



The merge of Young Leadership and Multisensory Space methods

Monika Kis

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Laurea University of Applied Sciences

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Monika Kis
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The purpose of this functional thesis was to introduce the Multisensory method to the already existing system of the Preschool in Kindergarten Aarteet, which is based on the Young Leadership method. Additionally, another objective was to create an easy-to-use guide in a form of a leaflet to support a fluid use of the method in the future.

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of three main components. First, the Early Childhood Education was discussed, as the foundation of the theory, considering the children's developmental needs both individually and as a group. Then the focus was on the Young Leadership method, on its background, goals and main benefits, besides the practical operations. Finally, the Multisensory Approach was discussed, the importance of senses in the learning process and the Multisensory Space method as an enriching addition to any pedagogical activity. Furthermore, I was focusing on children's social development and teamwork throughout the theory.

The implementation of the thesis included four projects conducted with four preschool teams. The teams in turns have planned, prepared and built their own multisensory spaces for everybody to enjoy and experience. The methods used for evaluating the process were participatory observation, verbal and written feedback from the children and teachers and reflective documentation in the form of a learning diary.

The final results clearly indicated the benefits of using the Multisensory Space method to enrich the Young Leadership method. The merge of these methods was smooth and natural, calling for further consideration of combining powerful pedagogical methods.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education, Young Leadership, Multisensory method, Kindergarten

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1 Introduction

The world we are living in is constantly changing. We witness this both in our environment and in our societies. Sometimes the change is more drastic and obvious, other times it is more subtle and hardly noticeable, but undoubtedly the process is present and never stopping. One of the most powerful changes can happen inside us, in our hearts and minds. This kind of change in the mentality was manifested for example, in the last centuries in the ways how people started to look at children (Bruce 2011). Viewing them as special and valuable on whom the future societies are built seemed rather radical thinking in the beginning.

At the same time, the notion of leadership is also getting refined, bringing forth such qualities that have a more positive outcome. For example, a good leader can change a whole work environment into a very positive and effective one (Rath & Clifton 2004), can help others to maximize and reach their full potential, to unite people for a common goal that is favourable for all of them, and on a much bigger scale, sometimes to change the course of the history, influencing whole societies. Because of such a powerful influence, it is very important to guide the path of potential future leaders already in childhood, to become good hearted, considerate and responsible leaders described by Leman & Pentak (2004).

According to Martin Seligman, the founder of Positive Psychology (2004), each one of us possesses 24-character strength (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Some are more naturally flowing from us, some require more effort to use them, but even if needing practice, they are there inbuilt in all of us. One of the strengths is “leadership”. This skill can be brought alive and nurtured at a very young age already. The Young Leadership method aims to enhance this process in the early years, setting the foundation for further development, which is in accordance with the curriculum of early childhood education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). This method, developed by Maritta Lamponen (Moilanen 2019), has already been implemented in Kindergarten Aarteet (Preschool) for 7 years. Currently maybe 80% of that is in use. The value of the method is in developing leadership skills during the early years, based on group work and respect, enhancing confidence and personal strength at the same time.

Considering the Multisensory Space method, it is through our senses that we learn about the world around us, that we can connect to others and we define not only our own place in life but also our identity is strongly affected by it from an early age (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). For some people the receptors of the senses are a bit blunter, for others they are more finely tuned, in which case the cognition of the world and experiences happen on a deeper level, creating a more vivid connection between the body, mind and soul. In our

high-tech world, where virtual reality is conquering more and more space from our lives, experiencing through senses might seem slightly old fashion. Still, the human body and mind are wired up in such a way, that this will still stay as the primary tool to perceive life for many years to come.

Learning and experiencing through senses is the most important approach of a young child. It starts even before birth and continues in an amplified manner throughout childhood, giving gradually more space later to other types of cognition as well (Robinson 2011). The multisensory approach has a unique way of deepening knowledge and provides a special tool to learn new information, while also develops various skills in these sensitive years of the children. This is the reason why I strongly want to promote the multisensory method in the early childhood education, either as an addition to an already existing system or as a primary method by itself. I believe introducing the multisensory approach as a regular part of the kindergarten's life would richly complete the already existing ways of using the Young Leadership method.

Further on, I am also personally interested how these two powerful methods can be combined, leading to a more holistic development. The merge of the methods should be a rather natural process, as the Young Leadership method is not an exclusive one but providing space for different varieties and enriching elements. On the other hand, the Multisensory method can be successfully integrated in any early childhood activities and is much loved by the children. Figure 1 below shows the three big entities of the theory (Early Childhood Education as a foundation, Young Leadership Method and Multisensory Space Method) and the common areas where the methods overlap. Though they share more commonalities in the targeted developmental areas, in this thesis I will focus mainly on social development and teamwork.

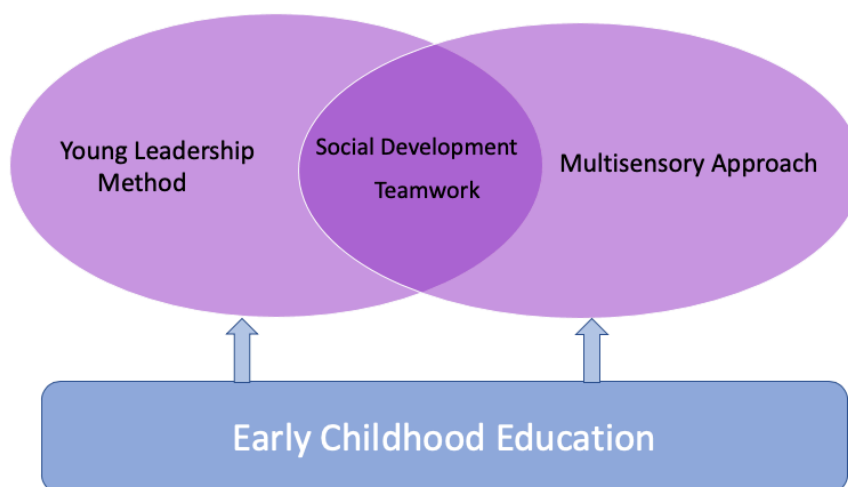


Figure 1: The three entities of the theory

2 Background

2.1 Working Life Partner

Kindergarten Aarteet is a private Finnish speaking daycare, located in Espoo, which operates together with the Espoo Christian School. Sharing the same facilities enhances a smooth transition from the daycare to school in a challenging phase of life for many children. The kindergarten provides both early childhood education for children between ages 3-5 and pre-primary education for 6-year olds. It operates based on the National Core Curriculum and Guidelines, focusing on the child's development, emphasizing social skills and celebrating diversity.

The kindergarten and school form an independent association that goes beyond the boundaries of denominations, not belonging to any, but rather tries to form a community where children from all different backgrounds are welcome and treated equally. Christian values are the foundation of the operational system, while encouraging open communication about the different world views in a respectful manner. Freedom of choice is planted in the children from a very early age.

Every child is valuable, unique and deeply loved. One can feel it in the atmosphere the moment stepping through the door and it continues to be visible in every interaction, activity and approach of the teachers. Considering each child with their own skills, developmental levels and special needs is one of the daycare's and school's strength, that is in accordance with its ethos. Striving for excellence in everything they do is a strong characteristic of the staff members. As claimed by the teachers, shaping the children's lives during these sensitive years brings along a lot of responsibility, therefore, offering high quality education in a caring, encouraging and inspirational environment is a basic requirement. Continuous assessment of own work and operations, evaluation of the teaching methods and interpersonal approaches serve the bases for functional development.

The role of the parents as primary educators is acknowledged and supported through co-operation. The motto of the school "Kotoa juuret - koulusta siivet" (Roots from home - wings from school) nicely captures this joint effort in educating active members of the society, who are considerate, respectful, curious and ready to soar high above, doing great things in life. This attitude is implemented since the first day a child joins the kindergarten group. Everyday communication with the parents, providing information and feedback about the daily

happenings, challenges and steps made forward or even bigger milestones to celebrate, are vital for a successful parent-teacher relationship and for an effective educational work done both at home and in the daycare. Teachers entrusted with the upbringing of the small ones always keep the children's best interest at heart and act accordingly.

Kindergarten Aarteet offers various activities, all characterized by creativity and the spirit of working together, in order to foster the children's physical, mental, social and spiritual development. This holistic approach is realized through a carefully built program, activity plans and individual developmental plan of each child. There are special emphases on art, music and physical education. The wellbeing of the children, besides the confidence- and skills-building learning activities, is enhanced during all encounters. According to Kaire Mansberg (2018), the manager of the daycare, making the children feel valued, accepted and being part of the group is at the core of the teachers' everyday work. The nature of this inclusive atmosphere is described by the workers as being constantly and powerfully present: "Every word and action communicates: You are part of our group, you belong!" (Päiväkoti Aarteet 2018.)

The kindergarten gives place to four groups, situated in two different floors. Downstairs is the group called "Jalokivet" (Jewelry) with 21 children ages 3-5, which includes the separate group of five-year olds, referred to as "Viskarit". Occasionally they take children under three-year old, but in that case the child takes up the place of two children. Upstairs in the school's building is located the other two groups: "Helmet" (Pearls) for 3-5-year olds, currently with 16 children and the Pre-school with 18 children. The target group of my thesis is the group of 6-year olds. The implementation will take place amongst the preschoolers, as the young leadership method operates only in that group, being woven into their everyday activities.

2.2 Aims and Objectives

The main goal of the thesis is to successfully combine the young leadership method and the multisensory method during guided activities to promote the multisensory approach in the kindergarten, this way offering a new addition to the young leadership method. Both methods have purposes of their own and targeted developmental areas, still many of the areas do cover each other, offering the opportunity partly to amplify the impact of these specific areas on the children and partly to include other areas as well in the educational process at the same time. The common areas involve social development, teamwork, communication, problem solving and emotional development. This thesis will focus on the first two elements of the commonalities: social development and teamwork.

At the same time, with this thesis I would like to prove that the multisensory approach stands not only as an individual method, but successfully can be integrated into other methods as well. This way a totally new aspect of the method can be examined, and it can be placed into a much wider perspective of methods implemented in early childhood education. The plasticity of the methods can be utilized for a greater benefit, merging them and melting them together to get a better outcome, creating a new entity, while simultaneously they keep their unique characteristics.

As the young leadership method is rather a new one, created by a Finnish teacher, this thesis also aims to raise awareness about the existence of the method in the social field and deepen the knowledge about it both personally and in general. The method serves the purpose of educating young children in a holistic way and developing such skills that are useful in the society. By promoting the method, the thesis will help others to familiarize with the different aspects and benefits of the young leadership method. Bringing it closer, hopefully helps to step over the barriers that people feel when facing a new idea.

Considering the practical objectives of the thesis in the implementation stage, the first and biggest one is to build four multisensory spaces in the kindergarten together with the children. The process will happen simultaneously with two groups and consecutively in time with the two other teams of the preschoolers. This allows offering the experience to more children and at the same time to be able to learn and improve the implementation, in order to have a more crystallized knowledge by the time reaching my second objective with a concrete outcome, which is writing a Guidebook. The aim is creating a practical, step-by-step guide for the teachers in order to help them build similar spaces in the future. An easy-to-follow instruction would provide a low threshold approach for further implementations.

Finally, I would like to add value to the precious work that the teachers are doing in the kindergarten. Their openness towards new things, the joy of a life-long learning and developing for the benefit of the children is truly touching. The attitude of keeping the child's best interest at heart is visible in all their actions.

2.3 Functional Thesis

A thesis can take different forms, depending on the interest of the writer and the approach taken towards the chosen topic. It can also be affected by an uprising need of a working life partner and by the aims of the individual or the organization. This thesis falls into the functional, activity-based thesis category, as on one hand concrete, planned activities will be carried out, and on the other hand a Guidebook will be produced, in form of a leaflet, for the teachers to

help planning future activities in a similar manner. According to Vilkkä and Airaksinen (2003), the phenomena of preferring functionality over theory is noticeably more present nowadays amongst the working life partners. The purpose of a functional thesis is described as to guide, instruct, organize or rationalize, depending on the needs and the field the thesis is conducted in (Vilkkä & Airaksinen 2003).

Documentation is one of the characteristics of a functional thesis, used from the planning stage onwards, through the implementation and evaluation. As it is a long-lasting process, taking notes or writing a learning diary helps to accurately remember and to make relevant conclusions. The target group, their socioeconomic state and the issues they are facing must be taken into consideration when planning a functional thesis. Even though it might seem easier to conduct a functional thesis than a research based one, both have their challenges and benefits. The research attitude in a functional thesis is proven through the sets of choices, reviewing them and arguing the choices made based on theory. Professionalism must be present in all cases. (Vilkkä & Airaksinen 2003.)

Combining theory with functionality in a functional thesis is both widely spread, and it has countless benefits. Undoubtedly it has a strong developmental outcome, and while putting the theory into practice, it also enlarges the areas of impact, which the theory might not be able to cover by itself. Influencing the work done in different social areas has a long-term effect on the whole society and can be considered as an investment for the future.

2.4 Methods

The two main methods that set the basis for this thesis (young leadership and multisensory methods) are to be discussed in detail in the following chapters. Besides these characteristic ones, also others will be used in the process, like observation and writing a learning diary regarding my activities, where I can reflect and adjust the activities accordingly. In the evaluation phase the method of gathering feedback will be used both in a formal and informal way, that aims further development.

Observation is one of the most used tools of a teacher, because young children are not able to word out thorough reflections concerning their own wellbeing, interest, developmental needs or other issues related their whole being. As it is pointed out in the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education (2018, 40), “the initiatives of younger children are often physical and non-verbal”. This is the reason why teachers must possess tremendous sensitivity when comes to ‘reading’ the children: their body language, signs accompanying their actions, the preferred activities, ways of relating to others, the levels of involvement and the quality

of interactions. Getting a better idea about the individual children, helps in forming the overall picture about the whole group, the dynamics working within and their ways of functioning. This leads to better customized activities both for the individuals and the group as a whole.

According to Greetham (2009), observation is an important strategy, because how people act speaks much louder than their words and intentions do. He also claims, that observation tells about the level of understanding, regarding discussed issues or instructions. The children's ways of understanding differ a lot, but when observing their actions, we receive indication about the gaps of knowledge and skills, besides the individual struggles that need to be addressed and supported.

Observation as a method depends on the observer's ability and sensitivity to notice and take in various signs, or even subtle manifestations and gather information through his or her senses. Even though this is an influentially subjective element of the method, there are still several reasons for using it. For example, because of the thorough observation, it can be ensured that the children's needs are met, that they are understood beyond words, as they have limited abilities expressing themselves, and it also gives practical insight about the accessibility of the learning environment. Thus, the teachers can improve their educational approach, teaching methods and can design better spaces for a successful developmental process.

Atkinson et al. (1994) refer to Gold (1958) and Junker (1960) when describing the four dimensions of participant observation, which varies depending on the involvement level of the observer: complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer and complete participant. Based on the level of interaction and involvement, the observer's role can be a more active or passive one; in our case the teacher is a participant as observer. This means, that while conducting the activities, I will be fully and actively present, as being a participant is my main role, but at the same time also making observations and mental notes.

Even though participant observation is the best method in conducting the current thesis, it is equally important to discuss the possible limitations implied by its usage. The awareness of existing blind-spots keeps the method on a realistic level. As Herrmann (1989) states, the closeness of the observer in his or her inside role might build obstacles that prevent the teacher from noticing all dimensions of the observed situation. Or simply, by attending the need of one child, the teacher might miss important details regarding the main scope of the observation. Either way, the information gathered in such a way cannot be considered as totally objective, because no systematic recording can be done, thus the final evaluation should rather stand as an informative data, than the ultimate truth.

When accompanied with writing a learning diary, observation aims for a much deeper understanding. According to Moon (2003), the difference between a learning diary and other types of writing is, that the former one focuses on an ongoing phenomenon for a longer duration of time with a clear intention to benefit and deepen the knowledge based on the outcome or the process itself. When writing a journal, we transform into an active learner, while on the other hand recording and reflecting become tools for discovering. The Reflective Cycle (Figure 2 below) created by Gibbs in 1988 illustrates the different stages of the reflective process.

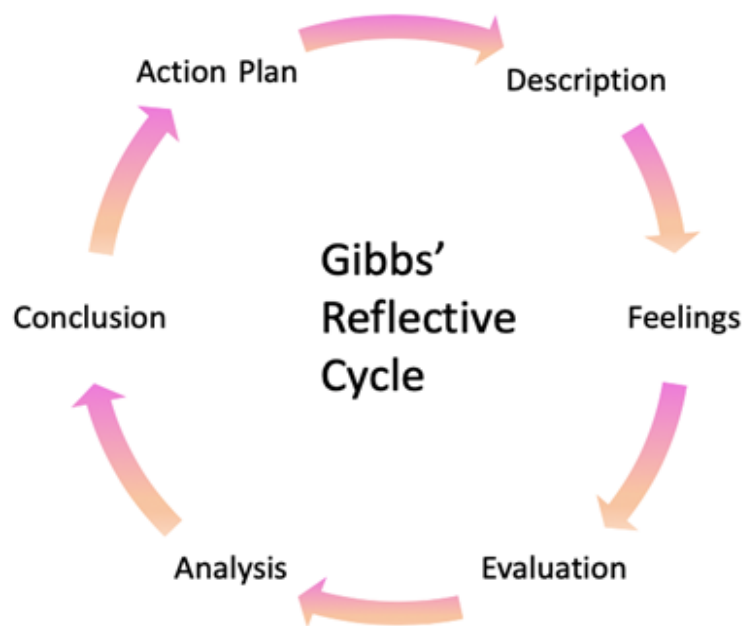


Figure 2: Gibb's Reflective Cycle (The University of Edinburgh n.d.)

It provides a framework to examine an experience (preferably in a written form) and learn from it. The six stages are: *Description* -to tell what happened, *Feelings* -to ponder about feelings and thoughts regarding the experience, *Evaluation*- to write about what was good and bad, *Analysis* -to try to make sense of the happening, *Conclusion* -what was learnt and what could be done differently and *Action Plan* -if in similar situation, what one will do. Holly, quoted by Moon (2003), highlights the fact that in this unique process the writer is both the learner and the teacher at the same time. To reflect and ponder about the observed ways and situations, allows us to process and deepen the knowledge, to make new realizations and to gain a better perspective. By committing to thorough documentation of the happenings as well as writing about own thoughts, we strongly influence the quality of our actions as teachers, because it is naturally followed by making the necessary changes and adjustments in our approach and activities. We should aim for constant development of own practices in order to

provide better services for the children, to be able to meet their needs on a more sufficient level and to increase the value of our work.

Finally, to be able to gain a more objective view over the discussed areas, it is crucial to obtain feedback from other parties as well involved in the process and affected by our professional manifestations. Feedback described by Shute (2008) is an “information communicated to the learner that is intended to modify his or her thinking or behavior to improve learning”. According to researchers, the characteristics of a good formative feedback are: nonevaluative, supportive, timely and specific (Shute 2008). In order to gain a better view on the specifics and effects of the activities in the current thesis, feedback both from the children and the teachers should be taken into consideration. From the children, because they are the subject and the target of our actions, and from the teachers, because they are the co-operational partners with vast amount of knowledge and experience, observing us from outside, thus having a better perspective and a more objective attitude.

3 Early Childhood Education

Throughout the history children had a rather disadvantaged position both within the family and in the society. Once they started to be noticed, great thinkers and philosophers tried to find their worth and the right approach to them considering their education. To be able to fully understand the great value of the early childhood education we are providing nowadays, it is important to familiarize ourselves with the development of ideas concerning children in the past centuries. Bruce (2011) gives a thorough presentation of the different early childhood education traditions from the 17th century. The first influential approach was the Empiricist view, influenced by the philosophy of John Locke (1632-1704). Children were considered as “empty vessels to be filled” (Bruce 2011,4). The adult’s presence is always needed, as being the one who holds the key to knowledge and strongly dominates the teaching process. The second strong opinion, the Nativist approach, was influenced by Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778). The main idea was that the children’s learning is biologically pre-programmed, and the teacher is only present as an observer, facilitator. The Interactionist view is originated by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), which claims that the combination of the two previous approaches is the one closest to reality. Highlights the importance of both adults and children in the learning process, and compares it to a dance, where sometimes one leads sometimes the other. This idea served as the bedrock of the current educational approach, but still further developed and refined. (Bruce 2011.)

There is a huge difference between the starting point back in the history and how the societies consider children nowadays, more like a long-term investment for the future, giving them a special value and working for the best of their interests. The United Nations provided a collection of the Children's Rights, which serves as the main framework for the different laws concerning children (Ombudsman for Children in Finland 2014). In each countries these rights are regulated by different laws and guidelines. In Finland the most important law is the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018). It clearly states that each child has the right to early childhood education, providing equal opportunities for everyone to develop holistically. This is crucial when considering the children with very poor living conditions. The law also gives the objectives for early childhood education and care, as educating the children to become responsible members of the society, honoring others, developing both in knowledge and behavior, to be able to function in peer groups, through interactions, refining their co-operation skills. The teachers' role is at the core in ethically organizing supportive activities for this kind of holistic development and well-being of the children. Giving more freedom to the children in participating in the planning of the activities is also highlighted in the law. (Finland 2018.) The Basic Education Act (628/1998) accompanies the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), as it regulates the pre-primary education, which provides smooth transition and readiness to school education, that is mandatory. In case of early childhood education, parents have the right to decide if they want to offer home education or use the services provided by municipalities.

The law must be implemented on all three levels: national, local and individual. On a local level it is the municipalities' responsibility to provide and organize the needed services, whether being a public or private service. Both the municipalities and the service providers have their own regulations and guidelines which follow the law. The law is implemented through the National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). It offers general and practical guidelines for all responsible individuals being involved in the education in a way or another. Every kindergarten has also a local curriculum, which is a well-regulated system, having the child's best interest at the heart of it. The curriculum leads towards a high-quality education organized by trained personnel, promoting equality in all areas: gender, language, culture and religion.

As being child centered, the curriculum focuses not only on the group, but also on the individuals, as unique human beings, with unique needs and aspirations. In order to be able to address this uniqueness, the curriculum provides the guidelines for an individual plan concerning each child. This way personal education can be assured, which can happen both in a group setting and individually as one-on-one teaching. The education by professionals in the kindergarten only completes the upbringing of the child happening in their own home, as the parents or other guardians have the primary responsibility for that. This suggests the co-

operative nature of the whole educational process and the family's active participation in drawing up the tailored plan for their child. The individual plan, besides the basic information of the child and parents or legal guardians, must include the child's strength, interests, the objectives that support the child's learning and well-being, how are they achieved, if potential support is needed or the involvement of special education teachers. The plan is confidential and updated once a year. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019.)

The objectives of the plan are targeted through pedagogical activities organized by the teachers. They can be guided activities or provided opportunities through free activities. According to Bruce (2011,16), "children learn best when they are given appropriate responsibility, allowed to experiment, make errors, decisions and choices, and are respected as autonomous learners". Children's opinion matters a lot both in planning and implementing the activities, because it brings forth active participation through intrinsic motivation.

These pedagogical activities involve the use of many different methods in order to offer a wide range of experiences and approaches for the children. The methods need to be checked and evaluated regularly by the teachers to be able to oversee the effectivity on a system-level and on the individual's level. Not all the children are the same, they have different kinds of pre-dispositions for learning, thus the teachers' sensitivity is required to modify and adjust the methods according to the individual needs. This thesis aims to present two of the possible methods available for use in early childhood education and care (the multisensory and the young leadership methods), their benefits and the ways how they can be incorporated into the everyday life of the kindergarten.

Even though it is wise considering a child's overall development and wellbeing while doing the observation, in the current thesis it will be limited to the child's social development and the teamwork promoted by the multisensory and the young leadership methods. Social development can be measured in various settings, like in smaller or bigger groups, or how a child behaves when being alone or with an adult, or is there a difference when the child interacts with a known or unfamiliar peer. While all these can be accurate indicators for a more precise assessment of the child's social development, in our case the social context will be limited to the already existing small groups and known team members, as the focus is on social development enhanced by the two methods, instead of other variables.

3.1 Early Childhood Education and Social Development

Garnett (2018,23) firmly states, that “schools must put relationships at the heart of their education program”. She recognized the importance of social development, which happens through the complex relationships of a child. The same idea is emphasized in the Core Curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019), as multifold learning takes place while children interact with each other, with adults, communities and environment.

According to Singer and deHaan, in early childhood setting we can differentiate two types of relationships: formed with adults and formed with peers. Children at already a very young age can understand the difference between the two types. The writers list the reasons why children need the adults for: “emotional support, security, practical help, cognitive challenges, moral rules and guidance”. On the other hand, their relationships with other children are more equal. They are attracting each other, because they share interest, excitement and joy experienced in their play. (Kernan and Singer 2011,3-4.)

As referred to it earlier, many -if not most- of the learning happens in a group context, irrespectively of the group size or in close interaction with the teachers. For professionals it is vital to understand the development of the child, because it serves both as a starting point and guideline in order to plan age appropriate activities and provide the needed support through them. If the teachers strengthen the children’s social skills, that will affect positively other learning areas as well, thus a more holistic development can take place, which targets at the same time the child’s overall wellbeing, too.

Children are born with a very strong social need. For newborns the social contact is even more crucial to stay alive, then later in life, though it affects considerably a child’s development also in the next stages. The lack of it can cause serious mental health problems even in the adult stage of life. Maslow’s Needs Pyramid (see Figure 3 below), adopted from his book *Motivation and Personality* (1954), illustrates the deep need for safety, which realizes primarily through the security of the family, but also the kindergartens are called to provide the same safety net for the children. Only the physiological needs are getting ahead of the need for safety and security in its importance for life. The next step in the hierarchy is love and belonging, which happens most powerfully in a social environment. The next two sets of needs (esteem and self-actualization) are also closely linked to a person’s social development. (Maslow 1954.) Garnett (2018) completes the need pyramid with a new viewpoint, saying that empathy is the connection between many of these needs, like safety, love, self-respect and intimacy. She claims that empathy connects people and serves as a catalyzer of positive social behavior.

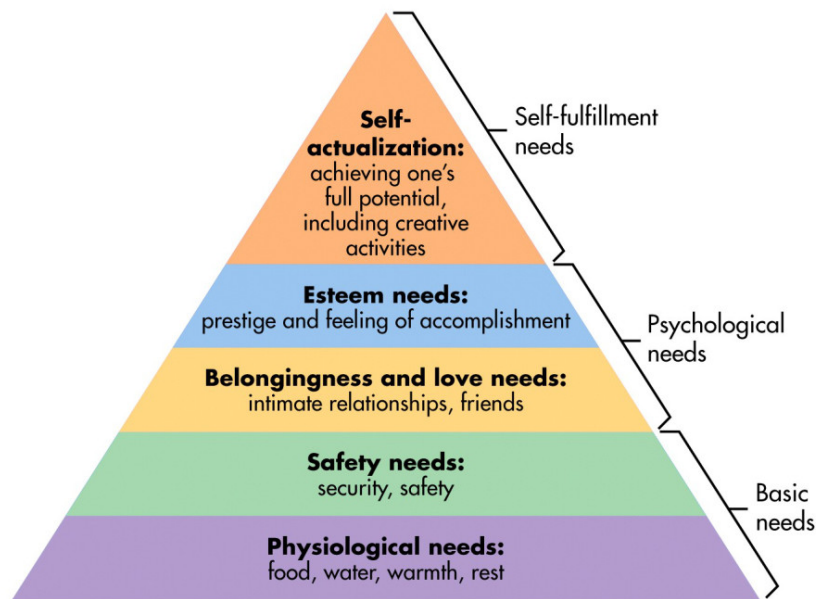


Figure 3: Maslow's Need Pyramid (McLeod 2018)

3.2 Social Development of a 6-year old

When considering the children's any kind of development there are tremendous differences in their level and speed, but still they go through certain stages which are well defined and considered as developmental milestones. There are also slower and faster developmental periods in a child's life, and they are considered normal. For example, a child might have very good motor skills from an early age onwards, but the language development falls behind. Or eventually when the child finally starts to talk, will talk already in sentences. There is not a certain way which fits all the children. Coffee et al. (2013) highlights, that even if certain developmental stages appear at a later age, that does not necessarily mean that there is a serious developmental problem or disability. It might only require more practice and support.

The social development of a child is strongly influenced by the biological, environmental and personality factors (Slentz and Krogh 2001). That gives the unique combination of the individual differences. These affecting factors appear the moment a child is entering this world. Because all humans are social beings, little children are also influenced by the people surrounding them. If they experience security and love as a baby, they can learn to trust and develop a strong and positive attachment with their mother, which in turn will define all their social interactions later in life (Lindon 2012). Unfortunately, many children lack this kind of

trusting bond with the care giver, which can be one of the reasons for antisocial behavior of children, that harms both the society and the individual (Bowlby 1997).

The secure attachment of a child works also as a source of confidence, which on the other hand serves as a “catalyst in supporting early personal growth”, according to Dowling (2010,11). She also explains, that in the early years of life children build up their identity and self-esteem based on what others reflect to them. Only around six years of age they start to have a clearer understanding of their self-worth. When they are loved, recognized, appreciated and listened to, they gain confidence. If they can freely experience in different settings, they gain not only positive self-esteem, but also valuable knowledge about their own skills and interests, too. Besides having a realistic view about themselves, they also need to believe that they are capable of learning new things. The early childhood educators can secure this belief for a child to be able to reach full potential later in life. (Dowling 2010.)

A six-year-old is already possessing very complex social skills. In this stage friendships are formed, and playing in a group also becomes smoother, due to their social and language skills they can have better interactions. They still prefer the same gender, but it is not restricting them in their choices. They remember the rules of different games and can follow them. They start to take care of their belongings and become more responsible in many ways. (Petty 2016.) They are much more considerate in their decision making, can think about others’ perspectives, which makes them less egoistic. They reach a physical, functional and intellectual independence, that boosts also their self-esteem. They experience and express a variety of emotions, sometimes they can change quite quickly. They start to understand the link between situation and emotion, but they still have a black and white thinking: cannot understand that one can have a mixture of feelings at the same time. (Dowling 2010.)

According to Vygotsky, learning takes place when there is a social interaction. Doing things together are experiences that eventually lead to learning to do it alone and to internalize it, master it. This is the so-called social learning. (Dowling 2010.) We will get back to Vygotsky’s statement and its practical implication in the light of the young leadership method in a later chapter.

3.3 Teamwork as Part of Social Development

Teamwork is very strongly woven together with a child’s social development, because it provides countless opportunities for practicing and refining these skills, on the other hand it fulfills many of the child’s basic needs. Bruce (2011) stresses the children’s need for a sense of belonging and inclusion, which fosters their physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. To be

part of a team is a very powerful urge for the children, as they seek acceptance of their uniqueness, while developing group identity at the same time. For smooth teamwork good relationships are needed between the group members. Bruce (2011) underpins the requirement for this kind of positive relationship, as being the balance between one's self and the others.

When working in teams the upraise of a conflict is inevitable, simply because the team members are unique individuals with their own ideas, views and interests. Even though in general conflicts are considered negative, which take away a great deal of mental and physical energy, they are also necessary and desirable, if considering the potential for development a conflict holds. Garnett (2018,97) quotes Broadbear when describing the benefits and the positive outcomes the process brings when dealing with conflict: "Conflict can increase achievement, motivation to learn, higher-level reasoning, long term retention, healthy social and cognitive development, and the fun students have in school. Conflict can enrich relationships, clarify personal identity, increase ego strength, promote resilience in the face of adversity, and clarify how one needs to change." Social conflicts appearing during teamwork require various attributes of young children, in order to be able to deal with them. For example, self-esteem, empathy, compassion, patience and constructive attitude (Garnett 2018). To be able to collaborate, children also need to learn the important skills of taking turns and sharing.

The group setting allows the children to learn and understand that everybody is different, but equal at the same time. Teamwork is ideally fostering this important goal of the early childhood education highlighted in the curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). To appreciate the diversity brought by the other children into the group, will lead to a richness and a variety of ideas, that the whole group benefits from. Teamwork can be considered as the framework for the different learning processes, where every child can participate and be listened to. For some children belonging to a group might be the only source for experiencing success, but inevitably has a positive affect on all the members, creating positive self-image for the individuals within the group.

The many great impacts of teamwork can be followed through when applying the young leadership method, which is based on the collaborative learning experiences in various areas shared with the other team members. In the next section I will present the method in depth, its origin, its goals, the practical implications, its effect on children's social development and the teamwork being at its core.

4 Young Leadership

As we have seen before, the world changed significantly in viewing the children. Nowadays children are looked at as future leaders and as the ones who have great potential in doing valuable and important achievements for the benefit of the whole society. This remarkable shift from being inferiors to be considered future leaders also require appropriate ways and methods to foster the proper development towards this goal. The young leadership method aims to address this need for re-evaluated and re-structured pedagogical approaches, which enhance valuable social skills, fostering the already ingrained seeds of leadership traits in every single child.

The young leadership method, as mentioned in the introduction, is developed by Maritta Lamponen (Moilanen 2019), a Finnish kindergarten teacher, to upbringing and educate leaders in the very noble sense of the world, leaders who care for others and listen to them, who can cooperate, have self-discipline, are taking initiatives, have good self-esteem and are not afraid to take responsibilities. At the very same time the method serves as a tool to prevent loneliness, bullying and becoming an outsider. Lamponen (Moilanen 2019) first came up with the idea when put in charge of a very misbehaving group. She presumed that giving responsibility to the children and converting her own leadership knowledge into the children's level will bring positive change. And it did. (Moilanen 2019.)

The only similar method, which also inspired Lamponen, is the American, already globally known The Leader in Me method, that has its origins from Stephen R. Covey's book: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Both methods are based on the ideas presented there. These habits are also called leadership qualities, because all of them are essential when it comes to describing a leader's skills. Covey (1999) identifies two types of leadership: leading others and leading own self. Self-leadership refers to qualities like to be responsible in own choices, deeds and for their outcomes. It also involves thinking ahead, setting goals and self-discipline. Leading others on the other hand could imply sharing skills and knowledge, inspiring others to reach their potentials, being as role models and guiding the group towards the set goals. One important aspect that is worth highlighting is that the means to get to these goals both individually and as a team is by using and encouraging the children's strength instead of focusing on fixing faults. Table 1 below extracts the seven habits and the key concepts identified with them.

Habits	Basic Description	Key Concepts
1. Be Proactive The habit of choice	You're in Charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See alternatives, not roadblocks • Focus on what you can influence • I am free to choose and am responsible for my choices
2. Begin with End in Mind The habit of vision	Have a Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental creation precedes physical creation • Define practical outcomes • Create and live by a Personal mission Statement
3. Put First Things First The habit of integrity and Execution	Work First, Then Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the important, not just the urgent • Effectiveness requires the integrity to act on your priorities • Plan weekly, act daily
4. Think Win-Win The habit of mutual benefit	Everyone Can Win	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective long-term relationships require mutual respect and mutual benefit • Build trust with others
5. Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood The habit of mutual understanding	Listen Before You Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To communicate effectively, we must first understand each other • Practice empathic listening • Give honest, accurate feedback
6. Synergize The habit of creative cooperation	Together is Better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole is greater than the sum of its parts • Synergize to arrive at new and better alternatives
7. Sharpen the Saw The habit of renewal	Balance Feels Best	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain and increase effectiveness, we must renew ourselves in body, heart, mind and soul

Table 1: The 7 habits by Covey and related key concepts, according to Buckley (2015)

The first three habits (be proactive, begin things with the end in mind and put first things first) are related to self-leadership, bringing independence, collectively representing private victory. The next three habits (think win-win, seek first to understand then to be understood and synergize) are about co-operation skills and leading others in the context of being interdependent. The writer calls these habits as part of public victory. The last habit (sharpen the saw) is about taking care of yourself in a holistic way to achieve physical, mental and spiritual well-being. It is affecting both self and others. (Covey 1999.)

The young leadership method represents and creates a culture of respect, where everyone is valuable and part of the team, every idea is listened to. It fosters equality between the children in any possible ways, for example, breaking free from the stereotypes of gender roles. In the autumn, when the schoolyear starts, the groups are formed to give comfort and security, meaning that there is always at least one known person for the child if there are familiar

faces in the group. As in our case, also children from other kindergartens join the preschool, so the teachers try to make transition smoother for them. The teams of four-five children are staying together for six to eight weeks, giving enough time for everybody to experience the different roles within the team. The groups cannot be mixed too often, because the shy and reserved children need more time to familiarizing and building trust. The leaders are changing every week, so each child can be a leader for approximately two weeks. This allows great opportunities and learning experiences for the children, especially considering the shy ones. This is one of the reasons I personally like this method a lot, because it offers possibilities for the children to “get out of the box”. Unfortunately, many children are labelled already at a very young age, like “he is the naughty one”, “she is the shy one” or “the quiet one”, and these attributes tend to stay with them for the rest of their lives, forcing them to act accordingly and losing on developing precious skills. This is not a unique phenomenon. Lately, in many societies, individuals have been dramatically losing social skills. Philip Zimbardo calls it a worldwide “epidemic of shyness”. He states that this worrying phenomenon increased 40-60% in almost every country (Dowling 2010,31).

Even though the young leadership method addresses many developmental areas, its main value and highest goal at the same time is supporting the children to develop skills and attitudes that helps them to live a responsible life, to work well with others and become active members of the society. These life skills point much further than the child itself and they are in accordance with the principles of the early childhood education as well, acknowledging their importance in a life-long learning.

4.1 Young Leadership and Early Childhood Education

The early childhood education is the foundation and the basis of the method. It supports the method in many ways, especially that the curriculum has a special emphasis on pedagogical activities. The young leadership method itself uses different pedagogical approaches, like class teaching, teamwork, modelling, leadership possibilities, shared leadership, goal setting, creating a safe and encouraging atmosphere and celebrating successes. The method complements the early childhood education and care, offering a high-quality operational system, without wanting to be exclusively present.

One of the core principles of the early childhood education is the principle of inclusion (Finland 2018), which naturally happens through the structure of the method. Belonging to a team already prevents exclusion, especially that the team leaders have the responsibility to look after their team members and consider also their opinions. The method is also in line with the values of the early childhood education presented in the curriculum (Finnish National

Agency for Education 2019), for example, growth as a human being and equity, equality, diversity. The young leadership method celebrates diversity and looks at it like opportunities for deeper learning experiences, where mastering the skills of being able to work with everybody and at the same time to learn to value the richness of ideas and personalities.

In case there is a special need to be supported in children's development, the teamwork is ideally offering the small group setup, which is more beneficial for this kind of supportive education. The different kind of interactions through the various roles within a team also supports the children's development, as they learn a lot from other team members, when they are closely observing and influencing each other.

Lately, there is a growing emphasis in giving opportunities to the children to participate in planning and preparing activities they are to be taking part into. The curriculum especially highlights that children's opinions must be taken into consideration (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). The young leadership method fosters the children's participation in any form, their opinion is listened to and matter, both in a team leader and team member roles. Lamponen (Moilanen 2019) claims, that a significant shift is noticeable in the perception of the teacher's role. The young leadership method challenges the old way of thinking, that says that the teacher is the all-knowing, who is needed all the time, as a guiding star. According to the method, the teacher's role should decrease, giving more space to the children to take responsibility, and to teach them to think by trying to find answers for themselves. The teacher rather facilitates the process by asking questions, instead of providing ready answers. "A question leads better than an answer", explains Lamponen (Moilanen 2019,50) and it also requires sensitivity to observe, notice and gently push the children further in their comfort zone. Kallio (2014) states, that this kind of mental shift leads to the change, where the teacher is more like a coach and a trainer, where the teacher-child relationship is more like a partnership, based on trust and presence.

Finally, the main principle that affects the whole early childhood education, is that at the heart of it must be the best interest of the child. This way it can guarantee that serves the right purpose and keeps the focus sharpened. The young leadership method shares the same ethos, always considering the children as the centre points and starting points of the education, keeping their best interest in perspective, focusing on a holistic and long-term development of future skills.

4.2 Young Leadership and Social Development

In creating a model for studying socialization in early childhood education and care settings, Howes (1999) emphasizes the quality of teacher-children relationship. A trustful attachment with a loving and positive adult means security for the child and a base for exploration with other peers. This aspect is especially crucial when a child enters a new group, where the peer relationships are established, and the group dynamics are at work already. The shy and withdrawn children with less social skills can easily drift aside, thus miss a lot of opportunity on interacting with their peers, which leads to slower social development even more. (Kernan and Singer 2011.)

For some children adapting to the group is a real challenge. They can easily become isolated and neglected. On the other hand, if they have an impulsive personality and tend to cause conflict, those children might end up as scapegoat and getting too much blame. Neither of the situations are favourable and require the early childhood educator's presence and sensitivity to help these children through the adaptation process. Howes (2009) claims, that a positive social-emotional climate creates all the preferable conditions to foster a positive change and a smooth adjustment for the child. (Kernan and Singer 2011.) The team setup, as a constant manifestation of the young leadership method, provides the framework for this kind of transition. The team members have an active role and involvement in taking a new child into their group. It is much easier to familiarize with a smaller group, to become friends and feel comfortable, and ultimately to reach that stage of feeling safe and confident to become ready to develop and flourish without any negative feelings pulling back, highlights Kangas-Kärki (2020).

Already from an early age onwards children discover that they also possess power and start experiencing with it. They can either use it in positive ways, when they help others and responsibly lead them or power can be used in negative ways, when they start excluding and bullying their peers. (Kernan and Singer 2011.) The young leadership method successfully promotes positive social competences in a group context, because respecting and considering others is at the core of it.

Surely, all children are different, and they manifest different social behaviors accordingly. Dowling (2008) refers to Ramsey (1991), who suggests that the children's social behavior can be categorized in four different group (see Figure 4 below), even though not all the children fall clearly in one category.

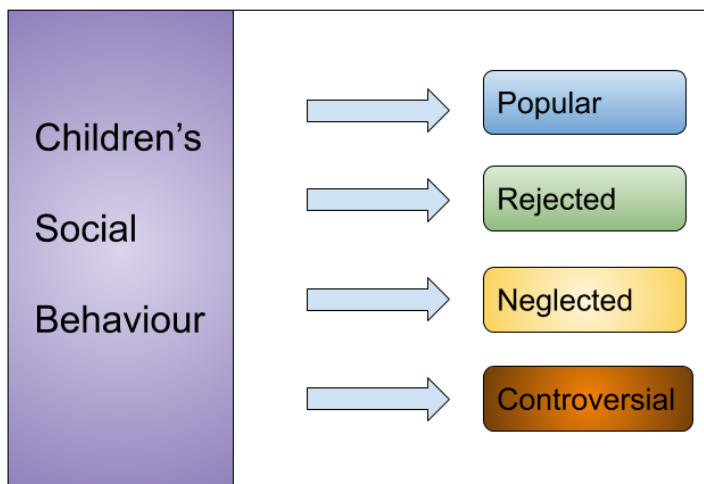


Figure 4: Children's Social Behavior according to Ramsey (Dowling 2008)

Ramsey (1991) gives a short description of the four categories: the *popular* child is very capable and more mature intellectually, socially and emotionally, the *rejected* child may show aggressive or withdrawn behavior, the *neglected* child takes little part in social interactions and content with own company, and the *controversial* child has a big impact on the group, talented, but gets in trouble for bad behavior (Dowling 2010). These different kinds of social behaviors are addressed through the young leadership method. By giving the chance to all the children to shine and feel important, their self-esteem is strongly boosted, which results in more positive behavior. Kallio (2014) also underlines the positive effects of self-confidence, self-leadership and life management.

The teacher's role promoted by the young leadership method is strongly linked to the children's social and emotional development. She is showing example in many ways. These attitudes reflect also the characteristics of a coach or trainer. By asking and listening the teacher gives space to the children. Everybody is seen and heard, which builds their self-confidence. By fostering a trusting relationship, she communicates that she believes in the children's strength and resources, respects their plans. By setting goals, the children can experience excitement, optimism and hope in the future. By asking questions, the teacher opens new perspectives and understanding, they can learn from each other. By giving feedback in a respectful and appreciative way, she helps the children to know themselves and trust their own self. By challenging them, the teacher helps the children to get outside of their comfort zone, where the learning happens. And finally, by celebrating success, the children will recognize their own strength and enhances their overall wellbeing. (Kallio 2014.) The children copy the same behavior and apply it in their teamwork.

Kangas-Kärki (2020) claims, that the process of self-development sets off quickly once the team structure is introduced. The leaders are chosen weekly and naturally the louder and more confident children get to lead first. Because everybody gets a turn to lead, the second week the first ones cannot “run” for leadership positions, even though many times they still would like to. It is interesting to see how their personality evolves week by week as all get a chance to become a leader. Table 2 below shows a typical dynamic as it is followed through the process of becoming a leader.

The dynamics of choosing a leader among the children	
Week 1	The loud ones with strong personality get to be the leaders
Week 2	They still would want to be but can't
Week 3	By this time also the shy ones see the benefits and rights of the leader
Week 4	The children ask the very shy ones to be their leader

Table 2: The Dynamics of Choosing a Leader

Most of the time is not easy to decide who should be the next leader. Each Monday morning starts with discussions and negotiations. The children try to convince each other or simply argue and reason why one should or should not be the next leader. It is amazing to see how very young children possess already good communication skills and can be fair and considering others. It also happens sometime, that there is no way to get to an agreement, because of very strong opinions. In that case the impartial “stone, scissors, paper” (kivi, sakset, paperi) will decide who will be the leader of the week. Everybody accepts the decisions made by the group or the rhyme, because they know that everybody will get a chance to lead.

Even though to be a leader of the team is considered the best thing, the leaders do not have only rights and privileges, but also responsibilities to carry out. The general privileges during the week are that the leader can be the first one in the line and choose the bench for the team for morning circle and the table for the activities and lunch time. The responsibility is to check that all team members are following, and they fit to the table. They also have the responsibility to show good example. During the so called “Joy of encouragement -moment” (Rohkaisun riemu-hetki) daily activity the team evaluates the preschool day (that is until 12.30, so in the afternoon the children are not bound by the team structure) and discusses what went well, what was fun, remembering the good and encouraging each other. The leader gets a sticker and has the responsibility to ask the members where to put it on their own joy-of-encouragement card, which has five sections according to the team culture of good

leadership: good job (Hieno homma!), good listening (Kuuntelen), building together (Rakennamme yhdessä), asking somebody to join (Tule mukaan!), and you are a friend (Olet kaveri!). The leader has the right to decide the place of the sticker if not in agreement and has both the right and the responsibility at the same time to go in the front and share the results, “the encouragement”, with the whole group. The goal of the activity is to learn to find and give positive feedback about the day and through that encourage one another. Once a week during teamplay the leader has the responsibility to ask the members “What shall we play?” and to listen to them but having the right to decide the play for the whole team, if not agreeing. Another time, during team game the leader has the right to decide alone what game the team plays and has the responsibility to make sure the fairness of the game. This aspect of learning to lead develops also an important skill: to make a responsible decision *alone*. There are so many people pleasers in the society (already visible among the children as well), who need to learn to stand up for their own ideas and wishes, and on the other hand to tolerate the negative feeling if somebody is not pleased with the decision. (Kangas-Kärki 2020.)

The young leadership method has undoubted benefits concerning children’s social development. If there are two different children with different developmental needs, for example a shy and one with a strong personality, the same system addresses both and tackles the lacks and the needs at the same time. The two-sided development happens simultaneously, as children with strong personality learn to listen and obey others, learn to ask instead of pushing own idea on others, learn to co-operate and use their leading abilities for the benefit of others. On the other hand, shy children build up their self-esteem when they experience that the others are listening and doing what they say. They get encouraged when they feel that their words and opinion matter. According to Kormilainen (2020), children learn and develop best when they get to know themselves, their talents and abilities; teachers foster this budding self-confidence by valuing each child the same way, indifferent of their family background.

4.3 Young Leadership and Teamwork

Teamwork and social skills can hardly be separated from each other. In this section I will discuss some of the teamwork’s characteristics and present the so-called explanatory models, the four motivations for co-operative learning, which also provides the theoretical background for the young leadership method.

Nowadays, there is a much bigger need for individuals who have good social skills and can function well in any kind of group setup. In the schools there are more group works than before. The young leadership method aims to prepare the children for this demand as well.

Even later in working life, people need to work in co-operation with others, without necessarily being best friends.

Forsyth (2006,3) states, that “a group is defined as two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships”. The group members clearly influence each other, simply by being present in the group and interacting with others. A team is considered a group of people who have the same goals and share the responsibilities in reaching their goal. Interdependence is one of the characteristics of the group, as the team members depend on each other to achieve their goals. The team works as a support group for the individuals and maximizes their potential by challenging ideas, creating new ones and encouraging the shared development through participation and co-operation. According to Kallio (2014), teamwork brings autonomy, capability and the feeling of belonging. These serve also as the intrinsic motivation for the members.

On the other hand, teamwork can cause different emotional reactions, because of the hard work the group forming requires. One of the most popular group dynamic theories is Bruce W. Tuckman’s theory of group development. He claims that most groups go through five developmental stages: forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Once going through the difficult stages, the teamwork feels smoother and there is a better co-operation. (Forsyth 2006.) Usually teamwork is very intensive and needs a lot of flexibility, as compromises are needed to be made. Considering all the challenges, Kallio (2014) concludes that team learning is still more motivational and more significant than individual learning.

Besides having a common goal, teamwork enhances also problem solving and communication skills. The children need to negotiate, discuss, talk and share, find new solutions and think outside of the box.

Teamwork can be very motivational. According to the explanatory models (see Figure 5 below), we can identify four root motivations for co-operative learning, each embedded in different theoretical approaches. The first one is the behaviorist point of view or behaviorist motivation. This explanation focuses mainly on the rewards and goals for the learning. Individual goals cannot be reached in groups only if we help each other. (Lehtinen et al. 2007.) For the children this might mean working together with the group, because we get common reward, for example sticker. The teacher’s goal is to teach the children to experience that the finished work is rewarding.

The second point of view is the socio-educational one, which explains that social attachment is the source of motivation. Children help each other, because the group is important to them, special and beloved. It creates interdependence within the group. (Lehtinen et al.

2007.) According to the young leadership method, besides having structured group work, the children also have team play to get to know each other and find out that the other person is also fun to be with. This way they learn to do good teamwork without the pressure of becoming best friends, explains Kangas-Kärki (2020).

The third approach is the constructivist point of view, which indicates that the development itself is motivational. This notion is connected to Vygotsy's idea about the Zone of Proximal Development. It means that individuals have certain skills and when operating alone they stay within that zone of own skills. On the contrary, if working together with somebody who possesses better or other kinds of skills, these individuals will learn as well to do the same things or have the same knowledge. This area of possible development provided by somebody else as an extension, is called "Zone of Proximal Development". (Lehtinen et al. 2007.) This concept applies also "stepping outside of comfort zone", where learning happens. Doing teamwork, it means children working together with different kinds of abilities. A child who knows more helps the one who knows less. It is also emphasised that it is ok not to know it yet. That is why they are there: to learn. The teachers are constantly encouraging them and suggesting not to compare each other.

Finally, the last point of view described by Lehtinen et al. (2001) is the cognitive motivation or the cognitive development explanation. The co-operative learning is considered very effective, because one way to learn best and deepen the knowledge is by teaching and explaining it to others. This happens in a social environment within the team. The young leadership method fosters this development, as in many teamwork occasions the leaders get the instructions and they need to explain it further to the other members and solve it together.

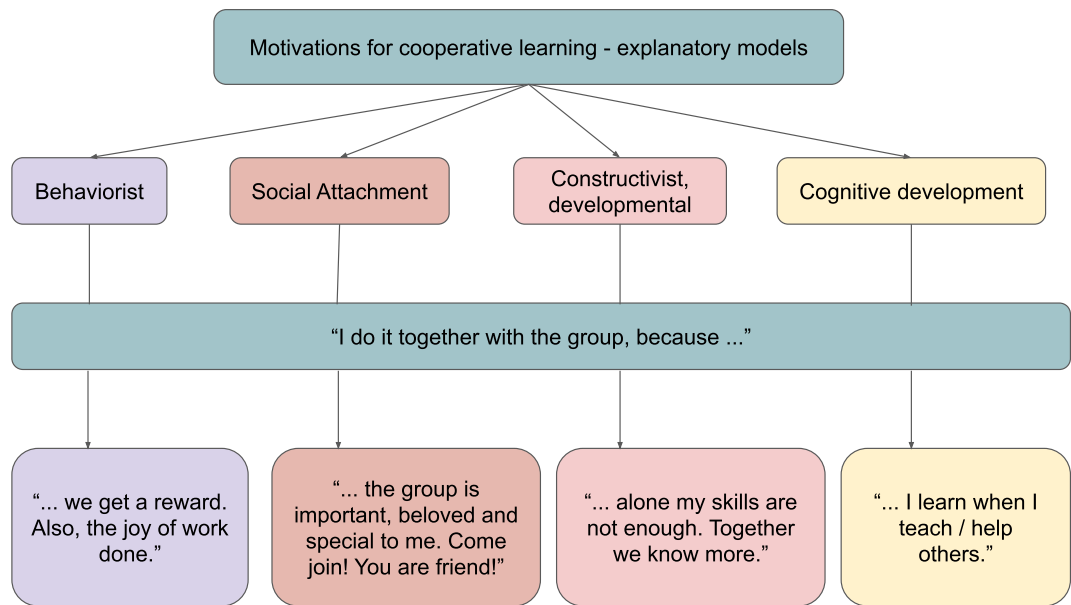


Figure 5: The Explanatory Models based on Lehtinen et al. (2001)

After learning about the young leadership method in depth, considering the many aspects it brings along, we will turn now to exploring the background, validity and importance of the multisensory space method, as well as discussing its benefits considering teamwork and social development.

5 Multisensory Approach

There are different and various ways for experiencing and drawing information about the world around us. The most profound, vivid and complete way is through our senses. Each person has a different maturity level of their senses which indicates the effectiveness of their use and the possible amount of information derived through the process. Even if our sensory systems are fully functional without more obvious deficits and difficulties, there are still slight variations in the way they work. Some individuals might be sensitive to sound or light or touch, or the sensitivity might even cover more areas. The same type of stimuli might cause some people discomfort, while others don't even notice it. Robinson (2011,25) compares our holistic experiences (most of the senses being active) to a "wonderful kaleidoscope where all the parts continually shift into ever changing but exquisitely combined patterns of experience". This means, that even though we are aware of our individual senses being at work, our ultimate experience is more a combination of our different sensations. The simultaneous presence of the senses leads to the global experience. In case of infants some of the senses

are already well functioning, like smell and hearing, while others are still developing, like vision and taste, as the baby's body and brain are maturing. (Robinson 2011.)

5.1 The Five Senses

Our sense of TOUCH is unique in its way, because the receptors are "spread out" throughout the body, instead of having a specific place for them, like in the case of eyes and ears. Thus, also the information gathered through a tactile way differs from other type of information. It contains various forms of stimuli, like touch, temperature, pain and body position, as the main sources. Our whole sensory system is very finely tuned. This is especially true when considering the sensitivity of touch. According to Robinson, the fingertips of a human being can sense a bump that is 167 times smaller than the dot of Braille. Surely, this sensitivity can differ profoundly person by person. For example, some of the children or adults can be extremely irritated by different textures or little sticking out pieces on the clothes. (Robinson 2011.)

Besides gathering information about the world around us, researches prove, that there are countless positive effects of human touch both physically and mentally. It lowers the blood pressure, boosts the immune system, produces feel-good hormones in the brain, like serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin. Also helps combating depression in a very effective way. There is a profound need in all of us for closeness of other human beings, which amplifies and deepens the connection through touch. As we have seen previously, touch and to be touched is among the basic human needs identified by Maslow (1954). See Figure 3. One of the most admirable quality of the human touch is that it has emotional associations. It means that we can communicate different feelings through touch. Psychologist Matthew Hertenstein (2009) came to an interesting conclusion through his experiment of touching blindfolded strangers. The participants could identify eight different emotions with 78% accuracy (anger, fear, disgust, love, gratitude, sympathy, happiness and sadness). This kind of vital communication of multiple positive emotions matters tremendously when considering young children. They need to be touched kindly, lovingly and respectfully in order to feel safe, loved and accepted. It is essential for their healthy physical and mental development. The belief in the power of touch must be rekindled both on individual and societal levels. (Chillot 2013.)

The VISUAL system is not falling behind at all from human touch in its complexity, even though its functional manifestations are still only partly understood, despite of the huge number of researches conducted in this area (Robinson 2011). Its development happens in a relatively rapid way, but to reach the full functionality, in some parts of it might even take three to four years. As mentioned before, the sight of a newborn is still blurry, focuses more on the

external contours and very poorly able to distinguish colors, if at all. The development speeds up after the first six weeks of life. Interestingly this is the time when the first smiles reliably appear. Robinson (2011,29) claims, that this would suggest “a period of adjustment to life outside the womb”. Babies’ vision is targeting mainly faces. They get fascinated by them and spend a lot of time examining people’s faces around them. Then they become more aware of the “near visual space” and orientation improves well. Visual development is closely linked to movement, because it requires a complex co-ordination as a child learns to reach, grasp, hold and carry things. (Robinson 2011.)

The same way as with touch, we can also identify differences of visual sensitivity with some persons, especially when considering light and colors. It is a personal predisposition whether someone gets easily overwhelmed with certain amount of stimuli or not. According to Sax (Robinson 2011,31), there is an anatomic difference between genders when it comes to the “presence and distribution of cells sensitive to color and those sensitive to location and motion”. This explains why the girls can differentiate more colors, while in general, boys have better spacial awareness.

There is also an important link between emotions and vision. Other people’s facial expression can tell us a lot about the emotions behind it. Still, as this information is transmitted to the brain, it will be affected by our own perception and interpretation. Ramachandran describes that the visual experience happens both on a subjective and objective levels (Robinson 2011). It is very important to often communicate positive emotions by our face to young children, as it a source of love and safety for them. They also see the world and themselves through the adults’ eyes and faces, thus they become the main factors in building up the children’s own identity. Dr. Edward Tronick’s “Still Face Experiment” offers a deeper insight into the connection between the mother’s facial expressions and the emotional disposition of her young child (Goldman 2010).

HEARING is another vital way of experiencing the world around us. The information is more accurate when combined with the visual stimuli. By hearing we can identify the intensity, frequency and the location of a sound. Detecting the world by the sounds of it provides us spacial information, non-verbal sounds, like music, processes by the right hemisphere of the brain and information through speech, of which the left hemisphere is responsible, according to Schiffman. (Robinson 2011.)

As the child is developing at the early ages, the hearing is also refined and developing with great speed. Newborns still have the sensitivity to the sounds of all the languages, and by the time of being eight-month-old they can clearly distinguish the sounds of their own language. If not heard for one year, the sensitivity for other languages disappear. (Robinson 2011.)

With time they can localize the sounds more accurately, becoming aware of the directions of them and a bit later also the distance of the sound. This type of spatial awareness includes the aspect of safety at the same time. For example, when estimating the distance of an approaching car. Besides gathering information through hearing, the inner ear is responsible for balance and posture. These are basic abilities in our human lives, that we do not even consider most of the time. For a child to be able to develop, all the senses are needed to work in unity. (Robinson 2011.)

One of the biggest impact hearing brings, is the ability to communicate, to express ourselves, to make connections, to listen and to be heard. These are vital for a healthy development and the whole wellbeing of a person. As early childhood educators and caregivers we have a huge responsibility in planting the seeds of positive and healthy communication by talking kindly, respectfully to the children and listen to them with undivided attention and without any prejudice. Even the non-verbal factors of our speech, like the tone of voice and intonation communicates emotions alongside with our body language.

The last two senses, SMELL and TASTE will be discussed together, as they are very strongly linked. Both are involved with the primary needs described in Maslow's Need Pyramid referred to earlier. See Figure 3, like hunger, thirst and later in sexual activity. As seen before, little babies have already a quite well functioning sensory system. It is applicable also to the sense of smell and taste, as newborns can identify their mother's breastmilk within a few hours after birth. Their sense of taste is also gradually developing, when after some month they are experiencing with different textures and flavors. The strong linkage is also noticeable during sickness, while catching a cold. Losing the ability to smell the food affects our taste buds as well, food does not taste anymore. Smell and taste not only link together, but they have both an interesting connection to emotions and memory. For some, certain food causes disgust, while for others even the very same food can inspire feelings of love and pleasure. Or a scent of the perfume can be perceived by others as part of that adult's personality, as memories of the relationship include the same scent. (Robinson 2011.)

From a social point of view, these senses and eating habits are deeply rooted in many cultures. Eating together brings and emphasizes the feelings of belonging and togetherness. These sensations connect with the positive feelings and the sensory memories can be evoked by a certain smell or taste even long after the actual happening. Unfortunately, nowadays the decreasing number of family meals affect very negatively the whole family's wellbeing, especially the children's development.

As a conclusion, I can only draw the attention on the complexity and wonder of our senses in completing each other and functioning in a holistic way. They provide us with experiences in

learning and understanding the world around us and at the same time ourselves. Robinson (2011,37) nicely concludes, that our senses, their design, structure and function are “the common framework for all human beings but the environment, both psychological and physical [...] begins the real work of forming the individual we sense as ‘me’.” Thus, in the early childhood education context the teachers have a significant responsibility to consciously provide divers play and learning environment which enhances not only the transfer of the knowledge, but also takes the role of shaping and building up the children as individual beings. In the following part we will see what this means in practice and what kind of possibilities teachers can have in offering the children these broad experiences.

5.2 Integration of the Senses into the Learning Environment

The Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019) highlights the fact, that through the usage of multiple senses, different working methods and environment, children learn how to express themselves in various ways. The general guidelines encourage teachers to plan their pedagogical activities and the space of the kindergarten in a rich way, that provokes children’s curiosity to explore further. Roskos and Christie (2011, 217) suggest, that adding more complex materials to the play environment helps the children to stay engaged for a longer time and will “challenge their thinking”.

As we have seen before, our senses are connected in various ways and they take a considerable part in children’s development. By providing different stimuli, teachers are also supporting the holistic development of the children, which is at the core of our professional goal. This is one of the main reasons why it is so important to include the sensory stimuli to the learning environment. Based on the teachers’ creativity there are countless opportunities for this to realize both inside the kindergarten and in outside environment. Bruce (2011) emphasizes the importance of this kind of rich learning environment, which calls for exploration and experience. During nature walks, forest trips or simply playing outside, the children get the most genuine and diverse stimuli considering the different textures, materials, visual richness, smells and nature sounds. It is worth mentioning that this also the place where children’s spatial awareness develops the most.

Compared to the wide range of outside stimuli, the inside possibilities might seem much limited, but the teachers’ professionalism and creativity is able to transform the kindergarten into a rich sensory environment. For example, there could be separate area for role play, providing interesting objects for the decided topic according to the children’s wish. Many kindergartens have the possibility to set up a sand table or water station for inside exploration. Finally, all pedagogical activities can be opportunities for sensory exploration. Adding

nature or other sensory elements to language, math, art or music activities makes the activity more interesting, colorful and serves the purpose of multidisciplinary and holistic education. The curriculum (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019,22) explains learning as being universal and occurring everywhere: “it combines knowledge, skills, actions, emotions, sensory perceptions, bodily experiences, language and thinking”.

Considering young children, they learn the best if more senses are involved in the learning process. According to Luojus (2011), the memory retention is drastically increasing when more senses are added to the learning experience: if you only hear an information, the 20% of it can be recalled, if you see, the 30% of it, if you both hear and see, the memory goes up to 50%, if you additionally tell or explain about it, then the memory reaches 70%, and if you allowed to touch and include kinesthetic sensation as well, then the memory raises up to 90% (See Table 3 below). It clearly shows that the most memories remain when learners can be actively engaged through all their senses.

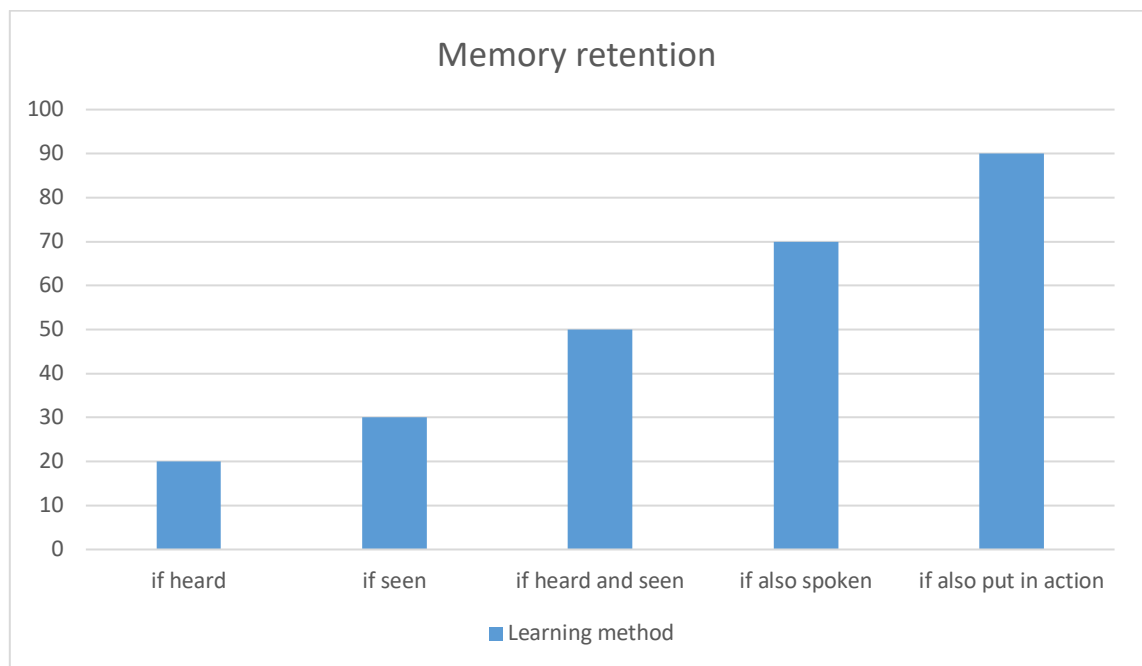


Table 3: Memory retention by learning method (Luojaus 2011)

One of the best ways to facilitate this type of diverse learning process is through planning and building multisensory spaces with the children, preferably if there is an allocated area for that. Even a corner transformed into a sensory world can engage the children in endless play and learning through exploration. The Multisensory Space Method already provides development for the children in many areas by itself, but it can be also included in other learning entities, as it can serve both as the goal and the background of pedagogical activities. In the

following sections we will learn about the method more in depth, considering particularly its connections to teamwork and social development.

5.3 Multisensory Space Method

As discussed before in connection with our senses, the word multisensory in the method's name refers to "sense experiences gained simultaneously via multiple senses" (Aistien Menetelmä 2018). These experiences trigger various emotions, thoughts, memories, which powerfully present themselves. It is very important to create a safe, warm and encouraging space, where these strong feelings can be accepted, validated and shared, both to enrich other people and to make deep realizations as well while putting them into words. At the core of the method is the Space itself. Rätty and Wikström (2017, 113) describes the multisensory space as "an easily modified space where all the senses are activated by different elements". This flexibility allows to change the space according to the target group's needs and interests. The customized spaces provoke creativity, inspiration and offer unique experiences. Through the space we can visit another space or time, we can share and learn about others' history and other cultures, it works as a learning environment, while promotes well-being and empowerment. (Aistien Menetelmä 2018.)

The multisensory space method came to life at the very first time as part of a student project in Laurea University of Applied Sciences Finland, that aimed to create a space by a multicultural group to share their own memories and experiences and learn about other cultures. With time the method has been further developed by students, teachers and other national partners within a project (2011-2015) called "With All Senses- Developing Open Learning Development". This brought significant changes in viewing the method's possibilities. It appeared to be an effective framework to support students with different learning styles, to enhance communication by shared memories and to foster multicultural awareness. As the method developed, it brought new perspectives as well: can be successfully used not only in schools but in various organizations, and different target groups can be reached through the method. When brought in the community building aspect along with the multicultural background, the method got a new shape in the project "Building Skills and Communities Together" (2017-2019). Ever since the method is constantly advancing, as they try to find new insights and possibilities to undermine the method's potentials. (Aistien Menetelmä 2018.)

When building the space, we need to be aware of the characteristics of the physical space. For example, it is possible to build a permanent or a temporary, so-called mobile space, depending on the conditions and the purpose. Because there is no right or wrong way building it, the method offers a lot of opportunity for creative engagement. Still some aspects need to be

considered and certain elements need to be present to stimulate all senses. Like pictures and colorful fabrics, if possible, even projected images to see; different sounds from nature or everyday life, instruments or music to hear; fragrant, spices or food to smell and additionally to taste little snack and drink. The whole place should create a harmonious, relaxing and comfortable space, without having a sensory overload. (Räty and Wiström 2017.)

It is very important to constantly keep in mind that the space is not a display, not supposed to be an exhibition, especially when building one with younger children who have the strong urge and need to manipulate with their environment. It is rather an open learning environment, where people get together and actively participate in the unique learning experience. The multisensory approach has a significant impact on the learning process. Shams and Seitz (2008) were studying the effects of including various sensory stimulus, that activates different functions of the brain, comparing unisensory and multisensory training. As we have seen before, our senses are linked in a complex way with our brain and sensory experiences are stored deep in our memories. When activated, our brain makes connections between the present and the past and a more profound and multifold learning is realized. With age the brain's associating abilities are getting stronger while memory is slowly fading. The multisensory stimulation holds refreshing possibilities for the elderly population as well.

5.4 Teamwork and Social Development in the context of Multisensory Space Method

I have already presented both teamwork and social development in detail, but this time I will focus on them in the light of the multisensory space method, describing those aspects that surface to, while building and experiencing the multisensory space. Teamwork and social development are very strongly linked, and they cannot be separated considering the multisensory space method either. Just as the method itself has multiple learning aspects, including social learning as well.

According to Räty and Wikström (2017), the method distinguishes three steps of the process: planning, building and experiencing. Each has its significance. For example, already at the planning stage the participants engage in a dialogue, which is one important prerequisite for smooth teamwork and for the success of the method. The whole process has a teambuilding effect, as everybody adds something personal to the original idea. This way the own involvement strengthens the motivation. Surely, other skills are needed for planning, just like in any other teamwork: communication, negotiation, interaction, listening, accepting, problem solving. Already this stage helps to reflect to values, and to define both individual and group identity. (Aistien Menetelmä 2018.)

At the building stage creativity can spring forth, while trying to materialize the ideas. It fills the group members with excitement, the shared work towards the same goal enhances the sense of belonging and togetherness. It is truly empowering to be able to create a whole new world around us, which is our own as a team, it is our shared identity, but the individual finds its place there as well. This social experience of creating together is highly empowering.

At the end, the experiencing stage is the crown of the whole process, where deep connections happen, and the dialogue is deepening the understanding and the shared experience. The presence of the various sensory stimulus makes the experience more vivid and imprints it deeper into the memory. The process of recalling and sharing own memories allows us to build social relations. (Aistien Menetelmä 2018.)

Once getting to know and understanding the other person through their shared memories and experiences creates a bond and unity that goes beyond words. It can form a strong foundation within the group and community. The method adds a deeper value to our interpersonal connections and empowers all participants. Even if considered as a learning environment, the purpose of the method is “rather to utilize multisensory processes as an experience-rich learning environment, which means that positive experiences motivate students to learn” (Aistien Menetelmä 2018).

After considering the method’s positive effects on teamwork, social development and overall wellbeing, in the next section I will present how the multisensory space method enriched the young leadership method in practice in the Aarteet Kindergarten’s preschool group.

6 Implementation

The implementation of the thesis is based on the two methods discussed above. As the young leadership method is deeply woven into the daycare’s everyday life, the implementation follows the already existing structure, trying to embed the multisensory approach into it. In practice it means, that the children are doing many activities in teams, thus building a multisensory space is also realized as part of their group work, being a challenge and a unique task for them as a team. The project was realized through a longer process, and even though the team leaders were changing weekly, but for the project activities and experiencing we kept the original groups with the initial leaders. The process involved certain steps, following the stages of building a multisensory space, recommended by Rätty and Wikström (2017): planning, preparing, building, experiencing. During the process of building, the children followed the principles of the young leadership method in the way they communicate, negotiate

respectfully, work as a group, considering each member, working towards a common goal and creating something together as a joint effort (Kangas-Kärki 2020).

The initial idea was to conduct one project in the preschool, but visiting the group and seeing their working structure, we have decided with the teachers to offer the same opportunity for experiencing the greatness and the benefits of the multisensory method to all the teams in a fair and equal way. So, I agreed to lead four projects with the four separate teams. The other reason for repeating the process with three different groups was, that the longer the process or the implementation lasts, the more accurate findings I can get regarding the workability of the two methods together and the effect on the children in overall. It was interesting to compare how the groups work similarly or differently from one another.

For each team the process included eight sessions, five regarding their own project and three sessions when visiting other spaces built by the other three teams, as shown in Figure 6 below.

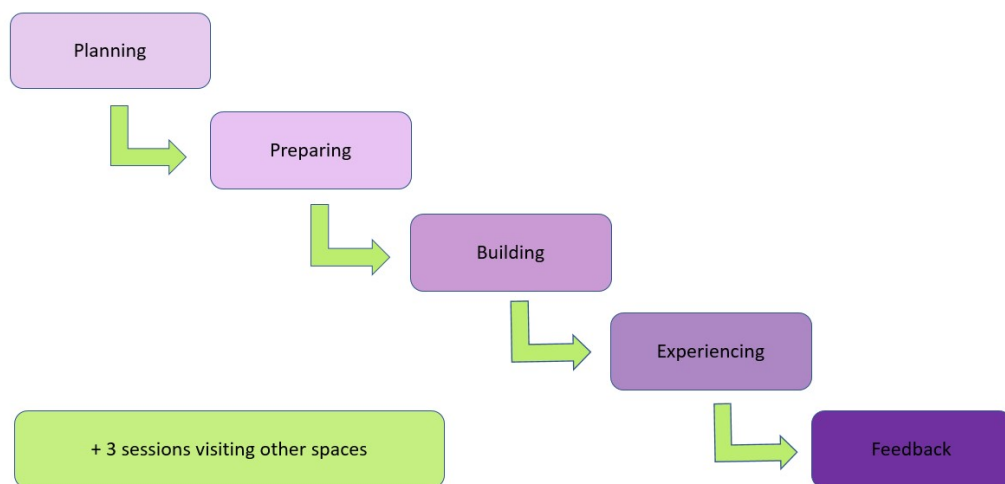


Figure 6: The Eight Sessions of the Process

I have not included into the project's process line the three visiting activities, only as an addition, because they did not belong to the actual project of their own. This is also the reason why in Table 3 below I marked these additional experiences with a different color. The highly skilled teachers' careful planning made it possible to include 32 additional activities into their already established preschool schedule. The four teams' different sessions were overlapping

week-by-week, and they were realized during the ten weeks of my practice placement, as shown in Table 3.

	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
Week 1	Planning	Planning		
Week 2	Preparing	Preparing		
Week 3	Building 1. Experiencing	1. Experiencing	Planning 1. Experiencing	Planning 1. Experiencing
Week 4	2. Experiencing	Building 2. Experiencing	2. Experiencing	2. Experiencing
Week 5	Feedback	Feedback	Preparing	Preparing
Week 6	3. Experiencing	3. Experiencing	Building 3. Experiencing	3. Experiencing
Week 7	Ski Holiday:	no pre-school	activity	
Week 8	4. Experiencing	4. Experiencing	4. Experiencing	Building 4. Experiencing
Week 9			Feedback	Feedback
Week 10	Final Celebration			

Table 4: The four teams' sessions during the ten weeks

It was very fortunate, that we could use a totally separate room for this purpose, that it was only partly in use. Before we started the whole process, the actual space itself was checked and prepared. All extra stuff was taken away, the games and books stored on the shelf were covered with light blue fabric, as if it were the sky. Two lower shelves served as the separation in the middle of the room, as in the two ends two built spaces will be created. I covered the empty shelves with darker brown fabric suggesting the ground or some "wooden" wall separation. In addition, another see-through fabric was attached to the pipe on the ceiling and put in between the two shelves in the middle of the room to separate the space also vertically as well, as much as possible.

In presenting the different stages of the implementation I will concentrate on one particular team, that seemed the most challenging from the process point of view, but at the same time it offered a nice insight to the young leadership method working in practice. In addition to it I will also discuss briefly the other teams' processes, comparing the four teams to each other, focusing on commonalities and outstanding characteristics as well as on interesting observations. The group that we will follow through more in detail will be Team 4. I will show in pictures also the other three wonderful worlds created by the other three teams.

6.1 Planning and Preparing the Spaces

According to the Early Childhood Curriculum, the children should be actively involved in the planning stage of all kindergarten activities, asking for their opinions, their interests and plan accordingly. Involving the children leads to more customized activities, at the other hand it keeps up the children's motivation for a longer time if they can decide the activities they want to be engaged with. This way the learning experience has a more profound effect and it results not only in a more advanced knowledge, but positively affects the children's whole wellbeing. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019.)

Besides awaking the children's intrinsic motivation for a more active involvement, I was also aiming for the children to really experience owning the project as something being close to their heart. In that case the experience would be realized on a totally different level, reaching the height of "lifetime experience".

When it was time for the actual planning for the space, I took the team (the leader being the first one in the line) to the part of the room they had available for their project, in order to activate their imagination and for them to see the possibilities and limitations the space is providing. After having the planning session with Team 1 and Team 2, I realized that we need to change the planning time for Team 3 and 4, so they would have the same opportunities with the same starting point to plan, meaning to see the empty space on both sides of the room, which then allows their imagination to run freely, without being affected by other teams' ideas and works. As much as we tried to keep it in "secret" from other teams, I think that they were still influencing each other, for example, seeing the drying art works.

For the planning session I took with myself a magical music box that I opened and spread "magic dust" on them, because I needed to transform them into planners, architects, creators and they need the magic power for that. Generally, the girls liked the magical element, but some of the boys were looking puzzled that what that was about. They still have gotten a little magic from afar. I talked with excitement about the wonderful opportunity to be able to build their own world. I tried to emphasize that it can be anything what the team decides.

Then we played a little game to give them some hints about the possibilities. I hid little objects in the magic box: plastic flower, stone, shell, cone, glass ball, shiny fabric, little horse toy and fur-fabric. See Figure 7 below.



Figure 7: The magic box and the little items

One by one, starting with the leader, with eyes closed the children put their hands in there while the magical music was playing, they had to take out one object and they had to guess what it was. Most of the children knew what they were holding in their hands even if they couldn't see it. The others could open their eyes and see it for themselves. Once the tiny objects were on the mat, we started brainstorming the possible worlds suggested by the hints. I stretched again, that these were only examples and they were free to come up with their own ideas. After this I stepped aside for a little while to give space and time for the team to discuss and come up with the "world idea" they wanted to build.

As in any other teamwork within the young leadership method, also here implied that the team leader had a final say in case of not coming to a full agreement. For Team 4 it was difficult to get to a consensus according the theme of the space. The two girls wanted to have a summer forest with flowers and butterflies, but the two boys did not want to. Especially one of them was more reserved and slightly negative. He wanted to have an explosion, while the other boy a meteorite. When it was time to decide, even though the team was not in agreement, the team leader concluded to her group, that they will have a summer forest and then turning to the boys assuring them that they can have both the dynamite and the meteorite.

They added also a treehouse to the ideas. The leader managed to make a decision, one that she favored, but including the boys at the same time and making it a team project after all. As a teacher/facilitator I needed a lot of sensitivity how to incorporate these things into the plan, so everybody feels part of the project, being heard and taken into consideration, even though the final work would not be that cohesive. So, we agreed to make a meteorite over the sky and a tunnel could be built in the mountain for which the dynamite is needed. I tried to channel the idea from aggressive purposes towards usefulness. I also made an initial sketch of the plan.

Even after going home on that day I kept on thinking about Team 4's planning session and I was not pleased so to say with the level of involvement of the shy boy who suggested the dynamite. I knew that in order to be able to fully experience the process and the excitement of building his own multisensory space, somehow, I need to try to include this boy into the project, that he really owns it as well. The next day, when discussing this with one of the teachers, she mentioned that he is a lot into dinosaurs, but when the team had the brainstorming session, he did not mention that at all. Probably he was too shy and uncomfortable to speak up in front of others, especially that I was still relatively new in the preschool. Even though his dynamite idea was incorporated, I did not want him to miss out on the full experience, so I talked with him whether he would like to include his dinosaurs as well to their world. If we have something that is close to his heart, he would feel more part of it. When offering him the possibility, his face lit up and said with a big smile: "Dinosaurukset ovat kivvoja!" (Dinosaurs are fun!). We agreed that we will discuss it with the rest of the team as well. Later they all accepted the new suggestion and I finalized the sketch of the plan. See Figure 8 below.



Figure 8: The sketch of Team 4

For some of the ideas, materials must be gathered and prepared beforehand. The children's artwork as decided initially would consist of trees, flowers, butterflies, meteorite and dynamite. I also tried to come up with additional ideas to make their world more vivid, attractive and fulfilling to the senses, like treehouse, rope and stick ladder, dinosaur bones and plastic dinosaurs, grass and different kind of things to touch, see, taste, smell and listen to.

As seen above Team 4 wanted to do many things for their world. So, when it was our next session, the preparing, they had a lot of work to do. I had my slight worry, whether they can finish it and concentrate for such a long time. First, they had to draw and paint their own trees, make flowers, butterflies (the girls were mainly involved in that and one of the boys a bit). The other boy made the meteorite and because his interest was brought into the "world", he also wanted to make a big dinosaur out of paper, even though to make crafts was really challenging for him, as his fine motoric skills fell behind compared to his age group. Interestingly, once he had his motivation in place, he did not even mention the dynamite anymore, even though it was on the drawn plan. He and his whole team could focus for a very long time. By the time they finished with the crafts, the paint dried, and they cut out the trees. They were very proud of themselves.

When looking at the other teams' planning and preparing processes, we can notice some differences and similarities. For example, Team 1 and Team 3 almost immediately came up with the idea what kind of space they wanted to build (Beach - Meren ranta and Wonderland - Taika metsä), while the members of Team 2 said to each other that it does not matter for them, anything is fine. Reminding them that they still need to decide on something, a girl suggested to build a forest. Then they started to throw in ideas what there could be in the forest: snake, bear, hedgehog, birds. After all they changed their mind wanting to build a winter forest instead. Once the teams had their ideas, I tried to help them with some open-ended questions to activate their imagination and have a more holistic idea.

The preparing arts and crafts sessions were always fun and messy activities. We used both the floor and tables, as we needed big space for each individual work. Team 1 decided to make sun and seagulls for their Beach, Team 2 wanted to make big wintery trees and snowflakes for their Winter forest, and Team 3 was concentrating on making magical, rainbow trees for their Wonderland. I tried to offer them a big variety of the different materials they could possibly use, and I encouraged them to use their imagination. All art works were unique, representing also the children's own likes, interests and abilities (Slentz and Krogh 2001). As having different skills, for some it took very long to paint or cut, while others could do it much faster and more things to prepare. However, this was not hindering any child from participating and have not lessen the excitement. This project also offered possibility for practicing these

skills. They were all working as a team and each one of them contributed to the work, according to their abilities.

The Table 4 below shows all the different sensory stimuli that were present in the created multisensory spaces by the teams. It is difficult to separate the various stimulations, because for example, all the objects, including the ones for touching, also create strong visual sensation, thus the two categories somewhat overlap each other. Besides the basic ideas of the children for the multisensory worlds, I always tried to include and bring something special for them as a surprise to complete their spaces.

	Something to see	Something to touch	Something to smell	Something to taste	Something to hear
Team 1 Beach	Sun Seagulls Palm trees Sea animals Umbrella	Sand Little stones Shells Water Sunglasses Soft sea animals Ball	Sun lotion Coconut	Coconut Seaweed Mandarin	Nature music
Team 2 Winter forest	Snowy trees Snowflakes Forest animals Forest objects Bear cave	Cones Bark of birch and pine tree Cotton balls Cinnamon sticks Forest animals	Birch scent Cinnamon	Raisins Sunflower seeds	Nature music Singing bird
Team 3 Wonderland	Kaleidoscope Magical trees Fairyland Rose path Shiny and colorful objects	Fairies Little animals Plastic flowers Fabric pieces Glass balls Shiny necklaces and garlands Flower petals Confetti	Lily of the valley Lilac flower (syringa)	Shiny sprinkles Pink jelly Mushrooms	Nature music Rain stick
Team 4 Summer forest with dinosaurs	Bird nest 3D Dinosaur book Dinosaurs cave Trees Flowers Butterflies Meteorite	Treehouse & ladder Dinosaurs Dinosaur bones Cones Sticks Stones Pine-needle Forest animal	Lavender Jasmine	Grapes Biscuits	Nature music

Table 5: The different sensory stimuli in the built spaces

6.2 Building the Spaces

When finally the time came to build the spaces, the children were all very excited. They were ready to arrange and transform the space into a special world created by their imagination.

One could really feel the intensity of the emotions in the air. The excitement of creating was tangible. This was a very common characteristic in all the teams. As being the last group to build, Team 4 has been asking already for long when their turn is coming. Surely, they were talking a lot about these projects at home as well, because the parents were also actively asking and keeping track on the process. Before entering the room where all the things and fabrics were gathered beforehand, we agreed on the rules of the room: we handle the things carefully as they are the kindergarten's or somebody else's belonging or their own artwork, which also can break easily. At the same time, we take care of each other as well. They got the privilege to build a space for the whole group, but it comes also with responsibility.

Entering the room, the children were in awe when they realized that they actually have a lot of available things they can use to build the space. Even though it was told beforehand, but it was still hard for them to imagine. I also showed them the sketch made based on their wishes. This provided us with the plan during the building process. We attached it to the wall. Then we agreed what could go where and how to build the space. I told them the process task-by-task in a logical order: first trees on the wall, then the grass, flowers and butterflies. They have all gotten blue tack to put at the back of their artworks, then they could put them on the wall with a little help. After that we set up the touching table and finally, they have built the dinosaur cave, while I was attaching the meteorite to the ceiling. The animals were taking their places at last, including the paper dinosaur as the crown of the process. They were nicely participating throughout the whole session. They were both excited about the process itself and the created world. In between they also took time to play in the cave and just simply enjoy their own creation. Figure 9 below shows a collection of pictures with the different sensory stimulations added to the space, whether it is the children's own artwork or added items.





Figure 9: The "Summer forest" pictures with the dinosaurs

At the end, when the building process was ready, I asked the children to come to the door and look back, checking their world, their space from afar as a whole. I was praising them for the great work they have done. As a reward they could all choose a big sticker sheet from the magical music box and I shook hand with all of them separately, appreciating their work and telling them how proud I am. They also clapped hands for themselves.

In general, the process of building was the same for all the teams, including the excitement as well. They all actively took part and shared the responsibilities among themselves (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019). Team 1 even had a special task, to bring water in the shallow container to the "Beach" very carefully. Team 2 also surprised me, while building the "Winter forest". I had no previous plan how to build the bear cave but provided some foldable mattresses for that purpose. The children were so creative, that they ended up building a proper home for the big bears, where even all four of them could fit in. They had a nice break in between, when they were playing in the cave, enjoying it.

The building process provided us not only opportunities to play but also to discuss (Aistien Menetelmä 2018). For example, in the Winter forest the children tried to jump up and touch

the hanging laminated snowflakes, then they started to wonder why they are constantly moving in the air. First, they could not figure it out, then I gave them a hint by blowing air on one of them. Then they realized that the air conditioner was moving the snowflakes gently.

Team 3 was commenting and praising their own work and the space (Wonderland) all along the process. The liveliness and the pulsing flexibility of the creative work was the most noticeable with this team. Creativity is an everchanging phenomenon, where one idea brings forth another one. It happened also with this highly creative group. It was towards the end of the building process, when one boy told he still has a missing feeling, but he could not tell what was missing. I encouraged him to go to the play area and have a look, maybe he finds something he would like to incorporate to the space. Then he came back with little white fences and a satisfaction on his face. He wanted to still put a stable for the horses in the forest. Then the other children got inspired as well and brought some other forest animals, even a tiger and arranged them according to their own imagination. They also wanted to add a long red fabric on the forest path, which I personally would not have, but I respected their wish and the building process of their own world.

During and at the end of the building process I was constantly monitoring the safety of the children and the space (Räty and Wikström 2017). Especially, that the children were getting more active and speedy because of the excitement the building brought to them. We also had to pay attention that the ready space is safe to use for other children as well, because the area was intended to be used also under partial supervision during free play time.

As a participant observer, I was experiencing the challenges of the role (Herrmann 1989). While being fully involved in the building process together with the children, my concentration was strongly engaged in it. At the same time, I was doing the observation and sometimes with questions trying to unfold the depth of the process for the children. From time to time I was making mental notes and reminding myself not to forget about some interesting realizations. After the activity I tried to recall the whole process and was making notes and entries in my learning diary.

6.3 Experiencing the Spaces

In this part I will present the experiencing stage in general and also some specifics space-by-space, focusing more on describing the multisensory space experience from the owners' point of view. Before the experiencing session, in the morning I always finalized the space: making a little snack ready for them, putting the soft nature music on, arranging the special objects and adding the scents. When standing in front of the room, I welcome the children and preparing them mentally for entering a magical, unique space, a world built by them. The first

group visiting the ready space was always the team that had built it. Even though it was a known environment for them, still entering the place with the music playing at the background and everything arranged in a pretty way, somehow caused them to feel as if entering a sacred place. There was a magical feel in the air. I also tried to create a special atmosphere by my own approach, tone of voice, facial expression and tried to communicate with my whole body language and attitude that somehow time and space does not exist anymore in the known way, but we entered a new world in the realm of imagination. The children were really excited, playing in the space and trying out the different things.

When experiencing their own space, familiarity always affected a little bit, but in general it was more the proud feeling that the known space caused them. On the “Beach” (built by Team 1) the children really enjoyed that everything happened like it would on a real one. They got to put a little sun lotion on their arms, putting on sunglasses and sunbathing on the mattresses. When it felt too hot, they went to sit under the big sunshade represented by a huge umbrella. They also played with the fish in the sea. When they got tired from swimming in the water, it was snack time. The children could taste some mandarins, coconut flakes and seaweeds. We had a little game for figuring out what those white flakes were. With the seaweed they were more reserved as it was known only for very few of them. I still encouraged them to at least touch it and feel the surface and the structure of it. They were trying out every corner of the space and touching every possible thing, including the sand, the water, the shells and little stones (see Figure 10 below).





Figure 10: The "Beach" pictures

The "Winter Forest" built by Team 2 (see Figure 11 below) provided many opportunities for exploration, play and discussion. The snowflakes hanging from the ceiling and gently moving in the air created a nice background atmosphere of a snowy day. The little animals and especially the big bear cave triggered the imagination for many teams. Children are naturally drawn to these kinds of small hiding places and spent a lot of time in there. The snake was introduced the first time in this space and then also reappeared in the other team's worlds. To put the scary element into the space, but in a very controlled way, helps the children to overcome their own fears. The different objects on the touching table nicely accompanied the theme, the children could experience the different feel of cones, tree bark, cotton ball-snowflakes and cinnamon sticks. The last one also provided stimuli for their smell, besides birch scent. While soft nature music was playing in the background, the children were tasting raisins and sunflower seeds. They even gave some to the little singing bird on the bear cave.



Figure 11: The "Winter forest" pictures

The visually most colorful space was the “Wonderland” built by Team 3 (see Figure 12 below). The trees made by the children were sparkling and all different, but magical in a unique way. The rose path, leading to the fairy castle was nicely catching the sight, directing it towards

the tiny little fairies and animals. Even the snake got a royal place in a little cave made for it on the big armchair. The many plastic flowers arranged by the children, added more to the reality feeling of the space. One of the most interesting places calling for exploration was the touching table. The children could feel the various textures of different fabrics, flower petals, shiny necklaces and tiny sparkly confetti. The glass balls had an interesting sound and if somebody wanted something softer, could try the rain stick. The soft music at the background added to the magic, where children could taste shiny sprinkles and pink jelly mushrooms and smell the scents of lily of the valley and lilac flower (syringa). The biggest surprise and the favorite object for the children was the kaleidoscope. They have not seen one before and felt truly magical as the beautiful shapes were forming right in front of their eyes as they were turning it gently.





Figure 12: The "Wonderland" pictures

The last space, "Summer forest with dinosaurs" (built by Team 4), did not fall behind at all in magic compared to the other multisensory spaces. The trees around the wall with the grass, flowers and butterflies, helped us to feel surrounded by nature. This experience was enhanced even more by the different nature objects on the touching table: cones, sticks, bigger stones, pine-needles and plastic leaves. The tree house with its rope ladder and a bunny climbing on it created a really playful summer atmosphere. But this was not just any kind of summer forest, but the place where the dinosaurs lived. The children loved the idea and the many smaller or bigger dinosaurs inhabiting the place. The meteorite zooming through the sky reminded us of those times of history. The children were happy to act out as dinosaurs and conquer the cave, "munching" on the big bones. Still, the soft music made the place friendly and sunny, where we could enjoy eating grapes and biscuits, breathing in the fresh scent of jasmine flower and lavender. One of the highlights of the space was the 3D Dinosaur book, with many different pictures and interesting facts about the dinosaurs and special 3D glasses.

All four multisensory spaces had their unique elements, and offered a profound experience, stimulating the senses, triggering thoughts and emotions. They served as catalyzers of the imagination, which brought forward creativity even more. Enjoying the space that is a result of a shared work through the process, makes the experience more powerful for the teams.

6.4 Manipulating the Spaces

When talking about manipulating the space I am referring to all the changes a group brings into the space as an extension of the project and taking ownership of a new space built by somebody else. The different worlds were very inspiring, and all the teams found something special to do. The multisensory space allowed the children to bring forth their own personalities and characteristic ways of being and playing (Kangas-Kärki 2020).

It was very interesting to see how the dynamics of the teams affected their additional activities within the space. It was also a valuable insight for the teachers to see how the groups were functioning and forming in becoming a well-working team. For some teams this was easier for some it took more time. I will present some of the outstanding observations regarding how they were present in the built spaces.

The dynamics in Team 1 was an interesting one, because there was a child with a strong personality, and depending on the child's mood and involvement, the team was either actively playing together or a bit more drifting around in an individualistic way. For example, when they were in the "Winter forest", they all wanted the bear cave for themselves, instead of sharing it and playing there together. At other times, when visiting "Wonderland" one child came up with a game idea with the glass balls and all the team members participated in it as one team, as it brought the interest of this particular child as well referred to it earlier. This team was exploring the spaces the most and all the different sensory possibilities.

Team 2 was the most empathetic and appreciative group. They were really amazed by the spaces others made and being happy even for the smallest thing in there. The dynamics was more even and balanced in this group. Their favorite was the role play. Wherever they went, almost immediately started to play, usually initiated by one girl, but apparently this was something that resonated with the all of them. The content of the role play always changed based on the space's own topic and characteristics. For example, on the "Beach" they were a family with a dog going on holiday, swimming, enjoying the summer and the mother was taking care of their children. When being a dinosaur family living in the cave, they were the good dinosaurs and had a peaceful, quiet game.

On contrary, Team 3 was a very active and loud group with great imagination and very good social skills. This left the mark on all their games. On the "Beach" they had a very lively ball game in the sea, and also when visiting the dinosaur cave, they were very physical as dinosaurs, (they called themselves the meat eaters), who are fighting for the best space in the forest. This was as well a role play, but a rougher physical contact game. They liked to redecorate the spaces, to make little changes. Also, in the "Winter forest" they started to put the cones and cotton balls on the floor (with permission) to make the space more wintery. While throwing the things carefully from all the boxes, they came up with the idea of their own

video game type of game. They had to cross the mat without stepping on the objects. Each child had ten lives that they use when stepping on the “bombs”. The cinnamon sticks valued 2 lives, the small cones 3 lives, the big cones 5 lives and stepping on the snake would mean losing all ten lives at once. (See Figure 13 below.) I was stunned by the group’s creativity. They were playing almost during the whole time. They were fully engaged all five of them and had a deep shared experience.



Figure 13: Own game idea with obstacles

Team 4 was also a group with mixed personalities, as I already presented it earlier. This affected the group’s dynamic, too, when it came to play. Usually it took some time for them to decide what to play. Their favorite game was hide-and-seek. They played it in all the spaces, and they were engaged in the game for a long time even though the space was relatively small with limited hiding places. This game was one of the connections that helped the team to share the feeling of togetherness, as it was their own special way of playing. Another characteristic of this team was, that they really enjoyed redecorating the ready spaces. For example, when visiting “Wonderland”, the children started to decorate even more the colorful magical trees with shiny garlands. It was very interesting to see, how they had the need to add something driven from inside, to express themselves and so make the space a little bit their own as well.

6.5 Other Use of the Spaces

The ready spaces were in multiple use and in various ways. Figure 14 below shows the different implementations and manifestations of using the multisensory spaces. There were four different ways of using the space: (1) experiencing the space itself - what it can offer, (2) manipulating the space - taking the ideas further, (3) using it during free play time, and (4) other kindergarten groups visiting it. I will present briefly the last two manifestations.



Figure 14: The different implementations of using the spaces

Once the different worlds were built and experienced by the teams, they became available also in free play time. During these sessions the children were allowed to use and modify it according to their wish but had to fix it afterwards before leaving the area. The biggest change was always made by taking the cave apart (both in the “Winter forest” and in the “Summer forest”) and rearrange the foldable mattresses. They made different type of shelters and homes, or other times they made huge slides from the top of the couch to the floor. One interesting thing was when they made a huge football field, putting all the mattresses around on their edges, just like in a skating ring and play inside it with a big ball. When giving the freedom to make changes and use the space according to their wishes, the children’s creativity blossoms and the engagement deepens.

Another heartwarming use of the space was when the five-year-old's group (Viskarit) was visiting it. They have heard previously about the preschoolers' projects and they also wanted to visit the spaces. They enjoyed their stay and playing a lot. They got inspired by the "Beach" space and during free craft time they started to make their own beach with palm trees, coconut, parrot and sea, initiated by the children. Afterwards they put them on the windows. It felt very special that other groups as well take the idea further and benefit from our project. Other times they went to story reading session to the "Winter forest", then they ended up only playing there as the children were amazed and eager to try everything.

After some weeks past, they kept asking, whether the preschoolers built new spaces yet. The teacher then took them to the "Wonderland" and "Summer forest", where the group was split in two, so they have more space for themselves. All the boys wanted to go first to play with the dinosaurs and the girls in the magic forest. From the dinosaur cave they built a swimming pool and put all the glass balls (dinosaur eggs) and were swimming in there, while the girls were playing with the fairies. After that they changed and the girls took the dinosaurs in their own cave and the boys took all the little confetti and made a confetti rain, spreading it on the floor. Of course, cleaning up afterwards belonged to the visiting, but I was happy for the teacher giving freedom to the children, as Rätty and Wikström (2017) underline that the space should not be an exhibition, but rather one that allows the children to freely manipulate it, as long as they do not break it.

7 Feedback and Evaluation

Even though gathering feedback was the last session of the individual projects, but still one with high importance and impact, considering the project as a whole and its future perspectives. Feedback in general provides valuable information, and through it we get an insight that aims and helps to improve our working practices, the planned activities and offer more need-based approach. But in order to improve ourselves we need to evaluate our work first, based on the received feedback.

According to Bruce (2011), evaluation supports the teachers to interpret and analyze their practices and activities offered and planned for the children - both as a group and individually. Evaluation is a very complex process, because it has both a retrospective dimension and one aiming the future. Bruce (2011) argues, that when looking back, evaluation is focusing on what being offered and to what extent this met the occurring needs. On the other hand, evaluation also tries to find answers to the questions: How to improve? What kind of change adaptation and development is needed? To be able to objectively evaluate with these questions in mind, we also need to understand our feelings, as reacting to the feedback. When our

motivation is to improve, then we can take much easier the negative feedback as well, or anything that falls out of 'very good'.

In the case of my thesis implementation and the reached goals I will assess and evaluate based on the effects the projects caused. I will evaluate the effects on four different levels: (1) on individual level (children's feedback), (2) on group level (teachers' feedback), (3) on community level (other feedback from the kindergarten) and (4) on system level (considering it from the young leadership method's developmental point of view).

For gathering the children's feedback, I used a simple form with three written questions, all of which having three answer possibilities also in easy to understand symbols (See Appendix 1). I explained the children one question at a time, and also indicated what the answers meant. The symbols were easy to understand: a happy face for 'yes, I liked it', a neutral face for 'I don't know' and a sad face for 'no, I did not like it'. The first question was: "How did you feel about building your own world?" All 18 children answered, that they liked it a lot. One child even said, that if there would be a smiley for a 'super much', then he would color that one. The second question was: "Did you like the different sensory experience? (something to see, taste, touch, hear and smell)". I reminded them what were those things in their own space and we also had the drawn sketch with us. 14/18 children said that it was fun, 4 didn't know how they felt about it. This made me wonder a little, because when being there and experiencing it, the children were very excited and clearly showed that they enjoyed it a lot. One possible explanation could be, that approximately two weeks passed since the actual happening, so they could not recall those feelings that much anymore or maybe I was not able to explain the question so well. The third question was: "Would you like to do it again?". 16/18 answered they would and 2/18 did not know. The last part of the children's feedback was to draw a picture about what they liked the most in their own world or think it was the best part of the project. Some children drew themselves doing something or drew several objects from the space or even drew the whole scene with all the team members and some even including me as well.

There was also nice verbal feedback in the different stages of the process, like during making her own winter tree, a little girl said, she could even teach her whole family to make such things at home. Another nice comment came from a girl lying on the mattress with her sunglasses on and sunbathing, saying with deep sigh: "I would really wish to move to such a place!". One boy liked the whole process so much, that even before the fourth space was built, he was stating with a big smile: "So, when they build their world, after that you take it off and then we can again build something there." Obviously, it was a memorable project for him and for many.

The next level of evaluating the effect of the projects was on the group level, including feedback from the teachers. (For the form see Appendix 1.) All of their feedback was very positive and appreciative. They pointed it out how perfectly it fit into their own system of the young leadership method both as a structure and in its goals: “All the children in the team had opportunity to influence the outcome of the project. Together they created something more than any one of them would have been able to create by themselves. This is one of the core goals in the Young Leadership Method” (Kangas-Kärki). To create their own imaginary world, it meant also to create four different play environments for the whole group to enjoy. They were happy that the projects followed the requirements of the Early Childhood Education in all aspects, like being multidisciplinary and child originated. The different aspects of the multisensory spaces and the included items for sensory stimulation were forming a nice unity and completed each other really well. One teacher also underlined the fact that even the parents liked the projects a lot and whenever it was possible, they went to look around and see their children’s doing. The teachers were also indicating to use this project method in the future, too.

The third level of evaluation of the effects is on a community level, meaning the kindergarten as a whole, including other groups as well. The teachers confirmed that the children also in their group enjoyed a lot the built worlds, which were according to the children’s imagination. Even the manager of the kindergarten was considering the future perspectives, to include more of this type of project-based activities into the daily life of the groups, focusing on one theme at a time. Ideally, one resource teacher could circulate between the groups and focus on bringing these additional activities to the children.

Finally, if we consider the development of the Young Leadership method, the teachers were very happy that I could show other perspectives and opportunities to build into the method and provide practical implementations to further develop the method. As it is a relatively new method, these activities served as enriching additions to it.

The last note on giving feedback is that we tried with the teachers to give a very positive feedback to the children by celebrating our shared success of the projects. Teachers were taking photos of the separate teams while experiencing their own created world and designed a two-page story for each group about the space and the children. On the last week during story time, these special editions were read and cheered. The children were very happy and proud to hear about their own stories and seeing themselves on the pictures. They got to keep all four stories in their folders. Afterwards we had a small celebration with juice and chocolate biscuits. Appreciating the children’s work and their effort always has a positive effect on their self-confidence, motivation and overall development.

Personally, I am very pleased with the results of the gathered feedback both verbal and written from the children and the teachers, because it shows, that I have reached my goals and these projects nicely served this purpose. Still, for me, as being a teacher myself, the best feedback was when I could see the spark and the excitement in the children's eyes, the driving force and their genuine amazement, enjoyment and appreciation. These talked much louder than any words and convinced me about the value of my work and the positive influence I had.

8 Ethical Consideration

During the whole time while I was carrying out the projects, I was strictly following the values and policy of the working life partner and also the general ethical guidelines for social workers provided by Talentia (2019). I listened to each child, respecting them and their wishes, as being client oriented. During the whole time I acted out as a member of the team, consulting with the teachers, taking part in staff meetings and following the conduct on confidentiality.

Most importantly, as children were the client group and the target of my work, I gave extra attention to children's rights, that shaped my ethical behavior. I considered each child equal, regardless of their background and family situation. They were allowed to express themselves; their opinions and wishes were taken into consideration along the process, starting with the planning session. I was ready to help them along the way however difficult theme the children might have chosen for their spaces. The Young Leadership method itself fosters open communication, where everybody is seen and heard. I also built upon the same structure. I was respecting their self-determination in a dignified way in various situations, for example when they made choices regarding building their own spaces, I respected them, even though in some cases I personally would have decided differently. Or when preparing the artwork for their worlds, I allowed them to determine themselves how they want to create those, how many different things they want to make and for how long they wanted to work on those (after the minimum work was done). Some got tired earlier, while others could carry on with it for a longer time.

Children's safety was also considered all the time, I checked that the used materials were safe enough. I made sure that both the building process and the ready spaces were not to cause any harm. I carefully monitored the children during the experiencing sessions, too.

The best interest of the children was always at the heart of any activity. For example, we had a discussion about whether I was interfering or not with the boy's idea and not respecting his wish when he said he wanted to have a dynamite. I had to carefully analyze the situation, including all the little signs of his body language, tone of voice and the whole context. I had to

make a decision, weighing the different aspects, and consider the better good. As a teacher I could not be a total outsider, but ought to guide and coach, so considering the child's best interest and better involvement out ruled the other option of leaving his contribution on a dynamite level. Both my intuition and professional experience suggested me, that if I have a bit different approach to him, I might be able to win him to be fully on board as well with the rest of the team and get the most out of the unique experience of building a multisensory space. I believe to be able to make professional decisions and argue them is not always easy, but surely contributes to professional growth.

The Ombudsman for Children in Finland (2014) highlights the children's rights, including their right to privacy and confidentiality. Regarding my work, it means, that nothing was mentioned without a permission and no personal information and photos of the children were revealed. The pictures taken and presented in this thesis work strictly included only their artwork and the built spaces with the unique elements.

Finally, I only used reliable sources when building up the theoretical framework of the thesis. I also reported in a reliable and precise manner the whole process of the implementation. With all these precautions I wanted to give extra value and creditability for my own work.

9 Conclusion and Discussion

Looking back to the process, to the set goals and to the wide area the project covered within the children's development, I consider it successful. I had the privilege to work with two unique methods and combining them led to a memorable experience. Both young leadership and multisensory space methods have their specific elements, which completed each other in a smooth and natural way. I could also bring something new to the kindergarten, enriching their ways of teaching, and it had a very positive echo.

The whole process happened according to the early childhood education's requirement in an ethical manner from the beginning till the end. The children had an active role when participating in the projects starting from planning. This is one of the core principles of the curriculum as well, because this way we can enhance the children's wellbeing and development. (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019.) The active participation in the team project fostered also the feeling of togetherness and belonging, as sharing both the work and excitement. According to Rätty and Wikström (2017) this shared experience of the team is more important than the created space itself.

The design of the spaces and the materials used encouraged pretend play, which fosters language development (Roskos and Christie 2011). The children were talking about the built worlds and their experiences with the teachers, their parents and each other, and also many

discussions arose from the themes. The multisensory experiences provided various learning opportunities not only knowledge-wise, but also considering the children's social skills, as the teamwork required them. In addition, the rich play environment determined by the children supported the individuals with different learning style and personality to feel safe and fulfilling their needs for different type of experience (Luojus 2011).

An interesting topic we were discussing with the teachers was about the different stereotypes existing in our ways of thinking in general. Surely, the structure of the young leadership method allows everybody to lead (boys and girls equally). But also, another lesson in breaking out from stereotypes was provided through Team 3. This very active group of three boys and two girls (one of them is always with the boys) surprised us the most in the sense of choosing the topic ("Wonderland - for fairies") and carrying it out. They naturally prefer playing with Legos, Bionicle, cars or playing football and this kind of Fairyland seemed far from their interest, still they decided on the topic and had full engagement and satisfaction. It is very important to allow the children to have a wide range of different experiences, to help and encourage them in learning about the world from many different aspects. It is enriching and widening their perspectives to become more understanding and competent as adults as well.

The projects and the process behind them provided great learning experience for me too, both personally and professionally. The challenges helped me evaluate my role as a teacher. Stepping back and making space for uncommon solutions helped in bringing forth creativity in the children, so when an unexpected idea arose, then I was allowing myself and the children to go with the flow. Another lesson was connected to this, like putting my own preferences secondary when it comes to how to build and use the multisensory spaces. I respected the children's wish and interest, and also their ways of playing in the areas. These worlds were built to be used and not to serve as an exhibition, despite of the many visual stimuli. I was very pleased with the outcome, even with the small 'imperfections', because they showed that the children's voices were heard and listened to along the whole process. I enjoyed being excited myself and realized how beneficiary it was to do the project with four different teams, even though this meant four times the job as well.

Both parents and the teachers were very impressed. Considering the future perspective, the teachers already asked permission to use my thesis and the created leaflet to advertise both of the methods and spread the idea of the multisensory space as a wonderful and developmental addition to the young leadership method or any pedagogical activity. It also generated discussion of other possible use of the multisensory spaces. The different purposes could be for example, when introducing a new topic, the space can deepen the knowledge and understanding, or it can serve as a more targeted support for children with special needs. Fostering the multiple use of the space depends only on the teachers' sensitivity and creativity. The attached leaflet (see Appendix 2) provides description of the multisensory space method in a

simple and understandable way with the purpose to help teachers to conduct similar projects on their own. The easy to use guide aims to lower the threshold and to support the teachers when considering future perspective of the method.

It is also important to mention, that in case of space constraint in a daycare, an alternative option would be to use only one corner of the room for these purposes. If that is not possible either, then also a display wall with a little table in front of it would be an inspiring starting point for further sensory explorations.

As a final conclusion, I can only point out the great value of this shared experience summarized by one teacher as: “This was a very memorable time for the children, I believe, and for the teachers definitely!” To connect to each other, to become part of each other’s lives (even for a short while) and to influence each other in a positive way are unique experiences. Enriching other people’s lives around us, indifferent of our jobs and means, will always be our call, to help them grow and reach their potentials. With this work I was honored and privileged to be in that role for many children and adults around me.

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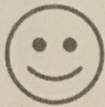
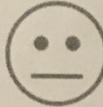
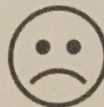
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Appendix 1: Feedback Form for the Children and the Teachers

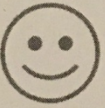
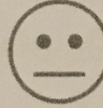
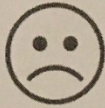
Feedback Form

1. Miltä tuntui rakentaa oma maailma?
How did you feel about building your own world?

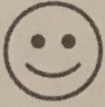
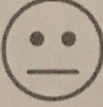
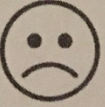
Oli kiva En tiedä En pitänyt

2. Piditkö erilaisista aistikokemuksista? (näkö-, maku-, tunto-, kuulo- ja hajuaisti)
Did you like the different sensory experience? (something to see, taste, touch, hear, smell)

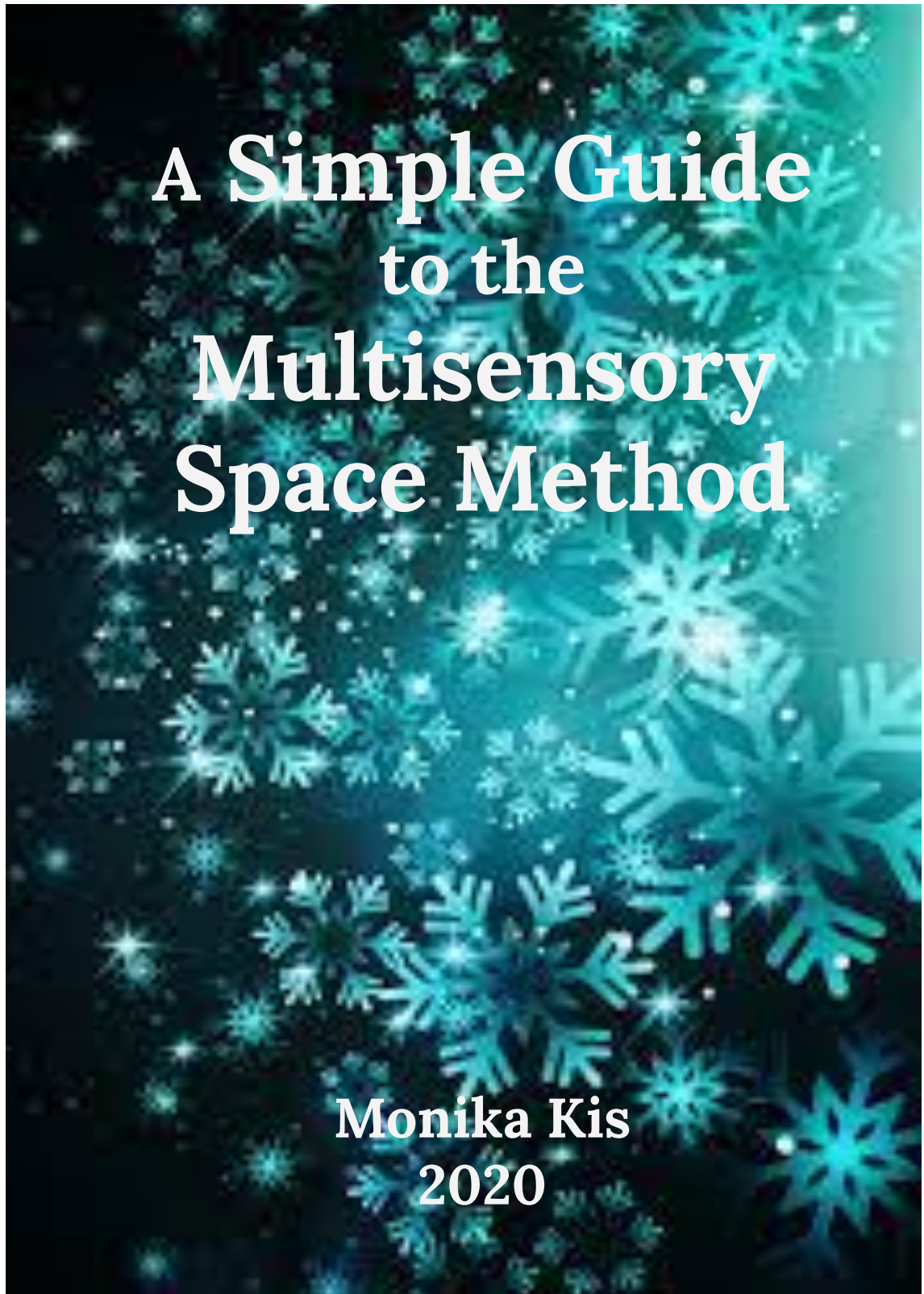
Oli kiva En tiedä En pitänyt

3. Haluaisitko tehdä tämän uudestaan
Would you like to do it again?

Kyllä En tiedä En

Appendix 2: The Leaflet



**A Simple Guide
to the
Multisensory
Space Method**

**Monika Kis
2020**

The multisensory approach

There are different and various ways for experiencing and drawing information about the world around us. The most powerful, vivid and complete way is through our senses. This global experience according to Robinson (2011,25) is like a “wonderful kaleidoscope where all the parts continually shift into ever changing but exquisitely combined patterns of experience”. By including different sensory stimuli into the learning environment, teachers are supporting the holistic development of the children.

The multisensory space

The multisensory space is an easily modified space where the various sensory stimulations are included. All these elements create a diverse learning environment. It can be easily accommodated to different purposes, themes and topics, and also customized according to the target group. The space can both enhance learning and serve as a meeting point for sharing. The multisensory space is at the core of the method.

Facts about the method

Background

- 2007-2008: The method began as part of a student project called “Welcome to South Africa” in Laurea University of Applied Sciences to raise multicultural awareness
- 2009-2010: Continued in a different project called “Encounters in Multisensory Space”
- 2011-2015: Further developed in a project called “With all Senses-Developing Open Learning Environment” in cooperation with six national Partners
- 2017-2019: Lately, the main project is “Building Skills and Communities Together” To promote integration (Räty and Wikström 2017)

As a method

The multisensory space method offers a platform for deep realizations and experiences. It triggers various emotions, thoughts and memories, which call for a safe place. Both the process and the outcome is important. The process holds a strong team building aspect, fosters communication and a shared identity. The shared experience of creating together is highly empowering and enhances wellbeing (Räty and Wikström 2017)

Significant impact

- Sensory elements serve the purpose of multidisciplinary and holistic education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2019)
- Young children learn the best if more senses are involved. According to Luoju (2011), if you only hear an information, you can recall 20%, if you see, then 30%, if both heard and seen, then 50%, if you explain and tell about it, then 70%, and if kinesthetic sensation is included as well, then memory reaches 90%.
- All types of learners benefit from the method

Building a Multisensory Space

It is possible to build a permanent or a temporary, so-called mobile space, depending on the condition and purpose. Safety must be considered all the time. The stages of building a multisensory space are: planning, preparing, building and experiencing. When building a space, certain sensory stimulating elements should be included:

- something to see and touch (pictures, different objects, colorful fabrics)
- something to hear (different sounds from nature or everyday life instruments or music to listen to)
- something to smell (different fragrant, spices or food to smell)
- something to taste (little snack and drink)

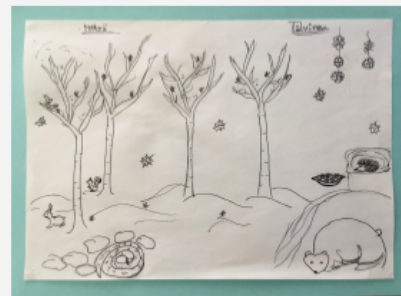
The whole place should be harmonious, relaxing and comfortable.

Sample Activity

based on: **The merge of Young Leadership and Multisensory Space Methods Project “WINTER FOREST”**

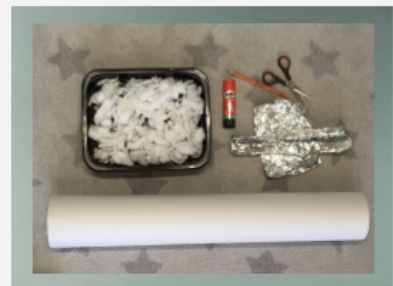
Planning

The children were actively involved in the planning stage, in accordance with the Early Childhood Education Curriculum (2019). This helped to keep up their motivation for a longer time and they could own the project. The active involvement also offered a more profound experience. The children decided to build a “Winter forest” with animals and a bear cave. I made a sketch based on their ideas.



Preparing

The team wanted to make big wintery trees and snowflakes for their “Winter forest”. We used both the floor and the tables, as we needed a big space for each individual work. I offered them different kind of materials and encouraged the children to use their imagination. All artworks were unique and beautiful. The process was messy, but fun.



Building the Space

The building was an exciting process. First, the children put their big trees and snowflakes on the wall with blue tack, while I attached the laminated snowflakes to the ceiling. Then we arranged the little objects for the touching table, and finally they built the big bear cave from mattresses. The building process also offered opportunities for interesting discussions and joyful playtime.



Conclusion

- The Multisensory Space Method stands both as a unique method by its own or as an enrichment to any pedagogical activities.
- The shared experience of building the space deepens the feeling of belonging and togetherness.
- The space encourages pretend play, which fosters language development.
- Teamwork enhances social skills throughout the process.

For more information visit:

<https://aistienmenetelma.net/en/>

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**Thank you EKK
Preschoolers and Teachers**