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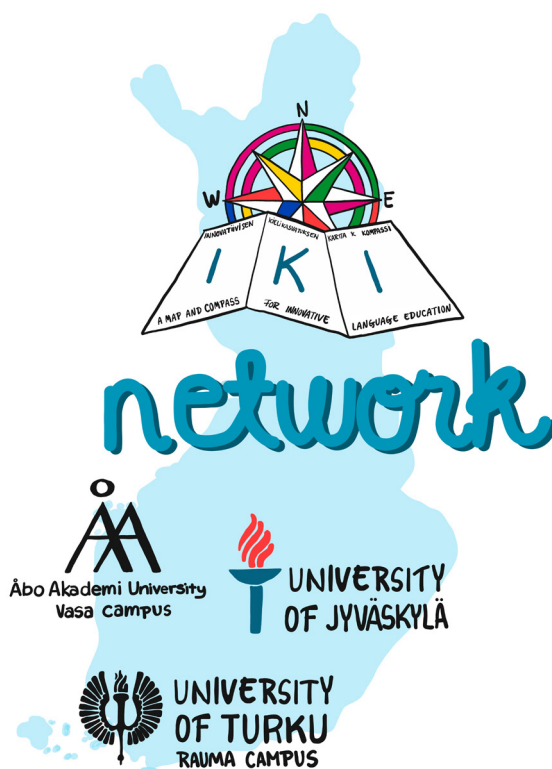
Introducing IKI: An Innovative Map and Compass for Language Education

Josephine Moate, Tea Kangasvieri, Anu Palojärvi & Liisa Lempel

The Innovative Map and Compass for Language Education (IKI), a three year, spearhead project, was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The aim of IKI was to map, develop and share language-based innovations that belong to the Finnish educational landscape. This handbook introduces the key ideas behind IKI, insights into pedagogical approaches and examples of innovative language-based activities that are part of the Finnish educational landscape. This opening section briefly outlines the role of language in education in Finland, introduces the IKI project and the activities included in the handbook. A more comprehensive bilingual Finnish-Swedish version has already been published and we hope that this international version of the IKI handbook provides useful insights for educators working outside the Finnish educational system.

Language and the Finnish educational system

Language has an important place in the Finnish curricula for early childhood education and care (age 0-6) (EDUFI, 2019) as well as in the national curriculum for basic education (age 7-16) (EDUFI, 2014). The national curricula recognise that every teacher is a language teacher whether they explicitly teach language(s) or use language to introduce, explore, develop and demonstrate knowledge and understanding. In the Finnish educational system, all children are required to learn one of the two national languages for formal study (Finnish or Swedish), to start learning a foreign language in first grade and the second national language in sixth grade at the latest. In the upper grades of basic education and in upper secondary school students can also choose optional language studies and languages can be introduced earlier in education including in day care and pre-school education. In recent years many educators and educational communities have invested in developing the role and presence of language(s) at earlier stages of education. The earlier introduction of languages is referred to as 'varhennus' or 'varhennettu kielenopetus' in Finnish. This phrase emphasises the 'earlier than before' aspect and suggests that this move prepares the way for something that comes later. As this term does not easily translate into English, we refer to 'foundational language education' to highlight the important basis early exposure to different languages provides for the formal study of language at a later stage. We also use the term 'language education' rather than 'language teaching and learning' because it provides a broader notion of what it



means to engage with language(s). In foundational language education, children and students become familiar with the presence and use of different languages in their everyday environment. Foundational language education does not require children to formally study language structures or vocabulary, but prepares the way for further study. Children become accustomed to the sounds and presence of the language(s), their curiosity to know more and their awareness of language is strengthened.

In addition to foundational and formal language education in Finnish curricula, current curricula include [transversal competences](#) that also language-related, such as *multiliteracies* and *cultural competence, interaction and expression*. These transversal competences complement the language awareness that underpins the Finnish curricula and the opportunities for language-enriched education. Whereas language awareness is mandated so that all students learn to use language well, language-enriched approaches provide opportunities to explicitly use and develop more languages within Finnish education.

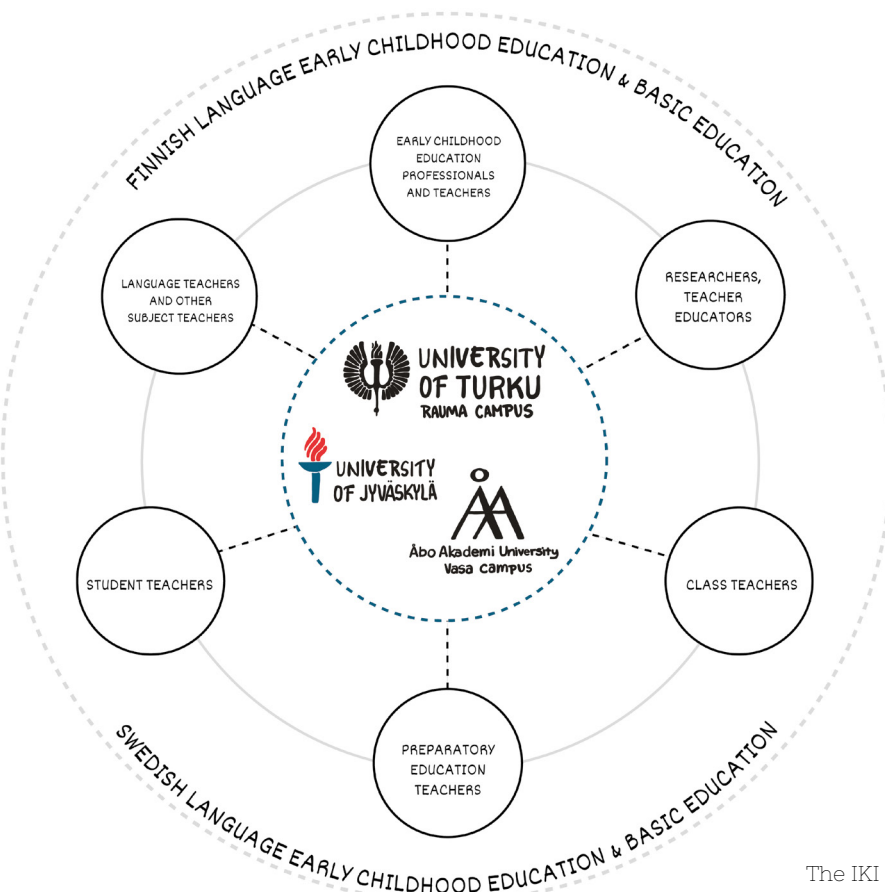
For example, educators are encouraged to actively include the different home languages of children within formal education, in addition to heritage language classes provided by educational authorities. While some educational communities have opted to integrate language-enriched approaches as part of their everyday practices, other educational communities have developed more extensive bilingual practices. Recent publications draw attention to the variety and extensive role of language in Finnish education (e.g. Pyykkö, 2017). These examples highlight the emphasis placed on language as an integral part of Finnish education, the value placed on language(s) as part of individual and community repertoires and the need for educators to pay attention to the role of language in education.

Introducing the IKI project and partners

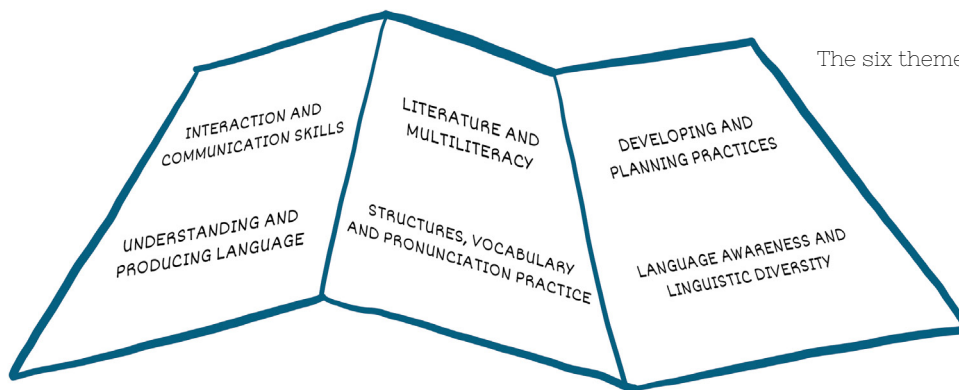
The IKI project is a practical, research-based response to the emphasis on language education in Finnish curricula. An important starting point for the IKI project was recognising the importance of language as part of education, the need to develop how language is used and developed across education, and to go beyond the conventional boundaries of language education. The three university partners involved in the IKI project are the University of Jyväskylä, Turku University Rauma Unit and Åbo Akademi University Vasa Unit. As the project coordinator, the University of Jyväskylä has worked to strengthen connections between different educational stakeholders and to trial different approaches to language education. The University of Jyväskylä has hosted on-line and face-to-face seminars and pedagogical cafés, organized children's language camps, observed teachers and shared experiences across Finland, and

explored different approaches in pre- and in-service training events to develop the IKI network. Project partners based in the Turku University Rauma Unit have strengthened teacher mentor activities as well as the use of [literature and art-based approaches across language education](#). Åbo Akademi University Vasa Unit partners have focused on how to develop [continua in language education as children transition through different stages of education](#) as well as [language aware approaches in subject teaching](#). The IKI websites includes tips, blogs and materials to support and inspire educators, recommended readings and question prompts to support innovation in different communities.

The complementary interests of the partners all invest in the development of language education and highlight the value of sharing different approaches and expertise. The partners provide a positive example of collaboration between Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking universities, between early childhood, class and language educators, researchers and teacher educators, between educators based in the field and at the university, between pre- and in-service education. The IKI project has greatly benefited from the active participation of student teachers and teacher professionals from early childhood education, preparatory, heritage and basic education, teacher education and educational organizations. IKI researchers have visited early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres and schools across Finland. This handbook draws on these experiences and insights gleaned through IKI activities with the aim of inspiring and supporting further innovation in the use and development of language across the educational pathway.



The IKI network.



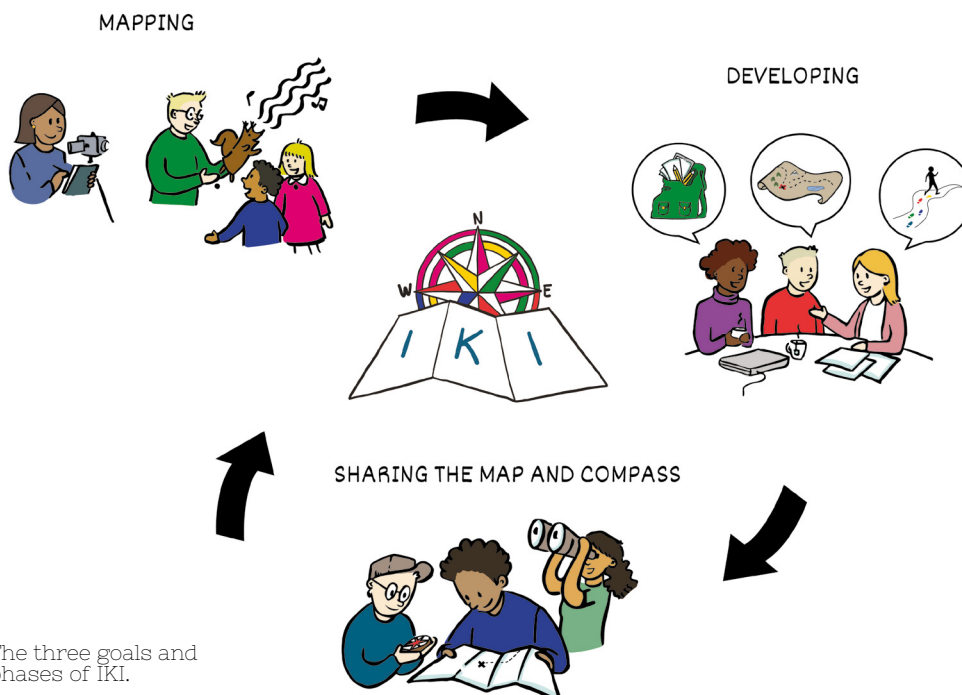
The six themes of the IKI map.

The Guiding Principles and Metaphors of IKI

From the outset IKI has drawn on the linguistic diversity and resources of **the Finnish educational landscape**, and here we have our first guiding metaphor. Just as geographical landscapes form across time and space, so linguistic landscapes take shape in response to different conditions, participants, needs and opportunities. The Finnish linguistic landscape includes bilingual, Swedish-speaking, Sámi-speaking, Finnish-speaking and increasingly multilingual communities. As this linguistic landscape has been shaped over time through the geography, history and communities of different regions, so educational communities have responded to the *particular and changing conditions* of the linguistic landscape. These responses include large- and small-scale innovations such as language immersion and language showers. While some innovations are now established approaches, the IKI team believes that many more educators and educational communities are creatively innovating on a regular basis. This leads to the first IKI goal – **to map and share innovations** that belong to the current Finnish educational landscape. These innovations might be small changes in established practices, other innovations might be new activities, others might build bridges between language users and language communities.

Throughout the project, the IKI map has taken shape as we have engaged with educators that are willing to share their innovations. The innovations presented here are a sample of the many innovations encountered during the IKI project with more innovations published in [the bilingual Finnish-Swedish version of the handbook](#). The innovations are presented under six themes: 1. *Interaction and communication skills*, 2. *Understanding and producing language*, 3. *Language awareness and linguistic diversity*, 4. *Literature and multiliteracy*, 5. *Structures, vocabulary and pronunciation practice*, and 6. *Developing and planning practices*. The international IKI handbook includes two-three activities under each theme.

It is our hope that by sharing these activities, other educators will be inspired to develop their practices in and across other educational settings. Indeed, the second goal of IKI was to support the **development work of educators**. Educational communities have to change to keep up-to-date with curricular changes and as children’s language repertoires expand through exposure to different kinds of media, family histories, personal experiences and educational innovations. At this point another underlying principle should be mentioned – the importance of pedagogical freedom to modify and develop activities that are of value to *these* children at *this* point



The three goals and phases of IKI.

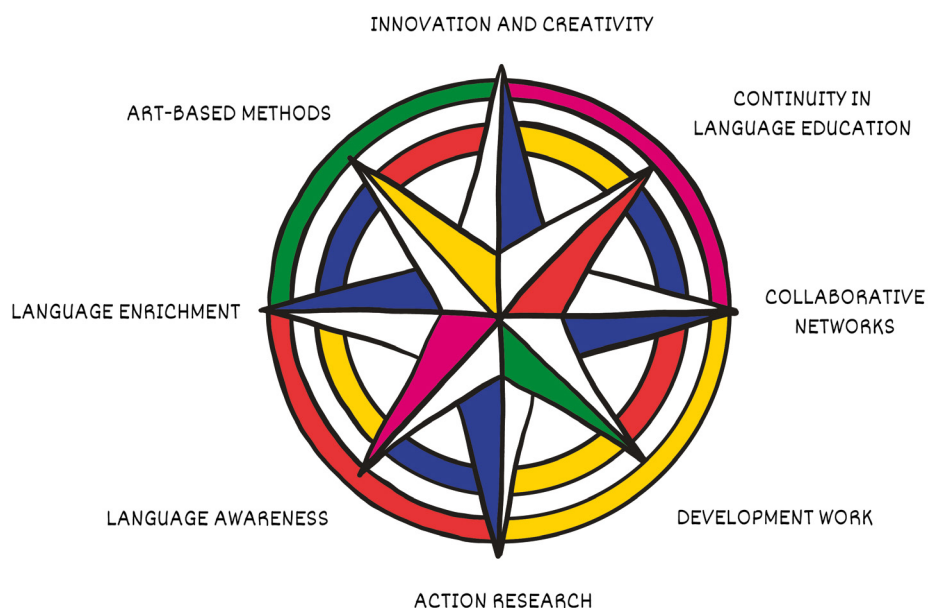
in their educational pathway for *this* purpose. While sharing innovations can inspire others in their own development work, this cannot provide readymade solutions for all communities, indeed all educators and communities need a *compass* to help navigate their ongoing journeys.

A compass is a device that helps a traveller to keep to a desired course. With the different demands of everyday life and the complexity of education, it is too easy to go off-course, to adopt solutions or ideas that appear educational, but on closer inspection are not beneficial. For example, insisting that young students stand behind their chairs and are absolutely quiet before a language session begins might establish the teacher as the 'boss', but it might not help children to engage with the language in a playful and creative manner. If an educator can play a song in the opening moments of a session to get the students' attention or bring a mystery object into the classroom, students can begin to engage with the language without first being 'silenced'. Indeed, younger and older students of language often benefit from the freedom to 'play with' the sounds of a new language, whispering and repeating new words and sounds to themselves, rather than being absolutely silent and waiting for permission to speak. This does not suggest that chaos is appropriate, but it is important that educators are aware of the principles behind their actions and activities they use. When educators are aware of these principles, it is possible to make better decisions about what is beneficial for their individual students and educational communities.

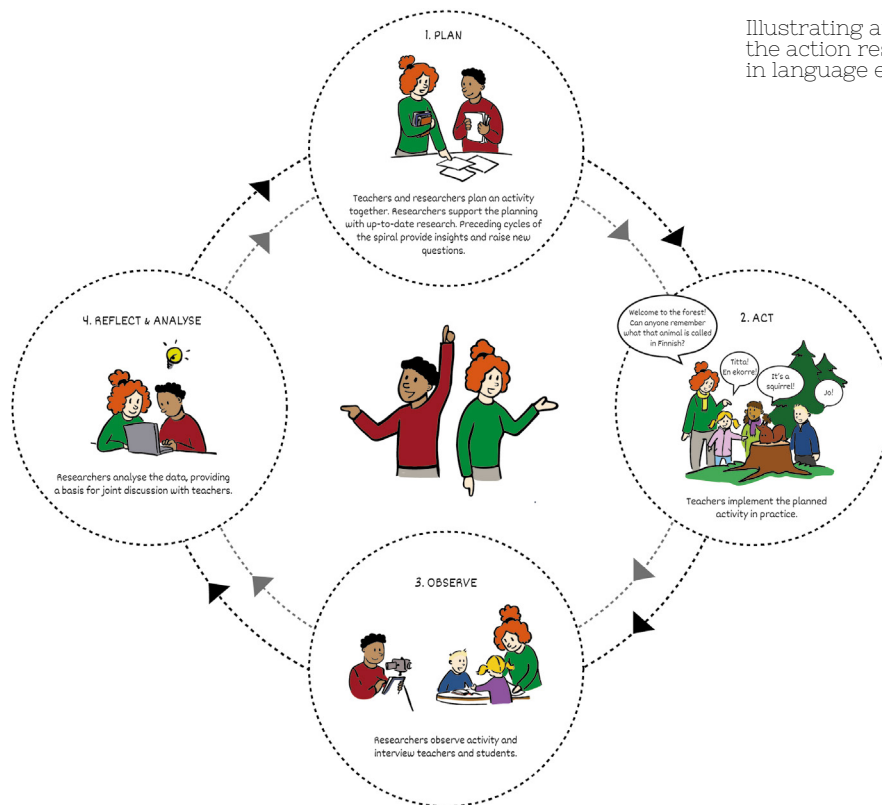
The IKI 'compass' highlights the key principles, or 'points', that have guided the IKI project. The first point, **innovation and creativity**, highlights the need to be active and responsive in the development of language education. Educational innovations can be unique to individual educators or born through community activity. This point, however, highlights

the dynamic nature of education, the responsibility educators carry and the way innovation can be part of everyday practice. The second point is **continuity in language education**. As Hansell and Björklund point out in [Transitions across educational stages](#), it is important that educators are aware of children's previous experiences and existing language repertoires, building on what they have already achieved and preparing the way for further development. The third point is the value of **collaborative networks** to share and try out different ideas and innovations. Collaborative networks can include many different educational stakeholders – teachers, parents, policy-makers, educational administrators. Understanding the bigger picture of educational development and the role of different stakeholders increases the potential success of innovative activities.

The fourth point is **development work** as part of individual and community activity. Although Finnish teachers are well-qualified for the work that they do, change is an inevitable part of education. If development work is seen as something extra, it can easily become a burden or haphazard. If development work is recognised as part of education, it can be more readily integrated into professional activity and time-tabled into the life of a community. The fifth point of **action research** is a well-established, concrete approach to the development of pedagogical practice. An important aspect of action research is that it takes place within a community, rather than being imposed from the outside. Action research involves four important stages of **planning, acting, observing** and **reflecting** on what has gone well through the process and what further areas can be developed. This process highlights the ongoing nature of education and the active involvement of teachers and professional communities in educational development.



The eight points of the IKI compass.



Illustrating an example of the action research process in language education.

The sixth point of the compass is **language awareness** which we understand as recognising the role and presence of language across education, that is, in both activities that target language development as well as in activities that use language as a tool to serve another purpose. Forsmans' section on 'Language-aware teaching in non-language subjects – what does that mean?' provides a more detailed introduction to language aware education. The seventh point is **language-enriched teaching**, an approach that broadens the range of languages actively used in education and the eighth point highlights the value of **art-based methods**, as explained in more detail in Lähteelä, Aerila and Kauppinen's text on *Art as a path to language – art-based language learning and the development of language awareness*. Having named the different points of the IKI compass, we have been able to reflect on our activities and progress, as well as check that we have been moving in the direction that we hope to move in. We hope that the IKI compass will help other language educators to identify, develop and reflect on the principles and practices that underpin their work.

tivity could be used, developed and modified with and for their own children or students.

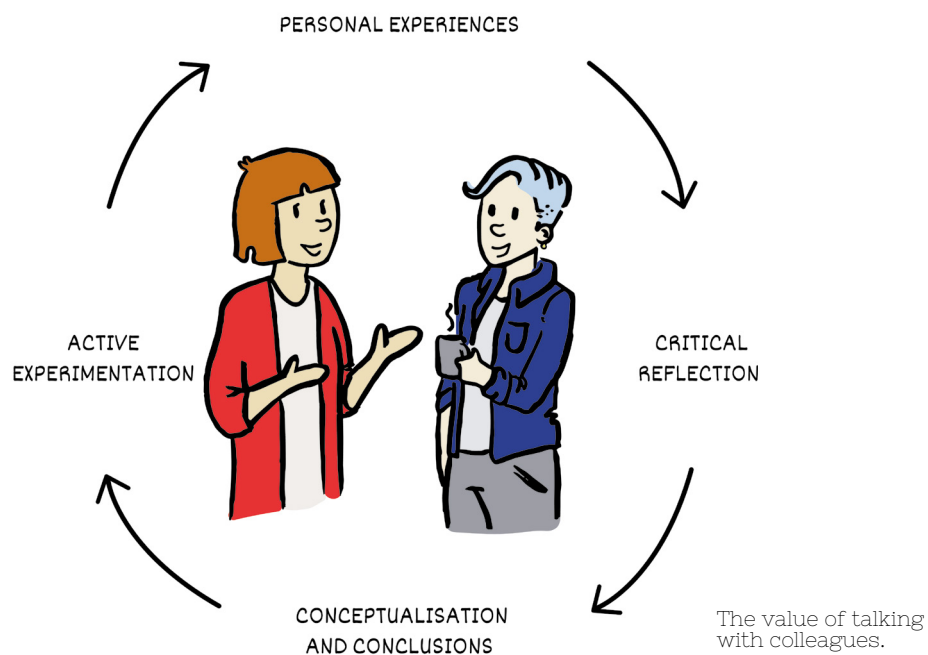
The title of each activity is followed by keywords and a short statement of the aim of the activity helping to characterise the activity. The 'Backpack' included in each section lists the resources needed to carry out the activity and the 'Steps on the path' describe how the activity unfolds. The final section of each description is 'Changing conditions'. This section recognises that with some modification the same activity can be used with different aged students, with different languages and levels of language proficiency. These suggestions included here have been provided by pre- and in-service educators that have collaborated with the IKI project. We hope that this inspires and encourage educators to change innovations in response to the needs of their students and to be sensitive to where students have come from, their different language repertoires and experiences, as well as where they are heading to as individuals and communities. The following illustrations are used to help navigate through the activities.

The activities in the handbook

The main body of the handbook includes a selection of innovative activities that have been shared with the IKI project. These activities come from different educational settings, in early childhood education and care, lower and upper grades of basic education, and represent different ways in which language education can be implemented in Finland in bi- and multilingual communities, in foundational and formal learning environments. In the presentation of each activity, we have sought to describe the activity as though an observer was present and watching the activity take place in real time. We hope that this provides an accessible view into the activity and encourages other educators to consider how the ac-



Illustrations to navigate through the IKI activities.



The six themes that have been used to organise the activities presented in the IKI handbook represent key considerations in language education with younger and older students. The IKI handbook is not a 'recipe' book or textbook in a conventional sense of providing guidelines that should be followed. Rather the IKI handbook is a place to explore different kinds of activities being carried out in language education and to reflect on what kind of activities best suit the children and students you are working with and the aims you are working towards. To support this reflective process, the IKI handbook regularly refers to key principles behind the innovative activities and seeks to make the thinking behind activities available to others. These principles are included to encourage educators to make more informed decisions about what might be good for the students that they are working with and the kind of language education that want to develop. We offer these activities as examples of innovation. Some of these activities are small-scale innovations, others are more extensive. Some of these examples might be familiar to some educators but we hope that even then there is something new for everyone and we think that even 'classic' activities re-viewed in a new light can lead to further innovation.

Supporting innovation in language education

For the IKI team, viewing language-based innovations through ecological metaphors has helped us to see the interconnectedness of different communities and innovations, without losing sight of the contributions of individuals. Education is premised on relationships between different partners with a vested interest in the development of young people in Finland, and in the instance of IKI, with particular reference to the role and presence of language(s) in education. We hope that through the materials made available through the IKI project, educators in and beyond Finland can continue to innovatively invest in and develop the Finnish educational landscape. Although the IKI project is only a small part

of the wider educational landscape, we hope that by recognising our vital interconnectedness we have contributed to better pedagogical conversations and activities that inspire educators to keep sharing and developing resources together.

Innovation does not need to be dramatic to be effective, it does not need to be digital to make a difference and to does not need to be demanding to be successful. The educators interviewed during the IKI project warmly recommend starting with low threshold activities, building collaborative relationships and listening to the children and students that make educational communities. We warmly encourage you to begin by identifying the principles that underpin your practice and consider how these principles have developed and whether they serve the bigger purposes of language education. If possible, discuss with colleagues and reflect together. The questions in the box will hopefully support these reflections.

Keep notes from your discussions and share ideas, be prepared to take a risk and to learn from the experience. Support and inspiration can often be found in unlikely, as well as everyday, places. So, pick up your map and compass, and enjoy the journey.

Acknowledgements

The IKI team would like to express our grateful thanks to the many pre- and in-service educators that have collaborated with us during the project. Thank you for sharing your ideas, experiences, concerns and hopes with us. Thank you for welcoming us to your communities and for talking with us. We have hugely benefited from engaging with educators working in the field and admire the commitment you have to providing positive language education experiences for children and students of different ages. Our grateful thanks as well to the cities, municipalities and towns that have supported the IKI project.

Something to ponder alone or with others:

- What kind of principles and goals guide your work as a language educator?
- What languages do the children or students in your group speak? How can these different languages be included in different activities?
- How can you use your own strengths and interests in the development of your work?
- Where can you get support for your development work? What or who can help you develop further?
- What concrete goals would you like to achieve?
- What kind of development would be easy to start with? What is the next step in your development work?

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