

Finland

Literature and stories are meaningful - Making connections between positive learning experiences, personal interpretations and children's literature in a NaCra-project

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What has this case study of NaCra (meaning Narratives and Craft) to offer to the reading in early childhood education?

The case study aims at highlighting the following perspectives to reading:

1. According to the latest PISA-results, one of the key features in good readers is an extensive vocabulary. Reading comprehension is sometimes defined as a sum of the knowledge acquired from the text and the prior knowledge (meaning the vocabulary). The less the reader knows about the area of the text, the more information the reader must acquire from the text. This makes reading demanding. In this case study, children's reading is supported by activities and environment, which helps them to gain vocabulary and knowledge of the text.
2. Every reader interprets literature differently: the more the readers reading skills, experiences (in reading and in general), worldview and overall knowledge vary, the more the interpretations differ from each other. It is vital to find ways to help children illustrate their interpretations to themselves, others and to the adults. This enhances the understanding of the meaning of reading literature: it is an individual process and the literature means different things to different readers.
3. Sometimes children's literature is used ineffectively in education: One can say that the whole life is a story. Children's literature helps children understand and indulge in different situations and times of their own. With their own stories, they describe their own world and make their voices heard. By creating holistic learning experiences and having literature as a starting point, the holistic learning could be effective and child-centered.
4. Art-based learning environments support the child's experiences and imaginative self-realization. In addition, these things learned through these functional and art-based methods are tangibly linked to the child's own world of experiences and thus enhance learning. Therefore, connecting arts-based activities will visualize children's thoughts on different matters including the interpretation of literature.

0NaCra-project aims at holistic learning and making literature the center of all learning

NaCra is an acronym for narratives and crafts, and NaCra-project develops an integrative pedagogy of pre-primary and early education. The aim of all the teaching experiments in NaCra-project is, that the child can use his / her own creativity freely to describe their own experience in different arts-based assignments.

This case study serves as an example of a project, which aims at holistic learning experiences in early childhood education. In the center of the holistic learning process is children's literature and they both (the holistic learning and children's literature) are beneficial to each other. The focus of this project is on choosing a story that supports the learning contents of the learning process. The case study presented in this booklet centers to learning about the history of children's hometown. The environment is one of historical home museums of their hometown and the picture book is telling a story of that specific house. The reading

of the children's book is supported by arts-based activities: making a craft product and an ISE that means individual story ending. However, any book and any theme is possible.

Practical example of a holistic learning process in accordance to the NaCra-framework and centering literature In Finland, children are acquainted with several home museum during their ECE. In the city of Rauma, the children visit Kirsti Seaman's Home Museum. The interior of the museum presents life at different times, and the museum houses living rooms from the 1800-1900s, from the 1940s to the 1970s. Mainly, the museum describes the residence of the owner and tenant families of the house in the 20th century.

Children's author, Annastiina Mäkitalo, has published a children's book called Kirsti Old Rauma (2015). It is a story of a small girl living in the house of Kirsti at the beginning of the 20th century. Her family owns the



The cover of Annastiina Mäkitalo's picture book and the museum environment the book is about.

house and they have tenants in the house. His father is a seaman and the family is waiting for him. Since there is no news of the father, the family's money becomes scarce and Kirsti is forced to sell flowers she had made out of lace. It is not necessary to find this kind of a picture book that specifically describes a subject, but the story can be written by any subject or the story can be a real historical story of the venue or even any object there. (More about the book also in English: <http://kiinnoste.blogspot.com/2012/12/vanhan-rauman-kirsti-kirsti-of-old-rauma.html>)

During their visit at the home museum, the children get familiar with the home museum environment and listen to an adult reading the picture book about the museum (Kirsti of Old Rauma). Reading aloud is connected to two activities:

Individual Story Ending (ISE)

The first activity, individual story ending (ISE), is aimed at illustrating children's understanding of Mäkitalo's story and the museum environment. Individual story ending (ISE) refers to creating an individual ending to a beginning of a story heard or read. Individual story ending can be implemented with any arts-based activity such as writing, multiplying, acting or drawing. If the children do not have writing skills, the stories can be created by dictating the story to an adult. Additionally, it is possible to invent a personal story ending in a group or individually. When creating the ISE, the child uses material from the original text and from his or her own experiences.

This means all the ISEs are different and they contain information from various perspectives: reading skills, knowledge and understanding as well as personal attitudes and values regarding the content of the original text.

The ISEs are recommended both by children and by educators. The children like inventing personal story endings since they are easier than inventing a story of their own. The reason for this lies in the fact that they get a lot of material from the original text: they can use the plot of the original text, they will have the protagonist and other persons, the venue, and other details from the original text. Simultaneously, the children learn about different features of a story. Additionally, the children love listening to ISEs and comparing them with each other and the ending of the original text. The teacher on the other hand can use ISEs to make the conversation around literature more child-centered and increase the participation of all the children. As being said, based on the ISEs the teacher will also know how the children have understood the story and what details they have paid attention to.

Making a soft toy with craft techniques

The second activity, *making a soft toy with craft techniques*, helps the children to recall the experiences from the museum environment and the picture book of Annastiina Mäkitalo. In NaCra-learning processes, stories (the story of the picture book and ISEs) serve as inspiration for designing products, which are carried out as a holistic craft process. The holistic craft process is an application of a creative problem-solving process, in which the children are encouraged to design and implement a personal product. For the smallest children the personal process can be supported by providing support for ideas, design and production by limiting the starting points, manufacturing materials and technology of the product being implemented. The goal, however, is that everyone produces a product of their own, in which, for example, the colors, shape and details of the product are children's own ideas.

The aim of this activity is to connect all the senses to the learning process and create a concrete product to help memorize both the picture book and the learning experience.

As the ISEs, the craft products are popular among children and educators. The children get many ideas for their soft toys from the stories and may still connect their personal interests and thoughts to the soft toy. This kind of making can be called a craft expression. Creating a soft toy activates all the senses and the process involves different activities. Additionally, the soft toy is concrete and children often feel much attached to their own soft toy. NaCra-processes have shown that a self-made product, which combine both the experience of visiting and the child's own life, helps children remember stories and details about the visit. In addition, the product tells the personal meaning of the visit, both to its creator and to others.



Making the soft toy with felting

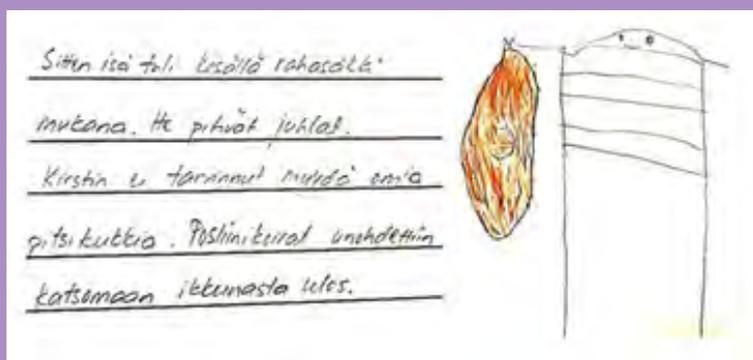
The results of the NaCra-activities based on a picture book

The individual story endings produced during the museum home visit and based on Mäkitalo's picture book contain plenty of material on both the children's own world of living, the home museum environment and the picture book. The stories are a mixture of children's beliefs and knowledge of past and life in general. For the ISEs the original story was interrupted to a place where Kirsti (the main character) missed his father. Additionally, the mother told Kirsti that they have no money (since the father is not at home) and they will have to sell the lace flowers Kirsti has made.

It is apparent the main character of the story (who is the same age as the children) helps the children to empathize with the story. All the children created happy endings to their stories: the father came back. In most stories, the father never left (at least not without his family) sailing again. The children were also able to solve the problem of selling the flowers: in some stories, the flowers were sold with a big amount of money, in some stories Kirsti made a lot more flowers and in some stories, the family gained money in some other way. From the perspective of the historical knowledge, the ISEs are revealing: for children being a sailor means mostly fighting against pirates. Additionally, the stories contain many details incorrect from the perspective of a historical perspective. For example, the family spends their evening watching TV.

Here are some examples of the dictated ISES and illustrations:

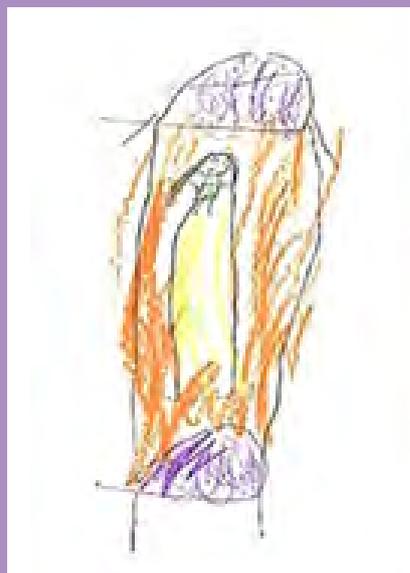
The father came home with a big sack of money. They had a party. Kirsti did not have to sell her lace flowers. They did not remember to turn the porcelain dogs and they still looked out from the window.



Story told by a child and his illustration to it

The starting point for the soft toy a historical detail in a picture book related to the porcelain dog found in the seamen's homes: the porcelain dogs symbolize the family's longing for a seaman who is absent and tell the by passers about whether the father of the family is at sea or at home. During the visit, the children were given the task of designing a soft toy that would have a similar function in their lives. The soft toy was done by felting. All children's soft toys were different and they portrayed meaningful things to the children, such as a toy cat at a child's father's home, or a favorite toy.

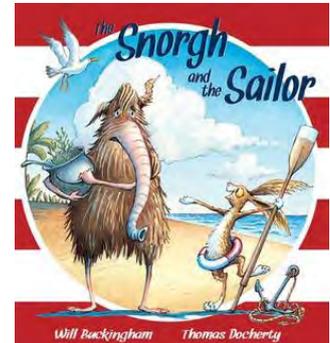
The illustration based on storytelling, a design for the soft toy and ready-made soft toy



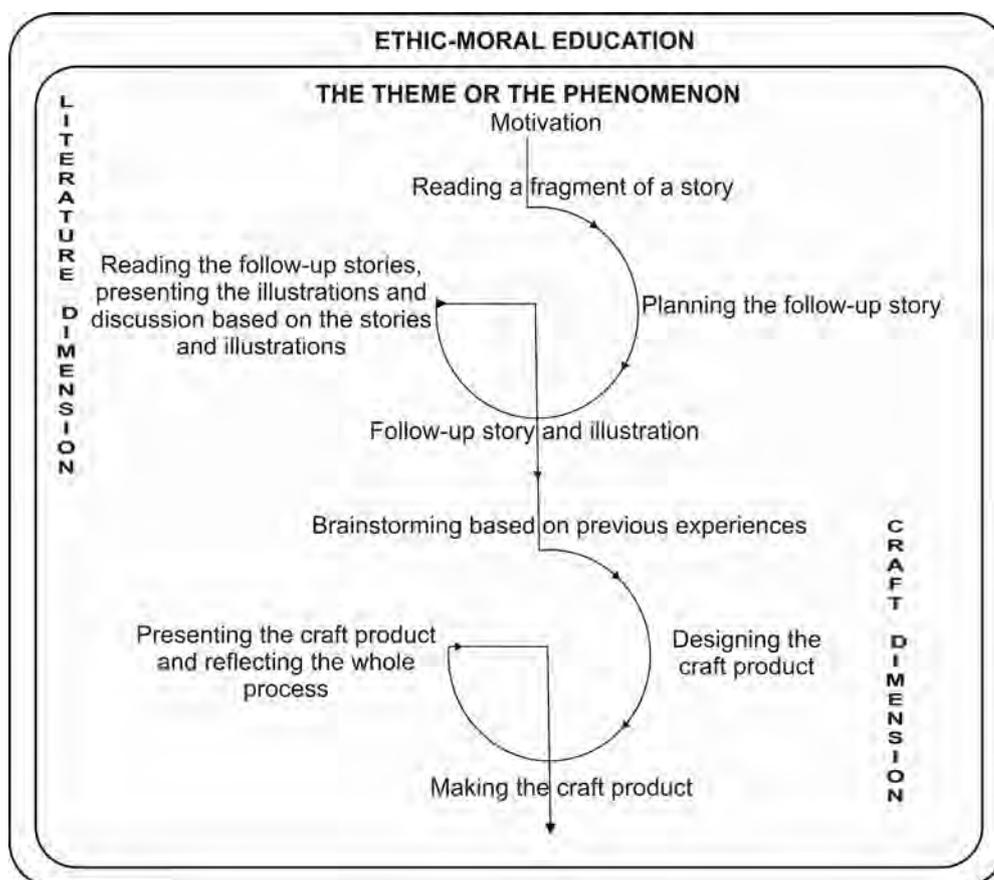
Some final thoughts

At the museum visit, the children learn the contents and meaning of reading and writing, crafts and cultural education by familiarizing themselves with the history of their own neighborhood. The NaCra-process utilize children's literature and children's creative activities. Children's literature helps children understand and indulge in different situations and times of their own. With their own activities, they describe their own world and make their voices heard. This makes them feel the literature meaningful and helps the educator to connect the literature to the thoughts and experiences of children.

Picture books we have used in the NaCra-project

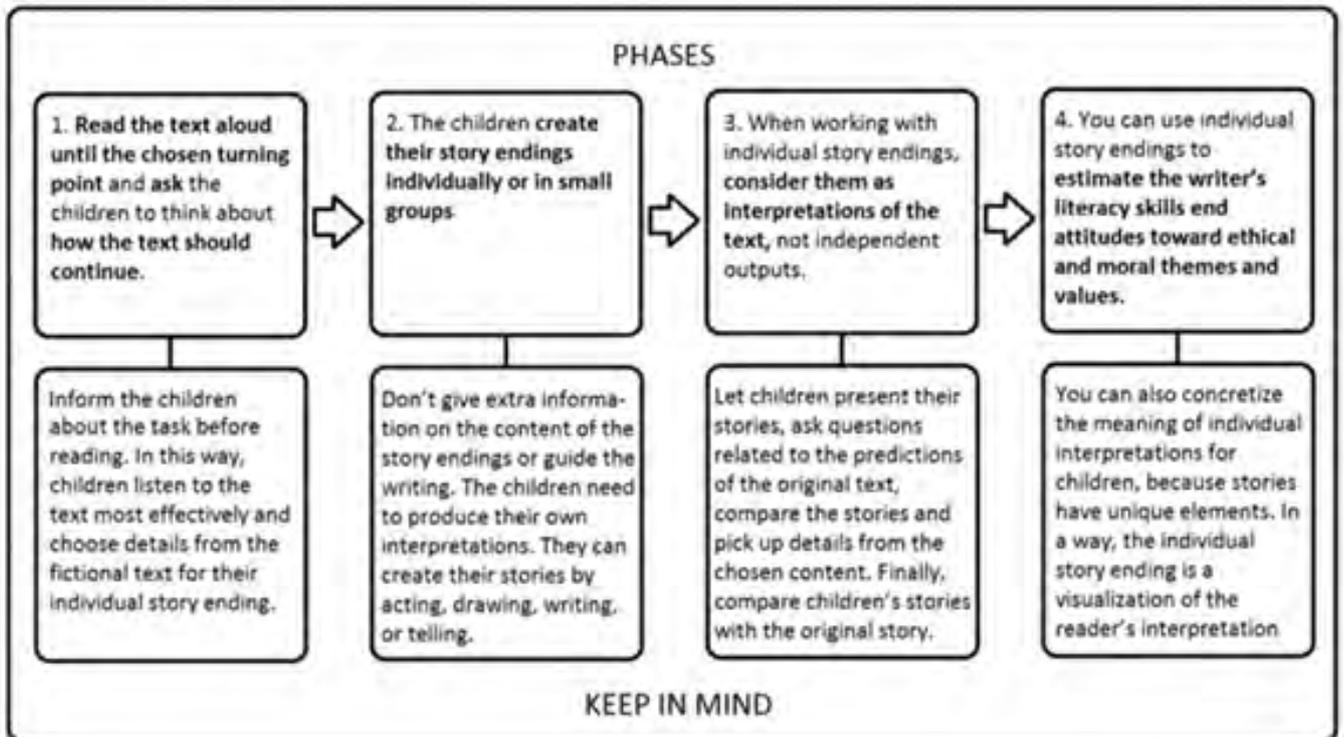


The process in NaCra (LCE-model)

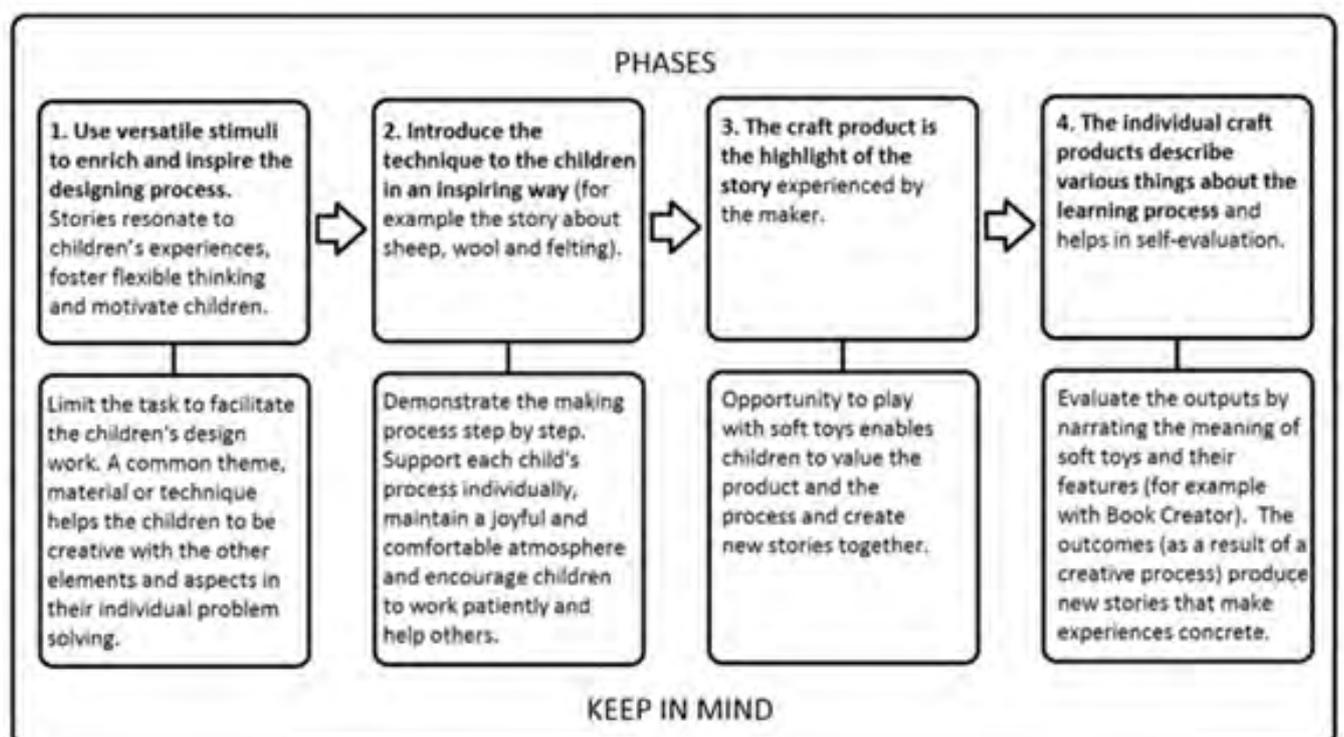


Summary for educators of the activities

Implementing the Individual Story Ending



Implementing a Craft Product



More about this project

In Finnish

[http://www.kulttuuriymparistomme.fi/fi-FI/Ajankohtaista/Artikkelit/Opi_ja_innosta/Kirstin_matkassa__Esiopetuksen_eheyttava\(46069\)](http://www.kulttuuriymparistomme.fi/fi-FI/Ajankohtaista/Artikkelit/Opi_ja_innosta/Kirstin_matkassa__Esiopetuksen_eheyttava(46069))

In Swedish

[http://www.kulttuuriymparistomme.fi/sv-FI/Aktuellt/Artiklar/Lar_dig_och_inspirera/Pa_resa_med_Kirsti__Forskoleundervisning\(46309\)](http://www.kulttuuriymparistomme.fi/sv-FI/Aktuellt/Artiklar/Lar_dig_och_inspirera/Pa_resa_med_Kirsti__Forskoleundervisning(46309))

More about NaCra-projects

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