

## Children's activity day

Irmeli Luoma  
Humanities Polytechnic  
The Korpilahti Unit, Finland

### Abstract

Students at the Korpilahti Unit of Humanities Polytechnic in central Finland planned and organised a cultural production in the form of a multicultural Children's Activity Day held on September 14th 2001 at the Korpilahti unit.

A total of 380 children, of Finnish and immigrant or refugee background participated in the event. Ten kindergartens and lower comprehensive schools at Korpilahti and three multicultural kindergartens in the nearby town of Jyväskylä were involved in the activity day. The age of the participants varied from 3 to 8 years. Children from different cultural backgrounds, both from towns and the countryside had an opportunity to meet each other and play together. The event contained four parts: the introductory, welcoming part, seven workshops, lunch and the final part, farewells. There were several themes running through the workshops: otherness, space, aliens and contact with aliens, people of different ethnic origin.

The final production "Children's Activity Day" was preceded by studies in the following fields: children and play and the work of authorities in the initial phases of integration of refugees and immigrants. In addition inter- and multicultural studies were completed during the study module. The aim of the theoretical studies was to provide students with a wide knowledge and different views in the area they would be working with. The event was produced by one of the Humanities Polytechnic students, Riku Karhunen who carried the main organisational responsibility of the event.

### Aims

The project had the following aims: Firstly, it aimed at offering children with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds an opportunity to meet each other and participate in the activity day. In addition it aimed at bringing children from Jyväskylä to the countryside, in order to combine two different cultural environments. The project also aimed at providing Humanities Polytechnic students with work experience with children with a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the project aimed at increasing the students' knowledge of cultural differences in general and arouse their interest in other cultures

### Contents

#### The final production

Humanities Polytechnic students planned and organised "Children's Activity Day", a games day held on 14th September 2001 at Korpilahti in central Finland. A total of 380

children from three multicultural kindergartens from Jyväskylä and ten kindergartens and lower comprehensive schools from Korpilahti participated in the event. The age of the children varied from 3 to 8 years.

The Activity Day consisted of four distinctive parts: the introductory or welcoming part, seven workshops, lunch and the final part, farewells. The world the children stepped into, when arriving, was called the World of Opportunities. The workshops concentrated on several themes including: space, otherness, aliens and contact with aliens, people of different origins. The children also searched a space mouse throughout the day and found it during farewells.

The students prepared seven workshops for the children, these were the following: Story telling, Handicraft, Room of Sun, Light and shade, Touch and movement, Action in space, Fairy tales. There was a supplementary workshop for children who had participated in all the workshops or who had to wait to attend a workshop.

The event was organised according to the following programme:

#### Welcoming

Children were welcomed into the spacecraft.

#### Story telling workshop

The story telling workshop was the control room of the spacecraft. The children created their own space stories inspired by the sounds they heard and pictures they saw.

#### Room of Sun

Children watched a puppet theatre performance and participated in it by composing music for the play. They could also play, draw and look for lost celestial bodies.

#### Light and shade

Children became familiar with the following celestial bodies: Sun, Mars, Saturn and Moon. Children were moving in the world of light and shade.

#### Touch and movement

Children learnt how to move in space. The workshop included space walking and dark tunnels, climbing and experiencing different types of surfaces.

#### Action in space

Out of door games.

#### Fairy tale workshop

Fairy tale drama. This workshop took children from space to Africa. Children even had a chance to try a totally new language: *swahili*.

#### Farewell

Children solved the enigma of the space mouse and found it. Children's experiences of the day (feedback).

One of the students carried the responsibility for the coordination within the project. The students worked together with the coordinator and were responsible for planning the event and organising the workshops. All the workshops required a great contribution from the students: planning, construction and staging of the workshops. Some students worked in the workshops helping children, others guided children from one workshop to another. Students also assisted children during lunch in the dining-room.

#### **Studies combined with the event**

The production of the event, "Children's Activity Day" was combined with theory of intercultural communication and cultural differences. In addition, the students became

familiar with integration projects run by municipal authorities among refugees and immigrants in the Jyväskylä region.

The partners, organisations and contacts involved in the project included the following:

The Korpilahti Unit of Humanities Polytechnic: students of cultural production and management, three multicultural kindergartens from Jyväskylä and ten kindergartens and lower comprehensive schools from Korpilahti, the Foreign Office of the town of Jyväskylä, Kotopolku –projekti (a three-year regional project working on the integration of refugees and immigrants, run by Jyväskylä and financed both by provincial and European Union funds), students of Multicultural Studies at a local college, Alkio-opisto.

## **Methods**

The methods used during the project can be viewed from two perspectives: methods used in the whole study module, of which Children's Action Day formed an integral part, and the methods used during the event.

The pedagogical and didactic principles of the study module emphasised the following four key areas: studies of children's play culture, studies of cultural differences and intercultural communication, becoming familiar with the integration of immigrants and refugees in the area and finally, planning and organising the cultural event.

Studies concentrating on children's play culture gave the students the tools and the confidence for organising the event. Intercultural studies with workshops combined with different views on immigration policy increased cultural sensitivity and awareness on the one hand and interest in multicultural issues on the other. Intercultural studies contained studies emphasizing cultural differences, intercultural communication and case studies.

The methods used during the activity day to reach the aims can be viewed from two perspectives: contact between children from different ethnic backgrounds and town and countryside environments, and the contents of the day. See the information under Contents for more detail.

### **Best practice**

This aim of bringing children from different cultural backgrounds and different living environments together was successfully attained during the project. It was the first time the multicultural kindergartens in Jyväskylä were invited to participate in the same event in the countryside. "Children's Activity Day" was a success. Positive feedback was given by kindergarten teachers, children, students and teachers.

The production of a multicultural activity day for children aimed at providing the students with professional experience. Organising a cultural event for children of different ethnic backgrounds provided the students with a completely new, inspiring and challenging learning environment. The students dealt with ideas of otherness and developed and realised them in workshops. In addition, organising a cultural event of this type provided the students with a broad-based learning environment of practical work experience.

The project also aimed at increasing the students cultural awareness in a broader context. One of the main ideas of the project was to place the event into a wider context of cultural similarities and differences. This way the multicultural event did not

become a separate event without theoretical and practical links to encounters with different cultures.

The students had an opportunity to develop their intercultural knowledge throughout the process and through increased experiences they became more tolerant, flexible and culturally more sensitive. This increased sensitiveness became very apparent during the evaluation meeting held at the end of the project.

The students, who were involved in the project, began discussions on how multiculturalism could be more effectively included in both the studies and the projects of Humanities Polytechnic in the future.

### **Feedback**

The positive feedback given by students, kindergarten teachers and Humanities Polytechnic teachers contained the following points:

Before the event: several meetings with representatives from kindergartens to hear their views, hopes and wishes concerning the activity day

The kindergartens were well informed about the day's programme beforehand

Design and staging workshops

The workshops were well planned

Clear opening and closing of the multicultural activity day

The adventure was credible

Fantastic atmosphere, the children were excited

Flexibility of all partners

The students took their responsibilities conscientiously

The negative feedback contained the following:

Problems with the workshop timetables

Too many children

The information did not always reach everyone involved

The information available on the budget was limited

No programme was available on the day

In addition the students' feedback contained the following:

"I have learnt to understand my own culture, other cultures and even myself better.

Now I am able to observe my behaviour when I meet a foreigner."

"It opened my eyes to see things from several perspectives."

"I received tools to handle cultural differences. In addition I learned terms and concepts."

"The project definitely increased my interest in other cultures."

### **Evaluation**

The aims set for the project were attained very well. The number of participants, about 380 children and their teachers, proved that all the partners involved were highly committed to the project. Efforts were made to inform the public in the region about "Children's Activity Day".

The children were happy and excited and seemed to enjoy the event enormously. The children participated in all the workshops with enthusiasm. There were no sad faces to be seen in the event.

The students involved in the event made an effort in planning and realizing the event, from the overall plan to the smallest detail. The workshops were praised both by children and kindergarten teachers. Students benefited from the project both culturally and professionally. The students were able to cooperate and displayed a lot of inventiveness, energy and expertise.

The project has led to intensified cooperation between Finnish and multicultural kindergartens and lower comprehensive schools. On Father's Day 2001 there was a feast arranged for families at the Korpilahti unit. The multicultural kindergartens in Jyväskylä that participated in "Children's Activity Day" were also invited to that event. Cooperation between Humanities Polytechnic and multicultural kindergartens in Jyväskylä continued in our third cultural production within the project "Enhancing cultural awareness through cultural production" in the autumn 2002.

The biggest provincial paper and a number of smaller local papers published news reports on the multicultural event. Coverage of these types of events in different media is important, because it increases tolerance and mutual understanding among the mainstream and minority cultures.

We encountered a few difficulties which were mostly related to the practical organisation of the event. The students were conscious of the challenges and therefore prepared a detailed schedule for all kindergartens concerning arrival time, participation in workshops and lunch. Some kindergartens did not follow their scheduled arrival time which led to queues to some workshops. Luckily the students had organised a supplementary workshop for children to attend in case of queues and unexpected waiting. More attention should have been paid to the information being delivered among the students. The number of children participating in the event 380, could have been a bit smaller.

## **Service**

Irmeli Luoma  
Coordinator  
irmeli.luoma@alkio.fi  
Tel. +358 14 8201213 or 213465

There is a video film made about Children's Activity Day.