabulary, and one of them expressed that she would like to learn to bake a salty pie. So we decided to bake some kind of pie or quiche during the next Neighborhood Café.

5.7 Seventh meeting, 24 November 2009

During our last session we decided to make a quiché because we found a good recipe for one that we were able to modify how we wanted. Some participants also hoped to learn more kitchen vocabulary. We thought that through the process of baking the quiché they would also catch some useful vocabulary.

During this session we had some challenges because there were no participants in the beginning. Then two participants, one with two children, came, and we started the baking and discussion with them. Four other women arrived later. We figured that it would be good to start the baking with the first two participants in order to be on schedule. This also seemed to be beneficial for them because they were ones that had weaker Finnish and we were able to concentrate on them and talk directly to them without interruptions.

We started the baking with the two participants who were present and they were very interested in learning how to bake quiché and they were actively participating in the process. We prepared two different kinds of quiche. We also wrote the instructions in simple Finnish to give a copy to every participant as we have done on the previous times. We split our thesis group so that one of us participated and led the baking and the other two mainly concentrated on discussing with participants.

When the baking was done we settled down at the couches with all the participants. We sat around the couches, just as the in the previous session. We noticed also this time that sitting on the couches and discussing really made it feel like we were meeting in a common living room, in a place where one meets with friends.

We continued discussing child rearing based on the same article that we used during the last session, because those participants who were not present last time were still interested in the topic.

5.8 Eighth meeting, 15 December 2009

The theme for the last Neighborhood Café was to learn about music from Northern Africa and perhaps dance, and also get acquainted with Somali weddings by viewing photos and dresses of one participant's own wedding. Our participants wanted to introduce their cultures to us.

Our project group decided to make fruit salad with coffee and sweet rolls for the café section. Baking this time was not a major activity and therefore we decided to bake pre-baked rolls and prepare the fruit salad from fresh fruits.

One of our regular participants brought music from her country. She also had along a beautiful full dress from her country, which circulated amongst the women that wanted to try it on. Simultaneously there was a group of women watching the Somali wedding photos, while the Somali dresses were set on a billiard table to look at. We heard about ways to arrange weddings according to Somali culture.

We asked the participants to fill out questionnaires when the time was running out, close to at 13.00 o'clock. We hugged the participants in the end. We befriended with many of them.

6 Evaluation

6.1 The purpose of the study and the evaluation questions

The aim of the study was to find out whether a low threshold setting such as the Neighborhood Café could act as an empowering tool for immigrant women. We wanted to plan, implement and develop the Neighborhood Café at Ankkuri and the goal was to empower the immigrant women through this kind of concept. The aim was also to create an encouraging environment, which would further the learning of Finnish by the participants, thus empowering them.

The project was implemented in co-operation with not just the Housing Association Ankkuri but 4V-project as well, which are both our working life partners in this project. During the thesis work we considered ways to align with the goals of 4V-project for sustainable development. (4V-hanke)

The participants that took part in the project were a varied group since the Neighborhood Café was an open event where anyone could come and attendance was optional and did not involve any kind of registration. In the end, the participants consisted mostly of immigrant Muslim women. Our evaluation question is "How does the Neighborhood Café empower immigrant women?"

6.2 Evaluation method

This study is based on an action research approach and qualitative research methods were used concurrently to evaluate and analyze it. The data was gathered via active observation, which was documented in a diary that we wrote after each session, and an evaluative discussion with our working life partners. These were then further analyzed with content analysis. The rest of the data comes from the participants' feedback questionnaire that they filled

during the last sessions.

Qualitative research can be described as appreciative and explanatory research. According to Varto (1992, 85, in Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 28) it is human research that seeks to find meaning for phenomena and to describe the world as humans see it valuable or significant. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 31) Therefore qualitative research offers a greater insight into the subject and into the participants reality rather than "quantitative which only offers a partial description" (Blaxter et al 2006, 199). We chose qualitative research in hopes that it would provide us with a fuller understanding of our participants and of the subject matter.

Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2003, 152) point out that within qualitative research, it is difficult to get away from one's own personal values because they shape how one tries to define and understand the phenomenon that is investigated. It is also difficult to be completely objective in the traditional sense of the word and, thus the results that we receive can only be conditional explanations placed in a certain time and place. In other words the idea of qualitative research is not to verify already existing claims but instead to find or reveal facts and realities. (Hirsjärvi et al 2003, 152) We seek to find out the possibilities of the Neighborhood Café but we are determined to remember and acknowledge the conditions of our specific study and our relation to it. Syrjälä, Ahonen, Syrjänen and Saari (1994, 13) also point out that there is a premise in qualitative research that an individual has the ability to interpret human incidents as well as find connections and meanings taking place around them. Through different experiences a person can learn, contemplate as well as draw conclusions or reveal these "real facts".

Action research approach stems from a desire to develop activities within a certain system or group. The researcher has to have a keen eye to observe, understand, analyze and create changes. Often the researcher has practical knowledge of the field he or she is researching. Usually the researcher tries to find out whether or not a certain model is applicable in practice and the research is conducted in the field without any specific research object (Heikkinen, Rovio & Syrjälä 2006, 94-95.)

In practice action research is a "cyclical process of think-do-think to research and create change." (Mac Naughton & Hughes 2008, 1) In other words, the researcher thinks about what they want to alter in a present practice after which they do something to create a change in that practice. Once the change has been created the researcher reflects on what they have done.

There are many variations of the action research cycle, however most researchers agree that the process involves phases of doing and thinking (Mac Naughton & Hughes 2008, 1.) For our

research we used Heikkinen et al's (2006) interpretation of the action research cycle, which involves four phases. First there is the planning of a new method, then that method is put in a practice. While the process is going on you actively observe the process, and the fourth phase is reflection on the overall project. This cycle can start from any one of the four phases, and the beginning point of the chain of actions is not always so precise or easy to pinpoint (Heikkinen et al 2006, 78-79.) In Neighborhood Café the process went naturally from planning to practice and further from continuous observation to reflection.

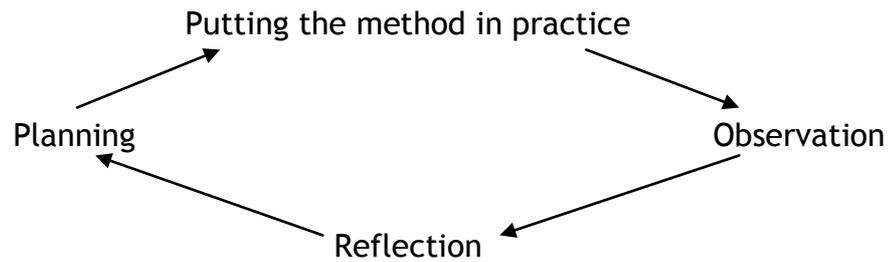


Figure 2: Action research cycle (Heikkinen et al 2006)

For the Neighborhood Café the planning phase of the study was done together with the working life partners and the participants. The ideas for the changes therefore came from the interests of the members involved in the project. The implementation phase of the project was also done in collaboration with the participants due to the fact that, action research should be conducted through “collaborative partnerships of participants and researchers, whose roles and relationships are sufficiently fluid to maximize mutual support” (Somekh 2006, 7).

According to Huovinen (Heikkinen et al 2006, 102) an integral aspect for the fieldwork, within action research, is being able to create a trust between the participants and the researcher, without it the research project is impossible. During the project process we have done our best to acknowledge and reflect upon our role in the project. It was also important to reflect on the general outcomes of the project since it is the last phase of the action research cycle and this reflection is done through the written report and the diary.

We found it very important to be considered as equals with the participants and not think of ourselves as leaders of the group. Kuula (in Vilka 2006, 16) asserts that action research project is a learning process for the researchers. We consider that our project is perhaps most importantly a learning experience for each of our group members. However, it also “engenders powerful learning for the participants through combining research with reflection on practice” (Somekh 2006, 8).

According to Vilkkä (2006, 16) an action research project includes the concept of interaction between the researcher and the participants. In the similar manner we formed relationships and interacted with our participants. Even though our primary goal was to empower the participants, it can take place through interaction of give and take. Vilkkä (2006, 16) also states that in action research, when the researcher participates in the action, he or she will learn while participating.

6.3 Data collection

The data for this study was gathered by several means of which active observation was the primary one. According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009, 81), mere observation as the only source for research material is challenging to analyze, thus it can be beneficial to combine different methods for collecting research material. We kept diary for the documenting of the sessions. The diary was meant to be a systematic documentation of our observation, which is an integral part of action research (Vilkkä 2006, 100). In addition to the observation and diary we collected data through an evaluative discussion with our working life partners and the feedback form, which aimed at gathering the participants' view on the project.

Observation was found to be the most suitable form of data collection in this study. Through questionnaires and interviews one can find out what the examinees think, feel and believe but those leave out what actually is happening. Although through means of observation, essential information can be gathered concerning whether the targets of the observation act as they say they do. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2000, 199.) This way by using both a feedback questionnaire and observation as a method, we hoped to find both the direct perceptions from the actual project as well as the participants' ideas and views on the project. The biggest advantage of observation is that one can get direct and natural information on the functions and behavior of individuals, groups or organizations. Thus observation suits very well qualitative research and it could be seen as studying the real world and life. (Hirsjärvi et al 2000, 200.)

Active observation was the method used in this study since it allows the researcher to participate as well. In active observation the researcher's level of attendance changes in different parts of the study. Sometimes the researcher stands back to be an outside observer whereas at other times he or she might be the center of action. As the observer the researcher is able to make notes during the situations on the field but when he or she is attending the activities, the notes must be made afterwards. (Heikkinen, Roivio & Syrjälä 2007, 106.) In our case we mostly attended the activities, thus we gathered our notes afterwards in the diary. It is the characteristic of active observation that the researcher attends the examinees activities in their terms. When getting into the group, the researcher strives to share life experiences

with the members of the group and “steps into their cultural and symbolic worlds” and their language use etc. The researcher thus often forms some kind of role in the group that they are in. (Hirsjärvi et al 2000, 203.)

As a person that is keenly aware of the ‘everyday life activities’ in Ankkuri, the director gave us valuable information and tips considering the implementation of our sessions. As Vilkkä (2006, 45) states the active observation demands that the researcher has to get into the society that he or she is studying. With this regard, Grönfors (in Vilkkä 2006, 45) suggests to use a so-called key person, who refers to a person who knows the society and helps in raising the participants’ trust towards the researcher as well as the study, which in our case would be the working life partner, the director of Ankkuri. We also recorded our working life partners’ evaluation of the project and in our thesis we refer to this discussion as the evaluative discussion.

When using a diary as a research method there are some points that one should consider. For example it is recommended by Hirsjärvi et al (2000, 206) to include only the kinds of things in the diary that one might find beneficial to the research. It is important to bear in mind the research questions, in our case the evaluation question, at all times. Other important aspects to take into consideration are confidentiality, anonymity and permissions, which were dealt with throughout the study. (Hirsjärvi et al 2000, 206.)

6.4 Data analysis

The main method of data analysis used in this study is content analysis. It was used to analyze our diary. We also transcribed the evaluative discussion between us and our working life partners, to enable us to do the content analysis on it as well. The content analysis was not used on the questionnaire because it was clearer just to summarize the answers. The question behind the analysis was our evaluation question, that is, how the Neighborhood Café can empower the immigrant women. Miles and Huberman (1994, 12) state that the process of qualitative analysis has to be well documented. We had to bear in mind at all times that we “need to understand more clearly just what is going on when we analyze the data, to reflect, refine our methods, and make them more generally usable by others” (Miles & Huberman 1994, 12).

Content analysis has three main stages: stating the research problem, retrieving the text and employing sampling methods and interpretation and analysis (Blaxter et al 2006, 210). According to Miles and Huberman (in Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 109) there are three phases in the process of content analysis; reduction of the material, data display and drawing and verification of conclusions. In the reduction phase the data material, that is being analyzed, is com-

pressed in a way that essential facts based on the research question are brought out. It is a process of focusing, selecting and simplifying the data that occurs in the notes. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 10.) The reduction can for example be conducted by underlining information that relates with the research question, called coding, with different color pens. Then the underlined, coded, material can be collected on a separate paper. Data reduction is a form of analysis that organizes and focuses and sharpens data in a way that the final conclusions can be drawn and verified. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 11.)

In data display the coded original expressions are read and scrutinized thoroughly in order to find concepts that are similar. Common verifications are then clustered under joint categories. These categories are then named under the same 'sub category'. Data verification is the phase where the researcher forms theoretical concepts and draws conclusions based on the material that has been displayed. The researcher tries to find commonalities between displayed sub categories in order to form new main categories thus creating new main groupings as long as it is possible within the limits of the material. Content analysis is conducted by combining verifications and conclusions that rise from the data. The answers to the research question start to form after the data has been analyzed and interpreted. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 110 -112; Miles & Huberman 1994, 11.)

In our case we started the data analysis by going through all the data and finding the essential parts in consideration to our evaluative question. Thus during this data coding we reduced the material by color coding the important parts that we felt answered the evaluative question "How did the Neighborhood Café empower the immigrant women?" We shortened the longer pieces of data into specific displays and then started looking for similarities. In the data display, we then started to make sub-groups of the statements. Normally, the sub groups would be regrouped further into sub-categories but in this analysis we found it unnecessary. The regrouping was not considered to bring any more valuable information for the results thus the displays were: original statement, simplified statement and sub-groups. We put all of the data into a table to make it easier for us to piece it together as an entity. The following table is an example from the diary's content analysis.

Original statement	Simplified statement	Sub-group
They (the participants) get to choose what they want to do.	The clients decide the themes.	Clients' interests
All the women seemed very interested in how the food was made. They seemed quite excited about learning a new recipe	Preparing food interests the clients.	Clients' interests
During the baking process we discussed the women's baking habits in Finnish.	Talking Finnish while baking	Methods for learning Finnish
The discussion was divided into many parts because people wanted to discuss different subjects. The participants enjoyed the discussion.	Discussions in small groups.	Methods for learning Finnish
We also write with simple Finnish the instructions.	Simple instructions for the participants	Methods for learning Finnish
The fact that we sat on the couches also probably affected the conversation The women find it to be a 'living room' kind of place where to meet friends from their neighborhood and where to feel comfortable.	The participants started to feel comfortable in the new setting	Creating an open environment
Our theme is to learn about Moroccan music and perhaps dance and get acquainted with Somali wedding by viewing photos and dresses of one of the participant's own wedding.	Theme to get to know the participants' cultures.	Mutual learning

Table 1: Content analysis table

7 Findings

7.1 Active observation

We documented our active observation by writing a diary after each session. We analyzed the diary through content analysis by finding groups or themes that arose from each session. The

main themes that arose from the diary were clients' interests, different kinds of methods of learning Finnish, creating an open environment, misunderstandings, mutual learning and adaptability. The quotations in this section are directly from the diary and thus are written by us.

7.1.1 Clients' interests

The fact that the participants got to choose what they were interested in was a theme that re-occurred in each session since it was one of the main principles of the Neighborhood Café. We tried to take into account the participants' wishes during each session and we always hoped that the participants would want to share their culture by for example showing baking traditions from their own country. Usually the participants took initiative and they had many suggestions for topics concerning food especially. Here is an extract to show this point from the diary:

We discussed with the participants about the theme for our next meeting on the 13.09.09 and a common wish from the participants was cooking. Most of them wanted to cook something that they have never tried before. For example two participants wished to learn how to cook Asian food (sushi, noodles) whereas a few of the other participants wanted to learn how to cook Middle Eastern food. Together with the participants we came to the conclusion that next time we would cook Jordanian food. The Jordanian participant will be the teacher and she will send us the ingredients needed for the food she wants to teach.

We also got feedback after our previous session from the director of Ankkuri about how the participants had praised the way we deliver this Neighborhood Café in the way that they get to choose what they want to do. (Diary 13.10.)

During our last meeting on the 15.09 the participants suggested that it would be nice to bake a regular coffee cake. Due to the fact that our whole project is based on the client's wishes, we pursued the goal of making the coffee cake. (Diary 29.9.)

7.1.2 Methods of learning Finnish

One important teaching method was creating different workstations whilst baking so that the participants got a chance for personal communication and more accurate Finnish directions while baking. We tried to use a simpler way of talking so that it would be easier for the clients to understand what we were doing.

We decided that we would have two workstations (in other words we would bake two cakes) so that there would be a greater chance that the women would be able to try out how to make a certain part of the cake (for example whip the eggs and sugar together). In the end we had 3 workstations. Two of them were for whipping the eggs and the sugar and the third one for mixing the dry ingredients.

Another important tool for facilitating the learning of Finnish was the articles that we used during most of the sessions. We chose the articles according to what we thought might interest the participants. One of the points of the articles was to act as conversation starters and to give a direction for the conversation.

We also started to discuss the article that we hoped would spark the participants' interests. The article was about two Somali women that hope their brother could get refuge from Finland. Their brother is being released from Guantanamo prison in January 2010. The women knew quite a lot about Guantanamo prison and they had a few comments on the subject. (Diary 29.9.)

The topic was brought about by first discussing the article which we had chosen for the session. The article spoke of the importance of touch in a child early development. We chose the article because the topic of touch is quite universal and we assumed that especially immigrant women understand the importance of touch (hugging and massaging your child). (Diary 10.11.)

Since baking and cooking were some of the most successful themes for the Neighborhood Café we used the baking sessions as Finnish lessons as well.

The participants were once again eager to learn more recipes and so they suggested that we would bake a coffee cake during the next session. One of the participants said she wants to learn more Finnish. So we decided to bake the coffee cake during our next session during which we could teach more Finnish baking vocabulary. (Diary 10.11.)

The participants really wanted to get all the recipes for all the food and pastries that we made in each session. So for each session we made sure that we wrote down the recipes in simple Finnish with picture instructions to make them even clearer. The instructions therefore also acted as a tool for teaching Finnish.

We also wrote with simple Finnish the instructions to prepare them which we then

gave to every participant as on the previous times. In the end the participants are very eager to get those recipes. (Diary 24.11.)

During our project we also tried to divide the conversation groups into smaller units. This was due to the fact that we assumed that it would be easier to have conversations with a smaller group and also it would give more room for the participants to have their voice heard. Sometimes the groups would divide quite naturally according to different interests. It was also easier to assist the participants with their Finnish language and therefore the division also acted as a tool for learning Finnish.

The discussion was divided into many parts because people wanted to discuss different subjects. While some of our group discussed about the difficulties in finding apartments in Finland, some of our group members talked about the topic of child rearing. (10.11.)

7.1.3 Mutual learning

One of the most important themes that arose from our diary was also the importance of equality between the participants and us. Also mutual learning was a vital part of the Neighborhood Café.

This time we the Finns are really in the receiving side. Last time one participant suggested that this time she could introduce us to music from Morocco and bring some festive outfits from her country. Another proposed that she could show photos from her wedding and show us some dresses from her culture. We agreed to listen to Moroccan music, learn some dances, watch Somali photos and familiarize with festive dresses from the two countries. (Diary 15.12.)

Having the participants lead the sessions acted a good empowerment method. The mutual learning happened through conversation, through the baking and cooking and through the music and other cultural aspects that the participants brought up.

They also said that the children respect the adults a lot more in their culture compared to the Finnish culture. This is because the mother gives birth to the child and therefore the child should respect the mother even if they make bad choices. She also explained about how her sons protect her daughters from harm, in other words the children also respect each other (not only the adults). This conversation also acted as a ground for mutual learning because our group learned

about their culture and we gave some information about Finnish child rearing.

At one point the translation changed even so that the participants had to translate a joke that they made in their language, to us. This brought us a nice feeling of mutual learning considering the language.

The example above was connected to several sub groups. It demonstrates how at this point the relaxed atmosphere was already starting to settle and it had a great sense of mutual learning to it. It is also connected to the client initiative to learn Finnish since they were translating to us, which also demonstrates the mutual learning again, as well as is another method of teaching Finnish. This phrase is also connected to the process of building trust to the participants, which seemed to be an important issue throughout our project.

7.1.4 Creating an open environment

One of the subjects that arose from our diary was different methods to create a more open environment. Ankkuri as a premise is quite cozy. There is a large sized kitchen, which served our purpose of baking, and cooking quite well and also there is a large living room area with a big table around which everyone can fit. During our first sessions we tried to concentrate on discussion topics and keeping the clients interested and we hoped that this would create a better atmosphere. Later on we discovered that we could make physical changes to the environment ourselves to make it more open and to create a more easygoing atmosphere. Rearranging the couches and tables into a form that we could have closer contact with the participants made them feel more comfortable and thus these re-arrangements helped us create a more open atmosphere.

When the baking was done we settled down in the couches with all the participants. As last time we sat around the couch which we figured to get the atmosphere more relaxed and the talking might go along a little easier when there is no big objects in the middle of the people. We noticed that sitting by the couches and discussing issues made the place feel like a 'living room' kind of place where women can meet with friends from their neighborhood and where they can feel comfortable which is what we had hoped for at the beginning of our project. (Diary 24.11.)

7.1.5 Misunderstandings

One topic that also arose through the diary was the chance of possible misunderstandings between the participants and us. This showed the participants' fear of being judged or edu-

cated by us even though that was not our intention.

Some women had commented about the topic of discussing raising children in different cultures and that they feel we are trying to educate them about the topic, because we think that they have wrong pedagogical views on raising children.

7.1.6 Adaptability

An issue that seemed very important during our project was that work in housing associations has to be adaptable and demands flexibility. Practical issues that were raised from the diary were for example that some clients might come late and that some of them might have more important things to do on that specific day. Reasons that prevented some participants from coming mostly concerned the weather conditions, sicknesses and doctor appointments for swine flu vaccinations. Also Ramadan was found to be cause in the lack of participants. We also had to make quick changes to plans depending on how the participants felt and because of communication failures.

Although everything was ready planned and organized when we arrived to Ankkuri it turned out that the person from Jordan who was supposed to bring the food supplies (it was agreed to be easier that way because she would know the exact ingredients and amounts) and teach us, was not able to come. (Diary 13.10.)

The person who had promised to show us how to prepare Arabic pastries for the next café had misunderstood, that we booked her for this Tuesday, and not for the next time as we had agreed. She had brought most of the ingredients with her and even an authentic tea set with a beautiful tray for serving original Moroccan tea with the pastries. Quickly we agreed on a change of plan, that we would do the Moroccan pastries this time. (Diary 27.10.)

7.2 Evaluative discussion

We had an evaluative discussion at the end of our project, which concentrated on how our working life partners felt about the project and how empowering work should generally be done. We transcribed the discussion from the tape and used the content analysis on it, as we did with the diary. The quotations in this section are comments from our working life partners. The conversation took place in Finnish, thus in each section there is first an English translation and after which there is a direct quotation in Finnish. In the discussion we found similar themes that we had found in our diary. The themes in the discussion, however, con-

centrated more on how we should understand our participants better.

7.2.1 Clients' interests

We discussed the participants' interests. In this kind of work it is important to think about who needs the service most and what the service that they need is specifically.

One issue that we realized that interested the participants was the 'living room' aspect of the Neighborhood Café. In our diary we discussed the issue from the point of view of trying to create a more open environment and aiming towards a 'living room' atmosphere. Our working life partners pointed out the same issue that it might be the reason why the Neighborhood Café interests the participants.

This is like a living room for them, to meet friends. Maybe you do not want other people in your living room. This request and the need that this is your living room to meet friends, but maybe the starting point is that there was a need for this and we move according to their needs and who comes first.

Tää on niinkuin se olohuone heille, tapaa ystäviään. Varmaan olohuoneeseen ei haluakaan muita. Tää tilaus ja se tarve että tää on teijän olohuone, tapaa ystäviään, mutta ehkä tässä olikin lähtökohtana että se tarve oli tällaiseen että heidän tarpeistaan lähdetään liikkeelle kuka tulee ensimmäiseks.

7.2.2 Methods of learning Finnish

One theme that arose from the discussion was how the participants learn by doing and seeing rather than reading, which demonstrates the different ways to learn Finnish.

But about reading, not everyone can read. For example lady X, as I was trying to say, she learns through looking and repeating after you.

Mutta se lukeminen, kaikki ei lue. Kuten Rouva X, sitä yritin sanoa, se oppii katseellaan ja toistaa perässä.

She (a client) wants to come to do and learn. She (the client) that wanted to learn the coffee cake also learns through watching and doing together. It is rooted in the folklore. The culture of memorizing and speaking, not a culture of reading.

se (asiakas) haluaa tulla tekemään ja oppimaan. Se (asiakas), joka halus oppia sen

kuivakakun, myös oppii katsomalla ja yhdessä tekemällä, se on niin juurtunut siihen kansanperinteeseen, mieleenpainamisen ja puhumisen kulttuuri, ei lukemisen kulttuuri.

7.2.3 Different ways of interacting

Some points that the working life partners brought up were the importance of different ways of interaction especially with the participants that do not know or share the same language that well with us. The main issue that was brought up was that with some of the participants you have to talk more clearly and simply.

A more direct contact input. -- When a person does not speak so well, when there is no common good spoken language, the contact should be close, intensive and with feeling for example take her hand.

Suorempi kontaktin otto. -- Silloin kun ihminen puhuu huonosti, kun ei ole yhteistä hyvää puhekieltä, niin silloin sen kontaktin pitäisi olla läheinen, intensiivinen, tunteella vaikka ottaa kädestä kiinni.

And I was going to say that you should talk simpler, understandable language.

Ja sitä piti sanoa että pitäisi puhua yksinkertaisemmin, selkokieltä.

Ways of interaction also placed building trust into an important role in our work.

--if you really want the thoughts and ideas to come from them, the starting point, that they trust you comes from them having the feeling that you actually care and listen to them.

--jos te oikeesti haluatte, että heiltä tulee ajatukset ja ideat, lähtökohta on että he luottaa teihin, lähtee semmoisesta että heillä on tunne, että te oikeasti välitätte ja kuuntelette.

During the project we also realized different cultural ways of interacting. For example the clients do not necessarily say 'no' in their culture. So if the participants disagreed with us they did not show it directly. Instead they maybe did not come to the session if they did not like the topic or they politely nodded as if to say yes even though they meant to say no.

Sometimes the clients politely nod. Lady X just nodded when I asked if the dis-

hwasher is clean or dirty she said clean and turned the washing machine on.

No, joskus ne vain kohteliaana nyökyttelee. Rouva X mullekin vain nyökytteli, kun kysyin että onko tiskikori puhas vai likainen, sanoi puhas ja pisti päälle.

In a multicultural environment some already speak really good Finnish but you shouldnt get caught in that...usually they dont say I dont understand.

Monikulttuurisessa yhteisössä joku puhuu jo tosi hyvää suomea, niin siihen ei pidä mennä...yleensä ei sanota etten ymmärrä.

7.2.4 Mutual Learning

Mutual learning was a finding in both the diary and the discussion. It was nice to learn something new from the clients. The worker is responsible for the interaction; however, we should acknowledge that as an important part of mutual learning. Mutual learning requires that we will not go and guide the participants as if they would not know anything but instead we consider ourselves to be on the same level with them. This also demonstrates the importance of equality between the participants and us.

Even though the worker has the responsibility of interaction it is still a two way street, it is wonderful when you can learn something new from the clients, so that you do not play the wise one and guide them as if they were the 'ignorants', the learning is mutual.

Vaikka työntekijällä on vastuu vuorovaikutukseen se on kuitenkin kaksisuuntainen, on aivan ihanaa kun voi oppia jotakin uutta asiakkaalta, silleen niinkuin ei mee viisaana opastamaan näitä 'tietämättömiä' se oppiminen on molemminpuolista.

Thinking you know better, that is a threat in this kind of work, think you know better than the clients and they freeze up for sure and leave. Always ears this big and the mouth a little smaller.

Paremmiin tietäminen, se on uhkakuva tämmöisessä työssä, tietää paremmin kuin ne asiakkaat, niin saa varmemmin ne lukkoon ja häipymään. Aina korvat näin isolla ja suu vähän pienemmällä.

7.2.5 Adaptability

Adaptability was one of the main topics of the evaluative discussion, in line with our observations. We have to be flexible for example in the event that the participants make decisions by themselves. This is something that is usual for housing associations and it is good to acknowledge it to be characteristic for this kind of work.

These women gather without you and talk in the phones and agree... this is characteristics for a housing association, you are very adaptable, then you bend...

Nää naiset kokoontuu ilman teitä ja juttelee puhelimilla ja sopii... tää on luonteenomaista asukastalolle, te ootte hyvin sopeutuvaisia, sitten joustetaan...

7.2.6 Misunderstandings

A very important topic that came up from the discussion was the fact that we had not understood our participants' culture and upbringing with one of our topics. We had apparently written one of the advertisements in a way that made it seem as if we were going to teach the participants how to raise their children. The flyer had said "We will talk about child rearing, come and have coffee and cake" and in retrospect we realized that it gave the wrong message to the participants. We also saw the response to the flyer because during that session we had very few participants.

The sentence structure on the flyer was too complicated and they wondered and if a person is unsure about the subject then they stay at home. They do not start arguing about what it should say.

Oli liian monimutkainen kieliäsi siinä ilmoituksessa, ne ihmetteli sitä, ja kun ihminen on epävarma asiasta niin se jää kotiin. Ei ne ala kiistelemään, mitä siinä pitäis olla.

They are scared of the education discussion because the education and raising that they have learned from their homes has been so different.

Ne pelkää kasvatust keskustelua kun niiden kodeista omaksuma kasvatust on ollu niin erilaista.

7.2.7 Feedback

It was extremely important that we received feedback from our working life partners throughout the project because through their feedback we were able to better understand our participants and it also allowed us to make changes in the ways that we worked. We were also empowered by the positive feedback that we received from our working life partner. She explained how some of the clients question when the next session will be and they schedule their activities so that they are able to attend the Neighborhood Café.

I received feedback about the Swiss roll that it was really good but it was such a recipe that they don't make at home because they don't have even have basic cooking skills and they would have wanted a recipe that they can make easily at home. So it was a bit difficult the carob roll cake with vanilla sauce. It felt impossible to find a powder called carob.

Siitä kääretortusta tuli sellaista palautetta, että se oli hirveän hyvää, mutta se on sellainen ohje, jota ei tule tehtyä kotona, kun ei ole noi keittotaidon alkeet edes hallussa, sit ne olis halunnu sellaisen, minkä voi helposti tehdä kotona, että oli vähän vaikea karobkääretorttu, missä on vaniljakastike. Et se tuntu mahottamalta etsiä sellaista jauhetta kuin karob.

It has probably been useful, they have received information that they have needed because they ask when will they come again. This lady X does not reserve sewing work when you are here but instead participates happily with you so it has probably been useful.

Varmaan on ollu hyötyä, on saatu tietoa, mitä on kaivattu, koska ne kysellee, että milloin ne tulee taas.- Niin kuin tämä vanha rouva X ei varaa ompelutyötä kun te ootte täällä vaan osallistuu teijän kanssa mielellään, niin varmaan on ollu hyötyä.

7.3 Questionnaire

At the end of our project we handed out a questionnaire (Appendix 2) to all the participants that had taken part in the sessions. The point of the questionnaire was to receive feedback and thus it was an evaluation from the participants' point of view about the whole project. We handed out the questionnaire on the last session of our project and we explained that answering the questionnaire is completely voluntary and that all the answers would be dealt with confidentially. We received altogether eleven responses to the questionnaires.

The first question of the questionnaire consisted of a ranking scale for each session. So each of our 7 planned sessions was described by the title that was written on the advertisement and they each had a box in which they could rank the session from 1-5. 1 meant that they were not interested in the subject and 5 meant that it was very useful for them. There was also space to explain the reason for the good/bad rating.

The average of each session is demonstrated by the following graph.

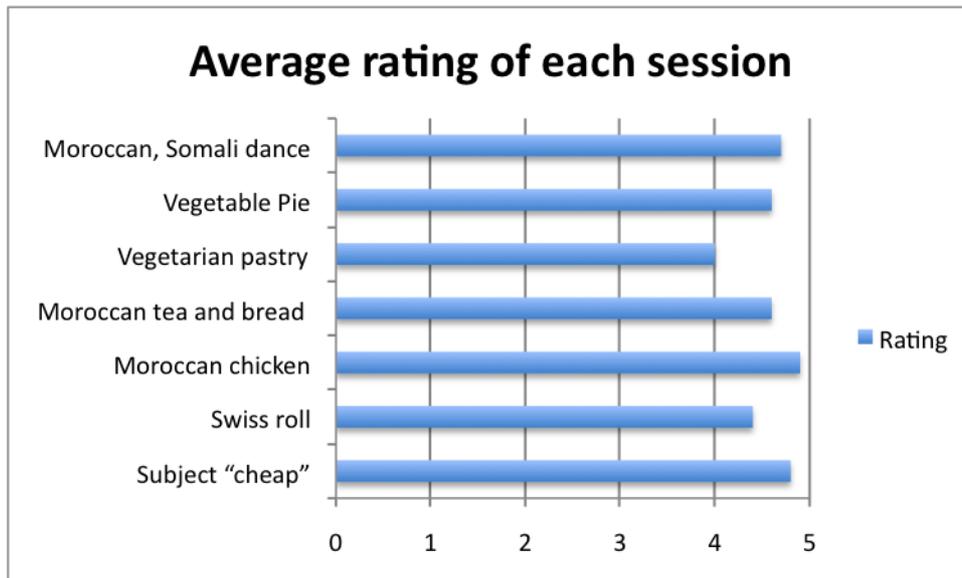


Table 2: Average rating of each session

The overall average score that the participants gave was 4,5/5 for all of the sessions. The feedback that the participants gave was also very positive for each of the sessions. Here are two of the participant's comments for the Moroccan chicken:

It was a good recipe that I learned to cook

oli hyvä resepti mitä oppin laittaa

Good because I taste it for the first time and I get to know a different culture's food

hyvä koska minä maistan ensimmäinen kerta ja tutustun eri kulttuuri ruokaa

The rest of the questions were open ended and through them we wanted feedback on: *how the Neighborhood Café affected the participants Finnish language skills, how the Neighbor-*

hood Café could be improved, what kind of activities the participants wanted Ankkuri to provide for them and also what does Ankkuri mean to the participants. The questions were open ended so that the participants would answer from their own frame of reference rather than filling out set responses.

Generally the participants felt that the Neighborhood Café was a positive experience.

It was really nice to see different people and speak amongst women and to get to know new faces

oli tosi mukavaa nähdä erilaisia ihmisiä ja keskustelu naisten kesellä, ja tutustua erilaisia kasvoja

The answers to the question *How has the Neighborhood Café affected your Finnish language skills* were very positive. Five of the participants felt that their Finnish language has improved or that they have learned new Finnish words through their participation in the Neighborhood Café. One participant felt that it was fun to speak Finnish and one felt that it was fun to see people and talk amongst other women. One only commented that their language development was "good".

Better than elsewhere. Here I speak more Finnish.

paremmin kuin muualla. Täällä puhun enemmän suomenkieli.

*I have learned some new words, new official ways (finnish) customs
olen aina oppinut joku uudet sanat, uudet viralliset tavat*

They speak clearly and easily and we learn more and more Finnish each time

*he puhuvat selvästi ja helposti ja me opimme enemmän ja enemmän suomenkieli
joka kerta*

The answers to the question *How could we develop the Neighborhood Café* were quite scattered. Two clients felt that there should have been more discussion in Finnish, whereas two of the clients felt that we should have had more exercise. One of the clients would have wanted to cook fish and one of the clients just commented that she was thankful that we have had lots of subjects and that we have listened to the clients' needs. One participant commented that having fun and discussing has been enough for her:

My mind (feelings) were good and fun, the meaning was to see people and speak. That has been enough.

Minun mieleni oli hyvä ja hauska, tarkoitus on nähdä ihmisiä ja puhua. Se on ollut riittävä.

The participants' responses were also very scattered to the question *What kind of activities would you want in Ankkuri in the future*. Three participants felt that there should be more exercise whilst two of the participants wanted more baking. It seemed that the clients wanted more variation in the activities because some of them added many ideas such as excursions, camps, cultural events, learning about Finnish culture and sowing courses. One participant felt that it would be nice to have an international atmosphere in Ankkuri. In other words more cultural exchanges would be preferable.

The participants felt very strongly about the housing association Ankkuri and this was very visible in their answers to the question *What does housing association Ankkuri mean to you*. For most of the participants it seems to be a good place that means a lot to them because it is a place where they can meet other women and discuss issues or make food together. Five participants said that Ankkuri is a great place. Five also said that Ankkuri means a lot to them. For example one of the participants said the following:

It means a lot to me. It is a meeting place where I can come and meet other women and discuss with others

Se merkitsee minulle paljon, se on tapaamispaikka, jossa voi aina tulla tapaamaan toisia naisia ja saada keskustella toisten kanssa

Another participant said:

It is a great place where we meet, discuss, learn Finnish or how to make food and the workers are really great

on hieno paikka, jossa tavataan, keskustellaan, opetellaan suomenkili, tai ruoan laittaminen, henkilökunta on hieno

The most important findings from the questionnaire were the fact that the women enjoyed meeting each other and the discussions that took place at each session. Most of the participants also felt that they had learned some Finnish, which was very significant in terms of our

aims.

7.4 Summary

The findings show the different factors facilitating the participants' empowerment and the factors to take into consideration when working in a setting like the Neighborhood Café. The most important features that came up in consideration to our evaluation question were the notions about learning Finnish. The participants felt they had learned Finnish and saw the Neighborhood Café and Ankkuri as places where they could come to see other women and to practice their Finnish. Methods for learning Finnish that were found successful were using articles, recipes, conversations in Finnish in smaller groups, and dividing the group into workstations while baking. Another important issue was to remember that not all of the participants know to read, thus it was even more essential to practice Finnish through the activities where the point is to see and learn. The participants were happy to get to be involved in choosing the themes for the sessions. Accordingly taking clients' needs into consideration was also an important issue.

Many of the findings concentrated on how to make the Neighborhood Café an ideal setting for immigrant women. Important things to consider were creating an open environment, need for adaptability and flexibility and the different ways of interaction. All these were linked to each other in different ways. The findings showed that with these kinds of participants one should take very close contact to them, speak with clear and simple Finnish and one should also be prepared for cultural differences. There might be misunderstandings, which demand adaptability to the new situations and changed plans. To decrease misunderstandings one should be aware of the demands of the functional interaction. The project seemed to be a mutual learning point for both the participants and us. The women noted in the questionnaire that they have learned about new cultures, Finnish language and got acquainted with new people. We as well learned a lot during the sessions about the participants' cultures, their traditions and their lives.

8 Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

The trustworthiness of a study is assessed by considering its validity and reliability. Validity refers to how well the study methods chosen for the study fit in the context of the particular project being conducted. Traditionally validity refers to the level of truthfulness that can be demonstrated within a study. Reliability assesses how stable the results of the study are, whether or not the same result can be produced consistently in later studies as well. (Heikkinen, Rovio & Syrjälä 2006, 147.)

According to Heikkinen et al (2006, 148) validity and reliability do not fit well for assessing action research. Validity is hard to demonstrate because the conductors of the study form the standard of truthfulness in the context of their study. Also reliability cannot be shown, because action research seeks to find new ways and methods to conduct things. Since the aim of action research is to seek change, the study is not easily replicable.

Heikkinen et al (2006, 149) refer to Steinar Kvale who recommends using validation instead of validity in evaluating the action research. They suggest using five principles in assessing such a study, which are principles of historical continuity, reflexivity, dialectics, workability and evocativeness. The quality of the thesis is a sum of these different criteria, and the evaluation of the thesis is a wholesome process and not a calculation of a total of different separate criteria. The principles proposed also overlap with each other. We will use the five principles to evaluate our thesis.

Historical continuity is relevant in action research, because the action does not start from nothingness nor does it end at any given time. The principle of historical continuity recognizes the fact that the process of action research takes place in a specific context in terms of history, politics and ideology. The activity can be examined from within a societal context or viewed in the context of a micro level recognizing facts that have occurred in the site in which the study takes place. (Heikkinen et al 2006, 149, 150.)

Looking at the historical continuity, there had been lots of activities at Housing Association Ankkuri for immigrants, especially for immigrant women, during the past ten years. It was therefore easy for us to introduce the concept of café-style meetings for immigrant women there. Also the day and time, Tuesday mornings from eleven to one, had been a slot at Ankkuri for immigrant groups earlier and thus it was familiar for participants. We had to respect and go by some earlier established standards at Ankkuri. We benefited from the experience of the director at Ankkuri, who had worked there continuously for the past ten years mainly working with immigrant clientele. At the same time we were cautious to introduce new ideas so that we would not step on somebody's toes or somehow take over the space, and were at times not active enough at moving on with our program. We had to adapt to the working methods of Ankkuri. The clients embraced the idea and the Neighborhood Café was kept as one of the weekly programs offered at Ankkuri, therefore the project has historical continuity there to this day. (Asukastalo Ankkuri)

According to Heikkinen et al (2006, 152, 153) the most important tool of the researcher is himself or herself. Therefore it is vital for the researcher to reflect on his or her role in the study, and how his or her own identity has developed during the period of research. A researcher ponders on the limitations and possibilities as well as conditions that his or her

knowledge enables or restricts. Previous experiences can assist in the process of understanding the target of the study. The interest of the researcher influences the issues that he or she brings out during the study, whether it is: religion, gender, or education. Reflection is essential in the cycle within action research. Heikkinen et al (2006, 154) point out that reflection of the work produces understanding and creates room for creativity and development in the project.

According to Hirsjärvi et al (2000, 214) the trustworthiness of a study is improved according to how specific and accurate the researcher's descriptions of the implementation is at each point of the study. The main aim of reflexivity is to be as transparent as possible, which means that each part of the study should be described in as much detail as possible. (Heikkinen et al 2006, 4.) For the purpose of transparency we reflected on our ideas in the diary that we wrote after each session. The most important aspect of writing an honest and reflective report is writing it while it is still fresh in one's mind. We each took turns at writing the diary therefore each description was from a different point of view. We made changes to each other's logs if we felt that they were missing certain important issues. In the beginning of our study we noticed that it was difficult to remember all the most important events that took place during the sessions and so we started taking notes during each session. The notes acted as cues to remember what happened at the session. Still, we realized while writing our study that our diary was not detailed enough and we lacked precise descriptions for example of our conversations with the participants. At the same time in order to protect the privacy of participants we should not disclose personal conversations with them.

In terms of reflection we noticed after the action-phase of the project some negative aspects in consideration to the questionnaire. For example, in the question "*How has the Neighborhood Café affected your Finnish language skills?*", the word how already implies that the Neighborhood Café had some sort of affect on their language skills. A better question would have been: "*Did the Neighborhood Café affect your Finnish skills? If yes, how?*" We strived for complete simplicity in the questions so that the questionnaire would be as understandable as possible for the participants. We realized that it would have been more beneficial to ask questions like: "*Did you enjoy the Neighborhood Café? And why?*", instead of going so specifically to the opinions about Ankkuri. By doing so, we might have received more findings directly from the participants. We could have also used interviews instead of a questionnaire for the participants. Writing may have been an obstacle for some of the participants and therefore interviewing them could have given them a better chance to communicate their ideas and feedback concerning the project.

Principle of dialectics is based on the fact that social realities can be viewed as a discussion of dialectics between theses and antitheses producing synthesis. There are scenarios in histo-

ry in which one ideology faces opposition from a different kind of school of thought and thus history evolves through the influences of different points of views. Similarly such discussions of ideas, methods etc. can take place while conducting an action research. Richard Winter (in Heikkinen et al 2006, 155) points out that ideally an action research based thesis includes many viewpoints as well as interpretations or even discords.

Our thesis followed the rules of dialectics by trying to have all the voices of all the people involved in the project heard. Each aspect of the findings represents the different points of view of our participants, working life partners and us. We filled out the diary from our point of view, we had the questionnaire to get the participants point of view and we had the evaluative discussion to get the working life partners point of view. Of course each view was subjected to our analysis which might reflect the participants' and the working life partners' views differently than the actual raw data portrays.

We had three people working on this project so during the planning phase we had lots of discussions and ideas about the methods and implementations of each session. It was beneficial to hear different views and experiences from each one of us. It is a part of the dialectics as well that we carried out only the plans that we all agreed on. Our working life partners, especially the director of Ankkuri, also commented and gave feedback on their observations throughout the project. In addition, the views of participants were vital in our study, because the common thread was the principles stemming from anti-oppressive practice.

Dialectics also deals with the issue of dialogue and the different ways that it affects the project (Heikkinen, Huttunen & Syrjälä 2005, 4). The dialogue that took place between our group members and the participants was quite positive, however, we still had quite a few misunderstandings, which were caused by cultural differences. We tried to be as culturally sensitive as possible by not imposing our own cultural views on the subjects that we spoke of during the sessions. It was of course impossible to be completely objective and therefore at times we might have made comments that reflected our worldviews. We also made the mistake of making one of the advertisements in such a way that made it seem as if we wanted to teach the participants how to raise their children better. There might have been similar problems with the language used in some of the other advertisements as well and this might have decreased the amount of participants. It was at times very difficult to simplify some topics that we dealt with and this might have caused misunderstandings as well.

Even though our relation to the working life partners was very beneficial and functioned well in the beginning of the project there was one issue that emerged once the action part of our study was ending. We made a visit to Ankkuri at the end our actual project to collect more filled in questionnaires. Our visit was viewed with some confusion although we had agreed on

the date of our visit and the purpose and this confusion was expressed via emails. Our group members also felt confused since in our opinion we had communicated clearly enough about our purposes.

The project definitely opened the world of teamwork and dialectics from a broader angle for each of us. Our thesis group felt disempowered by that one incident that arose at the end of our project even though the purpose of the thesis had been quite the opposite for both our group members and the participants. Thankfully we had very good dialogue within our group and the fact that there were three of us in the team proved to be a strength in the process. We were able to support each other and create a strong bond that helped us with the rest of the thesis process.

The principle of workability evaluates the activity conducted in the study according to how well it benefits the clients. "Effective research also makes the participants believe in their own capabilities and skills. At its best, action research is an empowering process, which makes people act to improve their living conditions and to rely on their own reason and autonomy" (Heikkinen, Huttunen & Syrjälä 2005, 9). The results of the study can be seen as unethical or there can be discussions concerning the integrity within the activity. Heikkinen et al quote Michael Quinn Patton (2005, 30) to sum up the principle of workability: "I can show you, what is beneficial. What is worthwhile is truthful" (Heikkinen et al 2006, 155, 156).

When there is a consideration of benefit, there can be a temptation for the conductors of the study to brush up the results in order to gain greater benefit, to improve the results. Heikkinen et al remind (2006, 156) that failures or realizations that the activity did not succeed, are also valuable findings. It is important to ask how beneficial the Neighborhood Café has been for its participants. We will come back to this in the Discussion section.

The workability of the study can be reviewed through how well it uncovers the links of power surrounding the activity conducted in the study. Heikkinen et al explain that most often power is connected with the language, and therefore the use of power can be seen in the use of words. A successful study in its best can empower the clients to believe in themselves and assist them to improve their lives and circumstances. (Heikkinen et al 2006, 157.) We realized that the participants face difficulties in society and attending this kind of program is just a small step towards being equal with the majority of the society. Nevertheless it is still a progress towards integration into the main society.

The principles of workability can be pondered further by assessing ethical issues within the activity. The conductors of the study need to review how the study affects the participants, the researchers themselves, society and even mankind. The researcher needs to evaluate

whether there will be harm for the participants from the written text. There cannot be a research that fulfils all the ethical requirements, but ethical considerations are essential aspect of research. (Heikkinen et al 2006, 158.)

During the project we made sure that no harm was done to the participants by not enclosing any private details of the participants in any of our data. The diary was written so that the participants involved could not be identified from the data. The questionnaire was also anonymous and we informed the participants that the data was used for our study and that the information they disclosed would be treated confidentially. We also assured the participants that anything private would not be discussed outside of Ankkuri. The participants' names were not revealed in our findings, instead we called a participant "lady X" when we referred to her. We received permission from the individuals whose countries we mention in our study. The information conveyed in the text about these individuals is not sensitive and thus does not harm their privacy. Also, we did not find it necessary to be gender neutral in our text because all the participants were female.

The fifth principle for evaluating the study is evocativeness in other words how much it touches somebody in its ability to awaken new ideas among those who are in contact with it. The assessment by what feelings or thoughts the study arouses is more closely connected with criteria for evaluating arts, cognitive and rational evaluation is connected with science. Yet for the study to be convincing it needs to touch the reader holistically. (Heikkinen et al 2006, 159, 160) The study has had a major impact on our group members. The participants were not just students that we tried to teach but we shared an experience with them, which was enjoyable for both parties. Information was transferred both ways in the form of mutual learning. Based on the responses we know that the participants really liked the project and therefore we hope that this thesis will also inspire others to take on such projects or participate in them.

In terms of our working life partner 4V-project, our project used their basic principles throughout the project. The Neighborhood Café especially touched the participants by giving them a place where they can, "enjoy life and feel great" (4V-project). The principles of 4V are very closely connected with empowerment and therefore through the empowering activities we also touched upon the ideas surrounding 4V. Ankkuri in itself is a place that strengthens community spirit and therefore is involved in participatory urban living, which is also central concept for the 4V-project. In terms of awakening new ideas we also tried to bring about the 4V's principles of recycling and reuse by guiding the participants for example to throw away organic waste into the organic waste bin. 4V-project has also evoked us to think about recycling and sustainable development in our own lives and we hope it did the same for the participants.

Due to the fact that our project was done in quite an open format following the principles of anti-oppressive theory and the empowerment approach, generalization is quite difficult. The findings of the project are context dependent and therefore we cannot draw generalizations from them. The findings and our analysis of them is also dependent on the participant group and to this particular time and therefore if a similar study were conducted in a different place, different time with a different participant group the findings may vary from what we received. We also felt that the dialogue, trust, our personal growth and the whole project developed a lot during the project time and anyhow it did not reach its complete potential due to the relatively short period of time. It would be interesting to see what the project could develop into during a longer period of time.

9 Discussion

The aim of the thesis was to find out how a low threshold setting such as a Neighborhood Café could empower immigrant women. In consideration to our evaluation question, “How does the Neighborhood Café empower immigrant women?” we looked at the empowerment process from the different observable and non-observable aspects. These aspects are based on the model of empowerment which “expresses itself at the level of feelings, at the level of ideas about self worth, at the level of being able to make a difference in the world around us” which is part of the level of action (Sehgal 2005, 295). These levels were observed to different degrees in our project. We also analyzed how the anti-oppressive practice worked as a model to attain empowerment at these different levels.

The mutual dialogue that happened between the different participants and our group members is connected to the level of ideas and the level of feelings. In terms of the level of feelings we viewed the project as one that “encourages reflection on events and attitudes which contribute to the evolution of one’s own life story” (Rees 2003, 25). Subsequently sharing one’s own story leads to the next phase of the empowerment model which is at the level of ideas and according to which, sharing stories allows the participants to learn new words and therefore a new language (Dalrymple & Burke, 2006, 118). Through sharing stories within the Neighborhood Café, the participants were also able to compare experiences and reflect on their own life situations. This reflection of the self is a main constituent in the increase of self-respect and gaining knowledge about oneself and through this self-awareness one can start to change one’s attitudes and life situation (Rees 1991, in Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 117). This sharing and discussing was one of the most frequent comments in the questionnaire thus it seemed to be the participant’s highlights and one of the main reasons why many of the women came to Ankkuri.

We realized during the analysis of our findings that it is very difficult to analyze or notice the actual effect of empowerment on the participant group. In fact it is hard to draw any conclusions on whether or not the participant group was empowered since empowerment is a process that takes place at an individual non-observable level and therefore, “goals, means and outcomes must be self-defined” (Dalrymple & Burke 2006, 111). However, we looked at the behaviors that we had reflected upon in our diary and the comments of the participants and working life partners for observable empowerment. Behaviors and comments that point towards empowerment were based on learning useful skills or gaining new knowledge. Also we looked at mutual learning and trust that developed during the process.

Learning Finnish in the Neighborhood Café was one of the main findings that was found to be empowering for the participants. They considered it beneficial because they learned Finnish and spoke more Finnish there than elsewhere. Thus this is a significant factor in the process of empowering the participants. Tähti (2008, 79, in Huuhtanen 2009, 37) states that learning a language should start from an easy environment, where one learns simple, everyday life vocabulary. Learning Finnish is often seen as the most important factor in the success of the integration and can be considered to be a pathway to the society. (Ekberg-Kontula 2000, 23; Kirjanen 2008, 16; Ekholm 1994, 93, in Huuhtanen 2009, 36; Rätty 2002, 158.) MoniNaisten Talo project had a very similar basis for their actions when considering the use of Finnish language. The Finnish conversations took place in the operational groups and the goal of those conversations was to support the development of the language skills and to maintain them. Thus the point of the activities was not to teach Finnish but to learn the language through the activities (Huuhtanen 2009, 37.) This form of practice was proven to be efficient in MoniNaisten Talo as well as in the Neighborhood Café. We wanted to find different ways of using the language in the project’s setting and it worked well.

One cannot force the process of empowerment from the outside, although doing things together and building trust usually strengthen some form of individual empowerment. (Joensuu & Rustanius 2005, 7) Our thesis project aimed at building this trust through different activities and through the creation of an open and comfortable environment. For example in the findings it is apparent that the participants started to translate their jokes for us so that we would be able to be a part of their conversation which reveals a certain level of trust. The findings imply that the participants had fun and enjoyed coming to Neighborhood Café. According to Trevithick positive experiences can create feelings of trust and hope as well as pass on “a comforting sense of being understood and accepted” (Trevithick 2005, 10). The participants had positive experiences during the sessions, which consequently can lead to increased trust between them and us. Trust enables better communication, reflection and dialogue (Freire 2005, 70). On the other hand, the trust and respect that is built through the

dialogue can be seen as the beginning steps of the empowerment process (Harju-Tolppa 2003, 54). Also the working life partners addressed the importance of building trust with the participants. This was revealed when they stated that when the participants feel that you listen and actually care about them a trust starts to develop and they end up sharing their thoughts and ideas in a more open manner. We also noticed a definite change in the conversations towards the end of our project because they were much more open and more informative for both the participants and our group members. A group becomes empowered through this type of open dialogue where the women can share their good and bad experiences.

From the feedback that we received from the participants some responses indicated the importance of meeting other women at the Neighborhood Café as being a beneficial experience for them. All the participants also noted that as a place Ankkuri is very important to them because of this meeting possibility. We think that the participants of Neighborhood Café also felt an increase of self-esteem by learning new skills, such as recipes that they can try at home as well as learning to speak Finnish with other people. Also through the practice they can feel at ease when speaking Finnish and gain more confidence for it in the future. For our project the empowerment in practice meant that the women that have come to Finland receive peer support as well as learn things about Finland and other cultures, which in turn increases their awareness.

The activities that the participants wished for were meant to strengthen individual and group empowerment. The empowerment process was very different with every individual depending on his or her own involvement and yearning for change. For example one of the participants was very eager to teach the other participants about her culture through food and music. The fact that the other participants showed great interest in the subjects that she taught would imply that the activities could be considered as empowering, at least for this individual. This is of course a natural part of the empowerment process because it can occur either at the individual level or at the collective level. It can also occur on both levels simultaneously. However, it can also occur so that an individual feels personally empowered whilst the rest of the group does not feel the same. (Dominelli 2002, 117.)

The original plan for our thesis was that we would continue the project that we had started for the anti-oppressive practice course but as an important change we would attempt to target the Finnish women in the area as well. One of our main weaknesses for our project was that we were not able to go through with the plan because it seemed like Ankkuri had a set clientele that took part in it and it was hard to inform people that were outside of the circle of friends. Our idea would have been to go to different apartment buildings in Herttoniemi and place advertisements. We were told, however, that it might not be such a good idea to have too many participants involved in the Neighborhood Café and so we had to give up on

our plan. In the future it might be interesting to see if such a project is possible because it would also act as an enabler for better integration and it could increase community spirit which would be in accordance with the goals of the 4V-project as well.

Harju-Tolppa (2004, 21) mentions that there is a lack of places where immigrant women can meet Finnish women. This lack of Finnish acquaintances can therefore be a reason why many immigrant women have a difficult time learning Finnish (Harju-Tolppa 2004, 21). Tiilikainen comments, that Somali women rarely get the chance to make Finnish friends and that their contacts with Finnish native speakers are only authorities and professionals representing different sectors of society. (Tiilikainen 2003, 163) It would therefore be beneficial for the two groups to meet because the Finnish women would learn about new cultures and the immigrant women would have a chance to practice their Finnish. They could share life stories and exchange cultural experiences, which would facilitate empowerment for both parties.

We also found out that anti-oppressive practice as a theory provides a solid backbone for this type of program. The principles of anti-oppressive practice that were important to us were: the participants choosing the topics, an equal partnership and promoting reflexivity. For example reflexivity was very important for our group members because it meant that we constantly re-considered and re-evaluated our aspirations throughout the project and during the process of thesis writing (Dominelli 2002, 184). We also reflected on our own actions at all times during the project and made sure that we took into account the participants. On the other hand the participants reflected on their actions and life through the stories that they shared. Reflecting and “understanding how personal values and assumptions shape research findings” (Somekh 2006, 8) is a vital part of the action research cycle (Figure 2). Thus, we did our best to acknowledge our own values and worldviews throughout the project. We also tried to understand how the participant’s experiences might be different than our own for example by getting to know their culture through different literature at the beginning of our project and by listening to their experiences. In terms of reflection it is also important to note that the project was a learning experience for our group. We pursued it out of our personal interests and our previous knowledge of Finland and being native Finns was hopefully a source of information rather than an obstacle during the process.

According to anti-oppressive practice, we found it essential to take the clients’ interests into account during each session. We were also open for any changes that the clients brought out before or even during the sessions because our whole program was based on an open format. We had been prepared to organize exercise activities in the beginning of the project depending of course on the women’s own interests. In fact we tried to organize exercise activities because of one participant’s request during the first few sessions, but we failed to book a neighborhood fitness facility as our networking partner. We contacted the manager of a gym,

who had worked previously as a partner with Ankkuri in our previous project, but she did not provide any assistance this time. However, it seemed that most of the time the majority of the women wanted to cook and discuss in Finnish and so we stopped looking for someone else to lead fitness sessions.

One major issue with a project that is based on anti-oppressive practice is the ability to adapt to new situations and to the requests of the participants. Adaptability also came up in our findings in the diary and in the discussion with our working life partners. For example there were a few times that we had planned together with the participants that we would for example discuss about some subject during the next session and then during that session we would find out that plans have changed. On some sessions the participants also came late, which was an issue that came up in both the diary and the evaluative discussion. There were also factors that affected the amount of participants that we could not influence on such as: swine flu epidemic, Ramadan, snow storms and other external factors. These were noted to be characteristics of the housing associations and it taught us that we should always have a backup plan in order to avoid major failures in the program.

As Dalrymple and Burke (2006, 133) indicate that partnership within the anti-oppressive theory, can be achieved by having an inclusive and collaborative atmosphere. In the findings there were implications that it was important to create an open environment in order to achieve a kind of welcoming, collaborative and pleasant atmosphere which contributed to the process of building trust. For example the children of the women were also welcome to the Neighborhood Café, which made it easier for the women to attend. Consequently the children were not in the way at any point of the project, instead in the end they were a natural part of the sessions and all the people at the Café took care of them collaboratively. The sessions were also planned in close cooperation between us and the participants, which also brought us a sense of partnership.

These kinds of projects can be very significant factors also in a newly arrived immigrants' integration. Their own ethnic group is important not only when arriving to the new country but in future as well. The immigrants that have been in the country longer are a significant support factors to the ones who arrive in the country. (Räty 2002, 112) In these kinds of multicultural women's cafés for example the immigrants can have a place where to find other immigrants and peer support. In the Neighborhood Café most of the participants had spent several years in Finland already. It could also be a good channel for the new immigrant women who stay at home with their children to start and find their way into the society. The social integration is remarkably easier if the immigrants feel welcome and if the environment supports their social integration. (Räty 2002, 120)

In terms of the action level of the empowerment model, we did not attempt to make changes on the societal level but instead we focused on the lives of the individuals involved in the Neighborhood Café. We focused on the micro-level interactions which can be “empowering to clients because this is the site in which they can exercise the most control” (Dominelli 2002, 164). We can also influence changes on the societal level through our thesis by evoking the reader to pursue similar projects and therefore allowing other immigrant women to experience a positive change in their life away from mundane everyday routines. According to Marjatta Eskola, (2003, 108, in Harju-Tolppa 2003, 52) the starting point of social work should be noticing the need and finding different methods to support the need. There is a definite need for these types of projects so that we can begin a cycle of empowerment amongst the female immigrant population and integrate them better into the Finnish society. Once the women in the groups become empowered they can take their ideas and knowledge to women that are in a worse situation than themselves. Therefore our thesis will provide valuable information on how a low threshold setting such as a café can enable empowerment for immigrant women and therefore act as a method to support their different needs, prevent loneliness and develop capabilities and social networks. The information provided in this thesis can act as a guideline or give assistance to organizations or people that are hoping to start a similar project concerning immigrant women.

There are multiple different angles that should be studied further in terms of empowering activity arenas for immigrant women. For example one of our thesis group members took part in a multicultural women’s club in Kannelmäki, run by Familia club. (Familia club) The club operates under a very similar principle that the Neighborhood Café had, which means taking into consideration the women’s wishes when organizing the sessions. Within this club, the women’s greatest yearning was to get to know different cultures and to exercise. (Nieminen 2008, 57.) In our project we also realized from the feedback from the participants that exercise would be a very good addition. There could also be a variety of different activities such as excursions and cultural events that could be implemented within multicultural women’s groups. In fact many of the women stated in the questionnaire that there should be greater variety with the activities.

This study was in the end quite a small-scale study implemented for the purpose of our Bachelor’s thesis, yet it proved to be a very good learning experience for both our group members and the participants. Our group members also felt empowered throughout the process by being together with the participants as well as receiving very positive feedback from all the parties involved. We also learned a great deal about how to run this kind of group empowerment arenas, which we can utilize in our future careers. For some of us it was the first time working with immigrant women while for others it was a more familiar field already. The

main issue that speaks for the success of the project is the fact that the Neighborhood Café still operates in Ankkuri under the same name and is lead by the immigrant women themselves even after our part of the project has been completed. (Asukastalo Ankkuri)

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Appendix 1

The Neighborhood Café flyer

Tervetuloa

naapurikahvilaan!

Välitä, Vaikuta, Viihdy, Voi hyvin

Kutsumme teidät ilolla keskustelemaan kanssamme teitä hyödyntävistä aiheista Asukastalo Ankkuriin. **Tarjoamme kahvia ja pullaa.**

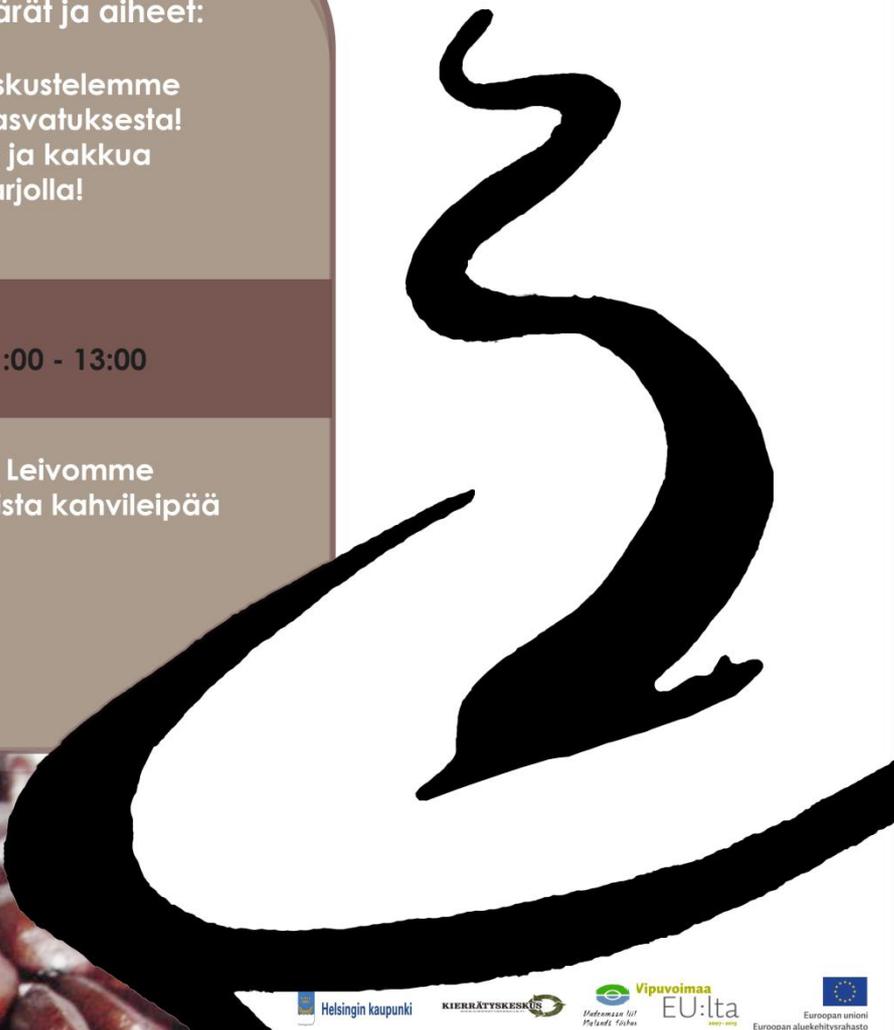
Tapahtumia järjestämässä mm. Herttoniemenrannan asukastaloyhdistys Ankkuri ry, Otaniemen Laurea AMK ja 4V-hanke. 4V saa EU-rahoitusta EAKR-ohjelmasta ja kansallista rahoitusta Uudenmaan liitolta vuosina 2008-2011.

Päivämäärät ja aiheet:

27.10 Keskustelemme lasten kasvatuksesta!
Kahvia ja kakkua tarjolla!

Kello 11:00 - 13:00

10.11 Leivomme Marokkolaista kahvileipää




Helsingin kaupunki

KIERRÄTYSKESKUS

Vipuvoimaa EU:lta

EU:n aluekehitysrahoitus

EU:n aluekehitysrahoitus

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for participants

Kiitämme kaikkia osallistujia!

Voisitko auttaa arvioimaan projektiamme vastaamalla tähän kyselyyn.

Vastaaminen on vapaaehtoista ja vastaukset käsitellään luottamuksellisesti.

1. Mieliä naapurikahvilan aiheista:

Arvioi asteikolla 1-5 (1=ei kiinnosta, 5=erittäin hyödyllinen)

Miksi?

a. 15.9 Keskustelua aiheesta "pihi"

b. 29.9 Kääretorttu

c. 13.10 Marokkolainen kana taijine

d. 27.10 Marokkolainen teeleipä ja tee

e. 10.11 Kasvispasteija + keskustelua lasten kasvatuksesta

f. 24.11 Kasvispiirakan leipominen

g. 15.12 Marokkolaista ja Somalialaista tanssia

2. Miten naapurikahvila on vaikuttanut suomen kieleesi?

3. Miten naapurikahvilaa voisi kehittää?

4. Minkälaista toimintaa haluaisit Ankkuriin tulevaisuudessa?

5. Mitä Asukastalo Ankkuri merkitsee sinulle?

KIITOS PALAUTTEESTA!

Appendix 3

Summary of an article used for the session on 10 November 2009

ELINTÄRKEÄ KOSKETUS

- halaus lohduttaa
- hieronta rauhoittaa
- 'karhupaini' vahvistaa sidettä lapsen ja aikuisen välillä

MIKSI KOSKETUS TEKEE HYVÄÄ?

Vuorovaikutus vahvistuu

- anna lapselle positiivista huomiota ja liitä kosketus
-pörrötä tukkaa, hierokaa hartioita...
- aisteja kiihdyttävä koskettelu, kuten kutittelu, painiminen ja peuhaaminen, tuottaa hyvää fysiologista stressiä

Levottomuus vähentyy

- tyynnyttävä kosketus, kuten tasainen, luja silittäminen tai hieronta, lieventää stressiä

Itsearvostus kasvaa

- kosketus auttaa lasta kasvamaan tasapainoiseksi, itseään arvostavaksi aikuiseksi
- kosketusta välttelevä kasvatuserinne voi olla syytä suomalaisiin kansantauteihin, kuten masennukseen ja päihderippuvuuteen

Pienikin kosketus välittää rakkautta

- nopea, hyvää tekevä hali on ohi jo ennen kuin lapsi ehtii rimpuilla tai kivahtaa "näpit irti"
- vaikka lapsi ei tänään anna koskea, huomenna voi olla jo toisenlainen päivä
- tarjoa mahdollisuus tulla syliin joka päivä uudestaan

Kosketuksesta tulee tapa

- kun hieronta on mahdollisimman rutiininomainen osa arkea, tulee eri ikävaiheissa myös vähemmän tilanteita, joissa koskettaminen olisi vaikeaa

Appendix 4

Recipe used for the session on 13 October 2009

Marokkolainen kana tajine

Versio 1:

- 1 kana paloina (marinoituina)
- 1-2 sipulia, joka muussataan koneella ½ l veden kanssa
- (oliivi- / rypsi-) öljyä
- mustapippuria
- sahramia
- inkivääriä
- kurkumaa
- pala sitruunaa, joka on lionnut suolavedessä
- oliiveja

Luumujen keitto-ohje:

- vettä
- öljyä
- sokeria
- kanelia
- riipaus suolaa
- seesaminsiemeniä

1. Marinoidut kananpalat paistetaan kattilassa kaikkien aineiden kanssa, kunnes liemi on paksumpaa eikä liian vetistä, ja liha kypsää
2. Keitetyt luumut lisätään lopuksi päälle.

Versio 2:

- 1 kokonainen kana marinoituna
- Lisukkeet: ranskalaisia perunoita
- manteleita

1. Kana paistetaan uunissa n. 180C kunnes pinta on ruskea ja kypsä
2. Lopuksi päälle lisätään lisukkeita paistettuina oman maun mukaan

Marinadi:

- 2 valkosipulinkynttä
- tuoretta persiljaa
- tuoretta korianteria
- suolaa

HYVÄÄ RUOKAHALUA!! 😊

Appendix 5
Pictures



Appendix 6

Recipe for the session on 29 September 2009

SUKLAA - TAI CAROBKÄÄRETORTTU 225 °C

4 kananmuna }
 1 - 1 1/2 dl sokeria } vatkataan vaahdoksi

1 1/4 dl Ohrakasta tai perunajauhoa }
 3 rkl kaakaojauhetta tai carobjauhetta } sekoitetaan
 2 tl leivinjauhetta }

Vatkaa munat ja sokeri vaahdoksi. Lisää jauhoseos siivilän läpi haarukkatkaimella sekoittaen. Levitä taikina uunipannulle leivinpaperin päälle. Paista uunin keskitasossa 6-7-min 225 °C:ssä. Kumoä torttulevy sokeroidulle voipaperille. Irrota paperi ja levitä täyte jäähtyneelle torttulevyllä. Kääri torttu voipaperin avulla rullaten ja jätä saumakohta alle. Anna vetäytyä paperiin käärittynä, ennen kuin viipaloit tortun.

Täyte:

VANILJAKASTIKE

1 kananmuna }
 1dl vettä } kiehautetaan koko ajan vatkatun
 1 dl sokeria tai vähemmän } ja jäähdytetään
 1 rkl perunajauhoa }

100 g voita tai margariinia (tai 70 g voita ja 30g öljyä vatkataan keskenään rasvaseokseksi)

1 tl vaniljasokeria

Yhdistetään pehmeäksi vatkattu margariini tai rasvaseos ja keitetty seos.

Lisätään 1tl vaniljasokeria joukkoon.

KERMAVAAHTO

1 dl kermaa ja 1 dl rahkaa vatkataan ja lisätään sokeria (maun mukaan noin 1/2 dl)