

Multiprofessional Collaboration and Creativity: Children's Cultural Centers are Close Partners to Each Other in Finland

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Children's Cultural Centre

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The Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Center was established in 2015. The roots are in the networking of children's cultural centres that started in the early 2000's. In 2003 the Ministry of Education and Culture established a new State grant for children's culture centers and seven centers from different parts of the country were chosen to create the Network of Children's Culture Centers on a national level. During the years that followed, the network extended. Today, more than 20 centers participate in the collaboration, from the capital Helsinki to Lapland in the north. Finally, the Association of Finnish Cultural Centers was founded last year, 2015, as a result of long and determined work of many professionals of the field.

Children's culture centers share ideas and art education methods with each other, create partnerships and start various projects together. There are, for example, more than 40 method guidebooks on different art forms and also other art education material on children's culture's national webpage

(www.lastenkulttuuri.fi, in Finnish and Swedish). Some of the centers specialize performing arts, some in visual arts etcetera. Through close collaboration, the experts circulate results of the versatile programs run in the centers.

Culture to all – culture education plans

The aim of the Association is also to impact on cultural policy in Finland and impact the everyday life of the children and youth. One of the central guidelines is the collaboration with the school sector by supporting municipalities and other education providers to draw up systematic cultural education plans in cooperation between schools and cultural institutions.

The cultural education plan is made in the municipality. It ensures that all the children and youth of the region get in contact with local cultural heritage, culture institutions and art forms and are given the opportunity to create their own culture and art during the school day. It means participating in and familiarizing children with local culture and cultural institutions as well as cultural heritage. This is accomplished, in part, through workshops with artists who represent various art forms. Cultural actors also provide materials and techniques to the teachers who create pedagogically appropriate supports for children. More than fifty method handbooks on different art forms are available on the website run by the Association (lastenkulttuuri.fi).







In brief the plan is an agreement of a municipal level between educational and cultural sectors. Then, focus is on the whole curriculum, not only in the art subjects. Typically there is a special art form or cultural heritage based program for each age group of the elementary school. In some municipalities also kindergartens are involved. During the school year, first-graders may visit the city's concert hall, third-graders learn perhaps circus skills with a qualified circus professional and so on. Approximately one out of six municipalities has launched its own cultural education plan in Finland. The development in other municipalities is fast at the moment, due to the work of local children's culture centers. This year, a workshop on culture education plans for professionals is on tour in more than 20 locations.

The political affects of culture education plans are significant because they are designed to strengthen inclusively the cultural competence of a whole age group. The Finnish school system is based on equal accessibility and quality education is free for all. The cultural education plan as a part of the system spreads the benefits of art and culture to all children and young people.

Colour Workshop for Babies and rock-festivals in authentic atmosphere

Regional centres are implementing a common strategy that emphasises every child's accessible participation, activity and artistic experiences as well as the quality of the culture work. These central values are seen in the different operating models all around the country. Most of the activities for children, youth and families are free of charge to guarantee the equal cultural rights of the target group.

Many of the centers organize art festivals for children and families and produce activities around various artistic themes. Some centers also produce art exhibitions that often circulate in several locations. The quality of the program is important, and the centers work in close connection with local artists, theatre groups, children's music bands and so on.

Networking gives the Finnish children's culture actors a lot of benefits. Many locally developed methods are now practiced nationwide due to the close connection of the centers. The best practices are often shared in the network. Good example is the method *Experiential Colour Workshop for Babies* that was originally created in the city of Pori in Western Finland, and is today practised in almost all the centers. (See Setälä's article in this issue).



Working in and with schools and kindergartens is an essential part of the work of the centers in many ways. The major contribution to schools and kindergartens is to provide different types of educational methods. The most commonly used are artists and art pedagogues working at schools and kindergartens, help with culture education plans, workshops of various art forms as well as different art projects in schools and kindergartens. Through multiprofessional collaboration, art and culture can become a more integral part of operations and services aiming for the wellbeing of children and young people.

As an example of inclusive art pedagogy on the field of music education, the *Pre school festival* celebrates children's own music expression annually in the city of Seinäjoki. In April, all the six year old boys and girls of the city gather in a big and a little gloomy music hall, to listen to the young musicians' shows. Children perform to other children in the same location as adults in their turn. The atmosphere is lively and happy every year. Theme of the festival this year (2016) is music theatre. The local children's cultural center produces the festival, invites kindergartens, takes care of the transport, and the program is planned with local early age pedagogues.

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Image texts:

- Theatre Anna, fotographer Mauri Tahvonen.
- Bändisimulaattori (band simulator), fotographer Eetu Kevarinmäki.
- Hippalot, taiteilua pajassa (Hippalot, art festival for young children), fotographer Jake Papinaho.
- Lasten Etnosoi, fotographer Pasi Tiitola.
- The Experiential Colour Workshop for Babies is a method that started the baby culture boom in Finland, fotographer Päivi Setälä.
- Pikkuprovinssi (Provincerock for young children), fotographer Janne Viitamäki.

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. Children's culture's national webpage retrieved from www.lastenkulttuuri.fi

. Setälä, P. (2015) (Ed.). *The Experiential Colour Workshop for Babies*. Original publication Vauvojen värikylpy [2011]. Publication No.3. Pori: Pori Centre for Children's Culture – The Network of Children's Culture in Satakunta.

