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Literary art supporting literacy skills in adulthood

INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills are under active discussion in Finland. Most of the concerned voices are heard from the educational field about children's literacy due to deteriorating PISA test results, but gradually understanding about literacy skills in other age groups as well is taking place.¹ Literacy skills are developed by practicing reading and writing. There is a rich selection of theory-based models and methods for exercising literacy skills in childhood. However, there are few theory-based methods and operating models in Finland to support adult's literacy skills. (Vänninen 2012, 1.) According to Sulkunen (2019), an adult with inadequate literacy skills doesn't necessarily realize that hardships in reading and writing could be the problem behind unem-

1 The International survey of adult skills (PIAAC) defines literacy as understanding and evaluating texts, and to use them to gather knowledge and to participate in community. According to the PIAAC 2012 study in Finland, most of Finnish adults are good readers, but the gap between the skills of the poor and the good readers is remarkable. PIAAC 2012 shows that 11% of Finnish adults in every age group have inadequate reading skills. (Malin, Sulkunen & Laine 2013, 20, 39.)

ployment and low performance in studies. Furthermore, there is lack of knowledge of ways to inspire reading and writing of those whose literacy is in inadequate state in adulthood (op. cit.).

Unreadable chances is a national project in Finland that aims to create new model to support adults with inadequate literacy skills. Universities of applied science in Turku and Seinäjoki, The University of Jyväskylä and the City libraries of Turku and Seinäjoki are working together to create new, interest-based services in libraries and other public services for adults of 16-35 years who need support with their literacy skills. The goal of the project is to inspire young adults to read and produce various kinds of texts, and become more aware of their relationship with texts, reading and writing. The operating model created in the *Unreadable* project are literature-based activities rooted in literary art methods, and the contents of the activities are created based on young adults' areas of interests and goals in life. We also take into account their level of motivation for approaching texts and try to find motivating ways to process texts.

The groups participating in literature-based activities in the project were customers of social and employment services, learning institutions, associations and prisons. Participating groups were invited to activities based on theory-based knowledge about literacy skills in different adult groups in Finland. 70 % of prisoners have difficulties in reading and writing (Gullman, Sunimento & Poutala 2011, 2). Immigrants and even second-generation immigrants are more likely to have inadequate literary skills than native Finnish language speakers (Kirjavainen & Pulkkinen 2017,

437). As many as 36% of adults with a basic education certificate or vocational education have a degree of literacy that matches the criteria of poor reading skills. (Malin, Sulkunen & Laine 2013, 20, 39.) In addition, difficulties in literacy skills can be a factor in unemployment and struggles to gain access to further education (Sulkunen 2019). Therefore, we offered our literature-based activities for young adult groups with no work or degrees.

In the *Unreadable* project, we didn't conduct literacy tests on our participants. Instead, we assessed their literacy skills by their own perceptions about their literacy and their own perceived motivation to approach different kinds of texts and media. Data was collected by spending time together with the groups and getting to know participant's fields of interests, their goals in life and possible challenges in reading or learning. We also interviewed the participants and professionals working with them before the literature-based activities and gathered verbal and written feedback from them after the first and last activities. The data available don't allow me to handle the subject as a case study. Instead, this article aims to give an insight on the phenomenon of supporting reading and writing motivation and skills in adulthood, and provide some hands-on examples about methods that can be applied in motivating adults to enhance their reading and writing skills.

In this article, I approach literacy as a skill to express oneself and understand other people and phenomena, and literary art as an inclusive method to engage with texts and practice literacy skills in adulthood. To do so, I begin by describing briefly the phenomenon of inadequate literacy skills, then continue to analyze the process in creating

a new model to support literacy skills in adulthood. After that, I will provide examples about literary art methods that created positive experiences, social cohesion and joy of creating and learning among the participants of the workshops I organized in 2019 in Turku City library. Finally, I will contemplate literary art methods as a possibility to make literature, texts and social reading more inclusive.

LITERARY ART OR CREATIVE WRITING?

While working with creative ways to use language, stories and texts, some specification of the concepts of creative writing, literary art and literature-based activities is required. Creative writing, at least in Finnish contexts, is considered literally as writing texts, combining theory and practice of writing and literature (Karjula 2014, 10). Creative writing is an academic subject in universities of Turku and Jyväskylä, and it can be studied in the universities of Tampere and Helsinki as summer studies. Since creative writing refers to the act of writing and has somewhat academic echo to it, I prefer using the concept of *literary art* in inspiring and motivating young adults with inadequate literacy skills to rehearse their reading and writing. Literary art refers to activities that are based on literature, language or stories. Themes and stories can be processed by discussing, telling, acting, writing, using media platforms or using multidisciplinary art methods. (Opetushallitus 2017, Ekström, Puikkonen & Suoniemi 2018.) In this context, creative writing can be seen as a part of literary art (Kuhalaampi 2005, 40). Literary art schools and education

centers in Finland are providing literature-based activities for children and adolescents, and literary art is a part of basic arts education in Finland (Puikkonen 2018, 179). Literature-based activities refers to literary art that uses novels, poetry, shorts stories and other texts as doors to create own stories and to express oneself (Kivijärvi 2019).

Literature-based activities, as well as literary art in general, seem to be considered as a part of children's and adolescents literacy education. Literary art methods, such as creating own fantasy worlds and combining stories to other art forms, can motivate children with language impairment and reading difficulties to practice their literacy skills in the side of play (Åhlgren 2017, 5). Even so, there are few working models to practice literary art with adults with inadequate literacy skills in Finland, even though there are many creative writing courses and workshops for adults that are already motivated and skilled readers and writers. In addition, various kinds of therapeutic reading and writing courses and gatherings are held for those who have the social and cultural equity to participate. However, literature-based activities would be useful tools for inspiring adults with inadequate literacy skills to explore new texts, if the services were targeted for them also. There have been promising projects providing literary art and literature-based activities for participants not accustomed to texts. I'll mention a few examples knowing that there are many other projects working with these themes in Finland.

Literacy skills are an almost invisible dimension in bibliotherapeutic reading studies and in book clubs and reading gatherings held in libraries in Finland. Reading gatherings held in prison libraries make an exception in this

discourse. Librarian Irmeli Malka-Kannisto from the Turku city library has applied shared reading methods to accustom prisoners to different texts with low thresholds. The texts are curated by taking into account prisoners' fields of interests and state of literacy (Elenius 2018.) The same kinds of methods are applied in prisons of England. In McNay's, Darby-Villis' and Walmsley's study (2019, 127), prisoners that were not accustomed to reading, writing or reading gatherings required applied read-aloud sessions and conversations about the stories heard due to their few experiences in reading or in analyzing stories. Text samples were picked by their gritty, even grotesque passages, so they would arouse an emotional response and get listeners interested in the story.

In year 2018, Central Union for Child Welfare held a writing project in cooperation with writer Elina Hirvonen. In the project, the former customers of child welfare were invited to the child welfare center for writing workshops to share their experiences and memories about their time as customers of Child Welfare and their childhood. Hirvonen designed and conducted writing tasks that gave the participants the chance to approach even painful experiences in a safe environment. The writing tasks were designed to give participants concrete tools to tell their stories in small pieces, like writing letters to themselves, making lists and statements and examine a single memory from early childhood. The goal of the writing workshops was to inspire young adults to express themselves through writing, even though some of the participants had been told that they have poor writing skills. (Hirvonen & Hurskainen 2019, 5-6.) For the writers, the experience of writing and of seeing their sto-

ries published was empowering, as pseudonym “Jenny” describes: “Writing for the book has been the greatest experience I’ve had. I’m not good at talking, but by writing I’m able to reach my feelings.” (Riihinen 11.11.2019.)

Turku Literary Art Association (Turun sanataideyhdistys) has developed a method to create communal texts with adults who are not accustomed to expressing themselves literally. *The Ear Poem Method* is a method of communal poetry writing that is based on listening. The literary artist listens carefully to groups’ or individual participant’s story and writes it down as accurately as possible. The literary artist aims to record the individuals’ rhythm, vocabulary and the tone of speech accordingly, and to compose a poem that looks and sounds familiar for the individual or the group who told the story. The Ear poem method is applied in several literary art projects and groups organized for adults of different ages and in different life situations. (See Harju & Vähämaa 2019, Turun sanataideyhdistys ry.)

If one wishes to improve writing skills and to inspire creative expression with language and words in people who have inadequate literacy skills, it is important that participants feel safe, they understand what they are expected of them, and they feel themselves capable and active during the activities. These are the reasons I prefer not to use the concept of creative writing while working with adults not accustomed on reading or writing: since the participants don’t necessarily see themselves as creative persons or good at writing, the concept of creative writing could arouse negative perceptions. Instead, I represent the activities to the groups by their themes, like a horror workshop or a relaxing workshop. Reading, writing and other creative

activities are tools to work with the themes that interest the participants, not the essence of the workshop. As far as the traditional conception of literacy as reading and writing is concerned, they are skills that can be practiced by providing a richer environment in which texts and writing can be situated. (Provenzo, Goodwin, Lipsky & Sharpe 2011, xxiv). In a group just starting to explore texts in their adulthood, it is crucial to take into account the possible resistance against texts, and start from other fields of literary art, like storytelling and communal writing.

DEFINING INADEQUATE LITERACY SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF MULTILITERACIES

In the *Unreadable* project, our goal was to create tools for enhancing traditional literacy skills, reading and writing, but also multiliteracy skills such as verbal communication and versatile interpretation skills, like reading pictures or social situations. Therefore, instead of defining literacy skills as just reading and writing, it is more fruitful to talk about multiliteracies as a broad understanding of literacy. From that perspective, literacy skills are skills that allow a person to decode cultural and social meanings in interaction with others. (Provenzo etc. 2011, xxi.) Literacy is evolving in postmodern culture by becoming even more multidimensional and complex alongside with technology, media and communication platforms (op. cit. 185 – 186). That is the reason why it is important to create tools to support multiliteracy skills alongside with reading and writing.

Hence, I need to specify what I mean by poor literary

skills in a multiliteracy context. Poor literacy skills are usually defined as automatic and shallow ways to engage with texts. Therefore, the performance of reading is inflexible and the reader achieves a fragmented comprehension about the content of the texts instead of a deeper understanding (Minguela, Solé & Pieschl 2015, 737.) In this article, it is useful to define poor literacy skills as a tendency to absorb only a small part of the contents of the texts or other social and/or cultural product, because this kind of definition can include multiple kinds of texts in multiple forms and media. According to Kellner (1998, 103), we need multiple literacies to meet the demands of new technologies, and for the demands of a multicultural population with different educational backgrounds. Therefore, in this article, I define poor literacy skills as weakness in perceiving texts and other cultural and/or social products as ambiguous constructions with contexts of history and genre. Instead, texts are decoded using singular, superficial clues. (see Sulkunen 2019.)

MOTIVATION AS THE KEY TO ENHANCING LITERACY SKILLS

If an individual's literacy skills are in a poor state, it's likely that the idea of reading a book is not only uncomfortable but could rouse experiences from past failures in reading and understanding texts. Therefore, it makes no difference how inspiring reading tips librarians or teachers provide, and how thrilling themes and relatable characters books contain: if the reading as a process itself is the problem,

it's very hard to get motivated to grab a two-hundred-page opus from the library bookshelf.

Reading and writing can be a fun leisure time activity, but also compulsory for certain achievements in society. Although certain reading and writing skills are required for getting degrees, applying jobs and even applying for social benefits, practicing those skills can be very unmotivating. Attitudes towards reading have an effect on reading achievement: enjoyment in reading improves reading achievement at least in high literacy countries (Cheema 2018, 158). Dempsey points out (2015) that teachers often come across the statement “reading is boring”. However, when a teacher drops the expectations to inspire students to read novels he or she prefers, and begins to provide texts based on students’ own preferences and specific interests, the situation changes (op. cit. 351.) In addition, children are more likely to enjoy creative writing if they have chance to write about something they are interested in and that they might have experienced themselves (Hiatt & Rooke 2002, 3). The same kind of phenomenon can be seen while working with adults who aren’t accustomed to reading or writing much: The more familiar the texts provided are in their themes and language to the participants, the more engaged they get to exploring them and participating in writing tasks.

The individuals’ positive or negative perception about his/herself as a reader has effects on the motivation and performance of reading (Torppa, Parhiala, Vasalampi, Poikkeus & Aro 2019). Smith and Jeffrey (2004) studied young men’s perceptions about their self-efficacy in reading various texts. The reader usually feels competent while reading

a familiar text type in an informal context, but the same efficacy in reading doesn't transfer to a formal context like reading a novel for a school project. The motivation to pursue new skills depends on how big an effort learning the skill requires: if the skill or the knowledge seems to be close to the individual's previous fields of interest and the amount of work required doesn't seem too burdening, it is more likely to engage to rehearsing. In Smith's and Jeffrey's study, participants were passionate "readers" of the plots and themes tv shows, movies, video games and sports, but the formal school literacy tasks like reading classic novels felt too distant and hard to understand (Smith & Jeffrey 2004, 544, 457, 458.)

The significance of motivation and self-efficacy in reading, as described by Smith and Jeffrey (2004), is obvious in *Unreadable* co-operation groups. Participants in my group activities seemed to get motivated even for demanding reading and writing tasks, if the texts or cultural products were close enough to their fields of interests. For example, ambiguous texts with rich vocabulary didn't really excite young men studying in vocational school – except when the texts were rap lyrics of artists' they were keen to.

PARTICIPANTS OF THE LITERACY SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES

The working model for supporting literacy skills of young adults has been built in the cities of Turku, Seinäjoki, Jyväskylä and Tampere by multiprofessional specialists from the fields of education, research and literary arts in

co-operation with young adults participating in our activities, and professionals working with those groups. The groups and activities described here were designed and organized by me as a project designer in Turku city library. Groups were informed that the activities they were participating will be documented in forms such as this article in order to develop the literature-based model to support reading and writing skills in adulthood and to help other professionals to organize same kinds of activities in the future.

Each participating group had their individual approach to literature and texts. Some of the groups were not accustomed to reading or writing, and they had quite negative attitude towards literature-based activities. For example, vocational education groups had few experiences in reading fiction nor non-fiction texts, and it was rare in those groups to read as a free time activity. According their teachers, many of their students had received special educational support in elementary school and were diagnosed with learning difficulties. For them, we created activities that were based on their areas of interest and were not too challenging for someone just beginning to process new texts in their early adulthood.

Some of the participating groups were quite active readers, but mental health issues and social exclusion alienated them from participating in social events or avocation groups and exploring literature-based activities that might interest them. Literature-based activities had socializing and activating functions in those groups, since participants got to express their thoughts and experiences in interaction with other group members. They were motivated in litera-

ture-based activities like creating their own murder mysteries, as long as they had the chance to start from small tasks and had enough time to conduct the tasks.

Literature-based activities brought to prisons were designed in co-operation with Irmeli Malka-Kannisto, librarian specialized in prison libraries in The Turku city library, and the groups met in prisons were gathered together by her. Prisoners were quite motivated to try out new literature-based activities and to express their thoughts and feelings through literary art. In a questionnaire conducted by Malka-Kannisto during our co-operation, many of prisoners participating literature-based activities found reading rewarding and enjoyable, even though they mentioned dyslexia and difficulties in concentration as factors that reduced their reading. The same kind results are found in Billington's study (2011, 70) and Alvarez's, García-Carrión's, Puigvert's, Pulido's and Shubert's study (2018, 1053).

Immigrant groups learning the Finnish language were quite different in their goals on texts and reading compared to other groups I had literature-based activities with. Most of the participants were extremely motivated to learn to read and write in Finnish, since they considered those skills as a key to education and employment in their new home country. Finnish learning groups experienced literature-based activities as motivating and inspiring when the activities were designed to contain discussions, play, and text materials easy to comprehend, for example easy-to-read books and short stories.

Getting to know groups of young adults with hardships in employment, mental health, language and learning, I recognized a few aspects of the potential of literary art and

literature-based activities. First, the need for self-expression and to become seen and heard are the greatest motivators to engage with texts for people who are not accustomed to reading or writing. Second, texts could work as gates to memories, emotions and empathy, if the group gathering is designed based on participants' areas of interests and structured to fit the group's needs and their state of literacy. Third, only adults with diagnosed dyslexia recognize their difficulties in reading and writing. A very common answer to the requests to self-assess one's reading habits and skills were that individual had no problems in reading, except that they never read.

THE PROCESS OF BUILDING THE WORKING MODEL TO SUPPORT LITERACY SKILLS IN ADULTHOOD

There are few models in Finland on how inspire and motivate adults to improve their literacy skills, although literacy skills are recognized as a part of the problems behind the full participation in society (Hyttinen 2018, 14). The model built in the *Unreadable* project is rooted in readers' experienced level of motivation towards reading and writing, their needs and goals in life in general, and on their fields of interests.

The first step of creating the model was to get to know the target group, young adults not accustomed to reading and writing much, by organizing interest-based activities called Idea Workshops. Idea Workshops were organized in Turku, Tampere and Seinäjoki in spring 2019. In Turku, I paid visits to the co-operation groups to have coffee and

spend time with participating groups. Gatherings were held in places the groups normally met and had their own activities. Idea Workshops consisted of free discussion and small literary art activities that aimed to get to know participants and their reading and writing habits. The atmosphere in the gatherings was relaxed and stripped from all structured educational goals. In spring 2019, I organized about 30 Idea Workshops in different groups in the area of Turku to gather enough material to design the further activities. Project designers in Turku, Tampere and Seinäjoki documented their observations and ideas from the groups on the structured report format. To build a bigger picture about participating groups, project designers in Seinäjoki also interviewed professionals working with young adult groups about their perceptions of participants' preferences and level of motivation in participating in group activities, their fields of interests and their possible challenges in reading, writing and learning.

Project designers setting up the Idea Workshops in Turku, Tampere and Seinäjoki reported their observations from the workshops in summer 2019. After getting to know participants and their reading habits and areas of interests, we analyzed and clustered them, and designed activities that matched their areas of interests, their level of experienced motivation to explore texts, and their self-assessed literacy skills. We also analyzed knowledge gathered from professionals working with participating groups about the activities that usually motivate and inspire the groups. As a result, we created a selection of workshops that clustered under three forms of activities: **Literary Art Activities** to inspire and motivate approaching new texts, **Text Work-**

outs to support critical reading skills and information retrieval skills by applying media educational methods, and **Individual Reading Counseling** to provide tools to assess individuals' literacy skills as well as counseling to find activities and materials to practice literacy skills.

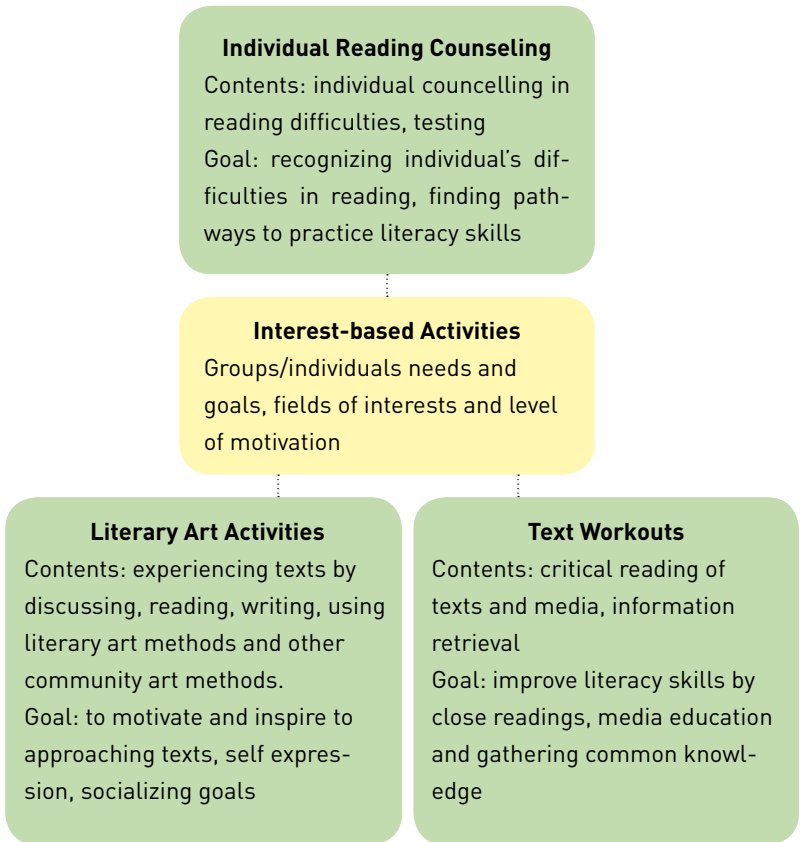


Figure 1. Working model to support adults' literacy skills

Literary Art Activities were the most popular among the forms of activities supporting literacy skills in our participating groups. Literary Art Activities consisted of workshops that combined literary art methods with other art forms like pop music and rap, visual arts and drama. In the workshops we analyzed song lyrics and made our own adaptations from them, wrote communal poems and stories and had theme sessions like horror and true crime workshops and cartoon workshops. Literary art methods applied in the workshops were designed to meet the demands of the groups' literacy skills. In practice, the activities were structured as small ensembles easy to comprehend (see Hornby 2014, 57) and text materials were created and curated considering possible difficulties in reading and perception (see Mitchell 2007, 14). Most of our participating groups were not accustomed to participating in creative activities and had quite a negative attitude towards them in the beginning. Therefore, the workshops were promoted for them with the theme of the gathering, and the art methods were only tools to approach them.

Text Workouts are a concept to practice skills of interpreting various kinds of informative texts and media. The aim of the activities is to practice critical reading by exploring the argumentation styles and reliability of different media. One important aspect of Text Workouts is information retrieval, which refers to skills to search and analyze information. The methods used in Text Workouts to analytical reading and producing media are based on media educational methods used in schools and libraries (Kupiainen & Sintonen 2009, 16) but they are adapted to meet the fields of interest and the literacy of adults with inadequate litera-

cy skills. Practicing literacy skills and information retrieval skills with informational texts motivated our participating groups as long as the activities had individual meanings for participants and they had a chance to have an impact in the community. For example, one of participating vocational education group was not exited to try the literature-based activities suggested, but as they got chance to build a “pub quiz” for a prisoner group in their home town, they were extremely motivated to reflect on what kinds of questions to put in their quiz and how much more or less knowledge the other group would have compared to themselves.

Once an adult with difficulties in reading and learning recognizes their difficulties and finds definitions for them, it’s easier to get motivated in finding ways to get support (Selkivuori 2015, 83). Individual Reading Counseling is a model that is applied by the Finnish Diverse Learners’ Association in Helsinki and Joensuu (Erialaisten oppijoiden liitto). The Seinäjoki city library has developed their own reading counseling model in the *Lukirastit* project (Seinäjoen kaupunginkirjasto) in co-operation with the *Unreadable* project. The aim of individual reading counseling is to provide adults chance to get to know their own literacy skills by literacy testing and counseling.

To summarize, our model in *Unreadable* project to support literacy skills in adulthood is made up of four elements: First, interest-based activities are required for getting to know participating individuals and their fields of interest, their level of motivation towards reading and writing, and their goals in what it comes in studying or in employment. Second, there are three different ways to support adults’ literacy skills: Literary Art Activities to inspire

and motivate reading and writing, Text Workouts to support critical reading skills and information retrieval skills, and Individual Reading Counseling to help individuals to recognize their possible difficulties in reading and/or writing. The elements of the model can be applied separately or they can be mixed to create activities best suiting for the target group. The working model to support adults' literacy skills is tested and rooted in year 2020 in Finnish libraries and other organizations working with adults with inadequate literacy skills. *Unreadable* project publishes a handbook about the model in fall 2020.

FINDING NEW SKILLS AND PERSPECTIVES –
POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WITH LITERARY ART IN
YOUNG ADULT GROUPS

Improving literacy skills is an important aspect of literature-based activities. Yet there are other aspects to take into account while working with adults with few former positive experiences with literature and writing. I think the most important impact to achieve with adults who are not accustomed to read or write is to create a sense of being listened to, understood and successful while conducting the activities. While trying out literary art activities for the first time, it is crucial that participants feel good about themselves and feel that they have understood the purpose of the activities. Also, positive experiences of being active, creative and capable are motivating participants to take part to same kind of activities in the future, so their literary skills get chance to improve. In this section, I will present

a few examples of the methods used in groups participated on the literature-based activities that aroused positive experiences about reading and writing, but also about themselves, in the participants. Experiences are gathered with feedback forms and verbal feedback from participating groups in the *Unreadable* project. Groups were informed that activities they participated in are part of the work in developing new model to support reading and writing skills and motivation in adulthood, and their experiences are crucial in the process.

You are listened to and your ideas are interesting

In a group gathered in an employment service center, the participants were interested in true crime stories, detective stories and horror themes. Some in the group were quite active readers, and they borrowed books from the library quite often. About a half of the group, on the other hand, had no history in reading or writing except what it comes in compulsory activities in elementary school, and they brought forth their learning disabilities and problems in concentration. No one in the group had experiences in creative writing or shared reading, and in the beginning, they were not motivated to try any literary art activities since they described themselves “not being creative”. The aim of the group was to rehabilitate the participants to return to work life by learning life management skills and social skills, so my goal in designing the activities was to provide a platform to try something new with low thresholds, and a chance to achieve a sense of succeeding in social interaction.

I presented to the group the concept of the locked room mystery with recent examples from television, movies and novels. The creative writing task of the day actually required no writing at all: I had prepared a task that suggested murder scenes (luxury yacht, art gallery, camping area, circus and so on), murder victims (heiress, physicist and so on) and other details that build a locked room mystery. The task was to choose the elements of the mystery and tell the story for others. The group enjoyed telling stories for each other and listening to the stories of other group members. In the feedback, many of the participants told that they had experience of being creative, funny and accepted while telling their stories to the other group members. All group members also shared their story, which was a positive outcome for very introverted group.

The locked room mystery task required some reading, imagination and verbal presentation skills. The point of the task was to create conditions where participants had a chance to create something based on their field of own interests, but without pressure to write a story out of thin air. According to group member feedback, the task along with other tasks of same kind were positive surprises for most of the participants, since they had low expectations about their abilities to participate in, and to enjoy creative literary art tasks.

Sharing your story, feelings and experiences and being understood

I met with a social rehabilitation group in their twenties. The purpose of the daily gatherings was to support life management skills. The participants were quite introverted and had low motivation for any shared activities whatsoever. I decided to start working with them individually, since they felt uncomfortable to sharing their thoughts and feelings in bigger group. We created written portraits. The method was a combination of Portrait poetry and Ear poems². I interviewed participants individually and asked, for example, what kind of first impression the person would like to give to new people, what kind of turns of events had affected to their lives the most, and asked them to mention three things that defines them. After the interview, we started to edit the text together and discuss about things participant wanted to save from the draft to the final version. We also discussed about form of the text and if it should be a poem, a letter or a short story.

Since the participants got a chance to speak freely and privately about things that were important to them, they were more open to the idea of creating a text together with me. The outcome was, for example, a letter for a recovering addict, a survival story of violence victim and a list of things participant appreciated in himself written in the form of poem. According to feedback of the participants, they were glad to see their stories in written form. One of the participants described that she felt like she could see

² Ear poems and Poetry portraits are communal poem writing methods. More about the methods on page 4 in this article.

her growth on a small piece of paper. A young man who created a letter to his former self as an addict felt good about himself since he could speak to his past self in the past tense and see the present self in more a positive light.

Experience of capability

I held gatherings for immigrants learning the Finnish language. The goal of the gatherings was to introduce the participants to the services of Turku City Library and to test a new kind of book club targeted for language learners. The texts used in the gatherings were easy to read materials: short stories and novels written in simplified Finnish with no ambiguity or special vocabulary. Participants explored the texts three times: The texts were distributed to participants before the gatherings so they could take as much time as they needed to read the texts. In the gathering, I read the text aloud. Then they got chance to read the text again and point out words that were unfamiliar to them. To avoid activities being too school-like, I avoided methods and parlance that resembled teaching. Instead, I pursued to create atmosphere resembling traditional book clubs held in libraries by encouraging participants to share their thoughts and opinions about the texts. We also conducted small creative tasks, like decorating small plaques with our names on them, and discussed the origins and meanings of our first names.

According to the participants' verbal and written feedback, their experience of their ability to read in Finnish language strengthened due to the gatherings. Participants

felt the joy of learning when they could read a whole short story and understand the content. They were also happy about being able to discuss the texts and tell their opinion about them in an informal context.

CREATING INCLUSIVE METHODS TO EXPRESS ONESELF BY READING AND WRITING

Shared reading gatherings are a form of social reading, and the phenomenon is actively researched in Finland. Finnish libraries have strong expertise in providing reading gatherings, book clubs and read-aloud groups. The groups are rooted in interaction, discussion and self-expression, closely resembling bibliotherapy gatherings. The difference between libraries' book clubs and bibliotherapeutic gatherings is that the latter are engaged to growth and change, whereas book clubs and reading gatherings in libraries are more for shared adventures in the literary world. Shared reading as a method is seen as an opportunity to provide literary experiences that have empowering social and emotional effects for participants. (Kosonen 2019 44–45.) However, as Ahola (2013, 153) points out, book clubs and reading gatherings in Finland are a very middle-class hobby that is practiced by people with freedom, individuality and secured income. They can be seen as middle-class individuals' project to reflect on their identity and their stories. (op.cit. 154.) In addition, book clubs in libraries are organized around books. (op.cit. 153.) As mentioned, there are many individuals with inadequate literacy skills that have never read a book or tried out any creative writing tasks.

How can we adapt the empowering and emotionally nurturing effects of reading to serve also participants who are not accustomed to reading or to decoding the tropes of literature?

When motivating people who are not accustomed to read and write to enhance their skills, and inspiring them to express themselves via texts, the perspective of inclusion in reading and writing can't be ignored. Literature-based activities can provide sense of capability and succeeding, if the activities are designed by taking into account different cultural and social backgrounds, literacies and fields of interest. To make the literary world more inclusive, we need to start to comprehend the concept of literacy as a much more diverse phenomenon. Alternative literacies could be one perspective to take account while pursuing to broaden the perception about literacy. In textbook edited by Provenzo (2011) rap, online social networks and reading aloud as collective literacy are mentioned as examples of alternative literacies. Like Provenzo describes, "unlike textual literacy, alternative literacy is often more democratic and inclusive. Expert knowledge is not limited to people who have mastered traditional methods and skills of reading and writing." (2011, xx1).

There is a field of studies about inclusion in creative writing pedagogy in school curriculum and in creative writing programs. To mention a few, Janelle Adsit has written about intersectional identities in creative writing and literature fields (2017). Non-white people and native people in school literature curriculum and creative writing programs are studied to understand of activism and politics of race (see Islam 2017, Hrenko 2014, Teicher 2016). There are also

some studies about creative writing in the context of mental illnesses, and about outsider art (see Richardson 2019).

However, there are few studies about inclusion in literary art and in the creative writing field in the context of inadequate literacy skills and among people who are not yet engaged in reading and writing. It's a common assumption that anyone could participate in a creative writing course or walk into a library and borrow books. Even so, these spaces tend not to be inclusive in the way we might think. As my discussion of people with people not accustomed to read and write shows, many people don't feel welcome in those spaces. Since they don't identify themselves as readers or writers, they feel that libraries and literary art hobbies are, according to one participant of my group, "for someone else", for those who are active in society and in cultural fields.

We should not leave writing as a tool of expression only for those who are already skilled and motivated writers. Inclusive literary art could provide platforms for expression, joy and development of literacy skills even for those whose literacy is in an inadequate state. To reach that goal, the professionals of reading and writing are required to educate themselves about literacy as a skill that is not same for everyone.

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