

Creative literacy as a way for multiliteracy

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Abstract:

Turku City Library is a place of knowledge, creativity, enjoyment and civic activity. The library is also an equal and open environment for learning and a meeting place for the community. One of the library's key functions is to support the increase of the literacy skills and develop an enthusiasm for reading for everyone including immigrants. Turku City Library and Turku Women's Centre cooperate in supporting Finnish language learning and literacy skills by applying various creative methods through collaboration between the EU Lifelong Learning Program's Finnish office CIMO (Centre for International Mobility) and the Turku City Library to provide a Grundtvig workshop titled Creative Literacy. The aims of the workshop are to inspire international cooperation and interaction, and to develop the participants' literacy and professional skills. The workshop is due to run in early June 2014. This paper will discuss the content and present the methods to be used in the workshop.

Keywords: Creative Literacy, Adult Literacy, Multi-literacy, Finland

1. Introduction

The city of Turku (about 182,000 inhabitants) is located on the southwest coast of Finland. The City of Turku has been preparing its 2029 Strategic Plan since last spring, in collaboration with residents and other interest groups. Creating a multicultural environment has been recognized as a special strength, as cooperation and integration are basic civic cornerstones both nationally and internationally. 9.2% of Turku's population speak languages other than Finnish or Swedish. According to the strategy citizens should use their knowledge and contacts to develop both the workplace and the city. Co-operation of this kind is not only appreciated by citizens, but creative and is encouraged as a recommended way to work.

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community. One of the library's key functions is to support the increase of literacy skills and develop an enthusiasm for reading for all citizens. The Turku Main Library comprises the new section completed in 2007 and the old library building that was completely renovated in 2008. Turku main library is the busiest public library in Finland. 13 branch libraries and two mobile libraries provide services for those who can't come to the city center.

2. Multi-literacy in Turku City Library

Developing reading and media skills (including various kinds of reading) are the top priority for Turku City Library. As the world is becoming smaller with the Internet and globalization, good communication between other cultures and proficiency in other languages are essential for everyone. The way we communicate has changed with advances in technology and multimedia. While people still use text for communication, technology now allows us to also use voice, sounds, pictures and film to communicate. The use of social media for communication encourages simple and short expression.

Libraries have numerous tasks and service opportunities in the use of new media and in supporting new literacy skills. Our work as librarians is transforming "from sitting and waiting to walking and talking" (personal communication, Schultz ,2014). An example of a media literacy project is the Turku City Library's involvement in the *Reading Rage Project*. The library has been one of the pilots in the project, which has been financed by The Ministries of Education and Culture, while the faculties of Arts and Education at the University of Oulu are carrying out a three-year-project (2012-2015). The target group consists of children and youngsters from 6 to 16 years, teachers, librarians and parents. A network of operators and methods of operation are currently being created when the project is being tested. The school year 2014- 2015 will be a theme year for multi-literacy. In 2015 the project will be evaluated and necessary improvements made.

3. Cooperation between Turku Women's Centre and the library

Turku City Library and the Turku Women's Centre cooperate in supporting Finnish language learning and literacy skills by applying a variety of creative methods. The library provides spaces, assistance and know-how for participants so they can access the collections and acquire library skills. Proposals for funding have been a collaborative effort and participants from the Women's Centre brought their exhibitions to the library and provided new perspectives to learning for the library staff.

Turku Women's centre has been doing multicultural work in the Turku area since 1994. The Centre assists immigrant women and their families in legal matters and helps them learn the language and understand Finnish culture. The Centre organizes courses which support the learning of Finnish and how to integrate into Finnish society. The teaching sessions are organized in small groups. In addition to Finnish language and culture there are computer and social media studies. The participants are encouraged to take part in cooperative learning. Efforts are also made to improve the learners' self-esteem and motivation. Each participant has an opportunity to bring her special skills (sometimes hidden) to benefit the whole group. The basic idea is that each participant is responsible for her own learning as well as that of the whole group.

Previously, the project EQUAL for immigrant women was carried out at the centre in 2002-2005. 150 women were involved. The aim of the project was to develop new methods to help

immigrant women to find their place in working life. The project had international partners in Spain (Murcia), France (Paris) and in Austria (Wien and Lintz). In 2013 the centre was awarded a prize for immigrant education by The Nordic Association for Adult Education. The association underlined the fact that the centre has organized courses for groups of immigrants (e.g. housewives) for whom it is extremely difficult to get any other kind of education, and that innovative educational methods have been used. Three supervisors from the centre participated in a one-week-course *Arts and Adapting to a new Cultural Environment* for immigrant educators in Naflio, Greece. The aim was to learn more creative methods when working with immigrants.

4. The Fluent Reading Project

The experience of working with immigrants at the centre gave rise to the idea of book clubs especially for immigrants. The main objective of the clubs is to improve reading skills and to encourage participants to use the club, the library and its collections. Why were creative methods chosen as tools for the reading clubs?

- Participative methods have been used since the establishment of the centre in 1994. Where no common language existed, the methods helped understanding. It is an advantage for the participants to be able to participate actively right from the start.
- Those participants who had taken part in the Turku City Library's *Fluent Reading Project* in 2009-2011, had attended or were currently attending a range of Finnish courses. However, their literacy had not improved and the participants felt that did not have a working knowledge of the language. It has been found that using creative participative methods makes it possible to provide positive emotional experiences for participants, which further encourages their literacy learning.
- The members of the groups (as well as library users) are in different phases and situations in their lives. Participants include a range of age groups, they come with varying abilities to learn and are often from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The *Fluent Reading* clubs are organized so these differences are taken into consideration. A range of methods are used to accommodate different learning styles. The idea is that each learner feels good physically and emotionally about their learning.
- Creative reading helps the learner to understand not only the surface level of the text, but also encourages reading for deeper meaning such as metaphors, nuances and references. It also helps to develop social literacy, or the ability to place oneself in somebody else's situation, for example somebody coming from another culture, because learning a language is also learning culture.
- Cooperational learning in creative literacy clubs encourages collaboration and cohesion. A common goal and working together ease the feeling of *being different*, and strengthen the feeling of *us* as a group. Cooperational learning creates joy and positive social interaction and supports the learning process. The whole group benefits from the different abilities and skills of the different members, which also improves motivation and learning results. The cooperational method provides opportunities for the learners to practice interaction skills, communication and tolerance towards others.

5. The importance of literacy for all

Surprisingly many Europeans have deficient reading and writing skills. National and international surveys show that approximately one in every five people over fifteen, lack the kind literacy they would need to function as a fully functioning member of modern society. As people move about more freely and are now emigrating from one country to another more often, reading and writing become more and more multilingual and involve different cultural backgrounds. The importance of literacy and reading in a global society has been summarized in the *IFLA Trend Report*.

TREND 1: New technologies will both expand and limit who has access to information. An ever-expanding digital universe will bring a higher value to information literacy skills such as basic reading and competence with digital tools. People who lack these skills will face barriers to inclusion in a growing range of areas. The nature of new online business models will heavily influence who can successfully own, profit from, share or access information in the future (IFLA, 2013, p. 10).

In the foreword of the EU high level group of experts on literacy report EU the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport Androulla Vassiliou stated:

When the results from PISA, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, were published, it was a shock to realise that one in five of our 15-year-olds in the EU still has insufficient reading skills. ... "More than 73 million adults in the EU currently have low qualifications, and many of them do not have sufficient literacy levels to cope with the daily requirements of personal, social, and economic life.... Indeed, we not only need to focus on a problem we have long considered as solved in Europe, but we need to rethink what kind of literacy tomorrow's Europe needs (European Commission, 2012)

Multi-literacy involves the use of technology and arrange of different tools to help the user to produce and interpret information. A writer must master writing by hand as well as using the keyboard. Old techniques work side by side with the new ones. Pirjo Sinko (Finnish National Board of Education, 2013), the Education Counselor for Finnish Language and Literature, maintains there is no upper or lower age limit for the development of multi-literacy skills. Visual literacy and understanding speech develops early, before actual literacy which is followed by reading and understanding text. An education counselor nearing retirement age should be able to communicate fluently both on an informal weblog, and in formal writing. Therefore, achieving multi-literacy is a lifelong process.

6. Creative literacy workshop in Turku

The EU Lifelong Learning Program's Finnish office CIMO (Centre for International Mobility) has given a grant to Turku City Library to arrange a Grundtvig workshop titled *Creative Literacy*. The workshop is to be held in conjunction with the Turku Women's Centre. The aims of the workshop are to inspire international cooperation, develop interactive processes and to assist participants in the development of professional skills. The participants have been chosen based on personal applications. The workshop will be held in Turku in early June 2014. Prior to the workshop, the group will get to know each other and participate in preliminary tasks related to the project on a Facebook page. It is essential that the participants commit to the pre-workshop exercises. They will use this social media tool to

share information about the workshop in their area afterwards. Each group will consist of 12 European members as well as Finnish participants.

The Creative Literacy workshop will offer adult instructors (eg. teachers, voluntary workers, students and librarians) up-to-date international training. The workshop focus is to increase instructor competence to support literacy among adult immigrants. The participants work can be related to either teaching reading, writing or other integration work. The Creative Literacy workshop participants describe their personal experiences, their current role and any activities they use in literacy programs. A variety of creative elements such as pictures, activities, music and drama will be used during the workshop to encourage skills development and the transfer of information.

Turku City Library provides various innovative learning spaces. The Creative Literacy team's aim is to use a range of the materials and tools in the best possible way to encourage interaction during the workshop and integration after the workshop in the future programs. Participants needs and their personal aims and objectives will be surveyed during the workshop to gain an improved understanding of the needs of instructors when working on literacy programs in the workplace. The most important result from the workshop is that their own work benefits from workshop activities.

The Creative Literacy Project is the most recent project run by the Turku City Library in collaboration with the Turku Women's Centre and is an example of how a library can step beyond the traditional role of being a repository for books, and into community-based educational role. The library can then become a true community space that nurtures the ongoing development and maintenance of literacy skills for everyone.

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