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Focusing on arts education from the perspectives of learning, wellbeing, environment and multiprofessional collaboration

Evaluation research of an arts education project in early childhood education centres and schools

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Abstract

This research focuses on one arts education project which was carried out in Helsinki in early childhood education centres and schools. This study is an evaluation research which concentrates on art education’s connections to learning, wellbeing and communality; it views kindergarten and school as arts learning environments and at arts education as a multiprofessional collaboration between teachers and artists.

The arts education project, which was started in Helsinki in 2000, was offered to children who were under school age (3–6 years old) and at elementary school age (7–9 years old). The data consists of interviews of the teachers, artists and principals of the kindergartens (N=23), the narratives of the closing report (N=9) and the follow-up materials of the project. The method of the research was multidimensional evaluation.

The research includes five independent articles and a summary that connects the entirety of the research. Each theme is included in one independent article, each of which was published in international peer-reviewed journals. Article I analyses the multiprofessional collaboration between teachers and artists. Article II focuses on the possibilities of arts education in developing learning abilities. Article III explores kindergarten and school as learning environments of arts education. Article IV highlights the evaluation of the arts education project through a multidimensional evaluation method. The last article, number V, analyses the long-term impacts of the arts education project in kindergartens and schools.

The results show that well-executed, long-lasting arts education projects may support and promote children’s wellbeing and their learning abilities. It was easy to motivate and direct the children in activities that connected target-oriented work with natural play.
Arts education can also be used to strengthen the unity of the community between early childhood education centres, schools and neighbourhoods. The multiprofessional collaboration between the teachers and artists connected their skills and professional abilities, but successful cooperation also required the ability to handle additional interests and tensions.

The long-term impact evaluation showed that five out of ten participating kindergartens still continue the developmental work started in the project. The project work was also seen as an excellent way to continue or update training.

**Keywords:** arts education, learning environment, learning skills, multiprofessionality, multidimensional evaluation, evaluation research
Saila Nevanen

Taidekasvatus oppimisen, hyvinvoinnin, oppimisympäristöjen ja moni­nammatillisuuden perspektiiveistä tarkasteluna

Arviointitutkimus taidekasvatusprojektista varhaiskasvatuksesta ja koulussa

Tiivistelmä

Tutkimus tarkastelee varhaiskasvatuksesta ja koulussa toteutettua taidekasvatus­projektia. Kyseessä on arviointitutkimus, joka selvittää taidekasvatukseen, hyvin­vointiin ja yhteisöllisyyteen, päiväkotia ja koulua taidekasvatukseen, oppimisympäristönä sekä taidekasvatustaka­oppetajan ja taiteilijan moni­nammatillisena yhteistyönä.


Tulokset osoittavat, että hyvin toteutetulla, pitkäkestoisella taidekasvatukseella voidaan tukea lasten oppimistaitoja ja hyvinvointia. Lasten oli helppo motivoitua ja sitoutua toimintaan, jossa päämäärsuuntautunut oppiminen ja leikkiminen yhtyivät. Taidekasvatusta voidaan myös hyödyntää varhaiskasvatuksesta, koulun ja lähimy­pär­istön yhteisö­llisyyyden lujittajana.
Opettajien ja taiteilijoiden moniammattillisessa yhteistyössä yhdistyi molempien osaaminen ja ammattitaito, mutta onnistunut yhteistyö vaati kykyä käsitellä erilaisia intressejä ja jännitteitä.

Projektityön pitkääikaisia vaikutuksia arvioitaessa kymmenestä päiväkodista viidessä tehty kehittämistyö jatkui jollain tavalla edelleen. Projektityötä pidettiin erinomaisena täydennyskoulutuksen muotona.

Avainsanat: taidekasvatus, oppimisympäristöt, oppimistaidot, moniammattillisuus, monitahoarviointi, arviointitutkimus
Acknowledgements

My work is based on themes that have often occupied my mind, and I have from time to time returned to these issues. I have always been interested in the question of what the arts can give to people’s daily lives. When I have worked with children, I have often considered how their interests and motivations for learning will emerge and how the teacher can stimulate and confirm them. In my work, I often come across the question of how the qualitative factors of learning can and should be evaluated. The roots of this dissertation are in these issues. These questions have bonded the research themes and the articles and form the foundation of the research.

The dissertation process requires a tremendous amount of work, and without the people who have been involved in the process with me, I never would have completed this dissertation. Thank you all. The work was not, however, just plain hard work. It has also contained joy and playfulness and happy moments when the work has progressed. I would like to particularly thank a few of the people involved in the dissertation process by name.

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An inspiring and important group for me has been the Arts Research Centre of the University of Helsinki. This group has made it possible for me to monitor many different types of studies. The atmosphere of the discussions has been positive and free. Appointments have always offered some new ideas or new perspectives which have contributed to my own research and helped it move forward step by step. Important partners are also the artists and professionals of education who have been involved in this research. From them I have learned much.

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Helsinki, Tapanila 14.07.2015
Saila Nevanen
List of original publications

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1 Introduction

This research focuses on an arts educational project that was executed in kindergartens and schools and its evaluation. The research explores the connection between arts education and learning and wellbeing. The declaration of children’s rights by Unicef states that children have a right to education, rest, play and free time but also to arts and culture. Learning, playing, arts and culture are the basic rights which can be seen as a basis for a child’s good life (Convention on the Rights of the Child 20.11.1989).

To become true, the good life requires that the child has a possibility to feel joy, to feel success, to be heard, to be active and to be surrounded by understanding and interested adults (see e.g., Ruismäki & Juvonen 2011). To make this possible, adults should have knowledge about the special qualities of childhood, and they should be sensitive to children’s feelings, emotions and initiatives (Karlsson 2014). Arts may create this understanding about children’s thinking—their worlds of fairy tales—and in this way form a bridge between the worlds of children and adults. Playing and art should be available to all children, not only those who are artistically talented or whose parents support their children’s art and cultural hobbies. Early childhood education and elementary school have an important significance as a basic service because they reach almost all children under school age and each and every school-aged child. The beginning of the learning path is the most important because what happens in the early years has an impact on everything that happens in later learning. Wellbeing or conversely, malaise, is built in early childhood. Problems can be prevented best in early childhood education, and if there are already problems, they are the easiest to solve when they have not become deeply rooted. From these starting points, the themes of this research handle the core matters of education and teaching. The Finnish school system has received a lot of praise as one of the best in the world, at least measured by PISA research results. Does this positive development mean that there still might be a place for development in the quality of school system? In addition to learning results and wellbeing, it is also important for children to enjoy being at school (Ruismäki & Juvonen 2011; Zhao, Sintonen & Kynäslahti 2014). The target should be both: good learning results and developing children’s wellbeing while at school. Wellbeing includes friends, other children and kind adults, in addition to a child’s own parents. Growing to be a member of community and finding one’s own place first in a neighbourhood and later as a member of the whole society are starting points for living a good life.

Sometimes artistic skills as school subjects must be defended against the core subjects. Artistic skills are not just a relief or entertainment when compared to important academic school subjects. The pressure for teaching academic content is not unfamiliar even in early childhood education. Arts education offers many
possibilities for teaching, and it has its own points to give to the teaching profession (Efland, 2004; Heilig, Cole & Aquilar, 2010; Sava 2007, 13–15). Artistic skills form an area in which every child should be able and have the opportunity to move in (Ruismäki & Ruokonen 2010). These skills are closely aligned to children’s own worlds, which most clearly show a child’s internal need and desire to play.

Foreseeing the future is difficult, and that is why it is challenging to question what kind of knowledge and skills the children of today should be taught so that they have the most benefit in their lives and work. In a constantly changing operational environment, work requires different skills than it used to. How can we predict this, and how can we increase interest in continuous lifetime learning and exploring? John Dewey (2005) stated that one answer to this challenge of the ever-changing operational environment is that children should be taught to learn from their own experiences and from the surrounding world. More than ever before, the period in which we live rewards innovativeness, creativity, richness of ideas and the ability to solve problems and enterprise. These are exactly the elements which are developed through the arts. However, creative work does not fit well into the Finnish school system because the system requires learning results that are easily measured. A creative way of working requires gestation, time and coping with failure. Supporting creativity would be worthwhile because it would increase both school enjoyment and effective learning (Csikszentmihályi 1997; Gardner 1993; Uusikylä 2005; Burnard 2007).

Evaluation is connected to appreciation: what is being evaluated rises in appreciation too. (Mark, Greene & Shaw 2007, 6). This is why, although they are difficult to measure, it is also important to find methods for evaluating artistic skills as school subjects. It is most important to measure the right issues, not only those which are easily measured. Evaluation highlights and justifies the value of different issues and matters. In school education today, profitability, impressiveness, utility and competitiveness are commonplace. The problem is that fast results are often wanted, while issues which need long periods to develop are forgotten. Finland has received a lot of praise and admiration from its PISA success. The international evaluation of the Finnish school system is such that it is being copied in countries around the world, but there are no individual tricks to be copied as the school system and culture has been built over a long period of time during which many choices have been made (Sahlberg 2011; Välijärvi, Kupari & et al. 2007; Zhao, Sintonen & Kynäslahti 2014).
2 Background of the study

2.1 Theoretical starting points

This research is based on a holistic and humanistic conception of man. The nucleus of the humanistic conception of man is that an individual must develop him/herself and that every human being is valuable as he/she is. The holistic conception of man sees a human being as a comprehensive physical, psychological and social creature. According to Lauri Rauhala (2005), every human being includes conscious, bodily and situational (in connection with life situation) aspects. These different areas are intertwined inside an individual, and they all are essential to each other. A human being’s relation to reality is always individual and restricted bodily, consciously and by situational matters. An individual creates a relationship with the surrounding reality from his/her individually structured perspective (Rauhala 2005). Human reality is a complex concept which is challenging to understand by scientific means alone. According to Rauhala, school education should keep in mind the significance of these relationships in building worldviews so that people do not remain only intellectual-cognitive. A human being needs a versatile, organized worldview to lead a good life.

As a scientific philosophical starting point, in this research I have chosen a qualitative and hermeneutic approach. My aim is to understand the phenomenon I am exploring. The understanding is built circle-like so that to understand the details, it is essential to understand the entirety, and the understanding of the entirety grows deeper when the details are understood. The interpretation of the significance needs support from context, i.e., the overall structure. The criteria for the suitability of individual interpretations include whether it fits within the entire structure (Gadamer 2004, 29; Koski 1995).

The hermeneutic of Gadamer underlines the dialogical approach between the researcher and the data or the reader and the texts. The interpretation of texts or research data is never identical to the original text or the ideas from its producer, but the dialogue and creativity between the text and interpreter connects the original text with the significance of the interpreter. According to science philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1994, 208), the researcher’s own starting points affect the interpretation, and the understanding is always only partial. The Gadamerian interpretation of text or data can be explained in four stages. The first stage is becoming conscious about the pre-understanding. This means understanding the researcher’s own starting points and those considerations which influence the interpretation. The second stage is the dialogue between the text and the interpreter in which the interpreter analyzes the significance of the texts. In the third stage, the significance of the text connects with the significance as understood by the interpreter, which is called assimilation of the horizons. In the end, an interaction has taken place in
which new understanding was created by interpretation of the text which has become significant in the life of the interpreter (Gadamer 2004, Merta 2006).

Another starting point for this research is in pragmatism. Pragmatism is based on everyday experiences and highlights the significance of functional and practical consequences in scientific discovery. Pragmatism can be called the philosophy of common sense. One of the developers of pragmatism was John Dewey, whose thoughts are referred often in this research. Pragmatic research connects seamlessly with evaluation research, which is close to practice and underlines the importance of putting research results into operation (Väkevä 2004; Määttänen 2009).

2.2 The operational environment

The operational environment in this research consists of Finnish municipal early childhood education centres and the elementary instruction classes of elementary school. Children under seven years old belong to early childhood education, and those between 7–9 years belong to elementary classes. Kindergarten teachers and child-minders are responsible for early childhood education, while classroom teachers work in elementary classes. There are not special art teachers in kindergartens or schools because the same personnel are responsible for teaching arts education. Finnish teachers have a long education—they have strong professional know-how, and they are committed to their work. They also have the possibility to influence the practice of education and teaching (Kupiainen, Hautamäki & Karjalainen 2009; Sahlberg 2011).

In early childhood education, playing, moving, artistic expression and exploring are mentioned as typical ways for children to act. These form a loose framework in which different local applications are made possible. The curriculum for elementary classes is more precise, as is demonstrated by its division into different school subjects. Early childhood education (1–5-year-old children), the preschool education curriculum (6-year-old children) and the curriculum for elementary classes (7–9-year-old children) highlight the provision of many-sided growth and learning opportunities that develop children’s identities through positive experiences (Basics for early childhood curriculum, 2005; Basics for preschool curriculum, 2010; Basics for elementary school curriculum, 2004).

The administration and legislation of early childhood education are currently being reevaluated (Kohti varhaiskasvatuslakia 2014). Early childhood education has been moved from the Ministry of Welfare and Health to a part of the Ministry of Culture and Education, and it is seen as a more important part of the lifelong learning path. Early childhood education has been built in Finland on the Educare-model, where nurture, education and teaching join together, and this model will also be used in the future. On the other hand, there are speculations about strength-
ening the national guidance and evaluation of early childhood education to improve the homogeneity of the system. One threat of this reform is that early childhood education could be developed in a way that structures subject content but neglects children’s natural ways of acting. Also, the school curriculums are being renewed at the same time, and one of the issues is the question about the importance and share of artistic skills.

Basic art education is offered outside school and has its own curriculum. It is defined as a target-oriented education in different arts which moves from one stage to another and aims to give students the ability to express themselves and move onto professional artistic education. The basic teaching of the arts fulfills and deepens the education gained from school’s artistic subjects. It is offered today in nine different fields—music, dance, theatre art, visual arts (architecture, visual art, audiovisual art and handicraft), literary art and circus art (Taiteen perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2005).

This basic teaching of the arts is one of the specialties of the Finnish educational system, and it is very popular. However, it does not reach all Finnish pupils because there are big regional differences in its availability. The pupils are mostly girls (80%) and the classes are subject to a charge. In addition to basic teaching of the arts, many Finnish children have hobbies during their free time and weekends that are connected to artistic skills (Kulttuuritilasto 2011).

In addition to these art education structures, there are a lot of communal activities, led by local artists, where citizens can explore their relationship to themselves, other people and the environment through art guided by real artists. This also allows the artists a touch to normal everyday life and the reality of people. Communal artistic work brings together different art institutes with everyday institutions such as kindergartens, schools, retirement homes and people of different ages in different life situations (Bardy 2007).

This evaluation research focuses on an arts education project where the special skills of artists were integrated into kindergartens and schools, which improved the know-how of kindergarten and school teachers. Every child was able to participate in the project, and this participation did not depend on his/her personal abilities or skills.

2.3 The arts education project as a target of evaluation

In this research, I explore a developmental project which was carried out in a district in southeast Helsinki. It was a wide arts and history education project which was placed in kindergartens and schools, and it included five sub-projects. The aim of the project was to familiarize children with their own area’s history using arts as a means of teaching. The idea was to use local history knowledge as channel for growth through experience and action. The aim of the project was to enrich children’s imaginations and offer them a possibility to experience and participate
making art in everyday life. This research focuses on the arts educational section of the project.

There were 1500 children, 400 kindergarten and school teachers and 20 artists participating in the project. The children’s parents participated mainly as an audience or in helping with odd jobs. Visual and environment art, literature art and drama, dance, circus and architecture projects were carried out as collaborations between the artists and the educators. These fields of art were chosen because the organizers wanted to bring them to kindergartens and schools because they are out of the ordinary, so the educators did not have much experience or skills in these areas. The aim was to bring quality arts education to the everyday activities of kindergartens and schools and in this way, to the children’s lives. The project was planned and began in autumn 1998. The sub-projects worked intensively for 1–2.5 years while they received outside funding from the inter alia Helsinki culture capital fund, which made artist collaboration possible. After this time, the actors continued working without outside funding.

The entire project was properly documented. The evaluation and documentation were done to track the usage of the money given to the project, to evaluate the fulfillment of the project aims and to collect information for further development of arts education more generally. The evaluation highlighted three themes: multiprofessional collaboration between educators and artists, arts education in developing learning skills, and kindergarten and school environments. This research observes these themes throughout the evaluation processes. It focuses on the possibility of evaluating arts education qualitatively, what kind of long-lasting impacts the project had, and how permanent its positive results. Picture 1 shows the different sectors of the research.
This research includes five articles (see Picture 2). Each theme that was highlighted in the evaluation has been explored and reported in one article (articles I–III). In addition to these themes, one article (article IV) discusses the possibility of qualitative evaluation in arts educational projects and one article focuses on the long-lasting impacts of the arts education project (article V). In part, I have used the same data which I used in my licentiate thesis (Nevanen 2009), which concentrated on finding a means of evaluation for the arts education project.
2.4 Placing this research in the arts education research field

This research explores arts education from several different perspectives (compare Picture 3). The focus is on different arts, their common challenges and the possibility of educational functional mechanisms. The research operates in the formal fields of school and kindergarten curricula but also in the field of informal arts education, which concerns artistic skills such as hobbies outside of the formal curriculum. It highlights the points of view of both artists and pedagogues. The arts act primarily in this research project as an instrument and a scaffolding operator for communal purposes. The targets are more in increasing learning, wellbeing and supporting the children’s comprehensive personality development than in teaching artistic techniques or artistic expression. Still, the absolute value of arts and the significance of producing high-level artistic objects are not pushed aside, as they are a part of a pursuit aiming to promote children’s learning and wellbeing. This research explores the connection between arts education and the development of learning skills, arts educational learning environments and multiprofessional collaboration. In addition to these, the research also produces new knowledge about the evaluation of arts education projects and the long-lasting impacts of such work.
Picture 3. Outlining the research fields in arts education

When we explore dissertations in the field of children’s or young people’s arts education or the use of art in education and teaching during the last ten years, it is easy to see that most of them focus on a certain field of art, mostly in visual arts (inter alia Lehtolainen 2008; Karvinen 2004, Koivurova 2010, Hautala 2008; Merta 2006) or in music education (inter alia Pääkkönen 2013; Huhtinen-Hilden 2012; Airosmaa 2012; Lindström 2011; Hietanen 2012; Vesioja 2006; Muukkonen 2010). There are some dissertations in the field of crafts (e.g., Karppinen 2005; Hast 2011), dance (e.g., Foster 2012, Kauppila 2012) and literature (Suvilehto 2008). A smaller number of dissertations explore arts more widely (inter alia Ehnqvist 2006; Kangas 2010; Hyvönen 2008). The majority of research concerns school education and focuses on formal teaching. The informal arts education has not been researched widely, although there are some examples in that field too (inter alia Erkkilä 2013; Marjanen 2009; Hiltunen 2009; Känkänen 2013). There are only a few researches that focus on both formal and informal arts education (e.g., Pääljoki 2004; Kokko 2007; Vanhatapio 2010). The next four-field picture (Picture 4) illustrates research in the fields of formal and informal arts education as well as those that focus on a certain art or several arts. This collection only includes dissertations which concern early childhood arts education or arts education in elementary classes.
Arts education researches in Finland usually use qualitative methods. The starting point for many of them is often a teaching experiment or a project (e.g., Hietanen 2012; Merta 2006; Pääkkönen 2013, Stolp 2011). Often the researcher has worked in the project as a teacher or educator (e.g., Suvilehto 2008; Kauppila 2012, Stolp 2011). Artistic methods of research are also strongly present (inter alia Foster 2012; Erkkilä 2013). Other methods used are interviews (Vanhatapio 2010; Lindström 2011), text analysis or an analysis of narratives (Koivurova 2010; Airosmaa 2012) and grounded theory (Karppinen 2005; Karvinen 2003).

The targets of research include the support of pupil’s self-conception or identity through arts education (e.g., Foster 2012; Kauppila 2012, Stolp 2011), development of interaction between the pupils and the teacher through the artistic work (Erkkilä 2013), interaction between the pupils (Pääkkönen 2013; Koivurova 2010), interaction between the school and homes (Lehtolainen 2008) or interaction between the wider community (Kangas 2010, Hiltunen 2009; Hyvönen 2009).

The researches have also been made about the gender roles connected to artistic skills at school and their meanings (Marjanen 2009; Vanhatapio 2010) and the therapeutic dimensions of art and its use in supporting wellbeing (Suvilehto 2008; Känkänen 2013). Some researches concentrate on the didactics of artistic skills, their contents and methodology (Muukkonen 2010; Vesioja 2006; Karvinen 2003).
2003). Arts education philosophy and the standing and attitude of arts education are also under investigation in some dissertations (e.g., Merta 2006; Väkevä 2004). Some of them focus on the teacher’s point of view (Vesioja 2006, Airosmaa 2012) and some on the pupils’ points of view (Koivurova 2010; Lindström 2011).

What connects this dissertation with those presented here is that the project highlights teaching practices and the researcher participated in the project (e.g., Hietanen 2012; Merta 2006; Pääkkönen 2013; Suviilehto 2008; Kauppila 2012). The socio-constructivist context of learning forms the starting point in this dissertation as well as in some of those mentioned (inter alia Muukkonen 2010; Huhtinen-Hilden 2012). This research explores arts education from several perspectives: learning skills, learning environment and the collaboration between the teachers and artists, which separates it from the other dissertations. It is the only evaluation research that uses a multidimensional evaluation method.
3 Central theoretical starting points

3.1 Art as a basis for learning, acting and communality – philosophical starting points

The basic tasks for arts education are teaching reception, interpretation and supporting an individual’s own expression as well as building artistic meaning. Experiential learning is that which builds on one’s own experiences, discoveries, understanding and actions. The experiences are both knowledge- and emotion-based, and this way of learning also includes increased self-knowledge. Experimental learning offers the possibility for multidimensional linkage of personal, social and cultural knowledge (Eckhoff, 2008; Dewey 2005; Alhanen 2013; Ruismäki & Juuronen 2011). Arts education is also education towards humanity when an individual feels themselves to be an important part of a social and cultural community (Pääjoki 1999; Räsänen 2000; Karppinen 2005). In this research, arts education means education which targets the versatile development of personality and increases knowledge and skills in different fields of arts to make self-expression possible. Arts education can be divided into making and receiving art, and it is built on experimental learning.

Arts education at school and in early childhood education can be approached from different angles (Sahasrabudhe 2006). It can also be explored from an “Art for art’s sake” point of view. In this way of looking, arts education is seen as an independent area with own its substance, methods, instruments and materials. Another approach integrates arts education with other school subjects or areas of education in which the teacher searches for solutions to teach the contents of the arts education together with history, geography or social skills, for example. The idea is to join together different content and learning styles, which motivates the learners. The third approach to arts education is seeing it as a more comprehensive, different way of knowing. In this approach, arts education integrates more extensively into the whole curriculum and becomes an important medium and power source for children and youngsters for understanding themselves and the world around them.

Liora Bresler suggests the division of arts educational perspectives into child art (art made by children themselves) fine art (observing the works of masters) and art for children (art made by adults for children). The child art focuses on children’s own work and production of artistic output. Fine art includes getting to know the classical master works in different fields. Art for children usually means art made by adults for children with a pedagogical approach. According to Bresler, the contents, pedagogy and evaluation in these fields are different. Arts education at school often highlights different techniques and skills rather than comprehensive, emotionally effective art experiences. At its worst, the content of arts education does not build meaningful cognizance, but stays scattered and uninteresting
Artur Efland has also criticized art education in schools in that art is used to prove that schools are free and creative. According to Efland, one of the important tasks of art in school is therapeutic; the arts can reduce the domineering and suffocating effects of the school system. These questions are also explored in Päivi-Maria Hautala’s research, which suggests that visual arts can promote pupils’ learning and wellbeing. The pupils’ self-knowledge and emotional skills increase through arts education (Efland 1976, 39–41; Pääjoki 1999, 38; Hautala 2008).

Arts education in early childhood must build on experiences and help with self-expression. The trailblazer in child-centred education, JeanJacque Rousseau, thought that a child cannot absorb knowledge through thinking and that multifaceted personal experiences are needed; these experiences must be gained through observation and be done under guidance of an educator (Rousseau 1933). In preschool and at the beginning of the school, arts education is at its best, a way of becoming conscious of the world, and it must be a part of children’s socio-cultural environment. Later in school years, the arts help to build one’s own identity and find a place in the global world (Sahasrabudhe 2006). The developer of Reggio Emilia pedagogy, Loris Malaguzzi (1987), sees education as a way of joining together children’s natural expression and interaction with the language of intelligence. The arts offer good opportunities in this by connecting magic and logic. Arts education can be a way to get connected to the child’s own language. Making art and receiving it require both intelligence and subconsciousness with its emotional warehouse. The emotions have an effect on learning: the stronger the emotional load of the experience, the better it will be remembered. If teachers can attach emotional elements into teaching processes, the learning experience becomes more interesting and meaningful. If there are negative emotions like fear connected to the learning process, learning is prevented (Hurwitz & Day 2007, 11).

Friedrich Fröbel (1896), who has had an enormously high impact on Finnish and other German-related countries early childhood education, highlighted playing as an important activity, as well as using different materials as instruments which stimulate the senses. Sensations are central to the arts, which makes it easy to build a connection to a child using them. The sensations are of primary nature for children rather than handling subjects on the basis of earlier knowledge and using abstract reasoning. Reggio Emilia pedagogy also underlines sensations as a starting point for children’s learning and exploring of the world (Pääjoki 2011; Varto 2001).

Communal arts education aims to improve people’s quality of life through artistic learning. In it we learn about the arts, ourselves and the world. It supports the growth of humanity, and requires taking on responsibilities, planning and collaboration skills. Communal arts education often takes place in the border area between formal and informal educational environments. The target of an art object
in communal art leads to an experimental and ambiguous dialogue between areal actors. At its best, communal arts education joins together an understanding about artistic education and communal processes. Different groups of actors bring together their own special know-how and experimental knowledge. This enriches and opens new ways of looking at the field of arts education (Kangas 2010; Hiltnen 2009; 2008; Varto 2005). In this research, communal arts education is defined as arts education which aims to empower individuals and communities, increasing their quality of life and enabling them to grow into active players in society. Communal arts education aims to activate local people to find their own strengths through art and to build confidence between them and their communities.

One challenge to early childhood education and school is finding operational models which support children as players and participants in society. We should be able to find meaningful tasks and challenges for children to commit to. That also solves the questions about control and freedom. It shows why we learn—not to get through the next examination but to solve the problems of the real life (Edwards & D’Arcy 2004; Rainio 2008; Anttila 2007). It is not always easy to recognize the activity or the player’s role. Often only its external presentation is noticed. Participation can also be hidden and passive, but still meaningful and rewarding. This kind of hidden attendance often stays unseen by teachers and is not advanced (Rainio 2009). This kind of activity, in which it is possible to choose different roles and to participate in different ways, could include a game with a storyline or theatre projects that offers children divergent possibilities for joining in the activities from their own starting points. Long-lasting games and activities with a storyline offer an opportunity to participate passively if the child is slow to warm up. They can first observe the other’s activities and slowly be encouraged to take a more active role in the playing.

Communal arts education seeks for instruments to develop participation and player roles for fastening the children to their immediate society. On the one hand, it is easier for children to accept the rules and norms of society if they feel that are participants in the community; on the other hand, the arts offer children an instrument for constructive critique or presenting their own points of view (Bardy 2007). The feeling of being a participant and a player is a significant experience both in light of personal development and in the development of the group and the whole community. Communal arts education echoes the thoughts of Célestin Freinet when he stated that the child’s personality develops best in a community where his self-esteem is supported. Freinet emphasized the meaning of the environment over the teacher’s possibilities in child development (Freinet 1987). Art subjects or skills like physical education, for example, may also motivate those children who are unmotivated in the classroom and may disturb teaching. If the energy of these children can be directed to a meaningful action, their role and position in the group changes, both in the eyes of other children as well as in the
eyes of the teachers. Different kinds of learners, who find it difficult to survive in traditional environments, may also get their first experiences of success in the area of academic skills through artistic skills (Davidoff 2007). One case study by Anna Pauliina Rainio concentrated on a boy who became interested in a narrative play-world project is an example of the change of role from a troublemaker to a constructive member of the group who developed self-control (Rainio 2008).

The arts play an important role in human growth and in creating and promoting human ideals. It is harmful if the arts grow apart from people’s everyday experiences and become isolated for the use of only a small group of people (Dewey 2005; Alhanen 2013). Arts mold people’s way of observing and evaluating, and through arts, people are able to disseminate their experiences more imminently than in any other way. They also makes it possible to share experiences and to learn from each other’s experiences, but also about different communities and cultures (Efland 2002). According to Dewey, the difference between art and science is that science tries to reduce and alienate experiences, while the arts are based on experiences which are enriched qualitatively and developed creatively. Science tries to conform to laws, whereas its universal applicability is based on sharing personal experiences. One difference between art and science can be seen in the ambiguousness of art and science’s endeavor to remove ambiguity. Art also creates experiences of wholeness in a fragmentary and unstable environment. Art and science are based on different kinds of thinking and different languages. In arts, the focus is on narrative expression, plausibility and the taste for life, while the starting points for science are theories, analyses, argumentation and hypotheses (Alhanen 2013; Väkevä 2004; Hyvönen 2001, 14−20).

According to Elliot Eisner (1998), the human mind is built in interaction with the surrounding culture. Eisner sees that the current culture is ruled by the following conceptions: 1) Conceptual thinking and intelligent behavior are based on the ability to use language and logic; 2) The sensations are not significant in the hierarchy of intelligent behavior; 3) Separateness and distance are required for real understanding and 4) The scientific method is the only right way to produce knowledge and information about the world. These statements rule our culture and similarly, they nullify the arts. Arts education offers us instruments for making observations and expression, which are de rigueur for personal development and success. These central elements of arts education remind us of the actions and targets of achievements in successful and innovative enterprises and communities (Eisner 1998, 78−85). One of the most important tasks for arts education is to strengthen and enrich the basic experience of the world. In it, the individual gets to know him/herself, the others and the world through expression and to own these experiences. Arts education makes it possible to render the sensitivity of senses, to increase courage, self-knowledge and self-assurance, and to grow collaborative and interactive skills. These basic experiences create the basis for conceiving the world using scientific methods as well (Hyvönen 2001, 27).
3.2 The conception of learning and general skills of learning

This research is based on the socio-constructivist and pragmatist conception of learning. According to the socio-constructivist conception of learning, knowledge is built as a result of the learner’s active behavior. The basic elements of learning are social interaction and functionality. The learner’s activity and curiosity are essential. The teacher is an instructor rather than a transferor of knowledge as the information is not transferable; imbibing information is always an individual and social process. In learning processes, the learner’s earlier knowledge and experiences are essential as they offer the possibility of different interpretations. The target of teaching is to increase self-regulation and develop meta-cognitive skills, which means learning how to learn. The teacher’s task is to support the learner’s knowledge construction processes and to activate his/her learning and thinking. Through social interaction, the learner gets support for his/her learning and is able to help others just as they help him/her in the reflection process. Connecting information and knowledge to practice and the environment gives meaning to learning as it becomes a part of the surrounding culture when it is simultaneously applied (Gergen, 2001; Miettinen, 2000; Tynjälä, 2000; Kauppila, 2007; Huhtinen-Hilden 2012: 26–27; Ruismäki & Juvonen 2011:23–24).

Socio-constructivism as a practical pedagogy can mean collaborative learning. Learning takes place in a group where the roles of the members and the division of work are flexible and keep changing (Kauppila 2007). This is how collaborative learning differs from cooperative learning where the distribution of work and roles are more exact and the learning processes include both individual and communal work and problem solving. In collaborative learning, a common understanding and meaning are built during interaction between the members. It is reciprocal and the members are committed to common targets. It is also evaluated together. Project learning usually means long-lasting learning that is entirely built around a certain theme which aims at a common target. Investigative learning can be defined as an investigative attitude towards information and knowledge and that the essential element of learning is questioning. In this research, the described learning processes are built on collaborative learning and they include elements from project learning and investigative learning. In this research, the socio-constructive conception of learning means learning in which knowledge is built through the active operations of the learner in interaction with other people. Learning is a wide-ranging process which includes the development of identity and self-regulation, the shaping of value targets and socialization processes. Learning is both functional and interactive by nature. The teacher should promote the students’ meaningful learning and help to build intrinsic motivation. This kind of teaching is not control-centered. (Kauppila 2007; Gergen 2001; 2003).

Learning skills mean the completeness of abilities and attitudes which direct learning processes. In a learning situation, the required abilities and skills become
activated, but the orientation towards the learning assignment and commitment to thinking and processing the information is also important. Learning skills also consist of the ability to receive challenges and to persevere at a task even when it feels difficult and there is a danger of failure and disappointment. Learning also requires the ability to get excited about new challenges and the ability to enjoy one’s own learning and new skills (Hautamäki, Arinen, Eronen et al. 2002, 9–11). The experiences of success increase intrinsic learning motivation and self-assurance. These positive experiences are crucial for the development of learning skills because they help and tempt the children to learn new tasks and try to learn things which may at first seem and feel very difficult. Success leads a child to a good circle of learning in which a child believes in his/her own survival and success (Juvonen 2008, 86; Hulleman, Durik, Schweigert & Hareckiewicz 2008; Steinmayr & Spinath 2009). In Finnish education policy, lifelong learning plays a central role. Because the picture of oneself as a learner and the attitudes about learning are built in early childhood before the beginning of school, the importance of meaningful and encouraging experiences is great (Välijärvi & Sahlberg 2008).

There is a strong connection between learning and wellbeing. It is important that children fasten themselves to the community of kindergarten and school. This is possible when a child gets positive experiences of learning and is given affirmative feedback that supports emotional wellbeing. If the learning process includes emotional elements, learning experiences become more interesting and meaningful. If learning experiences include negative emotions like fear, this prevents learning (Hurwitz & Day 2007, 11). Children form conceptions of themselves as learners in childhood and these conceptions guide their learning throughout their entire lives. Learning optimism and school enjoyment requires meaningful experiences of being a subject and an active player, and offering artistic skills at school forms a good field for promoting experiences of success and meaningful learning experiences (Juvonen 2008; Eccles & Wigfield 2002; Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013). Cultural hobbies and the wellbeing effects of artistic experiences begin in early childhood. The society where a child lives has a basic culture which develops the child’s methods of observation and develops his/her emotional life. If social participation and cultural hobbies belong to the society’s basic culture, they will support children’s growth in the communality and promote reciprocal confidence (Hyyppä 2007).

3.3 Playful learning environments and arts education

In this research, the learning environments are widely understood to include the physical, social and pedagogical environments that affect working and learning. In the conception of constructive learning, attention is drawn to those environmental elements which are interactive and guide the learner’s ability to build of information and knowledge. A good learning environment offers instruments for
thinking and creating new knowledge (e.g., Lehtinen et al. 2007; Huhtinen-Hilden 2012). Socio-cultural teaching does not start from a control-centred teaching and learning culture where the teacher distributes information and knowledge while the pupil practices and does the exercises the teacher offers. In a teaching culture which is based on building a versatile learning environment, the focus is on problem solving and supporting and instructing knowledge construction. The target is to create dialogue and connections. The thinking on learning environments does not underline a performance-centred pedagogy; rather, it starts from a humanist-constructivist conception of learning (Huhtinen-Hilden 2012, 35). In addition to mastering the substance of what is being taught, the teacher should also be able to support learning processes which may proceed in different ways as the starting points of pupils are not the same. The teacher especially needs to be able to lead the processes of social interaction. The role of the teacher includes organizing the learning situations, creating the learning environment, walking side by side with the learner, promoting curiosity and being a researcher themselves. The teacher needs the capacity for self-reflection and sensitivity to situations because it is not easy to find readymade models for instructing in constructive learning (Huhtinen-Hilden 2012; Rauste-von Wright et al. 2003).

Artistic work touches a human being comprehensively through the senses and emotions. What kind of challenges does this create for the learning environment? The starting point of Emilio Reggio pedagogy is that a sensitive small child is taught by the teacher, other children and the environment. The learning environment must consequently support active learning, collaboration, flexibility, openness and aesthetic character. The child must also join in as an important part of the surrounding social community. The teaching must be based on a child-respecting attitude, from the thought that children are wise and the teacher should help them to use their full capacity in learning. The enjoyment of learning and knowing is a basic emotion which both adults and children share (Upitis 2004; Malaguzzi 1987; Strong-Wilson & Ellis 2007).

In small children’s lives, playing is a central, intrinsic element which enables the child to act and strengthens his/her wellbeing and self-conception (Ginsburg 2007; Baines & Slutsky 2009). Art and play are closely related to each other. Both require imagination and the ability to find creative solutions to problems. They both offer an opportunity to work through emotions and experiences, to share common joy or to release stress and aggressive behavior. Both of them also afford power resources that help to meet environmental pressures. Children learn best when they work in tasks which have a suitable amount of challenge in the close developmental zone (Vygotsky 1978). This is naturally true in playing. Play is at its best in a learning environment that promotes joy from learning and a commitment to an activity which is meaningful for the child. Most of the skills the child will need in his/her life develop through playing.
When we think about playing as an environment for learning, it means that playing is seen as explorative, active, collaborative and participatory, which should be supported and encouraged. Through playing, a child can practice and learn activities which he/she not yet is able to carry out (Ashiabi, 2007; Baines & Slutsky 2009; Thompson & White 2010). Canadian brain researcher Adele Diamond and her research group made a comparison research study which showed that a program for 3–5 years old preschool children (“Tools of mind”), which focused strongly on play, significantly developed children’s independent initiative and self-regulation than traditional programs which underline and practice basic learning skills, subject substance and self-regulation skills. The work of these brain researchers amplified the picture of the significance of collaboration and interaction in the development of the brain. The biggest worry is the decrease in the amount of children’s imaginary play because this is the most important in brain development (Singer & Singer 2008). A creative and playful learning environment often connects different methods and integrates arts education with other school subjects. Playfulness refers to spontaneity, the joy of making things, a sense of humor and playing games. Playfulness is a state of mind or an attitude which includes exploration, wonder and excitement (Kangas 2010; Lieberman 1977; Lindqvist 1996).

The basic elements in playing are spontaneity, enjoyment, symbolism and opportunities for testing boundaries. Playing can be seen as a base for learning because it practices seeing matters from different points of view and develops imagination and problem solving ability. Play is also practice for handling emotions and processing them. A playful environment includes communality, imagination, narrative expression and active functionality; it also uses many senses, together with bodily and emotional approaches. It underlines many different possibilities and provides an opportunity for making mistakes and failure without having to be afraid of them. A playful environment highlights positive emotions in learning (Kangas 2010:136–41; Flutter 2006; Smith 2006; Hull & Greeno 2006). A good learning environment encourages and motivates a child to work and learn. It can offer learning solutions to the needs of divergent pupils and their learning styles (21st Century Learning Environments 2006). All testing and competition in connection with learning lead to a possibility of failure. This is why it is important to invest in teachers’ high-level education instead of the perpetual testing of pupils. Learning exercises should allow for different solutions and a different speed for learning (Välijärvi & Sahlberg 2008).

If we see arts education in early childhood as a channel for self-expression and gaining experiences, a child needs an environment where he/she is able to play freely and to try out and invent new ideas. The teachers should arrange available materials and he/she should make questions and motivate pupils with expressive exercises. The preschool and elementary school curriculum should focus on the neighbourhood’s social and cultural environment. Arts education could offer an
instrument for empowerment, integrating experience and creating connections to the neighbourhood and culture in which the child is living. The pupils need materials, instruments, techniques and possibilities for art making, which helps them make plans, mastermind and reflect on the essentials of their existence and their place in the world. This kind of achievement increases and strengthens their learning, memorizing and thinking abilities. Working both inside and outside the kindergarten and school in real life creates an environment where thinking, interpretation and playing with new ideas becomes possible (Sahasrabudhe 2006).

3.4 The teacher’s role and multiprofessional collaboration in arts education

Robert Schirrmacher (2006), who has explored the teacher’s role as an arts educator, found the following approaches to acting as an arts educator: an instructor of achievement, a model of artistic working, a collaborator in working, a creative individual and an expert in the arts. The children learn in many different ways—some learn easily through listening to the teacher’s advice, some observe the teacher’s ways of working and then follow the model and try to do it the same way. An adult is welcome to produce art together with the children, not for them or instead of them. The companionship of adults may be of help when a child gets frustrated or bored of the work. If an adult works with the same conditions of the children, it may lead to close and valuable interaction (Schirrmacher 2006, 326−327). Working with small children requires the teacher’s good skills in collaboration and interaction connected with pedagogical sensitivity. This means before anything else, situational sensitivity and the ability to activate children and offer them autonomy and freedom in the right amount at the right moment. The teacher’s task is observing children and supporting their choices. In addition to this, the teacher also needs the ability to throw him/herself into doing, experiencing and playing with the children. The teacher is responsible for creating a positive and inspiring learning atmosphere. The adults and the children together build the culture of the group. At its best, a positive emotional atmosphere is created in which the quality of the interaction is of crucial significance. The teacher must have both the interest and time to converse with the children about their lives, ideas and play (Chien, Howes & et al. 2010).

The role of the teacher has changed from the all-knowing mistakes-correcting master to that of an adviser and instructor. Arts teachers need more and more skills, not only in mastering their language in the the fields of art, but also in social and therapeutic connections (Lehtolainen 2008, 56−57). A good interaction and dialogue are the most significant elements between the teacher and the pupils. The dialogue guides the children in reflective thinking and in finding their own repositories of interest. An erroneous interpretation of child-centred education has led to leaving children alone without instruments of thinking and the mirroring of
thoughts, which a good teacher provide for them (Sahasrabudhe 2006). Marjatta Kalliala (2008) says that to be a “living companion” for children, an adult must be lively and playful. The teachers of the smallest children must have a special sensitivity for recognizing children’s emotions and opportunities. According to Max van Manen, a teacher must have pedagogical tact, which means the ability to act in the way situations demand and still do it according to a plan made beforehand. This sensitivity also means insightfulness and discretion, together with ability to interpret the psychological and social meanings of his/her observations (Kalliala 2008, van Manen 1991).

The teacher is responsible for creating the prerequisites for action: the space, time, instruments, the division of working groups, the working atmosphere, experiences and models, together with his/her presence. The teacher must confirm the background factors which make activities possible, for instance, a flexible plan of action and the use of available space. The teacher’s role includes a dimension of attitudes, working structure and functionality (Ashiabi 2007). The dimension of attitudes means appreciating the children’s work and the relationship between arts education and cognitive knowledge. The structural terms of reference are created in the plans of action through the usage of time, space and materials. The functional dimension includes the conventions of instruction and interaction. In multi-professional collaboration, several professionals of different fields work together to reach a shared target. The collaboration aims to bring together versatile skills and share know-how with others (D’Amour, Ferreda-Videla, et al. 2005).

Bringing an artist into the educational community changes the work more than bringing in someone from the same field of education. Artists are often used as working partners in work with the aged, in mental healthcare, and in kindergartens, children’s homes and schools. The results from the collaboration have been promising, but in these communities, finding the mental and physical working space takes a lot of work in the beginning. The artists often challenge the system or structure of institutions that are built around strict daily schedules (Bardy 2007; Ruokonen, Salomäki & Ruismäki 2014). Communal arts achievement is founded on the interaction between the different parties where interests and tensions meet. The shared responsibility for the work also releases energy and opens new possibilities to break bad routines, especially when the experiences of the collaboration are rewarding for the players involved. The collaboration can have an impact on professional identity when knowledge and know-how is shared. A close cooperation makes creates a different reality. Inkeri Sava has developed a method called multicultural arts education in elementary school, where the teachers work on their own identities through arts, which helps teachers to use such working methods when children come from different cultures. This allows to children to be seen and heard in the classrooms as they are, as themselves. Using arts as working methods helps the teachers and the children by offering them new tools for knowing themselves and each other (Sava 2007; Bardy 2007).
Communal art activity can be executed spontaneously or according to a plan. In most cases, accurate planning is required, especially when challenging communities are involved. The planning should not eliminate surprises or the unforeseen possibilities the processes open up. It is impossible to know what makes the group exited and what the consequences of the achievement might be. The arts-based projects are individual and situation-specific; standardization and mechanical copying is not possible. The success of the activities is only guaranteed through the professional expertise of the teachers and artists and their sensitivity to the situations. Arts-based work and thinking methods give birth to achievement that is significant for each group and which is built on its own world of experiences and discoveries (Bardy 2007).
4 The aims of the research and the research questions

This research aims to evaluate the results of a structured arts education project that was carried out in Helsinki. Three articles focus on these evaluation research themes one by one. In addition to these, the fourth article explores the evaluation process itself. Finally, the fifth article investigates the results years after the execution of the project in kindergartens and schools and focuses on the project’s long-term impacts.

The points of view and the research questions which were pointed out in the evaluation of the arts education project were:

- What are the possibilities for multiprofessional collaboration in arts education?
  - What were the prerequisites to carry out the project successfully, and what were the most challenging obstacles?
  - How was the cooperation structured and organized?
  - What were the results of the project, and how did the teachers and the artists interpret them?

- What were the possibilities of the arts education project in developing learning skills and abilities?
  - Can arts education and project work provide and support school readiness abilities for children?

- What kind of physical, social and pedagogical environments can kindergartens and schools offer for arts education?
  - What kinds of physical environments can kindergartens and schools offer for learning?
  - What kinds of social learning environments can kindergartens and schools offer for projects in art education?
  - What kinds of pedagogical environments can be created through the thoughts and actions of artists and teachers?

The question focusing on evaluation is:

- How effective is multidimensional evaluation in evaluating an arts education project?
  - What are the starting points and opportunities for success in project evaluation, especially from the multidimensional evaluation point of view?
  - What are the questions and problems that unavoidabley arise when the evaluation is targeted at multifaceted development projects?

The question focusing on the long-term impacts of the development and the project work is:
• What are the impacts of the developmental work which was started ten years ago?
  o How is the decades-old developmental project evident in kindergartens today?
  o What are the benefits from the developmental project?
  o What has prevented the long-term benefits of the developmental work from being realized?
5 The methodological solutions

5.1 Starting points for evaluation research

Evaluation research is applied research which has a connection to organizational theories and their development and a close relationship to practice. Evaluation research can be defined as the use of a systematic scientific research process in conceptual planning and in carrying out and evaluating the work of an intervention program (Koulutuksen arvioinnin uusi suunta 2004, 52). The border between an evaluation research and evaluation is difficult, but the evaluation focuses more on getting information for political and administrative purposes, while the evaluation research collects the information for research aims and makes value judgment decisions based on that information. The validity of the evaluation research is done according to the same criteria as other scientific research (inter alia Heinonen 2001; Virtanen 2007; Mark, Greene & Shaw 2007).

Evaluation research is built on interaction between practice and theory, and it underlines the recoverability and the usefulness of the results. Evaluation research is always connected to values and because of this, the ideology and starting points of evaluation must be visible and clear. This evaluation is seen as a de rigueur part of supporting leadership and decision making and an important instrument in producing information the supports the responsibility and duty to account for and develop the activities. The practices need to be evidence-based, and they must be built on evaluation information. As the amount and significance of the evaluation activities increase, the analysis of the evaluation processes, the meta-evaluation, is accentuated (Cuba & Lincoln 1989; Patton 1997; Dahler-Larssen 2000; Mark, Greene & Shaw 2007). The development of evaluation achievement can be described with a generation model of evaluation. The first stage of evaluation action in the 1960s focused on quantitative evaluation, measurement and statistical research work. In the second stage, qualitative description was highlighted in evaluation. The third generation of evaluation focused on the scientific context of the evaluation work in which evaluations were made by outsiders and aimed for objective truth. The fourth generation of evaluation was built on the principles of constructivism, where different participants of evaluation interact and debate with each other; it combines theory with practice. The usefulness and recoverability of the evaluation were underlined too (Cuba & Lincoln 1989). A developmental evaluation and the use of professional evaluators can be seen as the fifth generation in evaluation (Simola & Rinne 2006, 70–71). This type of evaluation is created during the process, and the evaluation criteria, the methods of evaluation and the sections being evaluated are structured within a collaborative process. The fifth generation evaluation uses methods which were developed during the earlier stages and generations of evaluation.
There is no consistent theory of evaluation; different areas of administration have developed several different ways of evaluation. The logic in general evaluation is based on rational thinking. The evaluator must have the criteria according to which he/she is able to make conclusions based on value judgments. The evaluation information must be systematic, clear and focused. The results based on empirical evidence should be separated from interpretative assertions or estimations. Evaluation research is more or less relative, and the criteria and standards created are never totally free from value judgments. The researcher must also highlight information which criticizes the basic values used in evaluation research (inter alia Clements 2007; Lemaitre 2002; Heinonen 2001; Vuori 2004). The evaluation must answer focused questions which form the most important and obvious targets for the evaluation. In addition to this, the evaluation should offer ideas and opportunities for improving the target organization’s ways of action (Chelimsky 2007, 35).

5.2 Multidimensional evaluation

In multidimensional evaluation, which was developed by Pirkko Vartiainen (2007), the target of evaluation is the whole of an entity, including its context. Another important starting point is the central role of different actor groups and the dialogue between their points of view. Multidimensional evaluation is constructive, plural and comparative (Ojala & Vartiainen 2008, Vartiainen 2007). In multidimensional evaluation, it is very important to recognize and include all the groups involved in the project to get significant results from the evaluation. Those key groups that influence the results are those that guarantee the evaluation’s success in using the results in the best possible way. Another point of view, social justice, notes the varying importance of groups, but does not put them in order according to how much power they wield. The opinions and points of view of different groups may also contradict each other (Ojala & Vartiainen 2008; Vartiainen 2007, 154). A diversified and wide evaluation point of view is built on collecting versatile data about the evaluation targets. Multidimensional evaluation takes advantage of different conventions of collecting and analyzing the data and for each evaluation target. Separate considerations must be taken into account to find the best possible way of evaluating. Information is also available from different documents, statistics, follow-up materials and other information sources. Both quantitative and qualitative information are used in the evaluation processes. The idea is to build a versatile picture about the target of evaluation and to avoid simplification. A wide variety of materials offers the possibility to form a diverse and extensive picture of the target, but may easily lead to an evaluation process which requires a lot of time and resources. In multidimensional evaluation, the pragmatic points of view are important too. In collecting data, the researcher should find a
balance between the versatility of the data and the most important points of view using only the resources which are available (Vartiainen 2007).

According to Vartiainen, evaluation information can be classified into subjective and intersubjective data and objective facts. Distinctive to subjective data is personality and subjectivity. The data is formed from individuals’ points of view, opinions and experiences. The information is versatile and often contradictory because individuals process information through their own viewpoints. Intersubjective data includes information that forms a shared point of view by the key groups. The third type of data is information which may include the other two types, but which can be proved to be true using different documents or statistics. The fourth group of data is material which contains pure objective facts, for example, the follow-up material of a certain organization (Vartiainen 2007, 166).

The evaluation criteria are usually formed together when all key actors are present. The criteria should be built in a way such that the content and context of the goals are taken to account. A wide understanding among the key actor groups helps in choosing the central elements as targets of evaluation and in setting suitable criteria. Criteria must be chosen according to theoretical starting points as well as practical methods of analysis (Ojala & Vartiainen 2008). The evaluation must be put in a wider context that helps to understand the target as well as possible. The interpretation of the results must be done in connection with the context. To understand different phenomena, both theoretical and practical knowledge is important. Context engagement can be divided into theoretical-conceptual and practical context analysis. In the evaluation process, the theoretical context works as a framework of the analysis and a point of view for the evaluation. The practical context analysis connects the target actions, organization or project as a part of the surrounding society and reality. The results of an evaluation need to be concretized and individualized in a well-defined form. The results often are formed as concrete and short statements, which help them to be utilized. The results can also be presented as wider recapitulation-like texts (Vartiainen 2007).

5.3 Applying multidimensional evaluation in arts education project

A challenge in evaluating arts education projects is that the evaluation targets have subjective significance for those who produce or experience them. The evaluation of arts education must cover the dialogue and interaction between the artist, receiver, the work of art and the pedagogical context. The evaluation of an arts education project must be based on experiential starting points and standards which are built on profound professional skills and observation of practices. The evaluator must know the factors in a quality arts education—those that are promoted in the developmental project and are the target of the evaluation. Quality is bound to context, and quality in different fields of art is based on different elements. For
the quality of arts education, the comprehensiveness and experiential elements are
underlined. On the other hand, the evaluator should start and lead the dialogue and
reasoning between the partners so that the different points of view and the best
knowledge about the environment can be reached (Stake & Munson 2008, 13-14;

Learning artistic skills is the communal sharing of experiences, which has its
base in experiential learning models. Sava (1997) and Stake and Munson (2008)
have evaluated arts education according to which types of learning the artistic
skills promote, whether sense and emotional knowledge, know-how and action
knowledge, or artistic-aesthetic concepts and imaginary knowledge, together with
knowledge of an individual’s own artistic processes. Not even an experienced
evaluator can be an expert in evaluating these emotions, experiences or thinking
in any other way than through his own observations and interpretations. The eval-
uation must always be more than just description. The evaluation should specify
the conclusions about the merits of the achievement and show the justification for
these conclusions (Sava 1997; Stake & Munson 2008, 19). Extrinsic and intrinsic
evaluations produce different type of knowledge, and joining together these ways
of evaluation in a dialogue makes it possible to create knowledge of how the learn-
ing process results in both external achievement in personal experiences, interpre-
tations and opinions (Sava 1997, 269–271).

A challenge for project evaluation is in connecting it to achievement. The off-
icial rhetoric and practical action may be separate from each other. The results of
the project may sometimes differ from the objectives which were set beforehand,
and the achievement may produce surprising results which depart from the ex-
pected (Sahlin 1996; Kajamaa, Kerosuo & Engeström 2008). The methods of
evaluation should be chosen according to the target and content of the achieve-
ment. In addition, there are always resources which must be taken into account.
Multidimensional evaluation proved to be well suited as a method of evaluation
in a multifaceted project that had many different actor groups and produced many
different materials. The key groups in this research were workers in the kinder-
gartens, the school teachers, the artists and the actors in the administration. Other
possible groups were the participating children, their parents and other coopera-
tive partners. The key groups were selected according to their wide knowledge
about the project, and they were motivated to produce material for the evaluation
within the limits of available resources. Evaluation material was also collected
from the children (interviews, taping the group situations and telling stories about
photos taken during activities), but collecting data this way proved to be too slow
and require too many resources, which stopped the task. Children’s material has
used for example in project reports and as background material. The development-
tal project in this research is described, analyzed and interpreted using the context
of multidimensional evaluation. The project is evaluated through the participating
central actors’ (key groups) experiences and opinions throughout the different stages of the project (see also article IV).

The research material includes interviews and the stories from the final reports of the project, together with the coordinating group’s memorandums of meetings and other follow-up materials. The interviews represent subjective data from the multidimensional evaluation; the stories from the final report represent the inter-subjective data, and the coordinating group’s memorandums and the other follow-up materials represent the fact data. Additional interview data was collected to research the long-lasting impacts of the project.

The following table illustrates the different data which were used in this research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research data</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Collected in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with teachers and artists</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2000-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives of project reports</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2000-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination group memorandums</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2000-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other follow-up materials: the middle and end reports made to the sponsor and economic follow-up reports, photos, video tapes, the children’s artworks; the book published about children’s stories and portfolios collected by working points in day care centers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collected from 2000-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second interview with teachers and leaders of the working points in day care centers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The qualitative research materials were evaluated in a data-based theoretical dialogue. The approach was both qualitative and practical. The written material was classified using themes and then typed into categories. The criteria for analysis and comparison were created as the research continued. Through the experiments, a working and suitable way of organizing and classifying the data was found. Comparisons were made between different groups of actors and between different data and different sub-projects. The subjective data, which was...
analyzed from a data-based starting point, made it possible to get unexpected results that were different from the project’s original intentions.

The project evaluation started from a goal-oriented evaluation. The criteria of the evaluation were those targets which were originally defined objectives of the project. All the key groups were involved in target building. During the project, key groups noticed that the achievement reached and even surpassed the objectives of the project. The evaluation widened during the process from a goal-oriented evaluation to a self-evaluation built on professional reflection in which the teachers and the artists no longer evaluated the goals of the project but compared the achievement to other similar projects with which they had earlier experience.

This evaluation research included some action-research elements because a signatory took part in planning the project (during 1998–2000) and worked as a coordinator of the project when it was carried out. The idea was both to develop achievement as well as to produce information about it. As action-research, this research also continued in a reflective circle where observation, reflection and planning processes were repeated. The research questions and problems took shape and changed during the research process. During the process, new side paths were constructed and became meaningful (Räsänen 2002; Heikkinen 2001; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 1995). The action-research–like method made diverse interactions and communication possible between the researcher and the target groups. Evaluation and action-research are both methods close to practice where the researcher participates in the achievement and may be activating or developing it. As a part of the organization and working community, the researcher has good practical knowledge of the context, and she is also able to collect background information which helps in interpreting and proportioning the results.

The close participation of the researcher in the project is not without problems, however, because it may also cause problems in evaluating and analyzing the processes. The balancing act between researching and participating in the project required the ability to conceive and evaluate one’s own actions and their impacts. The data collected from action-research should be analyzed at the same time as it is collected. In this case, the analysis was not possible until later because of the resources.

5.4 The evaluation of the long-term impacts of the project

It often happens that the long-term impacts of projects are left unevaluated because they are not planned beforehand or allocated resources. Still, it may be that a project’s impacts are not seen for several years because its impacts may not always take place simultaneously. Measuring the impacts of developmental work, innovations and renovations require wide-ranging evaluations because a narrow evaluation does not offer a picture of the sustainability of developmental work (Nocon 2004). From the organization development and learning points of view,
evaluating the mechanisms of project impacts is important. The basic questions in
the evaluation of impacts are: What kind of impacts, where, how, when and in
what conditions? (Dahler-Larsen 2005; 2001; Pawson & Tilley 1997). The evalua-
tion of impacts can be approached through traditional scientific evaluation in
which the developmental work is thought to proceed in a linear fashion, and the
evaluation must objectively explore the causal relations of the project work and
its results (Robson 2001). In evaluations that lean towards socio-constructivism,
the situational liability of the evaluation information is often underlined (Cuba &
Lincoln 1989). A realistic evaluation tries to join these two starting points together
(Pawson & Tilley 1997). The evaluation of a project’s impacts may be in recog-
nizing them, measuring them, exploring them, foreseeing them or superintending
them (Owen & Alkin 2007). Evaluating the long-term impacts may also be a part
of the learning process of the organization in which the evaluation makes the ac-
tivities developed in the project visible; it shows if they worked as planned and
whether the initial goals were met. The evaluation helps in joining together the
practice and theoretical framework, which should help in analyzing and making
conclusions basing on the evaluation results (Dahler-Larsen 2005).

The impacts of this project were evaluated ten years after it began. The evalu-
ation data was collected by interviewing the heads of the kindergartens participat-
ing in the project work ten years ago. These educators were still working in the
same kindergartens or at least in kindergartens of the same area. The request for
the interview was sent to ten kindergartens and five heads of kindergartens were
interviewed. A portion of the requested heads of kindergartens answered that they
didn’t know anything about the project or that they knew about the project but that
it was no longer topical in their kindergarten. In addition to these five interviews,
the researcher talked on the telephone and sent some e-mails to three heads of
kindergartens.

The interviews tried to answer the question of what impacts the developmental
project, which was carried out ten years ago, had on their work. The semi-struct-
tured interviews took about one hour, and they were taped and transcribed. The
data was content analyzed, and it was arranged in themes organized according to
organization, kindergarten and individual-level classifications. The results were
then compared to earlier project evaluation materials.
6 Results

The results of the study has reported in the original articles. This chapter is a summary of the results presented in the articles I-V.

6.1 The connections between arts education and personal skills

Children need skills they can use in continuously changing operational environments. These skills can be divided into technical skills, thinking skills, creativity and behavior control and social skills (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013). As a result of this research, we may say that the intensive arts education project increased the children’s critical and creative thinking skills (see the article II). Throughout the project, the children’s interest in learning and their self-confidence as learners increased. Similarly, their ability to communicate and collaborate with other children improved (compare Winner & Hetland 2008; Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013).

The arts education project encouraged the children to commit to working, which increased their motivation in thinking, problem solving, rehearsing and learning. The project work offered children experiences of success, which improved their self-esteem and desire to practice even more. During the project, their ability in listening, concentrate on goal-oriented work, evaluate their own and other’s work and receive feedback increased (compare e.g., Juvonen 2008; Hau-tamäki, Arinen, Eronen et al. 2002).

The teachers said that in the art projects, the pupils enjoyed and were pleased to learn new skills. The project work also taught them collaboration skills and a toleration of differences. On the other hand they learned to handle and cope better with failures and disappointment. An atmosphere where one did not have to be afraid of failure promoted learning. There were many different right answers in solving the problems and carrying out the tasks (see e.g., Uusikylä 2005; Hurwitz & Day 2007; Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013). The work underlined collaboration and cooperation instead of competition.

These learning skills developed as a side effect of the project; the original targets did not include using arts education for increasing the children’s learning skills. This positive effects of arts education on general learning skills took place in several sub-projects, but these were an unexpected surprise. When the teachers noticed the possibilities of art projects to develop learning skills, they started to deliberately integrate other subject matter with artistic work.

The development of learning skills in artistic work required long-lasting project work where the children could join the activities by choice on their own schedule, starting points and interests. The project took advantage of the children’s
world of play, and their own circle of experiences and interests, which increased the meaningfulness of the children’s work. This connected playing and goal-oriented learning together, which made it easier for the children to be motivated to commit to the activities.

6.2 Kindergarten and school can increase wellbeing through the arts

The arts, culture and social participation create a capital that affects wellbeing and even life expectancy (compare e.g., Hyyppä 2007; Juvonen 2008). Because these effects are begin in childhood, it is important to develop early childhood education and school as learning environments where cultural and artistic hobbies enable all children to get in touch with a good arts education. This research observes the kindergartens and schools as physical, social and pedagogical learning environments (see the article III).

The artists criticized the kindergarten and school environments for not allowing for focused and long-lasting artistic work because of the inflexible daily rhythm that interrupted activities (compare e.g., Bardy 2007). The indoor space was seen as unsuitable and too small for arts education. Through collaboration between the artists and the teachers, creative and individual solutions were found, which made the projects possible. On the other hand, the safe and familiar environment helped small children to work with unfamiliar artists.

The neighbourhoods of kindergartens and schools, both their built and natural surroundings, offered many good learning environments which were taken advantage of more often than usually is done in the normal daily routine. Using the neighbourhood environment required good planning and a deflection from the everyday schedule. The children had to get used to a new, different kind of environment and circumstances before they were able to concentrate and benefit from the opportunities for learning offered by the environment. Using the neighbourhood as a learning environment also brought kindergarten and school closer to other community members. The arts offered a natural route and possibility for communication with people living nearby (compare e.g., Kangas 2010). The children were seen as skillful members of the community, and they received positive feedback from their activities. The starting point of the project was the children’s participation in all stages of the action: planning, executing and evaluation. The themes of achievement came from the children’s experience, their playing and targets of interest. The adults were instructors and collaborators who worked side by side with the children. Their relationship was equal and their solutions were equally valuable. Competition and comparison were avoided, and everyone was encouraged to experiment. The results were creative and differing. There was no need to be afraid of failing. The learning environments highlighted play and learning took place through playing (compare Kangas 2010; Peacock & Pratt 2011).
6.3 Long-term collaboration between artists and teachers

The arts education project was carried out as a collaboration between education professionals and artists. According to teachers, a successful and coordinated collaboration (compare e.g., Bresler 1995) required familiarizing the artists with the kindergarten and school’s operational environment and conditions of action. Succeeding in collaboration required common planning and setting rules for achieving goals. According to the artists, obstacles to collaboration were teachers’ firm and inflexible working schedules, bureaucracy and the stiff structures of the school environment, as well as confusion as to the organization of the collaboration (see the article I).

Both teachers and artists saw clear and shared targets as important for success in the collaboration. Although these were defined, the interviews showed that different professional groups highlighted dissimilar elements of working as the most meaningful areas. A successful collaboration began when these dissimilar points of view were allowed to coexist without competition. When evaluating the achievements, the teachers highlighted the instrumental value of the arts, and the artists focused on the absolute value of the arts. Both professional groups were satisfied with the common work and the results.

The collaboration raised different kinds of interests and tensions. Both partners required an understanding of different working cultures. The collaboration also required flexibility and a tolerance for chaos. A will and ability to look at one’s own work from a different angle and point of view was needed, as well as questioning old routines and ways of working (compare e.g., Pääjoki 1999 and Schirrmacher 2006). According to this research, the collaboration between the teachers and the artists produced the highest level of teaching when the professional skills of two different areas were joined together for a shared target (compare Ruokonen, Salomäki & Ruismäki 2014). Deepening the collaboration required long-lasting cooperation and finding shared ways of action to which both collaboration parties could commit themselves. Both collaborators estimated that working together improved their skills, enriched the everyday work and increased their wellbeing.

6.4 Multidimensional evaluation as a framework for evaluating project unity

A flexible and diverse practical evaluation framework was needed to evaluate the wholeness of a versatile project. A multidimensional evaluation met these requirements. The project was evaluated through the experiences and opinions of central actors (compare Vartiainen 2007). These central actors and key groups were educational professionals, artists and administration workers (see the article IV).

Evaluation research data consisted of interviews, stories in the final report of the project, memorandums from meetings of the coordination group, and follow-
up materials of the project. The interviews represented subjective data on the multidimensional evaluation; stories from the final report represented intersubjective data, and the memorandums and other follow-up materials represented pure fact data.

As a result of this research, we discovered that no single type of data and no data from a single participant group could give a good picture of the wholeness of the project. What was needed was connecting and comparing all the data collected from different partner groups and other sources.

The evaluation of the project started as goal-oriented evaluation but it widened to professional self-reflection. The research clearly shows that the evaluator’s own professional background and his/her own values affect the subjects and points of view that he/she highlights as important. The subjective and informal evaluation data showed surprising and unexpected results, which proved to be important in the qualitative evaluation wholeness (compare e.g., Mark, Greene & Shaw 2007). In an evaluation process which is built on professionalism, the challenge arises in finding clear and publicly expressed evaluation criteria. To succeed, a multidimensional evaluation requires good collaboration between different participating groups as well as knowledge about the context of the achievement and management of the wide and versatile evaluation materials and data. The best way to evaluate this is when the results are formed as short texts or statements (inter alia Ojala & Vartainen 2008), then it is a good instrument for evaluating developmental or project work.

6.5 Long-term impacts of developmental project work

The impacts of the project were analyzed through interviews with the heads of kindergartens who were still participating in the arts education project ten years after the first sub-projects began (see the article V). The interviews showed that the changes in organization and personnel have a connection to whether signs of the project are still apparent. The role of the head of the kindergarten in especially important to the sustainability of the impacts of the developmental project (compare Dahler-Larssen 2001; 2005). There was not any real developmental continuum to be found, but at the individual kindergarten level or among certain individual participants, the developmental work still found to be going further in some ways. In five out of ten participating kindergartens, there was still developmental work going on. In these the heads of the kindergarten and some members of the staff had wanted to keep developing the project.

At the kindergarten level, the arts education project’s impact could be seen as art’s important role in the whole achievement. It was important that the project’s effects were documented so well and in a concrete way because it made it possible to transfer the learned ideas and ways of working to new employees even several years later. The workers who participated in the project familiarized and educated
new workers about the actions that were learned during the project in the areas of arts education. The collaboration with the artists still continued, but it was on a small-scaled because of the lack of funding. Sometimes the artists made special visits to kindergartens, but they were not permanent collaboration partners or members of the community. The neighbourhoods were still used as learning environments in these kindergartens, and different learning content was integrated into art education.

According to the heads of kindergartens, the project was intense and long-lasting because good experiences changed their personnel’s attitudes in a positive way towards other kinds of professional development. This became concrete in the interest and willingness to participate in other developmental projects too. According to the leaders, more important than learning arts educational skills was that reflecting on one’s own work and a pedagogical dialogue had become a permanent part of the kindergartens (compare Cheng 2010). Project work was seen as an excellent way to upgrade education in which the whole community learned together and the subjects learned could be immediately put into practice.
Conclusions

This research asks the question: what makes for a good quality arts education. It also asks the wider question: what is good education? This research explores children’s learning, wellbeing, interaction between children, collaboration between adults and association with the surrounding community. In addition, it investigates the children’s operational environment, the learning possibilities and opportunities it offers, and the ways in which the environment may constrict children’s interest in learning.

The results of this research increase the understanding of the use of the arts and its possibilities in education. The arts education project brought up practical questions and solved problems in integrating arts with other subjects in early childhood education and in elementary school classes. It also highlighted the idea of joining together the absolute and instrumental values of the arts (compare e.g., Ruokonen, Salomäki & Ruismäki 2014; Winner & Hetland 2008; Sahasrabudhe 2006).

7.1 Conclusion of arts education’s possibilities in improving children’s learning and wellbeing

According to Dewey (2005; Alhainen 2013), a human being’s learning skills are most effectively influenced through education. The challenge for education is in its relationship with experiential learning. This refers to a human being’s ability to learn from his/her own experiences (compare e.g., Westerlund 2002). According to Dewey’s, kindergartens and schools should be a part of their surrounding socio-cultural environments, not isolated separate units. This interaction with the surrounding community is also highlighted by Eisner (1998). Early childhood education and schools must be in continual dialogue with their environments so that learning will include the pupils’ everyday experiences to balance and widen their influences. Formal and informal learning should not be separated; they should interact with each other for mutual advantage.

The arts education project presented in this research created a natural dialogue between kindergartens, schools and the surrounding community. For this, the children’s performances, exhibitions and other happenings offered useful tools. To make the surrounding community interested in the achievements of kindergartens and schools required high quality artistic outputs. This was made possible by the communal work of teachers and artists, which combined their professional skills and know-how. Communal art includes elements which Dewey saw as de rigueur for good education: attachment to a close community and children’s own experiential world (see also Kangas 2010; Hiltunen 2008).
Early childhood education and schools must create a learning environment that helps children learn about the surrounding world. They should widen the children’s conceptions and experience of their surroundings, especially in the social environment (see e.g., Dewey 2005; Malaguzzi 1987). Children learn from each other and adults and, of course, from their teachers. They gain experience and learn to conceive of the influence of their activities on other people and how other people affect them. This is how children gain the experience of being a participant in society. The target project acted as a learning environment which included these versatile elements to promote learning. In the project, the social learning environment was constructed so that the children could solve problems together; this occurred during the activities; the adults supported them and contemplated solutions as equals. The parents and other people from the surrounding community were also involved as an audience or as helpers in building performances or exhibitions in different places. Joining in the artistic work was totally voluntary for the children. The example of other children participating in meaningful activities tempted them to join, but they were not told to participate by the teachers, schedule or plan of action. The children’s own teachers were surprised by the intensity and long-lasting work of the children whenever the task was interesting and offered suitable challenges. Also, the children’s own achievements of participation in planning together, problem solving and intensive dialogue and reasoning often surprised the adults. The long running time of the project made children with different types of temperaments participate at their own schedule—they either jumped right in or observed as bystanders before slowly joining the action.

The experiences of the project also highlighted the fact that the child’s individuality must be respected in all learning. Dewey (2005) criticized schools for not taking children’s own facilities, objectives and goals into account in teaching. The children’s temperaments also impact learning, and it can be asked whether current teaching technique take this into account. According to Dewey, the goals of learning should be set in interaction with an individual and the environment. Often these children’s own goals are unclear, and the task for a teacher is helping to structure and handle them. The children’s individuality and dissimilarity in learning is a big challenge for curricula and goal setting in early childhood education as well as in school.

During the project work, the teachers often speculated about the possibility to deviate from the goals and schedule set in the curricula. They also wondered how much divergence from daily routines and plans is possible. The fact that starting points were from children’s own interests seemed to give birth to new learning skills, which in the beginning could not be foreseen. The interest and commitment to learning and the desire to struggle is built through experiences of success and from a task’s meaningfulness. Success in learning becomes possible when the goals are set from the child’s point of view and with respect for his/her learning abilities and schedule (compare inter alia Juvonen 2008; Steinmayer & Spinath
The fear of failure or of making mistakes paralyzes a child, which prevents and restrains learning. A feeling of haste is already a familiar problem in kindergartens, and it prevents concentrated and long-lasting activity for some children. In a tightly made schedule and a sometimes under resourced environment, achievements easily drift to system-orientation (compare e.g., Bardy 2007). The mental and physical freedom of the environment can sometimes become so limited that the variety and complexity of learners become disturbing elements instead of enrichments to the environment. It is an important requirement for the teacher to familiarize him/herself with the learning styles of each child, their targets of interest, and to be able to clear space for different learners in a way that is not based on the system or the institution.

The arts project carried out multifaceted achievements, which made different types of learning possible. Communal work towards a shared target included different types of exercises. The children could choose an exercise that interested them or the teacher could guide them in to different tasks. The feeling of success grew from their own performances and also from making a concerted effort in collaboration. The project harmonized the fragmentary day and weekly schedule and created an unhurried atmosphere. Children’s work, as well as their play, became more long-lasting, and there was less transition from one task to another. This required flexibility, which differs from kindergarten and schools’ usual manners. The artists and teachers also needed to be creative in molding the learning environments in way that made them suitable for the tasks. A good team spirit supported the children and promoted good performances in which they could surprise and surpass themselves. In arts-based achievement, self-expression skills, listening to others and interaction skills were practiced, creating a good base for respectful dialogue between the participants. The basis for achievement was a respectful attitude for each child’s contribution and attempt to perform. The project also increased the children’s positive presence in the community and offered them respect as important members of society.

The goals set by adults, which are often not meaningful for children, can restrain children’s curiosity and willingness to try different things. This is why it is important to include children in activity planning. In this project, they were involved in all stages: planning, executing and evaluating the project. Dewey asks: how can we set goals for education in an ever-changing world? According to him, the best way to prepare oneself for the future, or to be able to act rationally in a strange environment, is to learn to take advantage of and to use one’s own experiences (compare Westerlund 2002). The way of acting presented in this project could be characterized as throwing oneself at an adventure and letting the experience lead to further activities. There were no ready-made answers. Although the activities were planned beforehand, they were developed and molded throughout the process according to the direction of the children’s own work. The goal in this kind of working is the continual growth of children as well as adults.
The researchers Lois Hetland and Ellen Winner (2001) have explored the connection between the arts and academic skills development, and according to them, good academic results are reached in schools where there also is a high level of artistic education. But they don’t see the arts alone as explaining the good academic results. In these schools, there is probably something else that supports learning—it might be project-based learning, high goals for learning or good process leadership. According to Winner, Goldstein and Vincent-Lancrin (2013), the arts also develop academic skills, and such skills are needed in a continually changing world. These skills are for example, the ability to see and plan, and the ability to think and use imagination. They came to this conclusion after going through a large amount of research over many decades about the connection between art and academic skills. They found evidence of connection between music, theatre, visual arts and dance, which positively affect learning academic skills. However, they remark that evidence for the arts being able to develop creativity or critical thinking is not strong. One explanation is that everything that can be taught can be done well or poorly.

Good teaching of academic subjects also develops creativity, and no results can be reached through poorly done arts teaching. The conclusion to this is that when good results are reached through arts education, we should not concentrate only in practicing the artistic skills and techniques, but also focus on developing skills in precise observations, explorative learning, perseverance envision, self-expression, collaboration, creativity, reflecting and thinking (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin 2013).

This research was not carried out as an experimental design and is not able to show any direct cause and effect mechanisms; however, the results were parallel with those of other researchers: learning skills were developed in conjunction with a successful arts education project. A successful project was made possible through connecting the skills and know-how of teachers and artists. There may also be other common elements from the participating kindergartens and schools such as a developmentally oriented working community or strong pedagogical leadership.

### 7.2 The role of the arts in education

Dewey and Eisner were worried about artistic skills becoming differentiated as separate islands that diverge from people’s everyday lives and experiences. The arts have an important role in the development of experiential matters and ideals and also in skills of observation and self-expression. Making art and experiencing it is a way to handle new things that occur between an individual and their environments. According to Dewey, art deepens and widens a human being’s ways of experiencing and offers a possibility to learn from other people’s experiences too.
In communal arts achievement, people can deepen their understanding of themselves as well as others through artistic activities and also contemplate their place in the world. The artists also are able to meet new realities in communal artistry. The activity field of artists is widening to cover people of different ages and different life situations. Arts institutions are also more active in opening themselves to different environments and different groups (Bardy 2007; Hiltunen 2009).

On the other hand, the instrumentalization of the arts is shunned because it is thought to castrate art’s autonomy (Bardy 2007, 28). Art projects can also avoid being made instrumental if the intensive artistic work drives people in such a way that the idea of the achievement is internally motivated. That is what happened in the project presented in this research. The different goals of teachers and artists were joined together or lived peacefully side by side and complemented each other. No competitive juxtaposition occurred between the absolute and instrumental values of arts.

Social activity and active cultural and artistic hobbies form social capital in connection with health and wellbeing. This has been shown through experimental research designs. Communality and models of action are learned in early childhood from the environment (Hyyppä 2007). This is why the role of kindergartens and schools in activating the families towards culture and arts is significant for children’s wellbeing and even their predicted lifespans. Applied models of art are constantly being developed. The use of arts in working with children and young people requires good skills; instruction that is too rough, of poor quality or taken out of context may be even harmful. The arts should not be seen as a decoration of life; to make an impression, art needs to be in long-lasting contact with people’s everyday lives (Strandman 2007).

7.3 Learning environments that facilitate art and play

A playful learning environment helps a child commit him/herself to learning and brings joy to his/her life. At its best, it leads different kinds of children to the circle of good learning, which is characterized by enthusiasm, richness of imagination and an explorative attitude (Kangas 2010; Karlsson 2014). The arts project offered long-lasting opportunities in the world of play, especially the circus and sub-projects, which were built around literary art created long-lasting and story worlds that were continued and elaborated upon in the children’s own play. The common tasks enriched and colored the children’s play.

Art and play can also be thought of as learning opportunities that offer a child-oriented, functional, versatile and variable learning platform that can be connected to different learning contents and methods. Through arts, an adult can also reach the children’s world of play (compare e.g., Rainio 2010). Play is children’s own culture, which an adult can changeably reach. Arts may form a path for an adult
to develop his/her own sensitivity, pedagogical susceptibility and situational sense, which is extremely important when dealing with small children.

Taking advantage of arts and play is not a new phenomenon in early childhood education and the beginning of elementary school, but its capacity and value has not been fully utilized. This is even more important because children’s imaginary play, which is so important for cognitive development, is decreasing (Singer, Singer & al. 2008). Long-lasting playing that includes complex story lines should be encouraged. This is where art leads—to creating imaginary worlds of play.

7.4 Conclusions of the evaluation of arts education

When evaluating arts education, it is very difficult to assess the reasons that led to specific results and successes. Indirect effects often remain unrecognized. The developmental work includes a lot of invisible decision making and implicit knowledge (compare e.g., Dahler-Larsen 2001; 2005; Jaffe 2002). Often, communal art projects are individual and situation-oriented, and any kind of repetitive pattern can be impossible to find. That is why the evaluation should describe the context of the activity and the circumstances and background factors for the achievement. The elements of the process joined nicely together in this project. Evaluation research describes the discoveries and interpretations of different participants, all of whom made it possible to successfully execute the arts education project.

The danger in evaluating of projects is in concentrating too much on administration. Arts education projects are often evaluated only from the joy and creative educational points of view, while the social impacts stay unevaluated. Project evaluation needs more dialogue to decrease the bureaucracy of the evaluation (Clements 2007). The multidimensional evaluation used in this research a flexible enough framework to evaluate a manifold project. It also highlights the importance of dialogue and a multi-voiced modus operandi. A general view of the project could not be drawn using the materials collected from only one of the participating groups of actors; it is formed through connecting and comparing data from different origins. Multidimensional evaluation enables the use of subjective and informal data in conjunction with goal-oriented and other formal evaluation data. The subjective and informal evaluation material is important as it highlights surprising and unexpected points of view (Vartiainen 2007). This is especially true when the evaluation targets are experiences, the personal relationships to the achievement, and the intrinsic world, which forms the nucleus of learning and wellbeing.

Behind any evaluation, there is always a framework of values; evaluation is value-bound activity. This is why the starting points and the ideology of the evaluation must be clear and visible (inter alia Clements 2007; Lemaitse 2002). Mul-
tidimensional evaluation enables the use of different values from different partners as starting points for the evaluation. Still, this does not totally negate the values behind the results. Even more difficult for the researcher is analyzing his/her own values or hidden values and considering the impact of these values on the research (Heinonen 2001; Vuori 2004). This research clearly showed how the professional background of the actors impacted what they saw as important targets in the evaluation and what kind of interpretations they made about the matters that were evaluated. The professional educators saw matters related to learning and children’s social skills as the most important. The artists underlined high-quality output of the project—performances and exhibitions. The administration personnel highlighted the equal opportunity for children to receive high-quality arts education together with the empowerment of communities and an increase in well-being through artistic achievement.

Long-term follow-up of projects is seldom done. Still, investigating earlier developmental work might offer insight into the characteristics of a project’s developmental and organizational history, which could be integrated into new developmental projects. The impact of new models and developmental work may not be apparent for years (Kajamaa, Kerosuo & Engeström 2008). The biggest problem with the current evaluation models of educational quality is that they focus too narrowly on economic matters and short-term impacts (inter alia Gerwitz 2000; Raivola, Valtonen & Vuorensyrjä 2000). In this research, it was important to return to the project’s origins, which were ten years ago, to explore the impacts and sustainability of new ways of action.

7.5 Validity, reliability and ethical questions of the research

The validity and reliability of this research are analyzed according to context by describing the choices and comparing the consistency and logic of the various points of view in connection with the responses from other researchers. These can be considered important points of view in evaluating the research work (Silverman 2005; Denzin & Lincoln 2011). According to Kvale (1995), the validity of research can be evaluated from three different angles: professional skills, communication and ways of action. Validity in professional skills means succeeding in the whole research process: collecting the data, analyzing it, building the theoretical framework and presenting the results. The research should answer the questions which were set out to be answered. The validity in communication means the openness and transparency of the research so that the researcher’s choices and solutions can be evaluated by the readers. Practical validity, according to Kvale, means the significance of the research and the new information it offers.

In addition to the targets, achievement and results, this research also described the environment and conditions in which the project was carried out. This description of the activities and context of the research offer important information about
the process and the elements that influenced the results. With this information, the reader is able to evaluate the transferability of the results and also their potential applications. As a researcher and participant in the project, I had good opportunities to understand the context and wholeness of the project. On the other hand, my own participation in its achievement brought some challenges. I represented the project from the administration personnel’s point of view, and the danger in this is that the interviewees might not dare criticize the project if their picture of the researcher as neutral was not clear. For this reason, I used a neutral person to conduct the interviews of the teachers and artists. Varto (1992) nicely describes the contradictive role of a researcher by saying that the researcher must keep him/herself apart from the research target. On the other hand, one must understand that deep intrinsic processes and experiences are not possible if the researcher doesn’t get involved with the meaningful content of the matters under investigation. The results are easily affected by the researcher’s own value presumptions (Gadamer 2004), and this makes it important for the researcher to recognize his/her own presuppositions. A research project in which the researcher participates in planning, carrying out and evaluating processes is not an easy starting point from with to address presuppositions. As a project actor, you are committed to the project’s targets, and you wait to see positive results, but at the same time, there must be an outsider researcher who has a distant relationship to the project itself. This contradiction was facilitated by the temporal distance of my own experience working in the project. Lacey (1999) notes that subjectivity and a value-bound connection to a project’s conception is unavoidable, but it is important to become conscious of this fact.

The quality of the data is an important for the quality of information the research can offer. Central is also the atmosphere of the interviews, how freely the interviewees can express their own experiences and thoughts, and how valid the other sources that are used for data collection. A good interaction between participants and actors is most important in the evaluation research and in the success of the whole project. This is particularly important in making hidden values visible and conscious. One starting point of this multidimensional evaluation was that those actors who could offer the most relevant information about the project were selected as key groups (Vartiainen 2007). This was one of the significant factors guiding data selection. Another critical point is the voluntary participation in both the project and the interviews, which means that those who participated were those believed in the possibilities for arts education and who were excited about the project. Educators who criticized the arts education project for taking away too much time and resources from other, more important subjects were not systematically reached and included in this research.

Qualitative research describes the discoveries that can be found from the research data. It doesn’t offer direct answers to causal connections between different matters or results. The strength of qualitative research is not in its transparency,
but rather in suggesting new models for thinking and new points of view (inter alia Patton 1990; Metsämuuronen 2006, Denzin & Lincoln 2011). This research has been reported in a way that practical examples and direct references from the data enable the evaluation of the conclusions and interpretations. The research process has been described so that the choices and reasoning behind the solutions of the researcher can be seen clearly. Evaluation research includes many practical choices and compromises. These choices include, for example, why the children were not directly interviewed. These choices were justified in the description of data collection.

The project was divided into sub-projects, which made comparisons possible. Comparison is one of the ways to improve the reliability of research (Silverman 2005). A multidimensional evaluation as a method also enabled the comparison of data collected from different groups of participants (interviews, the stories from the final report) in which the similarities and contradictions offered new information about the usefulness of the data in the analysis stage. A multidimensional evaluation does not automatically offer reliable results because the choices made by the researcher in selecting the key groups have a strong impact in getting reliable results.

One challenge in this research has been consistency and logic because the data was wide and versatile. This made consistency within the text challenging; this can also be called coherence (Potter & Wetherell 1989; 1994). The wholeness and focus of the research was formed during the project’s execution. The research is divided between the evaluation of arts education and the analysis of the results of the project evaluation. The focus of this research has been clarified in Pictures 1 and 2. The consistency was improved through feedback from publishing the articles. The data-based analysis is demanding in terms of consistency and the conclusions are based on the data used. The peer reviews from other researchers have repeatedly supported the critical analysis of the data. The understanding of the research target has grown from the dialogue between theory and data in conjunction with comments from other researchers. The parallel results which have been found by other researchers strengthens the results of this research.

One of the challenges in this research was its extended timeline. On the other hand, it offered good distance and perspective from the research target. The data for the fifth article in the research series was collected ten years after the project had started. This enabled mirroring the earlier results with the heads of the kindergartens who were involved in the project. The discussions strengthened the conclusions from the earlier results, which were found to be true. The themes researched were not outmoded; they were still very topical.

In this research, data was not collected directly from the children, which would have meant even more strict adherence to research permissions. The interviewees sometimes mentioned children by name, but in the report, the names have been removed or changed. The identity of the interviewees is not given in the report.
Due to the small community of artists, the most difficult challenge was keeping the names of the artists unknown.
8 Concluding remarks

Arts have been applied in working with children and young people, old people and in social work; this work is increasing and seeking new models. This research offers new points of view for this developmental work. One important message of this research is that for children, academic subjects and artistic skills are not competitors; they feed, support and complete each other. Wellbeing and learning are also interconnected, and that is why a wide and comprehensive approach to learning and learning environments is needed. Wellbeing should be taken into account in planning and carrying out learning tasks and creating learning environments. Playfulness is children’s approach to learning; this research underlines the possibilities offered by this information.

The requirements for teachers’ professional abilities and situational sensitivity are large. They should be able to take into account different learning styles and learners and arrange experiences of success that build motivation, perseverance and a basis for lifelong learning. Multiprofessional work within teaching connects different knowledge, widens possibilities, helps in wellbeing at work and works to update education. This kind of long-lasting collaboration between different professions can positively renew educational institutions for young children. Hopefully, this will be possible in the future because the importance and benefits are well understood. It is important that, resources will be found for culture and arts education, which prevents problems, instead of using these resources for remedial work in special education to repair damage after it has already happened.

New working methods and developmental work must be evaluated. This research describes one method of evaluation, multidimensional evaluation, which is a practical means of evaluation. For supporting developmental work, practical, adaptable methods of evaluation that vary according to changing contexts are needed. In practice, evaluations must be carried out with limited resources, and they are done in addition to other work. The evaluation information is valuable if it can be taken into consideration when supporting the development work. To start using this information demands a dialogue between the evaluator, participants, funders and administrators. Information should also be evaluated in conjunction with dialogue.

When observing the results of this research, new questions arise: How do we educate our children and what skills and abilities do they need later in life? Is joyful learning also effective? How can different children with dissimilar interests be taught simultaneously? How do we grow intrinsic motivation for learning? What kinds of teachers and educators do the schools and kindergartens need?

An interesting idea for further research would be finding out if there is a connection between the participating children and their artistic hobbies. It would be good to find out whether the learning motivations of the participants differ from
others by the end of elementary school. It would also be nice to investigate the communality of the environments as well as its sustainability and long-term impacts. For example the circus project was carried out in a new area, and the parents of the children were strongly involved in the project as helpers. They got to know each other in common helping tasks, and it would be interesting to research whether this left a sustainable culture of communality in the area.

There has been research done about the use of arts in Finland. In 2013, a political analysis was published about the state of arts and cultural education in 2010. This report noted that more than one million people are involved with arts education in Finland, but the distribution of the offerings is not equal geographically or across different fields (Tiainen, Heikkinen & al. 2010). As a result of this report, a wide arts education project got started nationally which aimed to strengthen children’s cultural competence. There is a desire to attach cultural education and a basic education in the arts to statutory municipal wellbeing plans. The connection between the arts and wellbeing has been clearly highlighted in publications such as “Taiteesta ja kulttuurista hyvinvointia” (Wellbeing from arts and culture) (Liikanen 2010) and “Kulttuurin ja hyvinvoinnin välisistä yhteyksistä” (About the connections between culture and wellbeing) (von Brandenburg 2008). The atmosphere in the discussion about arts education today is quite positive. The meaning of arts to human growth is recognized, and this is why early childhood education and basic education need to include more elements of arts education. New arts education objectives have also been written into current government platforms, and the Ministry of Education and Culture has also published a proposal for a children’s cultural political program (2014), which supports children’s rights to arts and culture through strengthening the status of children’s culture and its operational preconditions.

Local experiments in applying arts are done all the time in Finland. For example, in Vantaa they employ an artist in ten kindergartens to work in collaboration with the teachers instead of employing special advisers. There are also projects that already have established their agency, such as the national children’s cultural central’s “Taikalamppu-network” (The magic lamp) and the children’s arts centre, Annantalo’s, collaboration with kindergartens and schools. There is also a children’s artistic welfare clinic in Helsinki. In light of the results of this research, what is important is long-lasting collaboration, not only in short artist visits to kindergartens and schools. Arts education should become a part of the learning environment, and artists and art teachers should be a part of the growing environment to support the children. The success and impact of arts education requires inspiration and stimulation and skillful and capable teachers. Arts education also supports children in learning about different cultures and nicely promotes multicultural education.

Another recent positive development has been the emphasis on the significance of children’s play and its possibilities. For example, the three-year project “Koko
Suomi leikkii” (The whole Finland is playing) is funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation and is carried out by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare, together with the Finnish Red Cross. It aims to encourage people of all ages to play and to build connections between the generations while simultaneously highlighting the significance of play. Many other projects focus on play and playful learning environments, one of which is the early childhood education developmental and upgrading education project, VKK-Metro. Work that promotes playful learning environments simultaneously connects playing, arts learning and wellbeing. It also attaches new challenges and possibilities in teaching such as the use of games in learning. Along with the project described in this research, these learning environments take advantage of arts and play in early childhood education and at schools; these environments are warmly welcome.
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