Supporting self-expression of six-year-olds through story reading in Stepping Stones day-care

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The implementation of this functional thesis was done at the Stepping Stones daycare in Es-poo, Finland, and it was a part of VKK–Metro unit in Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The thesis examines the role of story reading and self-expression among six-year-olds. The objective of the thesis was to examine what kind of role reading stories and functional meth-ods have with the children of this age group. The purpose of the thesis was to stimulate and build courage to self-expression through story reading and art. The theoretical framework consisted of the development of six-year-olds, language and literacy in early years, social learning, story reading, self-expression as well as art and drawing.

The implementation of the thesis consisted of four functional workshops, all of which were implemented during a time period of two weeks in spring 2016 in the Stepping Stones day-care. The group consisted of 13 six-year-old children, all of whom were preschoolers. The workshops were all recorded on video and tape to support the observation. The recorded ma-terials will be deleted after the publication of the thesis. The workshops were also supervised by the teachers of the daycare. All information concerning the identities of the children that participated in the workshops will remain confidential. The permission to work with the chil-dren was given by the parents, the daycare management and the participants themselves.

The implementation was inspired by the use of art and drawing with materials that were al-ready familiar to the children. Each story included a certain theme and emotion that was then discussed and navigated to the art session. The workshops were conducted in a safe and familiar environment to the children. Through the workshops all the participants were able to have their opinions and thoughts heard.

Narrative (thematic) analysis was used to understand and present observations in order to provide the project evaluation. Feedback from teachers and children were also used to sup-port the evaluation. The observations revealed that in order to foster and utilize this tech-nique effectively the support agent has to be more knowledgeable regarding children's pref-erences and the whole group's dynamics. In addition to that timing, working in smaller groups and repetition are necessary and should be based on meeting the needs of the involved indi-viduals.

Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu   **Tiivistelmä**
Sosiaalityön koulutusohjelma
Sosionomi

Kibet Naomi
Uutaniemi Hanna-Riikka

Kuusivuotiaiden lasten itseilmaisun tukeminen satujen lukemisen avulla Stepping Stones-päiväkodissa

Vuosi	2016	Sivumäärä	51

Tämä opinnäytetyö toteutettiin Espoon Stepping Stones-päiväkodissa osana VKK – Metro-yksikköä Laurea- ammattikorkeakoulussa.
Opinnäytetyö tarkastelee satujen lukemisen ja itseilmaisun roolia kuusivuotiaiden kohdalla. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli tutkia satujen ja toiminnallisten metodien merkitystä kyseisessä ikäryhmässä. Opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli rohkaista lasten itseilmaisua satujen ja niihin liittyvän taiteen kautta. Opinnäytetyön teoreettiseen taustatukimukseen kuului kuusivuotiaiden yleisen, sosiaalisen ja kielen kehityksen selvittäminen. Näiden lisäksi selvitettiin lasten lukutaitoa, satujen roolia, itseilmaisua sekä piirtämistä ja kiinnostusta taiteeseen.

Opinnäytetyön toiminnallisen osion toteutus koostui neljästä työpajasta, jotka toteutettiin Stepping Stones-päiväkodissa kahden viikon aikavälillä keväällä 2016. Ryhmä koostui noin kolmestatoista esikouluikäisestä lapsesta. Satujen lukemishetket sekä taideosiot äänitettiin videolle sekä nauhurilla tukemaan observointia ja tiedonkeruuta. Äänitetty ja kuvattu materiaali säilytetään opinnäytetyön julkaisuun asti. Päiväkodin opettajat olivat työpajoissa läsnä valvomassa prosessia. Työpajoihin osallistuneiden lasten ja opettajien henkilöllisyys pysyy luottamuksellisena tietona eikä niitä luovuteta eteenpäin. Suostumus lasten kanssa työskentelyyn pyydettiin lasten vanhemmilta, päiväkodin johdolta sekä osallistujilta itseltään.

Taide ja piirtäminen on osa lasten jokapäiväistä elämää. Tämä inspiroi toteuttamaan työpajan jo heille tutuilla ja olemassaolevilla materiaaleilla. Jokaisella luetulla tarinalla oli oma teema ja tunnetila, josta käytiin keskustelu lasten kanssa jälkikäteen ja yhdistettiin myöhemmin pajan taideosioon. Työpajat toteutettiin lapsille tutussa ja turvallisessa ympäristössä. Pajojen kautta lapsilla oli mahdollisuus ilmaista itseään ja ajatuksiaan.

Käytimme opinnäytetyön analyysiin narratiivista (temaattista) analyysiä, joka toteutettiin havaintoihin sekä lasten ja opettajien antamiin palautteisiin pohjautuen. Analyysi tehtiin tukemaan projektin toteutuksen arviointia. Analyysin tuloksista kävi ilmi että kaikkien osapuolten tulisi tuntea lasten mieltymykset ja ryhmän dynamiikka mahdollisimman suuren hyödyn saamiseksi käytetyillä tekniikoilla. Tämän lisäksi ajoituksella, pienemmällä ryhmäkoolla sekä toistolla on suuri merkitys työpajojen onnistumiselle. Tällöin tulisi ottaa huomioon myös lasten yksilölliset tarpeet.

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1   Introduction

Story narration has been the source of information, entertainment and social interaction for centuries. The role and the significance of storytelling in a child's world are immense. For the past 100 years, thousands of story books have been established. Households and child care centers are filled with varieties of story books. The importance of story reading as well as the social interaction experienced through this, makes the activity lucrative to both the reader and the listener.

The Finnish early childhood education and care (ECEC) is known for its EduCare system in which care, education and instructions are formed so as to approach each child holistically. Though play is the centre of the children's pedagogical activities in the day centre, there are several structures that prepare children for the educative years to come. Part of these is the early morning group story reading and among other story reading opportunities throughout the day. The children are not only introduced to the love of print, but the language used and vocabulary is developed while social interaction rules are practiced.

Private daycare centers are the backbone of ECEC in Finland. What started as non-governmental and community day centers decades ago, has evolved into a national phenomena. Now the legislation requires every municipality to provide each child with EduCare from the end of maternity and paternity leave until the end of age of seven. The private daycares are rather similar to public daycares with only small specifications. The will and need for Finnish children to learn foreign languages increases as the world is becoming more of a global village. Thus English daycares are in the rise for this reason as well as to provide EduCare for children from international families. Language immersion approach to learning language came to Vaasa, Finland in 1970's and has spread across the country since then. Usually initiated by parents, the aim is for the majority to learn the language of the minority.

For the children to comprehend the value of reading and the role it plays in their development they must have first hand experiences with it. More importantly, through effective introduction story reading can allow children to love reading time as well as emotional closeness that is created during this activity. Burns & Alberts purports that "Knowledge about and love for literacy can develop only through experience. Children should own books, should have access to books in their preschool and primary classrooms, should be read to often, and should see others reading and writing." (1999) Reading to children at an early age gives them the opportunity master the language, enhance communication skills, expound logical thinking as well as develop their concentration and discipline.

When attempting to design our thesis topic, some of the questions that filled our discussion were; what is the purpose of story reading? Can reading develop children's language skills and thus self- expression? Eventually, what method can help children express their self, thoughts, imaginations, ideas, wishes etc. Therefore, the purpose of the study is supporting self-expression of six-year-olds through story reading in Stepping Stones daycare.

1.1 Purpose of the thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to support self-expression of six-year-olds through story reading and engaging in creative activities. In other words, stimulating self-expression through reading stories and drawing as well as expressing one's thoughts on the story we have read. It is said that during this developmental stage, children continue to build their confidence, self-esteem and vocabulary and use of language. The methods chosen e.g. reading and drawing are already familiar to the children. This way we can focus more on supporting the self-expression rather than introducing new unfamiliar methods.

This thesis examines the role of story reading and self-expression in an English speaking daycare with 6-year-olds. We chose this topic for the thesis based on our own interests and specializations in our studies. The topic itself is an area in which we couldn't find so many researches done about here in Finland and therefore found it even more fascinating and rewarding to dive into. The thesis includes a project in which we will implement at the daycare centre.

1.2 Target group

Our working life partner for the thesis was Stepping Stones which is an English speaking daycare located in Espoo, Finland. Stepping Stones started as a private Finnish day care called Onnentupa which was established in 1993. The day care later added English groups called Stepping Stones to its business portfolio. The learning and education in Stepping Stones is executed completely in English language and its daily program includes arts and crafts, storytelling, music, drama and gym sessions.

The group we worked with in our thesis consisted of 13 children, all of whom are preschoolers and the age of six. We chose this age group because the language development at this age is already more developed than that of younger age. Thus will make it more relevant to observe as these children have already been learning English language longer in the day care and the children are able to more eloquently; explain their situations, experiences and requests. Therefore they were the ideal age group within early childhood education to work with. Finally, if not all, most of our target group members were bilingual speakers who mostly used

Finnish or another mother tongue at home and were mainly exposed to English language in the daycare center. We aimed for an average of ten children to participate in the workshops

We chose this daycare because one of us had previously done her placement there and thus knew the place. This made contacting the place easier. We first contacted the daycare's manager and presented our ideas to them, after which we had a meeting with one of the head teachers. Their reception was very positive and they were willing to work with us.

2   Theoretical framework

2.1   Six-year-old's development

Six years old is an interesting age as it is the approximate time of life in which many children around the globe start their education. In Finland, the children may not have joined school yet, but their kindergarten curriculum is already well structured and designed to develop a concrete basis for learning in the following years. At this stage the children have learned enough about themselves and are more than earlier on equipped to explore the world around them and even more exploring what they are capable of as their physical, cognitive, emotional aspects continue to develop. Therefore our approaches should be balance in that the children are able to utilize the methods and understand the instructions that are given to them. Challenges should however also be present in order to make learning possible and interesting. "Six or seven-year-olds can be persistent questioners, sensing if they have only been given half an answer. They are able to reason logically with the support of language - both speaking out loud and thinking ideas out in their head with internal speech. They can plan, speculate and think ahead within the limits set by what they already know and have experienced" (Lindon 43, 2012) within this speculation, our tasks and approaches were as appropriate as it allowed critical thinking and exploration.

During the introduction and follow up sessions our key aim was to get acquainted with the group as well as for them get familiarized with us. During the first visit our aim was to create a comfortable space between us and the children. This way they would feel that they could ask us anything and or express their thoughts and feelings freely. "Children of five and six years can hold a long conversation with another child or an adult with whom they feel comfortable. The key point about conversation is that it involves turn taking, listening to another person and saying something yourself that links in with the general topic." (Lindon 43) During workshops as the children conversed about their thoughts and comment on each other's self expression our role was to smoothly guide the discussion, to make connection between points and make sure that each child was heard.

The purpose was to foster the importance of everyone's thoughts and that if presented in a proper manner, others could have also learned to give constructive feedback. "Five or six-year-olds may have enough experience to understand now that not all people share their opinions or that families differ in lifestyle or the family members who live in the same home."(Lindon 53) The possibility of having different art and interpretation is possible and with the platform we had created, children would learn that being different can actually be a positive thing, and that as long as we respect one another's thoughts and ideas, we too can be different.

2.2 Language and literacy in early years

Language is learned and it is also something that affects every part of our lives and learning. "Language is the primary medium through which teachers and children work." (Lee, D & Rubin, J. 1979). It has an impact on so many areas from communication to learning and that is what makes it so important. Almost every child is born with the ability to develop and learn language as the process of language acquisition already starts in the very early years, beginning with spoken language and continuing to develop throughout life.

According to the research of Hart and Risley, early language experiences have a great impact on our language acquisition and development. They estimated that children whose families talked more at home were able to acquire around 32 million more words during their first three years of life. Based on a research by The National Literacy Trust's Face to Face project: "talkative parents have talkative children." That being said, if the language was used at home the child would be able to develop their language skills in significantly richer environment.

Children who speak more than one language are bilingual or multilingual if they speak more than two languages. These days there are more and more children who grow up in families where there are more than one spoken languages. They will therefore develop the languages they hear at home and use the languages in different areas of life, for example at school or home. They do need to establish which language to use and where but once this is done they will efficiently switch between languages with no issues. It is however, important to support all languages that the child uses.

It can be wise to only speak the school language at school to the children. If at home the parents speak different languages it is also beneficial to only stick to one language when speaking to the child.

Elaborate talk is often most beneficial to children and they learn more from it. Children need language at its fullest potential and therefore need as many words as possible to describe things. Children also needto be listened to and to be heard. Opportunities to engage them in

conversation are valuable. Playfulness is something that can be beneficial when talking with children.

Language is an essential component in our functional project, although during this process children can practice and learn more about language, the ability to understand the text being read and to be able to share one's thoughts is crucial. Being able to interact in an environment outside home is important as well, and since these children have been in the day care some of these skills has been utilized.The challenge here perhaps is that the children will get invested in one text, and perhaps commit longer than the usual reading and feedback sessions. "Another component of literacy acquisition for preschoolers is the authentic drawings they do concerning the story being discussed in their small groups. Watch the children; learn to be an observer as well as a teacher. Youngsters become quite absorbed in the process of illustration." (Wilburn 78). This is rather crucial in this process, as they get to teach and or share to others about their ideas, if successful, this tool is empowering as well as the child can be imprinted with the knowledge being shared longer than if they had only listened to the same idea.

2.3   Theory of social learning

Language is an integral aspect of child's development and thus it goes without saying that language plays a major role in self-expression. The choice and use of words, tone, structure and grammar all impact the outcome of the message communicated.
Children are born into a social world and it is language that introduces them to how the world works and their role in it. Cognitive development and social environment is responsible for the child's language development. The most interesting part to us while working with the thesis is the social environment and the use of language, as there is more that can be influenced compared to cognitive development. Of course this is not to undermine its importance. Bandura elaborates that: "If children had no opportunity to hear the utterance of models, it could be virtually impossible to teach them the linguistic skills that constitute a language."(1977, 12).

Furthermore Bandura discusses that "In the earliest years of development, children's modelling is largely confined to instantaneous imitation. As children develop skill in symbolizing experiences and translating it to modalities, their capacity for delayed modelling of intricate patterns of behaviour increases." (1977, 30).
Thus the instantaneous imitation in the earlier years is necessary in internalizing some language rules, however as the children develop they should be able to extract the recorded rules in order to use them in their changing situations. Children can through imitation experi-

ence the use of language regarding an event that is occurring in front of them, and thus developing what the child knew prior on translating events into words. The child's creative ability improves while limiting the imitative nature in the future.

In observational learning Bandura exclaims that: "Information about new responses can be extracted from modelled examples as well as from the consequences of one's own behavior. If sensory and motor systems are sufficiently developed, and the component skills exist, there is no reason why children cannot learn novel responses by watching others, though obviously the moderately familiar would be easier to learn than the markedly different" (1977 32). However it should be noted that the children's imitations of what they hear or see is partially influenced by the model's reactions toward the children. In addition the incentives play a major role. In conclusion, children's level of sensory and motor plays a role on the efficiency of their imitated event, however, the reactions of the models in question is highly significant.

As children grow and other areas of developments advance their communication techniques expand as well. In the early years children receive information mainly through verbal instructions or behavior traits exuded by those within their environment. However, as they grow print is introduced as their source of info. While an infant might have been read stories long ago, as they develop and conceptualize more complex scenarios they are more and more able to take instruction from all sorts of print. "As linguistic skills are developed, verbal modelling is gradually substituted for behavior modelling as preferred mode of responses guidance. People are aided in acquiring social, vocational, and recreational skills by following written descriptions of how to behave." (Bandura, 39).

In an experiment where children were exposed to passive narrative the results where least surprising. Part of the group were shown pictures or enactment alongside the narrative and another group only heard the narrative. It was then recorded that "linguistic modelling without referential correlates improved comprehension in children who already had partial understanding of passive constructions, whereas modelling with enacted referents facilitated learning of the grammatical form even in children who did not previously know it." (Bandura, 177). Thus children can relate to the story when they are read alongside pictures or accompanied by an enactment. "Through observation of referential modelling, children can gain understanding of grammatical relations which aids in later imitative reconstruction" (Bandura, 179). Though this aspect is important in production of speech, language proficiency is well achieve with combination of modelling as well as corrective feedback.

2.4   Story reading

Story reading has been one of the key areas in which adults interact with children, as long as one can remember both at home environment and care centres, children have always been eager at the proposal of reading a story to them. Though, not much thought goes into reason behind story reading to children, there are certainly various advantages of reading to children. Through reading children can acquire several tools that are essential to language development "Given the opportunity, young children develop vocabulary, other language skills, and basic knowledge about the world around them." (Burns & Alberts, 8)

Furthermore "Through exposure to a wide array of books, children learn that print can entertain us, amuse us, and even comfort us." (Burns & Alberts, 32). Hence reading techniques, variety of books and environment should lead to children's understand that books are essential to their everyday experiences and has several different functions. For instance, through books we can attain pool of information including directions to the nearby library, how to cook a certain favorite meal. In addition books can help us in finding solutions as well as instruction on how to make just about anything.

In many situations, adults take for granted what they know about reading. Some simple aspect of reading such as reading from left to right and from top down in an English book format is information to children. In other languages sentences are read from right to left. Children need to be explained the role of spaces between words, comma etc. Simple explanations such as "sentence starts at the upper left of a page and continues from left to right. At the end of the line, the sentence continues until the punctuation indicates the end of one sentence and the beginning of the next." (Burns & Alberts, 33) have to be illustrated. Instructors or adults have a great role in imparting the ways and importance of reading. "Kindergarten instruction should be designed to stimulate verbal interaction, to instruct vocabulary, and to encourage talk about books." (Burns & Alberts, 10)

These aspects of reading can be built into everyday reading sessions. The reader takes time to look at the cover page, looking at the title and the writer's name as well as illustrator. More so, the reader can point the words or sentences as they read.

One can take breaks for questions and can use this opportunity to show that there are ending to each sentence, paragraph or chapter "When you need to take a break from reading, for example to answer a question, use the opportunity to point out something that experienced readers take for granted— that there are stops built into text. Say to the child, "Let me finish this sentence before I answer that question." Then point to the period when you get there. "There— that's the end of the sentence. Okay, now let's see if we can figure out your question." (Burns & Alberts, 33)

Eventually, as children grow and experience more reading, their input and curiosity develops as well. Their spoken language is developing as well as hearing, and thus during reading session the adult will notice that children are asking more or maybe complex questions. "They show this understanding through their questions and comments. When reading a story, they should freely relate information and events in the book to real-life experiences. As they get older, they should become comfortable with following who said or did what in a story." (Burns & Alberts, 35)

Play is work for children, children learn through play; this is true for reading as well. Children need to look forward to reading time. This can be done through your enthusiasm, attitude and tone towards reading. Children can be given the chance to choose book, visit the nearby library for more hands on experience as well as variety. Here too the children should be allowed to choose the books they like, within reason however. Given the age group, some younger children may enjoy more familiar read, while older ones may grave new books and adventure. "Create a warm atmosphere around story time, reading, and pretend play activities. Once in awhile, invite other favorite people to join in during reading time. Respond to children's remarks and observations about books, and take time to answer their questions while reading. Make literacy activities fun and a part of play" (Burns & Alberts, 37).

Choosing the story to read is another aspect that needs thorough analysis, the theme, characters, storyline should resonate with the children's age and life happenings. This way the responses and immersion into the activities can occur. Wilburn emphasizes that "as long as the ideas in the story have some relevancy in the child's mind that he/she can make a connection to in his/her life's experience, the child can begin to comprehend the story." (Wilburn 80) When the story resonates with the child's emotions and thoughts, the child is able to digest and express their raw experience.
 Therefore, reading the same story during the sessions will help the child to identify and become familiar with the happenings in the second and following session if they had struggled with it the first time.

2.5   Self-expression

Self-expression at its best is the ability of an individual to critically think and act. Others describe this phenomenon, as one's ability to express themselves in a creative way.
This may include art, activity etc. In her book Surina notes that: "Self-expression, on the other hand, is a process in which a human is able to see his or her own voice, *becomes a casual agent*, who does not fit the pattern imposed by the leading culture" (189, 2014) Self-expression is important in the sense that one is able to portray own feelings and thoughts. More

often than not, it is important that others are able to understand the expressed message. This way, individuals should respect individual characteristics to allow better co-existence in any setting.

Despite the many ways in which self-expression can be explored, we have chosen story reading , art and sharing as a method of fostering and stimulating these phenomena. Through this children acquire much more than we can measure. "Storytelling creates a safe environment for positive self-expression and interaction. In addition, telling stories immerses children in the sounds and patterns of the language needed for writing. Storytelling encourages social communication with meaningful tasks that stimulate language learning and cultures of others."(Stanley &Dillingham 8, 2009)

Reading and sharing about stories can be done just about anywhere at home, school or a bus. This is a method that is familiar to 6-year-old kindergarteners; therefore the transition into learning to reflect and share will occur much smoothly. "For most children story telling is familiar and is the starting point for literacy growth. Storytelling can also strengthen the home and school connection as an active social experience that is shared among family. It creates a community in which children learn about and from one another. Storytelling communicates sophisticated content effectively and aids in the development of cognitive growth across the content areas." (Stanley & Dillingham 5). Self-expression needs not to occur only at school, but in all other environments that children are involved in.

Moreover, Stanley and Dillingham emphasize that "Storytelling stimulates the imagination. It develops and enhances student's response to literature, including his awareness of story structure and sequence. It also improves concentration and memory, encourages critical-thinking skills and teacher about other cultures and other times." (8, 2009) These are all the areas that are significant in self-expression. Through the project, the children can practice these areas, thus affirming their ability to observe and reflect issue on a critical manner.

At its core self expression can be seen as ability to value what is inside and within an individual. As a result of this self reflection can occur, confidence as well as getting to know oneself better, in other words "Self expression is a method by which we take what is inside our collection of thoughts and feelings- and turn it into something tangible so that it can be viewed by ourselves and others. At its most basic definition, self expression is about someone presenting his or her own individual personality" (Ramsey and sweet 28, 2008). Therefore due to its sensitive nature, self expression should occur in an accepting, trustworthy and value for difference. Furthermore, children and adults as well may have a tendency of fitting in or copying others in order not to stand out. Ramsey and Sweet are in agreement with this as they point out that "As such, it is important not to judge our own realizations of self-expression

against the work of others. Out of the desire to excel or to just appear competent, we can get caught up worrying about not being as good at "making at" as other" (28)

As it develops, and perhaps becomes a more natural or at times conscious choice, self-expression is not only about expressing our feelings but also sharing important facts, perceptions, or ideas to further improve current status quo of any given situation. "Self-expression also provides a bridge for others to understand more about us, what we feel, and what we think. In this sense, self-expression can be a teaching tool, a way of educating others about our point of view." (Ramsey and sweet 36). In sequence, when self expression is utilized within the right boundaries, it can serve as an empowerment tool. There is nothing more empowering, than being able to present the real individual to the society at large and be accepted in that manner. It can be said that it is the ultimate quest for each human being, to be known for who they really are and be accepted " Being seen for who we really are can be a profoundly positive experience, keeping us connected with those around us. We all delight in knowing that we have successfully put our ideas across to someone else" (Ramsey and sweet 37)

The greatest artist of all time, are those whom have been able to produce a piece of art that is truly from within their souls and feelings. The greater ones are those who have even managed to transform us into experiencing something during the encounters with these arts. Ramsey and Sweet corresponds to this in that "Beyond the quest for self-knowledge, self expression provides us with a creative outlet. We can experience great pleasure and satisfactions in knowing that we have taken something from inside of ourselves (an idea, a feeling, a point of view) and found a concrete way to impress it on others" (37). Many other great products, services and experiences that are available to us today, are the results of those individuals who dared to go beyond the norm and push their ideas, feelings into form and perhaps share or present them to others in a manner that you could be understood.

2.6   Art and drawing

Reading stories to children allows them to develop and expand their language capability and express a vast range of emotions in an authentic way. There are several creative ways for children to engage with stories. These ways include: drawing, creating narratives in a play such as role-plays, small-world plays and outdoor plays, assessing through media or music.

The arts bring children closer together and it also attracts children to collaborate and discuss together. According to Elliot W. Einsler: "The arts help children learn to say what cannot be said. When children are invited to disclose what a work of art helps them feel, they must reach into their poetic capacities to find the words that will do the job." and "The arts teach

children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer." (2002).

Art promotes children's social, cognitive and emotional development. It allows children to become more sensitive to the environment around them as well as to engage their self-expression. It also allows children to develop their independence and grow their sense of accomplishment.Art and drawing can be used in many different situations from normal daily activities to teaching something more concrete. It is a method through which children can express their innermost feelings and thoughts, but it also gives the children the freedom to use their imagination freely. Art in itself is a very important tool of self-expression. It is something that suits everyone, but it is especially effective when used with young children. Art enables children to make their feelings visible and concrete and also helps teachers to communicate better with children and to understand them.

Art like many forms of self-expression and talents can be nurtured and developed. Encouragement and support can go a long way in developing any kind of skill or venturing into life experiences that may be challenging. Striker reminds that: "A child who is exposed early to positive creative art activities, and who is allowed to develop freely and naturally (with adults offering encouragement instead of directions), will take writing very early when the time comes and will continue using art as a means of self-expression." (5, 2001)
It is seen in the way that children draw, how conscious they are about the surrounding world as well as how they see themselves and their development. Therefore children's drawings should not be evaluated as a measure of talent because a child will first and foremost draw according to their innermost development process. During the first ten years of their lives children do not draw to please anyone but themselves.

During the art session children were given the opportunity to explore freely and encouraged to draw and color as their thoughts and feelings guide them. In addition, the feedback sessions were guided as well so the children could give positive encouraging comments to their fellow mates. We hoped that this would show the children that it is important to share your feeling and thoughts in a creative and positive approach. In fraction one's creative ideas can be presented as raw art, however, feedback to others should be constructive just as they wish to receive it. No one was forced to draw what they didn't want, but we rather wanted to see what they were willing to draw and what activated their interest the most. How they visualized the story we read to them and what they referred to the most.

We used art and drawing as a creative method in our thesis to communicate better with the children and to be able to observe what kind of emotions and thoughts they put into their art work.

3   Conducting the study

3.1   Objectives

In order to meet our purpose of stimulating self-expression through story-reading, there were three objectives we aimed to achieve.

Initially, we wanted to create a natural environment in which children could interact with each other and the teachers. This was done through the physical setup of the classroom, our mood and motivation and most importantly, setting and abiding by some interaction rules. The rooms were always comfortable and had enough space for the activities. The adults listened, acknowledged, interacted and motivated the children during the workshops as well as guided or helped children to communicate and respond to one another respectfully.

Secondly, we aimed to create an environment in which children could be imaginative and creative during the workshops. Therefore we aimed to set up the working spaces according to the activity as much as our resources allowed us. This mostly concerned the drawing tables and sufficient materials. We set out to make sure that each child was given enough physical, emotional space from other children to be able to create their own authentic work.

Finally, throughout the entire workshops we wanted to help the children experience meaningful moments together. To achieve this we encouraged the pre-schoolers to be supportive of one another, especially when someone was sharing their thoughts on the story we had read with the help of their drawing. For our last session we wanted to focus on teamwork and fun and especially highlight experiencing meaningful moments together. In the workshop we asked the children to form two groups and draw or color together on a big poster. They then later presented their parts to us or shared something they wanted about it.

3.2   Spiral model

The spiral model was used to evaluate and to present our project in perspective. The analysis was done before the implementation to help examine and assess risk factors. This model was effective to our project as it allowed earlier realization of risks and therefore risk management plan was established.

Planning phase

As a result of the thesis project we aimed to accomplish three main objectives: Initially, we aimed to create a natural environment in which children could interact with each other and

the teachers. secondly, we wanted to create an environment in which children could be imaginative and creative during the workshops. Finally, through the entire workshops we wanted to help children experience meaningful moments individually and together as a group. In addition to this, self-expression is a possibility that comes from within each individual. Therefore during the sessions we wanted to support the children in this endeavor. In other words we wanted the workshops to work as an encouragement and not as something that would feel manipulative. This is a line that can be easily crossed especially if some children are shy or their expressive nature is out of the norm.

Our goal was that the sessions would run smoothly and that we would be able to avoid as many distractions as possible. The introduction session was important in that we needed to aim to build trust, mutual understanding of the project as well as clear out any obstacles that might affect the session and the end results. The children ought to be given possibility to ask us questions and get to know us as well.

All the materials were checked in advance, including the music and camera operation. The questionnaires and discussion questions were to be used when needed. We hoped that about 70% (9 children) of the children would be present for our project to be effective. Lesser number of children would have been acceptable but we thought that too many of them would result in infectiveness as the sessions might last longer or and time for each child might be reduced.

Risk analysis phase

We evaluated the possible risks we might run into during our thesis process. One of the unpreventable misfortunes of the project thesis would have been that one of us is unavailable for the sessions, due to unavoidable circumstances. Obviously, if this had occurred the project would have been aborted until both parties had been able to be present. We also calculated that if the number of the children in the group is too low or too high the project might be affected in certain ways. This meant for example that smaller group could have resulted in lesser group interactions and more feedback from different individuals. However if the group were too big the time allocated to each child and adult per child ratio would have been reduced.

Another risk of the project thesis is that despite preparing for the sessions, things will most likely not go entirely according to plan. It will be up to us to keep going on despite these possible changes and to adjust to the given situation. In terms of collecting data, losing the digital data, can affect our project entirely, irrespective of the fact that notes will be taken. Since one person is responsible for gathering info on several individuals at once, many aspects

will go unnoticed. Also written forms can be lost as well as the children may not be open to sharing their feelings and thoughts as we expect, this too can be the case of the teachers.

Thesis objectives are very important yet occasionally missed. Our first objective was creating a physical environment which was practical and easy to achieve. This meant that our moods, attitude and responses should be encouraging, open-minded as well as empowering. These aspects can be written off if one focuses too much on the story, children's distractions or other practical matters. Our second objective was to create an environment in which children could be creative and imaginative. This can be missed if the narrator does not manage to fully immerse the children in the story and guide them into relating the story into their own situations. We also wanted to create meaningful moments, meaning that the children would enjoy the process as an individual as well as a group. We hoped for the children to realize that they are capable of something entirely new.

Implementation phase

Parents were asked for permission and informed of the specific days the project took place in order to limit the possibilities of absences. This way they could also inform us if their child would not be present. The data collected during the workshops were saved after each session to avoid data loss. During the sessions both of us aimed to be aware of our attitudes and mood, in order to create the best possible environment for the children. We aimed to utilize affirmative and encouraging comments

Evaluation phase.

The feedback was given by the children in form of verbal discussion. The teachers filled a questionnaire and were interviewed. We also evaluated the workshops personally after the each session as well as at end of the whole process as a whole with the help of a prior designed questionnaire and spontaneous responses

3.3 Implementation of the workshops

3.3.1 Implementing the project plan

Goals: To create a natural environment in which children can interact with each other and the teachers, secondly to create an environment in which children can be imaginative and creative during the workshops. Thirdly, children to experience meaningful moments through interaction with one another

We read altogether three stories during our workshops. Before reading the chosen books we had analyzed and evaluated the vocabulary content, theme, and storyline of each of them. The objective was then to read the stories with the children and after that the children could participate in the art sessions.

The creative activities were executed with the use of art. After finishing the activities we sat down together with the children to talk and analyze the content. The purpose of these activities was to analyze and observe what kind of emotions and effect of the stories had as well as how well the children had learned the vocabulary and literature content used in the story.

The workshops were done at Stepping Stones day care with their group of six-year-olds during a time span of two weeks. Each session was held at the same time of the day, between 10:00-11:00. Prior to implementations we had a visit to the day care to get acquainted with the environment and the children to introduce the upcoming sessions to them. In addition we asked them to help us locate a space they would prefer for both reading and art sessions.

3.3.2   First workshop

Goals: To create a natural environment in which children can interact with each other and the teachers, secondly to create an environment in which children can be imaginative and creative during the workshops. Thirdly, children to experience meaningful moments through interaction with one another

Story reading session

We began the workshop with introductions and an ice breaker game. The story time followed the ice breaker. The story chosen for the first workshop is called "The color of home" by Mary Hoffman. The book tells the story of a refugee boy who finds a way to express himself through art and colors. The short story was chosen because we thought it would be meaningful and different to the children, and it had a clear storyline for the session as well as the following. The strory explores the main character "a preschooler" who struggles to express themselves through art. "The story-time circle in preschool is a time for group interaction by engaging in the following routine: (a) the teacher introducing the story, (b) reminding students of listening skills, (c) discussing some aspects of the story with the class, (d) predicting some story outcomes with the class, (e) discussing how the story relates to the students' personal life, and then (f) reading the story to the class." (Wilburn 81) Before reading the book the reader asked if the children had seen the book and what they thought the book was about. The children answered "It's about the boy and the mom" and that the book is "happy". Other words that come to their mind are "painting", "car" and "sky."

"Predictions about the present story may foster retrieval of prior knowledge of either real events or previous storybook events. The retrieval of prior knowledge is a higher level cognitive process. Interaction between the story and prior life's experience tends to make the story more meaningful to the child." (Wilburn 82)

In addition, the reader clarified with the children that if they had a question they could raise their hands and ask. This was followed by a brief discussion about the author and the name of the book. We also had relaxing background music playing the whole time. During the reading session the children asked about potential plot points in the story as well as made other comments here and there. Some of the children got distracted by the music playing in the background while others lost attention altogether and started moving their sitting positions as their eyes wandered to other areas of the room. When the story ended the children made some comments about it and mentioned that they liked it. The children were then told that they could think about the story during the art time as they draw.

"In order for the art creating process to be uninhibited, many items and materials should be available to the youngsters, so that they feel free to select the different media they want to express themselves through." (Wilburn 118) Therefore, the art area was set with available resources and materials in advance so that the children could move on swiftly to artwork after discussion.

Art session

During this session the children sat quietly while some of them were occasionally speaking to one another. The music was playing in the background but no comments or questions were made regarding that. We observed the children in the background without much interaction. The children had different drawing speed, some finishing faster than others. Some of the kids could also be seen using various colors while others stick to using just few pencils or crayons. The children shared the art supplies with one another and did not argue over them. The ones who finished their work faster than others were quite restless and wanted to go to play. The children tried to interact with us even though one of us was taking observational notes and tried not to speak to them or make contact while observing. After finishing their art works we all returned to the reading area to discuss and collect feedback.

Discussion session

The boys were the first to finish their art works and were eager to show their drawings to one another. One of them asked the others what they thought of his art. He specified that: "It's a Ferrari car." One of us tried to get the boys' attention but the children seemed engaged in

their own discussion and did not listen. The other children started coming in the room as well. They were tired and easily distracted by everything at this point. Especially by one another, the video camera and the recorder. One of the boys jumped up and told what he drew without anyone asking. Others stood up too, ready to show their art and following the boy's behavior. Only a few children remained seated.

The children wanted to see others' drawings repeating "Can I see, can I see?" When we asked who wanted to talk about their art everyone raised their hands simultaneously to show drawings. Many were not sitting quietly enough to do this. After calming down, the children did not raise their hands but answered to the questions nevertheless. After the children had shown their own art they became restless. They did not answer the questions that we asked them so we moved on to feedback collection and thereafter the session was summed up.

3.3.3   Second workshop

Goals: Creating an imaginative and creative environment where children can interact with one another as well as the teachers, experiencing meaningful moments, encouraging and empowering the children.

Reading session

For the second workshop we re-read the story from the first workshop and created discussion by this. "By retelling the plot of a story, the youngsters are involved in a literacy activity that is popular and serves the purpose of reinforcing storybook structure. Storybook structure usually has a specific introduction of characters, of the plot, of the problem, of the build-up to climax, and finally the climax. Daily readings seem to insure that youngsters at least begin to internalize the structure of storybooks. Once children learn the structure they can learn to tell their own stories with some semblance of sequence." (Wilburn 76)

We asked the children what they remembered about the story. The children list quite a few things and recall certain points in the story. "The internalization of particular parts of a story can be expressed as the preschooler retells the story. Interacting with a small group of peers facilitates this process." (Wilburn 77) Some of the children were very keen on interacting with the reader. In the story the boy starts a day care in a new country and doesn't know the language yet. The reader points out the facts herself going to an English daycare yet, she didn't speak the language. Some of the children say that they can relate to the story because they didn't know the language so well by then either.

"Do youngsters get bored by hearing the same stories read to them over and again? Generally speaking, no. Youngsters relish this procedure because it allows them to 'predict' the outcome of the story successfully, every time! They already know the outcome of events due to having heard the same story previously. But when youngsters can say, in advance, what will occur in the story, they may feel in control of the event and subsequently, feel powerful. The task of prediction is concrete in the sense of having been rehearsed in previous readings, so that youngsters know their predictions of the story are always correct. And youngsters begin to realize the story will always relate to their lives in the same way as it did in previous readings." (Wilburn 80)

The teacher engaged the children by pointing pictures, asking open ended questions which encourage the children to discuss and share their thoughts. Towards the end of the story the children started to become restless but there are certain points in the story that they still noticed and made remarks on storyline, new words as well as characters. It was noticeable that the children asked more questions concerning the story compared to the first workshop. "When the child begins to become familiar with literacy and begins to experience literacy situations, the youngster internalizes a sense of comfort from being able to rely on words in the book to always say what they said previously. And, the pictures are there every time he/she opens the book, no matter how many times! This sense of comfort can prompt a youngster's creative and imaginative processes into action." (Wilburn 81)

Art session

The children were explained that they should draw something that reminds them of the story. The children asked what it means to draw something that remains them of their day or reading sessions we tried to explain and we mentioned that it was also okay to draw whatever they felt like. 80% of the children drew with pencils and then colored with crayons, the rest preferred not to color at all. One boy cried after a few minutes while claiming that his art was all wrong, we tried to encourage him to use the other page in which he accepted and continued.

Discussion session

The children were then encouraged to share their thoughts of the art. One boy told about his own art: "In the picture there is a turtle that has peed and is trying to clean himself." We asked him if he had the similar animal at home. He replied yes. Other children continued in the same manner. Some drew what happened in football field or on a plane. Characters such

as Ariel from Disney's Little Mermaid also appear in their drawings. The discussion time continued to be a challenge as children were restless and wanted to share or comment simultaneously.

3.3.4   Third workshop

Goals: Creating a natural environment in which children can interact with each other and the teachers and by imaginative and creative during the workshops. Empowering the children and their imagination and self-expression.

For the third workshop we chose the book Jonadab and Rita by Shirley Hughes (2008) the themes in the story include friendship and courage. After introducing the book, children paid attention to reading and there were only minimal movements. A child even noticed and commented on reader's improper reading of a line. In general the story was a bit too long to read even though the book had an interesting story line which was easy for children to pick up even after missing out on few pages. Children made comments and questioned some character's actions and happenings in the story.

Art session

As they started drawing some children realized that one side of the paper was glossy which brought a few distractions but we managed to explain and they continued their work. There were other issues too, such as blunt crayons as well as children wondering why other children had left earlier for discussion unlike before. Some children commented on their friend's work after which they got positive responses about their own work from fellow friends too. During this session for the first time, some children drew art based on the read story.

Discussion

This time the discussion took place in smaller groups. The first 3-5 children to finish were grouped together. "In this small group learning experience, members are all rehearing elements that may have escaped them for various reasons the first time the story was read by the teacher. But they are now being refocused on those elements in the small group retelling and discussion activity in order to bring about expansion of cognition to each member. The group members do not realize that they are stimulating each other intellectually. That is an inevitable literacy by-product of the group's conversations." (Wilburn 78). The children talked about their art, some made jokes about their art which made others laugh. Other children wished that teacher or other children could guess what they drew or then asked some questions regarding the earlier read story. In addition some children drew something based on the

read story, the first time since the workshops started. Some children are able to share more clearly than others. This time a shy girl managed to talk about their art as well. "When other people can appreciate one's creations, a sense of enhanced self-esteem is usually the result. A shy child can gain recognition and feel empowered through the process of creating art. The young student might be encouraged to exhibit his/her art during Show-and-Tell and discuss the art piece with peers." (Willburn 117, 2000).

3.3.5   Fourth workshop

Goals: To create a natural environment in which children can interact with each other and the teachers, secondly to create an environment in which children can be imaginative and creative during the workshops. Thirdly, to help children experience meaningful moments through interaction with one another.

Reading session

This was the last session with the children so we wanted to focus on having fun while working as a team. On this day we will approach self-expression through group work and art. The book chosen for this workshop was Jamal Jealousaurus by Brian Moses (2013). The themes of the story included friendship and overcoming feelings like jealousy. After a brief discussion about the book, author and possible storyline children some children already made a comment about their experiences of being jealous. "Verbal references to print are adult verbal behaviors, such as questions and comments about print, that increase children's contact with print during book-reading and other literacy activities. Some types of verbal references are evocative, in that they explicitly seek to engage children in conversations or question– answer exchanges about print. Other verbal references are non-evocative, in that they seek to provide children with information about print. Questions about print are generally evocative, whereas comments about print are generally nonevocative." (Justice.L & Sofka. A 24, 2014)
Unlike the previous story session, this session was more lively and filled with actions and interaction. The children asked questions and the reader encouraged them to comment as well as strived to compare the scenarios into children's own lives. The children eagerly narrated their similar experiences as well as wishes and hopes in relation to happenings in the story.
 "Children who are read storybooks in ways that do not support their contact with print will show little growth in development of print knowledge even if they are read to repeatedly; on the contrary, children who are read storybooks in ways that explicitly support their contact with print will show tremendous growth in print knowledge over time." (Justice.L & Sofka. A 23, 2014)

While reading the story we asked what the children think happens to the dinosaur when they get jealous. A quiet boy said: "His eyes get green" while the other children got more restless. A boy and girl were wrestling in the back and pulling one another back and forth. The reader interrupted this. She then again continued the story. The children calmed down again to listen to the story. "The physical delivery of a book concerns how the adult uses paralinguistic communication devices to excite and engage children as the book is read. Paralinguistic communication devices are aspects of communication that accompany and surround the actual words we use, such as posture, facial expressions, pauses, and voice changes that include modifications in pitch (frequency) and loudness (intensity) "(Justice.L & Sofka. A 49, 2014).

Art session - Group A

The purpose of this task was to have fun and interact together and also to see how with cooperation the children can create something big and cool. "When preschool and kindergarten children draw in close proximity to others, they initiate interactions overtly as well as inadvertently." (Bresler & Thompson 134, 2002) We wanted to ask the children to express their feelings about this task. Researcher proceeded to explain to the children that they should draw according to their feelings on today's story and keep in mind the color themes that the story had. This made the boys of the group pick out the green pen. Most of the children drew something related to the story; however some drew other pictures of personal interest. The teacher participated in drawing while asking the children about what they were drawing. "At times, no verbal interaction is involved as children simply draw companionably side by side. And, at times, inspiration for drawing emerges as children compare their experiences in the world beyond the transitory society they share in their art class." (Bresler & Thompson 135, 2002). In the end one of the boys took a blue pen and colored the whole art work blue. After the children thought that the art work was finished all were given time to share their thoughts and experiences of art session.

Art session - Group B

In this group there were 6 children taking part. The session started by small discussion about color choices as well as what do they wanted to draw. Furthermore, the researcher tried to converse individual children regarding their experiences of the day since that morning. The idea was to get them to think and perhaps ideas may surface. The children made comments occasionally regarding workshops their recent life experience or random topics. Some children tried to guess other's work, some get it right and some not. All children contributed to the final discussion about the art turns were taken accordingly.

3.4   Observation as an evaluative method

The observation was done in order to evaluate our objectives, success of workshops as well as to evaluate the project as a whole. In the thesis workshops we took observational notes, video and audio recordings, questionnaires as well as semi-structured interviews. All the data and approaches are in place to guide and support the project evaluation. The videos taken were utilized to form observational data together with observational notes. After each session children were asked pre-made open ended as well as closed questions and teachers were asked to fill in a questionnaire. In order to provide as relevant and informative data we did an evaluation of each session right after implementation by filling in a readymade question-naire. In the questionnaires, we evaluated our own and each other's performance and gave ourselves constructive feedback after each session.

"Feedback and discussion are a core component of participatory evaluation. Discussion also allows interpretation of results in collaborative way. " (Keen et al. 2005). As stated before, the teachers from Stepping Stones daycare were asked to give us feedback after our work-shops.

The feedback is used to support observation in evaluating the thesis process. As our work-shops included feedback sessions, the children were also asked to give feedback on our ses-sions. "The overwhelming strength of the face-to-face interview is the 'richness* of the com-munication that is possible. Questionnaire data in particular can appear (and usually are) thin, abstract and superficial. The richness comes at a price, of course. It isn't just the time you give to the interview itself, it is the time involved in transcription and analysis -" (Gill-ham 2010) It was a key point in our thesis to ensure that the children's feelings were taken into consideration and that they were provided an environment where it was easy to express their emotions and experiences on our project together. Some areas of workshops were changed after the daily feedback from the children, for example all the children agreed that one of the books we read was too long and in the following session we switched to a more shorter and interactive book.

The teachers were interviewed shortly at the end of the project in order to receive varying perspective on the project. Interviews for the teachers were semi-structured. This was so that the situation would be somewhat controlled and within the topic area but still give room for free speech and multi-layered answers as well as diverse feedback and room for improve-ment. "The semi-structured interview is both flexible and, at the same time, standardized. Every interview is 'unique' and personal, and yet covers essentially the same ground. The use of tape recorders is strongly recommended. Of course, you have to ask the permission of the

interviewee - in advance if possible - and you need to know what to do if they refuse." (Gillham 2010) The teachers were provided with a premade questionnaire that they could answer, but the interviews were still executed in an open ended question manner. Questions for research feedback was designed beforehand but modified a little in the end to suit the nature of the workshops. The questions for the children were modified after the first session to make them simple and easier to retrieve meaningful information. "You need to prune your list of question topics to those that are really essential for your research project and which cannot be answered satisfactorily in any other way. The questions you ask will be open, i.e. where the answer is open." (Gillham 2010). Sufficient feedback was collected but due to the length of each workshop the children had little patience and concentration at the end of each day. After the second session we noticed dividing the feedback collection to each separate parts throughout the workshops.

3.4.1   Observation and feedback analysis

In order to evaluate our workshops effectively, we used narrative (thematic) analysis in the thesis. This method was chosen specifically, as it would support clear and collective analysis. In addition, it would allow thorough presentation and understanding of observational data or project outcomes as a whole. After each workshop videos and audios were transcribed into word document. In addition data from written observation or rather field notes were added to each workshop transcription to support parts that were not captured by camera or situational facts. "The analyst can start the thematic analysis by the open coding of data. This means building a set of themes by looking for patterns and meaning produced in the data, labelling and grouping them in connection with the theoretical framework of the research. In practice analysts utilize both the ideas and themes from their conceptual framework and 'new' themes in data while conducting thematic narrative analysis." (Frost 108, 2011) When all data have been transcribed, phrases related to the topic and objectives were retrieved and unnecessary data were cut out.

The themes were labeled and grouped together through open coding which meant that phrases and observation notes were highlighted and categorized into themes and topics relating to the project objectives. Four themes were developed reading time experiences: interaction between children and teachers, imagination and creativity as well as experiencing meaningful moments. In using narrative analysis the author, can reveal meaning and structure to gathered data. "Narrative research enables researchers to see multiple and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to reconstruct meanings through linking these layers, and to explore and understand more about individual and social processes. By working with narratives, researchers investigate multiple aspects in the construction and function of stories".(Frost 95, 2011)

Actual happening or phrase	Coding	Categorizing into themes
The word 'war' was mentioned in the story and the children ask what war is. Reader answers their questions about it (Session 2)	Curious questioning and spontaneous learning	Learning experiences
"The children comment individually what color their eyes are. One boy says his eyes turn red when he is jealous." (session 4)	Sharing thoughts & Imagining self in a certain way	Open interaction Imagination
"Children want to see each other's drawings, saying "Can I see, can I see?"" (session 1)	Showing interest on others work	Open interaction
They say in unison "yes!" and one boy explains that him and the shy boy are all the time jealous of one another	Sharing of personal experience	Open interaction
One boy told about own art: "In the picture is a turtle that has peed and is trying to clean himself."	Past happening or non-existing event!	Imagination and creativity
"... boy said that it is all wrong... He started erasing everything while crying." (session 2)	Desire to create art in a certain way	Imagination and creativity
" A shy boys shows his drawing. He points at the art and asks a researcher what is the meaning of the name of one character from the story. The first time he drew something from the session and not his usual drawings." (session 3)	Showing off own work Curious questioning Making in kinds of artwork	Open interaction Learning experiences Creativity and imagination
A third girl<...>tells that her drawing was beautiful. She responds back by saying that her art was nice as well (session 3)	Positive feedback from classmates	Meaningful moments
"The talkative boy says he's good at bicycling. Others mention drawing, painting, playing and scooting. A quiet girl says she likes drawing." (session 4)	Everybody sharing own interests happily	Meaningful moments
"After her, a girl that is a little bit shyer to talk tells about their art. She smiles when she mentions that the girl in the picture is happy. It is the first time she makes a comment on her own without the researcher asking her to" (session 3)	Sharing proudly about an artwork she made of a happy girl.	Meaningful moments

The feedback collection with the children was done by using three different emojis to voice their general mood and experiences. The children's responses can be seen in the chart below. During our last workshop the group was divided into two and that was the best session for gathering feedback from the children because the situation was more relaxed and calm. Session one and other parts of session 2 & 3 are missing, due to difficulty to retain accurate or clear feedback from the children.

	Liked	Average	Did not like	Total respondents
Reading time S2	7	2	4	13
Art time S2	-	-	-	-
Discussion S2	-	-	-	-
Reading time S3	6	1	4	11
Art time S3	8	0	3	11
Discussion S3	-	-	-	-
Reading time S4	5	2	5	12
Art time S4	6	1	5	12
Discussion S4	3	4	5	12

The chart above indicates how many children liked, did not like the sessions or thought it was just fine. The table also clarifies that not the same amount of children who liked reading time did like the art time. In the second workshop (S2) the emoji feedback was collected simultaneously after reading and art sessions. Despite having explained how the emoji faces are supposed to represent the children's feelings towards the workshop parts many of them were hesitant to put their thumbs up and express their opinions. The loudest children shouted their answers and also raised their thumbs up for several emoji options. In the second workshop (S3) the feedback collection went a little better. This time the children knew what to expect. We had also learned from the first and second workshops. The children's general opinion varied from liked to not liking the workshop. For the art time the majority of the children gave positive rating.In our last workshop (S4) the mood charting was done in separate parts as this proved out to give clearer and more constructive answers from the children.

Moreover, teacher feedbacks we collected through questionnaires (appendix 3) and one semi-open interview (appendix 4). The feedbacks were received after each workshop ended in written form. We handed the teachers a premade form to fill while they were observing our workshops. All the answers were transcribed into a word document. To put meaning and clarity to feedback received; process coding was used as analysis method.

"Coding is a heuristic — a method of discovery — to the meanings of individual sections of data. These codes function as a way of patterning, classifying, and later reorganizing each datum into emergent categories for further analysis." (Saldana et al 95, 2011) Phrases relating

to our thesis topic and objectives were yet again highlighted. We coded the phrases in order to summarize them and later put them into categories.

Category1: Things to improve

Code: Prop the children more
Code: Better time management
Code: Children's lack of motivation
Code: No great impact

Category 2: Things done well

Code: Patient with children
Code: Answered children's questions
Code: Children enjoyed workshops
Code: Shy children opened up

4   Project Evaluation

In this section the thesis as a project will be assessed, by looking at the methods utilized namely, observation and feedback. Furthermore achieving objectives as well as communication within research team and working partner. "Evaluation itself can be a vehicle for social learning, thereby enhancing the evaluation process as well as leading to learning." (Measham, 2008). A good evaluation practice is thought to include both formative and summative evaluation. Formative (observation and feedback) evaluation is one that includes interaction that provides information about learning. This learning can then be used to evaluate and re-establish the whole process. Summative (objectives achieved) evaluation will provide information about the altogether effectiveness of the thesis project, and whether it succeeded in its goals.

4.2   The workshop observation

Observation is one of the powerful tool of data collection, though appears simple for a novice researcher it actually takes experience and expertise to master the art of collecting data in this manner. The research is put into the environment in which they can listen, watch the participants as well ask follow-up questions if necessary. "The overpowering validity of observation is that it is the most direct way of obtaining data. It is not what people have written on the topic (what they intend to do, or should do). It is not what they say they do. It is what they actually do (which may also be reflected to some extent in records)." (Gillham 2010)

The idea to video record the sessions, was rather beneficial in collecting data accurately and quantitatively. It could have been impossible and unrealistic to gather data through record notes.

During the sessions, one of us was in charge of the session and the other making observational notes. One teacher was always in the room not only to observe but to help in guiding and communicating with children. "The first requirement for the participant observer is to identify himself or herself: who you are, where you're from, what you are trying to do or find out. The latter is particularly important. It won't bias the members of the group. You will only bias them if you say what answers or results you expect to find. Telling them your purpose is part of your openness, much of your identity, and it may be helpful." (Gillhum 2010) In addition since the video camera was present in the setting, it was necessary to inform the children of its purpose. Video camera can be intimidating and distracting for anyone, and therefore having a discussion about it before the sessions was necessary and for children daily reminding was necessary.

However, one technical issue was that the children were rather distracted by the video in the beginnings of the workshop and took more time to ask questions as well as trying to play around the camera. Perhaps, if their teacher had explained beforehand or if we had placed the camera earlier on it could have received minimal attention. The children managed to forget about the videoing only to remember during transitioning. However, the video set-up worked out well and no data was lost and all sessions were recorded. Each workshop recording was backed-up on the same day to avoid data loss.

Description was used to gather factual data of the events as they occur. However, it is difficult to record every single move or conversation, therefore taking short sentences and keywords is useful in being able to cover as much data as possible, especially since observation is focused on several individuals. In the end the written notes would be compiled with data distracted from the video. " This emphasis on description entails attending to mundane detail; the apparently superficial trivia and minuti-ae of everyday life are worthy of examination because of their capacity to help us to understand what is going on in a particular context and to provide clues and pointers to other lay-ers of reality." (Bryman 1988)

Children like any other being have feelings, emotions, perceptions as well as point of views. In many cases being able to communicate clearly is challenging to them. In some scenarios, the actions and body language do not march the words that are being spoken; therefore "the use of observation as a technique varies according to the kind of case you are dealing with and the kind of research questions you are asking. If your study involves young children or older people with severe communication difficulties then observation of them is going to be

more productive than trying to interview them." (Gillham 2010) In some session, observation video shows the children interacting, participating and enjoying the session and when the feedback is taken, a large amount of children claim that they did not like the session in contrastingly, another observation shows that the session was long and the children appeared restless, however, larger amount of the participants claim that they enjoyed the session. Thus gathering different kinds of feedback and observation was fruitful.

Some of the downfalls of observation method are ability for the researcher to influence the data collection as well as be biased. Regardless of the approach taken, be it participating or detached research, it is rather difficult to bring about absolute objectivity to the research. "the researcher is the research instrument, and any instrument used makes some contribution, has some effect on what is found. You have to make a consistent effort to observe yourself and the effects you might be having. You can also ask members of the group or institution whether they think that what happens when you are there is characteristic." (Gillham 2010) Therefore, other tools such as feedback from other observers, target group as well as personal feedback from the research partner has been established to decrease the amount of influence the researchers have on the data collection as well as analysis. In addition to teacher and children feedback, after each workshop we filled out a pre-made questionnaire which gave feedback regarding our perception of own performance and that of the research partner (appendix 5).

4.3   Feedback

Gathering the data from children turned out to be slightly more difficult than we anticipated because the emoji feedback was done in groups instead of individually. In this sense we were very grateful that the workshops were also recorded so that we were able to count in every child's opinion. While gathering the votes the children would all speak simultaneously which made it difficult to focus on simply one sound. Therefore we asked the children to show their thumbs whenever they thought that the emoji fit their general mood. Using the emojis was a fun way to communicate with the children but in the end it could have also been organized differently to gather more votes for the daily mood

In order to collect more valuable feedback we also wanted to include a short questionnaire that we would fill with the children after each workshop. The questionnaire consisted of six different questions that we asked after each workshop (appendix 2). The children would all be present for the questionnaire and we asked them to raise hands when they wished to give an answer. However, due to the fact that there was quite an amount of repetition in the questions the children's responses didn't vary as much as we hoped. Generally when a ques-

tion was asked the children would often reply in unison, start mirroring one another and repeat what everyone else said. In the end, the answers from the questionnaire were not utilized in the data analysis as they were inconsistent and therefore, unreliable to work with.

The feedback we gathered from the children was collected first at the end of each workshop, but during our last two workshops we changed it so that we gathered separate feedback from the reading and art sessions. This change was done due to the fact that the children became restless after sitting still for such a long time. After our first workshop the teachers' feedback focused more on our performance rather than the children's reception. The teachers complimented our patience with the children and the fact that we answered the children's questions except when we were reading the story. This could partially be explained by the newness of the situation and us not knowing what to fully expect but they were valid points all the same. Due to our limited time each day, the time management could have been planned better. In addition art session was also cut short and therefore felt rushed. This was especially unfortunate because the art time was the easiest time for the children to open up about their thoughts. The teachers also wished that our story time should have been shorter so that we could focus on the interaction with the children better. These were once again valid points to which we tried to adjust our thesis implementation. In reflection shorter story and more time for discussion and art could have been more valuable for supporting our thesis objectives.

The semi- interviews we conducted with two of the teachers were also recorded as it would not have been possible to write everything down. The interview was semi structured leaving room for free thoughts. The semi-interviews each lasted for about thirty minutes. We aimed to keep the questions open ended while asking them in order to gain more information. For both interviews one of us would be the interviewer while the other remained as an observer. The general feedback for our thesis workshop was positive. The teachers told us that the children had been enjoying the workshops. They also said that the children had been talking about the topics during their playtime. One of the teachers however said that the impact we left on the children wasn't necessarily that great. After each session we received tips on how to improve our workshops even further. The teachers' general feedback therefore consisted of what was good, what didn't work and what could be improved. The main improvement issues included the reading style. The teachers wished that we would include the children in the story even more by asking questions and acting the story out. This was something we both agreed on as well.

One of the main improvements that one of the teachers noticed was that even the shyest children were willing to open up to us and began to enjoy the workshops despite the fact that we were complete strangers in the beginning. Conversing with the children has a lot to do

with the timing. Our timing with the workshops was often problematic and it was difficult to find a time between the daycare's own daily schedules. Many times the workshop would occur right before lunch. This was also due to the fact that there were many other groups for the teachers to monitor at once. According to one of the teachers it would have helped if we had had a chance to get to know the children better and orientate ourselves into the group. The teacher also mentioned that a new adult in the group easily provokes a child to ignore or test them, therefore, the experience would have been different had we spent more time before the workshops.

4.4   Achieving objectives

Our main purpose for the thesis was to see in what way do stories affect children, and also what kind of ways of self-expression does storytelling inspire in the children. We wanted to give the children something that would encourage and empower them to tell about their feelings and thoughts, to participate in the conversation as well as to express themselves through art. Our plan was set out to make the workshop environment as natural as possible in order for the children to feel more comfortable. "Participation occurs within the interaction between a child and a teacher in a learning environment." (Sheridan & Pramling-Samuelson, 2001; Woodhead, 2006) It was important that the workshops would go well into the day care's normal schedule and wouldn't hinder their daily activities. The thesis topic and purpose were chosen according to our own interest in the study field of Social Services. Stories and self-expression were themes that went well with our own objectives for the whole thesis process. They were in the area of our interest when it comes to early childhood education studies as well.

When we first started our thesis process at the daycare the children were unfamiliar to us. In order to build mutual trust and natural environment we set out to get familiarized with them before we started. Because the workshop days were not as numerous as we would have possibly preferred the introductions had to be done in a more superficial and general way. We wanted to memorize each of their names and know a little about them. Throughout the thesis process this was something that happened naturally. In the beginning of the workshops we used name tags to remember everyone's names, but by the end of the project we were happy to notice that we remembered their names without the use of tags. As the process continued we were also able to recognize which of the children might need some additional adjustments with the guidance. These were however very personal minor adjustments.

General reading experiences

Three books were read during this project the first was read twice and the last two books were read on different days. The first book was based on a true story and children listened to

it quietly on the first day, and they were more interactive on the next day when the same book was read. The second time we read the book, children remembered some points and they were happy to share the upcoming happenings or ask questions.

The second book was too long and the children were restless and tired. It was hard to follow the story to the end; therefore, the final discussion was quite vague. Though the book was supposed to be read on the last session, based on the feedback and observation, it was important to change the book the next time to meet the needs of the children.

Therefore, the third book was more interesting and even though the children didn't know about the storyline prior, they enjoyed the interactive reading that was filled with pauses and actions.

Interactive environment

Furthermore, in order to meet the goal of creating a natural environment in which children could interact with each other and the teachers. The children were comfortable to talk with us and awaited for us eagerly on workshop days, they shared their experiences outside the research topic. Though we requested that the children raise their hands and give turns, some children were not able to follow this rule, which made it harder especially to have a flowing discussion and to give room for each child to share their thoughts. However, we managed to do all sessions, the children were not afraid to share their thoughts as well as comment of each other's art. Some children had a lot to say about their art and some were happy to share a sentence or two. We had reasonable discussions.

Creativity and imagination

The art sessions were meant to be creative and full of imaginations. The music worked well as children had concentration and there were moments of silence when children focused on their art. In fact all children did their unique art and none of them were copying from the other. Though we encouraged the children to draw or color based on the read story, on the first two sessions, children drew something from their everyday lives, mostly pictures of toys, pets and activities they enjoy. This made it easier for them to share and talk about their thoughts and experiences with the subject. However, on the third day they drew based on the read story and on the fourth day more drew based on read story more so than previous session. For some children the art meant more to them than others, as some were eager to share and keep their art and others were happy to quickly finish and did not mind if we kept their art.

Experiencing meaningful moments

Through the entire workshops we wanted to help the children experience meaningful moments together. In other words we wanted the children to enjoy the process as well as to feel supported by the staff and each other. The children, furthermore, on the last session enjoyed the small groups working together. In group A the art session was different in that the result was a unified picture whereas the other group B, they drew personal pictures and made no connections to others art. Of Course, the group dynamics and the children involved brought about the difference. However, the teacher in group A made it more communal as she also participated in the art work. Nevertheless, the idea seemed strange in the beginning; however, the children warmed to up and were excited as well as anxious on how to proceed on shared poster.

Child feedback

The feedback from the children was as important to our thesis as it allowed us to know how the involved children experienced and thought of the project. While it did not necessarily fully measure the success of each workshop it did give us some idea about how the children felt. It also helped us to see whether the workshop was enjoyable and whether things could be done differently to inspire them to voice their opinions and thoughts more. A larger amount of the children enjoyed each of the sessions unlike those who didn't like. Following this category was the amount of children whom didn't like our sessions and lastly small amount of children thought the sessions were just fine or nothing was special about them.

Teacher feedback

The teacher feedback was effective not only to analyze and criticize the sessions, but to help in improving upcoming sessions. The teacher noticed our positive attitude and patience while interacting with the children. They however, wished that our story session was more interactive and more probing questions would be directed towards the children. As the session continued, they noted that we made improvements or changes accordingly. On some sessions, the teachers commented that we could have done more to get and keep children's attention as they grew restless or inattentive. Moreover, story session could be shorter so as to have more time for art session which was usually rushed through. Based on the last interview at the end of the workshops, teachers made positive remarks to our workshops; however, one teacher felt that the impact was not as great as they would have liked to see. On the other hand, children anticipated the sessions; they talked about the topics and experiences from the sessions as well as reading sessions improved over time. They noted that we managed to get some of the shyest children to share. More introduction time could have been beneficial; however, a new adult in the group is bound to change the dynamics in any given situation.

Despite our flawless communication as research team we have some small communication hiccups along the way. When we first started thesis planning our first contact with the day-care was several months before conducting the workshops. In addition our workshops plan was sent in advance. After the first meeting a few months passed by before we proceeded to the functional part of the thesis. By then we realized that the information concerning our thesis and the workshops had got stuck along the way. Therefore we ended up explaining our workshop plans during our first workshop. We would have benefitted greatly from an orientation session, but sadly realized this only there and then. Better flow of information would have also helped us to collect more feedback and evaluation from children and teachers. What also made the thesis process challenging was the limited time we had with the children and teachers. This was due to the fact that we didn't want to interrupt their daily schedules. In essence we should have spent more time getting to know the children and the characters in order to support them.

5   Discussion

Reading stories and doing art were the tools used in this project thesis to achieve the goals set forth. In this thesis some of the goals were achieved better than others. The goal of the whole project was to have an average of 11 children participate on the reading, art and feed-back sessions. In all sessions we had at least 10 children and a max of 13 on one day. We noticed that small groups led to increased productivity in the sense that, it was easier to have a productive conversation and fewer distractions during art work or reading time. In addition, it was more effective to have feedback on the last session when we separated into smaller groups. Children shared more in small sessions than in bigger sessions. "Vocabulary building and syntax structure are occurring rapidly during preschool years in terms of the youngster expressing his/her ideas to a larger number of people than would be available to him/her at home. It is also occurring through the give-and-take responses of verbal communication with more knowledgeable people than himself/herself." (Wilburn 74) Furthermore children, who took more time to open up, were able to share easily in these small groups as there were more time for each child.

"Because social development is seen as an intrinsic part of cognitive development space is planned and set up to facilitate encounters, interactions and exchanges among children."(Edwards & Gandini, 1998) It was in our interest that the workshop environment we would provide for the children would be something that is already familiar to them. Therefore we chose spaces that they normally use for story reading, playing and doing art. This also helped the children to settle down because the environment was already familiar to them and the activities didn't differentiate too much from their daily routines. One of the teachers was also always there to monitor the situation. This ensured that the atmosphere was familiar. We

wanted for the children to know that they are safe and listened to. According to the teacher interviews the children were always very enthusiastic and vocal when they knew we would be visiting them soon. The workshop times were also very lively and active. The children were willing to open up and be the centre of attention during the workshops. As this was one of our goals, it was very rewarding to see it happening in real life.

Our thesis topic was supporting early self-expression of 6-year olds through story-reading. The nature of qualitative research and narrative analysis in specific allows the realization of individual situations to be noticed and are then put together to give a general picture. The main approach was to spend more time reading, however, the results revealed that a balance of the session can yield better outcomes. Children responded more to short and interactive stories unlike those stories that painted a complex situation and required more attention span. Consequently, the longer and complex stories let to more questions from the children's part. Thus, for the purpose of the thesis the interactive stories that required children to relate with every turning page let to more internalization as the children remember the story longer and used it in their art session."Construction of meaning and reflection on personal experience are integral parts of understanding what the main idea of the story is. When a youngster can relate the events in the book specifically to his/her personal life, this indicates that a connection has begun to form between events in the storybook (literature) and comprehension of the genre, termed story." (Wilburn 79) Therefore, there were changes in the choice of the book to read later on in the workshops.

The ability to influence children regarding their self-expression has no real limits and success can be seen in differing stages. One of our objectives was to create a natural environment in which children could interact freely with adults and fellow children. "Encourage conversation when children are in a comfortable setting. They're more likely to open up and talk when they are in a nonthreatening situation" (Burns & Alberts 51, 1999) In doing so all the children shared their thoughts at least once during each workshop, be it commenting or inquiring about a point in the book, sharing their morning experience or discussing the choice of their art work. The difficulty however, was managing the group dynamic so that there are turn taking, respect for others thoughts through praise and appreciation as well as giving attention to whomever turn it is to share. Of course this is an everyday challenge for children, therefore more practice is necessary. "Five-year-old children who enter kindergarten must learn how to sit quietly, to share, to listen, to communicate cooperatively, and to do what is asked. Even in the most individualized class, they must make do with far less personal attention than they probably are used to. Helping children meet this emotional and behavioral challenge is extremely important" (Burns & Alberts 65, 1999)

Furthermore, Wilburn (2000) claims that "Time span is another important consideration in the art curriculum. It should be long enough to allow for thought and conversation, revisions and re-creations. Sometimes creating art may be a solitary event where the youngster prefers to be alone to mold the clay or paint the picture. At other times the artist will enjoy the companionship of peers who may be engaged in creating their own art." In approaching imagination and creativity, all children managed to make art during each session, however, one boy did not finish their artwork within two consecutive days. As he took more caution and time to imagine and work on his art, there was little time for him to finalize, however, their teacher would provide an opportunity to finish the art later in the day. Unfortunately, the child in question agreed with us to do so, however in the afternoon due to other ongoing activities, the child did not wish to work on the art.

"Preschoolers do not usually like to have gratification delayed. They are in the egocentric stage of development, according to Piaget, and delayed gratification is not one of their strong points. "(Wilburn 117, 2000) Therefore, in planning such session each child should be considered and more resources are necessary to support each individual. Some children knew what they wanted to do right away and given a chance they could finish art, discussion and feedback within 10 min. Therefore organizing possibilities to move on to other activities after the workshop would mean that no one will be rushed and those who wanted to take time can do so. In our situation those children especially, who took more time with the art, were shy and required further probing and time to respond. Unfortunately, richer discussion and further opening up could have resulted had the time allowed for those specific children.
"However, even the well-equipped children may not move with equal ease through any preset sequence of lessons. Teachers must adapt and augment their lessons to meet the unique needs of every one of the individual children in their classrooms. Most children need a motivating introduction and a lot of repetition and practice in order for their emerging skills to become automatic." (Burns & Alberts 64, 1999)

In creating art, individuals require freedom to explore the material as well as the kind of art they make. Of course depending on the goal of the art session these facts may vary. Our resources were limited regarding the variety of art material we could have desired to use, thus hindering diverse exploration of creativity. Therefore, some children might have been limited as others could have perhaps preferred or related to another method or materials. In order to further explore this study it would essential to expand the variety of art material as well as reserve enough time for the sessions.

In sequence, there was a struggle between the directions the children wanted to go in terms of what they wanted to make verses what we wished them to do. Our initial emphasis was that children draw or color something related to the story or their experiences from the same

day. However, children wished that they create whatever they wanted to. In the end we explained that we wanted them to base their art on these topics ,however, they have the freedom to create what they desired as well. "When preschoolers are exuberant, their art may be quite different in terms of shape, color, shading, and even content than when they are melancholy. Mood has an influence on what a person wants to portray in his/her creations." (Wilburn 116, 2000) Earlier on, the children stuck with pictures of their favorite toys, characters, pets and familiar art; nonetheless, on the third and fourth session children started making art based on the read stories. It is mentioned earlier that this could be due to better reading session experience or perhaps the children started to internalize our approaches and were open to trying new things and being malleable to the process.

Consequently, creating meaningful moments was essential to our project process as well as one of the objectives. Though there were snapshots of instances which deemed meaningful, the aspect is altogether challenging to establish. Getting to know the group more deeply as well as organizing group oriented sessions could aid to yield lucrative results. Perhaps this was an area that could have been emphasized more. When the children are more relaxed and the process was clear their input to the session was more constructive. Also the differences are seen when the groups are separated and the different experience each group had. It was essential that the instructor participated in order to further act as a role model and to encourage certain aspects, for example commenting on others art or sharing space and material."The apparent change for the youngster is that he/she now has to wait and listen as the teacher talks to other children and attends to their questions, answers, and conversations as well. Waiting one's turn is a learned behavior." (Wilburn 70, 2000)

Getting feedback from the children was beneficial on two levels; receiving feedback on what areas to improve or to re-adjust and allowing children to be part of the process. The later served as a motivation as well as empowerment, in that their thoughts and ideas mattered. "When the preschooler experiences the necessity to make a choice, to make a decision about which toy or game to play with, which playgroup to get involved with at a specific moment, he/she begins to experience self-reliance. The choices and decisions the youngster makes are tied to self-realization and self-determination." (Wilburn 18, 2000) Input was taken on an informal level as well as formal. Informally by asking them to chose locations and set up material and formally by recording figures and comments during feedback times.

In succession, teacher feedback was instrumental not only to the thesis project but importantly towards implementation. Some of their feedbacks in comparison to our own feedbacks were utilized to influence remaining workshops. In most cases we received constructive criticism both on the questionnaire and verbally in an informal fashion. Of Course strengths

and successes were applauded; however, it was vital to receive feedback in the former manner, which was instrumental to our implementation plan and process.

6   Ethical considerations and trustworthiness

The thesis occurred in a private daycare. Therefore in order to proceed with the thesis, permission and consent were sought out from several stakeholders. The daycare was contacted to seek permission to do our thesis with them. Teachers involved, management and owner also accepted our project. The thesis has been conducted following the ethical guidelines for early childhood education (JHL).The teachers were informed and asked for consent to be present in our workshops, to observe and offer feedback as well as to conduct an interview with them. The manner of interview, including recording methods were also explained to them. To maintain trustworthiness, the interviews were recorded as well as observed in turn by both of the researchers. Because the daycare is a private one and not under the city of Espoo it was not a necessity seek out permission from Espoo city. The children's parents were presented with a letter informing about the thesis project and data collection methods. They were offered a possibility to decline or limit their child's participation in this thesis.

The children's consent was also important to us. They are the ones whose well-being and safety was our priority when conducting the workshops with them. When working with children it's always important to pay attention to the individuals and their needs in the group. It's also good to observe what kinds of group dynamics are present in the group. There is always the argument whether the children are fully aware of their decisions even though they are asked if they agree to participate. We asked the children about their feelings and thoughts verbally before participation.The workshops were also planned in a way that they didn't interrupt the children's normal daily routines.
"Children's daily life contains situations and events that can be considered and analyzed from the viewpoint of the questions of right and wrong, good and bad, truth and lie. The questions of justice, equality, respect and freedom can also be dealt with naturally in the context of daily events. It is essential to take account of the child's developmental stage. Fears, anxiety and guilt are part of children's life too. These issues are discussed with children in such a way that they can feel safe." (National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education in Finland)

No names are presented in the thesis, be it the teachers or children, so that the identity of the participants remains confidential and anonymous. The recorded materials will be deleted after the publication of the thesis."As participation in research is founded on these same principles of trust and cooperation, it is imperative to grant adolescents who are part of a clinical study the same degree of confidentiality." (Leibson & Koren, 2015)

As authors we take full responsibility of the recorded materials and the research conducted in order to write this thesis. The thesis was implemented based on our research on the field of study. The theoretical background surrounding the thesis has been studied from reliable and official sources. The ideas and influences have been inspired by the courses completed in the studies. The thesis and its methods are based on both authors' personal research and the workshops were based on their own imagination and ideas.

The findings presented in the thesis are based on the observations, feedbacks and interviews from the daycare. They reflect on the documentation done based on the workshops. They have been presented as they are and have not been influenced by personal opinions. The analyses conducted based on the findings are also the results of combined observation notes from the authors of the thesis and from feedbacks of the teachers and children. Lastly there is no need for the thesis to have a conclusion as it's' purpose is simply to reflect upon the observations based on the functional workshops. We did not start the thesis to find any specific result. The findings are not meant to apply to any certain theory or to answer any supposed claims.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter to parents

LAUREA
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
Together we are stronger

Letter to Parents

Hello!

We are two Social Services students from Laurea Universty of Applied Sciences. We are doing our final thesis with the Stepping Stones daycare. Our thesis topic is "Supporting self-expression of 6-year-olds through reading stories". Our purpose for the thesis is to find out how children of age 6 experience group storytelling. That is to find out how group storytelling in kindergarten bring effect to the self-expression of the children.

The thesis is a project thesis that includes workshops with activities such as storytelling, story crafting and creative methods. For the workshop part we would be cooperating with the children as well as the daycare staff.

In order for us to write our thesis we would be interacting with the children through these workshops as well as recording the workshop sessions with audio and/or video. The tapes will be deleted afterwards, and will only work as supporting tools to us. They will not be stored anywhere, nor will anyone else see them. We will also keep the content of our thesis anonymous so that no child can be identified afterwards.

The participation of the children in this thesis is completely voluntary. You may decline the participation of your child altogether. The children will also be asked for their consent to participate in our workshops as well. There are no known risks to participation beyond those encountered in everyday life and the workshops will be monitored by the daycare teachers. The children's' reactions and responses will remain confidential and anonymous.

If you do not agree for your child to participate in this project, please let the daycare know. If you have any questions about this project, feel free to contact us through our e-mail or through the daycare.

Thank you for your assistance in our thesis!

Sincerely yours,

Hanna-Riikka Uutaniemi   Naomi Kibet

hanna-riikka.m.uutaniemi@laurea.fi   naomi.kibet@laurea.fi

Appendix 2: Child feedback

1. Use the Emojis here.

- How did you feel about the reading time?

- How did you feel about the art time?

- How did you feel about presenting your art?

2. What did you like about the story time?

3. What did you not like?

4. What did you like about colouring?

5. What was not fun about colouring?

6. What was nice about telling about your colouring?

7. What was not nice about telling about your colouring?

Appendix 3: Stepping Stones teachers' feedback after each session

1. In general how did the session go? First thoughts!

2. How did we interact with the children? How could it have been different?

3. How could reading the story be different? What should be added or taken away?

4. Do you think the children gave their best? How could we have maximized their potential?

5. Was attention & opportunity given to each child equally?

6. In what way did the children's feedback approach could have been improved? Did anything surprise you?

7. In general what could we adjust for future sessions

Appendix 4: Teacher interview questions

1. How do you prepare for a storytime?

2. What kind of transition do you have to the storytime from your daily schedule?

3. How would you describe your reading sessions?

4. What Kind of factors do you find most important for children about storytelling and literature?

5. How did the story telling bring effect to children's use of language?

6. Did the children's motivation during the narration increase after the storytelling? How so?

7. Did the children use at least one new learned vocabulary or form of expression? Give examples?

8. Did drawing the storyline before narration help the children in their telling of stories

9. Where the children's attention during the session similar to their average attention span?
10. What kind of benefits would you say the storytelling has had in your daycare