

Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland
- A Study Tour Report -

Finland

Step by Step
Treasuring Every Day for Our Children's Future

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Enveloped in Nature

Finland

A harsh yet beautiful land of a lakes and forests.

Finland is home to 5.4 million people, living on a land area nearly the same size as Japan. In the winter during the Polar Night, the sun is mostly hidden below the horizon. Santa Claus lives on Mt. Korvatuntuli, and Moomins live in the forests.

In Northern Lapland, we drove south from Lake Inari located in the Arctic Circle to Saariselkä along Route E75. It was late November. The sky began to lighten finally around 9 a.m., and the landscape slowly appeared from the blackness. The landscape changed little as we drove along a narrow road for just over 20 minutes. Along the way, we twice came across herds of wild reindeer, and once passed parents pushing their child in the stroller. The rumors were true. At a mild -6°C, the locals still traveled on foot, pushing strollers, with their children.

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High level of happiness and gender equality

World's most mother-friendly nation

Curriculum reform for basic and early childhood education in 2016

Free and equal education

Consistently ranks high in PISA (the OECD Program for International Student Assessment)

Both parents work and take parental leave

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Joy and anxiety: visiting your local *neuvola*.

A *neuvola* is the place where mothers can go to get advice, free of charge, regardless of income or nationality. Nearly 100% of expecting mothers and infants visit a *neuvola*. Through prenatal care, delivery, and preschool, the same *neuvola* nurse supports the health and well-being of the child and family.

Welcome to the *neuvola*! I am here to support you.

The word *neuvola* means "a place for advice". Mothers can leisurely talk for an hour with their *neuvola* nurses. The purpose of these clinics is to insure the health of the mother and unborn child, as well as promote a mentally and psychologically healthy lifestyle for the entire family. In a *neuvola*, the nurses

provide initial prenatal exams and regular follow-up visits in cooperation with doctors and psychologists at the hospital where the mother will give birth.

After childbirth, nurses make home visits to support the emotional and physical health of the mother and newborn. There is no charge for childbirth.

From a strictly prenatal visit model to a comprehensive preventive support model extending to the child and family.

The purpose of the visits is not only risk prevention and health management for the mother and child. Rather, the role of a *neuvola* is to understand mothers' diverse needs, offer the appropriate support, and to connect families with relevant institutions as necessary. They also provide information about social security, give guidance on application forms, and encourage participation in parenting classes.

- ✧ **Marja Rosengren:** has been working as a *neuvola* nurse for more than 35 years, and is also a certified midwife. "In recent years, there are more women from different cultural and language backgrounds. We have to provide appropriate information and support for them."
- ✧ There are a total of 10 to 15 prenatal visits. Infants will have at least nine appointments from birth until age one, including home visits. Six more follow-ups are held between ages 0 and 6.

We asked Marja, "What is a *neuvola*'s mission?"

"As *neuvola* nurses, we don't give the same advice and information to everyone because there is no "typical" mother. Recently, mothers obtain a surprising amount of information from the internet. Some want to be a 'good mother' and turn down advice in favor of their own research. But they may not know what information is appropriate for them. Our mission is to identify hidden concerns mothers may have through dialogue and choose the right support. And to give effective advice in order to support the well-being of the child and family.

Although *neuvola* nurses are affectionately called "*Neuvola Aunts*", one can sense they are professionals from their skill level, experience, and medical knowledge that is based on the latest

information. Parents feel secure having someone outside of the family to whom they can easily ask advice.

- ✧ In recent years, because of a push to merge maternity *neuvola* and child health *neuvola*, they are often build on the same sites as *päiväkoti**.
- **Päiväkoti*: combined educational and childcare facilities for children ages 0 to 6.
- ✧ Trust is built through responsive dialogue in daily conversation.
- ✧ Medical examination space for children. Both parents are encouraged to attend visits where they can receive guidance on breastfeeding, preparing baby food, changing diapers, etc.
- ✧ Based on the child's age and needs, a speech and hearing exam (MILS) and developmental assessment (LENE) are conducted. The exam results are recorded both on a Neuvola Card and in a database, and kept until the child enters elementary school.
- ✧ The first book to introduce Neuvola in Japan, written by Dr. Mutsuko Takahashi.

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Thoughtful design all around: playing outdoors in -20°C

A *päiväkoti* is an educational and childcare facility for children 0 to 6 years of age. To avoid disorder in the learning environment, architects design children's spaces to be comfortable and rich in functional UI/UX.

Children's day-to-day lives are designed by experts

To encourage children who are still mentally and physically developing to willingly perform everyday activities, thoughtful design measures are implemented throughout the *päiväkoti* by expert architects and designers.

To compensate for the geographical characteristics of Finland such as limited daylight and heavy snowfall, the environment is designed for smooth indoor/outdoor transitions and allows children to freely engage in physical activity regardless of weather conditions.

Indoor spaces, which can often be gloomy in the winter, are filled with colorful and well-designed items. Wallpaper and flooring with various colors and textures are used deliberately so that children can experience the contrasts through their visual and tactile senses as they see, touch, and walk on them.

Children's spaces, which can easily become disorderly, are functionally divided, with affordances meant to attract children's interest positioned throughout to creating captivating *'form UI/UX'*. Pathways and spaces are also designed to make teachers' jobs easier.

- ✧ Children eat lunch where and with whom they like. Teachers model good manners.
- ✧ It's called a triangle because it has three sides. Children are aware of form as they play.
- ✧ Children of different ages play and interact with each other.

Children learn the social norms they need for everyday life by experience.

Children diligently perform daily activities while teachers patiently accompany them, repeating the actions until they are committed to memory. Once the action becomes second nature, children can spend time with their friends, and a pleasant order emerges in the space. The acquired habits become the social order allowing children to play together peacefully.

Teachers do not teach children rules from the start, but instead help them learn rules through actions, while being constantly attentive to each child's physical and emotional development. Spaces where functional and effortless form coexist are beautiful and intriguing. The children playing in the spaces become accustomed to the functionality, enabling them to attempt new things, and commit daily behavior to memory. The time children spent focused on accomplishing new tasks was calm and quiet.

- ✧ Children working on what they like in small groups.
- ✧ Various colors and design around the children help them understand numerical concepts.
- ✧ Children form a habit of keeping daily items orderly. Design and function encourage such behavior and is aligned with their level of development.
- ✧ Bulky beds fold away into the wall. They can be folded out and set up with the touch of a button.

- ✧ **Design innovation for outdoor play**
 - ✧ Various types of clothing, shoes, and caps are provided for different weather. Functional clothing is chosen as not to interfere with play, and designed for smooth transitions between indoor and outdoor.
 - ✧ Before going inside, children change in a space equipped to dry clothes that have gotten wet from rain or snow.
 - ✧ Several entries and exits are put into designs to avoid traffic congestion.
-

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Promoting continuous dialogue: Creating a space for activity without words

We visited a daycare in Espoo, a metropolitan area with a high immigrant population. 48 of the roughly 100 children spoke a native language other than Finnish. In all, there were 13 different language backgrounds.

Children learn social norms together through experience.

At the time of our visit in late November, families were beginning to prepare for the coming holiday season. During this time of heavy shopping, this *päiväkoti* had set up a supermarket called Ladybird. Here children were learning how to shop by playing together with their friends.

The store sold items found in real supermarkets such as foods, beverages, daily necessities, books, toys, and clothes.

The children chose items themselves, put them into their baskets, got in line, paid for them, put them in bags and took them away. They first experience a series of actions, and afterwards learn the words to go along with them.

The children are encouraged to try new things by themselves. They experience excitement, nervousness, at times frustration, and may want to take their friends' items. While responding to the

emotions they feel, they learn to take responsibility for their actions. Furthermore, by interacting in the same space as classmates and teachers, children develop the ability to determine their own behavior.

- ✧ Lots of items on display
- ✧ Children choose their items and queue up at the cashier.

What did the research reveal about effective learning environments during early childhood?

Full implementation planned for Summer 2017.

Finland conducted a research and development project on early childhood education from 2014 to 2016. The topic was “Play and Play-centered Learning Environments”. The project observed from various perspectives how children acquire and apply knowledge to combine play with art, media, exercise, and exploration.

Play has an active power that encourages children to challenge their limits. When absorbed in play, children have the courage to explore new paths.

This project revealed the importance of peer-work, educators’ participation in play, the types of support and roles that enable a playful environment, as well as attitudes toward playfulness.

Saija Turunen

Ilkka Tahvanainen

The research and development project was conducted in metropolitan areas including Helsinki, Espoo, Kauniainen, and Vantaa.

- ✧ A supermarket called Ladybird set up in a *päiväkoti*. Children learn how to shop while playing.
- ✧ Items are lined up neatly. Price tags are easily visible.
- ✧ A cafe set up like those in supermarkets. Children roleplaying as customers place orders while children playing waiters take orders and serve.
- ✧ Cookies and chocolate in the cafe, handmade by teachers and children, look like the real thing.
- ✧ Children’s art is displayed on the wall. Inspiration for artwork comes from picture books and daily life experiences.

- ✧ **Understanding Different Cultures**
 - ✧ Among classmates there are differences in textures, colors, and styles of hair.
 - ✧ **Using Picture Cards**
 - ✧ By looking at picture cards children understand what they should do next without asking teachers.
 - ✧ **Support for Special Needs**
 - ✧ Special needs education is integrated into mainstream education during early childhood. Children learn tasks at their own pace with special support. The rules for determining grade levels are not rigid and divisions between grades are flexible. Along with the child's age, level of development and educational achievement are also considered.
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After päiväkoti, 9 years of peruskoulu.

Peruskoulu is a basic education school for students between 7 to 15 years old. It spans from mid August to early June totaling 190 days, five days a week. The minimum number of lessons per week varies between 19 and 30 and is fixed upon discussion between the school and parents.

Visiting a new class of 1st graders. School tour in English led by 5th graders.

When we arrived at the school, a boy and girl in 5th grade came out to welcome us. They were members of a club that gives school tours to guests in English. They applied for the role themselves and were our only guides around school for the one hour tour. The two said they were nervous, but spoke English quite fluently and were very friendly. They kindly accommodated our questions while being careful to finish the tour on time.

After completing *päiväkoti*, children spend nine years attending a compulsory comprehensive school called *peruskoulu*. When we visited in late August, it was the beginning of the school year. New students were experiencing their new classrooms and first lessons. We observed 1st grade math and craft classes.

The first thing that surprised us was the way students sat in craft class. They formed their own groups and worked wherever they wanted to. The students made two types of three-dimensional shapes by cutting a sheet of paper (top left: Crafts).

In math class, students were studying the numbers 0 to 2. What was interesting was that they started to mimic the shapes of the numbers with their bodies.

Later, students placed stickers and circled animals according to the numbers shown, then wrote the numbers they counted in boxes.

- ✧ To answer students' questions, teachers sometimes search the internet.
- ✧ Teachers help answer each student's "How to...?" questions.

In English class, since it was the first day, students passed a ball around and introduced themselves. They learn to speak a second language by age 12 and a third by age 15. I felt as though the students were learning not only by sitting in a chair speaking and listening, but using their bodies as well.

Students ages 7 to 12 (Grade 1-6) attend primary school, and ages 13 to 15 (Grade 7-9) attend secondary school. At this school, there were also students 16 to 20 (Grade 1-4) attending upper secondary school.

Well-educated Educators

Teachers create lesson plans and course content for their own classes adhering to the framework of the national core curriculum, and considering the the particular characteristics of local the area. Since they are given a large degree of discretion and entrusted with great responsibility, teachers are required to have at least a master's degree. Norssi, an elementary school for teacher training, attached to the University of Jyväskylä, is the largest in Finland.

- ✧ Students research where their clothes are made, consider why, and think about the concepts of production and consumption.

✧ Crafts

- ✧ A box made by cutting paper into a square and folding (2)
- ✧ Three-dimensional shapes made by folding and cutting paper (1)

✧ English

- ✧ Teacher using a smartboard in class. Students introduce themselves in English (3rd grade).

✧ Math

- ✧ Math class (1st grade). Students learn numbers 0 to 2.
- ✧ Understanding numbers from many angles.
- ✧ A student in craft class (1st grade)

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Characteristics of Nursing and Education

The aim is to encourage children's health and well-being according to their stage of development, and to lay the foundation for lifelong learning.

Chika Inoue

Profile

Chika Inoue is a lecturer in the Department of Nursery Education at Tokoha University Junior College in Japan. She specializes in early childhood education and care. Her research topic is "*How childcare professionals can best support children's development?*"

Teachers listen to each child through a constant dialogue

According to one experienced nursery school principal: "When teachers started making a conscious effort to listen to children, they naturally began to speak less. And children began to say they had learned to think a lot for themselves."

In Finnish classrooms, the wishes of the parents and children overlap with the expertise and competence of the teacher, creating children's day-to-day with a constant dialogue.

Playing, exploration, physical activity, and artistic experience and self-expression are at the core, and childcare takes place in a fun playful atmosphere.

There, adults never rush children. Children develop self-awareness through experimenting with their bodies and their senses, and adults place great importance on this process that children go through.

Children weaving a story of their own

When I visited a Finnish nursery in 2016, children were thinking carefully with a pen and a piece of paper, making their own stories based on their experiences, only occasionally talking with teachers. What is really being demanded in this constantly changing world, I feel, is not simply to read existing stories. But also to understand the world around you and to create new meaning.

“In order to raise happy children.”

Finnish National Core Curriculum

Anne Valpas

Profile

Anne Valpas is a director of early childhood education in Kurikka, Finland. Aiming to improve education and care, her studies focus on the effects of teacher training programs for early childhood education in multicultural environments.

Nurturing the ability to understand connections between various phenomena

To achieve a multidisciplinary learning environment, the national core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education was formed with an emphasis on skills and knowledge necessary for life in a democratic society. Because in infancy, children are developing as a whole, education with a focus on physically learning, feeling, and experiencing is highly valued. With this at its core, areas of emphasis such as multiliteracy and ICT skills are implemented according to the children's level of development.

Understanding children with multicultural backgrounds

Teachers in early childhood education need to be conscious of their own practice and able to explain it. In other words, they should be able to reflect on a situation and make adjustments as necessary.

Transversal competences

1. Thinking and learning to learn
2. Cultural competence, interaction and expression
3. Taking care of oneself and others, managing daily activities, safety
4. Multiliteracy
5. ICT-competence
6. Competence required for working life and entrepreneurship
7. Participation and influence, building a sustainable future

Developing as a person and a member of society

Scenes from a Päiväkoti

- ✧ Buffet style lunch: nutritionally balanced and all-you-can-eat.
- ✧ Handmade ornaments: treasuring a child's sensibility
- ✧ Seasonal transitions visualized. Window facings change according to the season.
- ✧ Playground equipment for small groups
- ✧ Various types of seats. Different types of classrooms.
- ✧ Comfort for staff too
- ✧ A cart for cleaning supplies
- ✧ Easy to clean chairs
- ✧ Teachers' lounge

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Communication without words.

Cultural Exchange

When children are seven years old, they enter basic education. Before that, children age six enter preschool education called *esiopetus*. Many *esiopetus* are located inside a *päiväkoti*. The practice of multiliteracy is strongly embedded in the national core curriculum for preschool and basic education.

Practicing multiliteracy

In Finland where they believe multiliteracy starts to develop from infancy and continues throughout one's adult life, children are exposed to multicultural communication and develop life skills while constructing their own identities.

Actually, there was little conversation during our visit. We thought, "There are no more samurai in Japan, but making an origami samurai helmet might be fun," and immediately took out a stack of papers and started to fold. The children were fascinated by the teachers' origami art and were excited to put on the paper helmets. At the second visit in November, origami was again quite popular. Like the last visit, the teachers started folding in silence. And the children imitated what the teachers were doing. The time passed peacefully with only the sound of paper folding. Then, a child said with a smile, "Sō, sō". And the child in the next seat also said "Sō, sō" as they looked at each other and smiled. The Finnish children imitated a words *sō, sō* that Japanese teachers unconsciously said as they encouraged the children. As they folded paper, their laughing voices filled the classroom.

Once they had finished folding, the children rushed out of the classroom holding their origami. They cherished them putting them into their bags, saying *sō, sō* and smiling.

It would be interesting to know how they described that day's experience to their parents and how they translated their first Japanese words *sō, sō* into their mother tongue.

- ✧ Kindergarten principals preparing to fold paper helmets
- ✧ Curious children gather around the Japanese visitors
- ✧ Absorbed in folding. A silent lecture.

Visitors from Japan

The teachers told students, “Kindergarten principals from Japan will be visiting our class.” And the children started to wonder “What sort of a country is Japan?” They spoke freely in their own words. On the day of the visit, the children asked their own questions, like, “Are there Samurai in Japan?” and “Do ninjas still exist?” The principals responded to the questions, “We used to have them, but not anymore,” but were sometimes at a loss of words. Samurai, Ninja...even in 2016 the children have such stereotypes about Japan. Though honestly taken aback at first, a spontaneous dialogue emerged between the Finnish children and the Japanese visitors.

The role of educators in supporting multiliteracy

Finnish teachers do not answer questions like, “Are there samurai in Japan?” They create an opportunity for children to ask, and let children experience the reaction themselves. The teachers believe it is important not to immediately tell students correct answers, but to let them experience thinking, having questions, asking them in their own words, and understanding the response.

I would like to applaud both the Finnish and Japanese educators who collaborated in silence, allowing children the *sō, sō* experience.

- ✧ Teachers also learned how to fold paper ninja stars.
- ✧ **First attempt at folding paper**
- ✧ We would have liked to get more pictures of the completed origami, but the children were so pleased with them they made sure to take them home.

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Children set out on a journey

A Global World

In the *päiväkoti* we visited in Espoo, children were learning about multicultural values and global education in preschool.

A “passport” connecting Finland and Japan

The word “passport” stood out in our minds from a presentation we saw during our visit to Finland in May, giving Principal Toshie the idea to try it in Japan, starting with the multiculturalism in her own kindergarten.

In mid October, the 4 year-olds class started talking with their classmate, Yori, who has a Finnish background, and the 5 year-old class with their classmate, Maiya, who has a Russian background. This was the start of their “world travels”.

A teacher for the 4 year-old class, Ayumi, read the children two picture books she bought at the Moomin shop in Osaka. One child noticed that the leaves in the Moomin Valley were the same color orange as the leaves in the school yard. The comment led to children deciding to make a Moomin Valley in the classroom.

In the 5 year-old class, the children cooked Russian food with their parents. It was the first time for them to taste food with those ingredients.

Miho, teaching the 5 year-old class, asked the children questions and organized their responses in a mind map. “What do we need to travel to Russia,” “How do we get there?” The class concluded that they would need an airplane, so decided to go to the Itami airport. The children were fascinated by the airport staff. *What's inside an airport? Let's build one! Let's get on an airplane!* Their imagination knew no bounds.

21st century skills: intelligence for living in a multicultural society

“How should we play with children who can not express their feeling in words?” “How often should we intervene in children’s play?”, asked Marjo who believes it is important for caretakers to play together with children to help each child find their own meaning. In the past, rather than play with children, a caretaker's role was to manage and look after them. Recently studies have shown that caretakers taking part in play can be beneficial to children's development. The principal of the daycare, Hannele, says the role of educators has been changing. In the 1960s, children were expected to obey the teachers, in the 1970s and 80s, children were allowed to solve problems on their own, and now we

think it is important that children participate autonomously in activities, for example, going to a library to search for information when they want to know something. Playing in small groups, teachers now place emphasis on listening to what children have to say.

Describing a typical day at Kuise Kindergarten

The kindergarten principals watching the video of a typical day at Kuise Kindergarten were interested in early childhood education in Japan saying, “We would love to research with the Japanese educators!” Some teachers who were involved in a national research project asked us many questions. When we visited the next day, they told us they had put a poster on the wall describing a typical Japanese kindergarten to share with other teachers.

Children set out on a journey

This is a story not only of children who explore the world but also of teachers who collaborate with each other to create environments where the children experience that world. Children and teachers sought answers to simple but intriguing questions, discussed with each other, asked their principals, and finally formed a figurative collage where the imaginary world meets the real world. That first step taken out of the doors of Kuise Kindergarten had taken me across to the world.

“I can’t keep up with children’s creativity,”

“It’s sometimes difficult to make a decision despite knowing what I need and want to do for the children,” said a teacher, Ayumi, in an interview shedding tears. This interview made us remember the words, “That’s why we must continue to learn as educators,” spoken by Marjo who has created a number of learning experiences for children at the *päiväkoti*.

Kuise Kindergarten: built in the early Edo period (c.1615), located next to the Kumano Shrine.

Every morning, children come with their parents and bow to the shrine before entering the kindergarten. Most live in the neighborhood. The topics they learn are different depending on the season. For example, cherry blossoms in spring, fresh greenery and animals in summer, the Shinto Autumn Festival. The theme of the theatrical play children perform in the third trimester also changes

every year. The goal of the kindergarten is to raise “happy children in the sacred grove”, “healthy children both in body and mind” and “children observing, feeling, and expressing what they see”.

- ✧ A poster describing a typical Japanese kindergarten was displayed on the wall.
- ✧ The Autumn Festival. Children, parents, and local residents take part.
- ✧ Please refer to the separate pamphlet for details ”PASSPRT”.

◆p.20-21

Interview with an Expert 2: Education and Society

Education and Society

Learning in the Finnish education system focuses on diverse skills and knowledge to fit each individual, and promoting individual well-being.

What is *Information Literacy*?

Nowadays, anyone can create information and anyone can obtain it. In today's world, rather than learn “correct” information, it is more important for us to choose “appropriate” information from the vast amount of information available, and be able to apply it. The capacity to search for, analyze, evaluate, apply, and create information is called “information literacy”.

Finnish education aims to develop children’s information literacy in combination with skills of “logical thinking” and “multiliteracy”. Children get used to the fact that things can be looked at from different points of view. In schools, children reference and compare a variety of perspectives and sources of information, and learn to judge the credibility and appropriateness of this information. All subjects are intended to develop an understanding of diversity in the world and the relativity of information.

Information literacy is an indispensable ability in this rapidly changing world because people who have it can respond to change flexibly and make better decisions about life, politics, and the economy, for themselves and society at large.

“Education gives back to society.”

Developing as a person and a member of society

Neuvola

Early Childhood Education

Basic education

Upper-secondary education (general upper secondary school diploma)

University (bachelor's, master's, doctoral degree level)

Vocational school (vocational qualifications)

Polytechnic: Vocational higher education (bachelor's, master's degree level)

Two paths for upper-secondary and higher education

Most students continue studying after compulsory education.

After compulsory education, more than 90% of students enter high school or vocational schools. The students in high school study not in an age-based system but in a credit-based system, and make study plans themselves. Vocational school has eight disciplines and more than 100 study programs issuing around 50 qualifications with practical training. In higher education, universities conduct academic research. Polytechnic is called University of Applied Science and gives a higher education certification and practical professional skills.

We had lunch at Ravintola Oppipoika, a restaurant run by students studying at the Lapland Tourism College in Rovaniemi. According to our tourguide, Riina, polytechnics offer more specialized job skills combining theory and practice. This restaurant is managed in cooperation with local businesses, and customers are happy to support the students' education.

Acquiring various skills to work and live happily with one's family.

Milla Kumpulainen

Profile:

Milla Kumpulainen (M.A.) is currently working in the field of education and intercultural communication. She graduated from the University of Tampere specializing in the social and educational history of Japan. During her studies, she spent a year in Japan as an exchange student.

If you ask Finnish teachers the goal of their work, most would answer that it is to teach children life skills and support their well-being. The Finnish education system and pedagogy are designed with the aim of allowing all people to work and live happy family lives.

Different people have different lifestyles and ideas of happiness. Rather than teach the same thing to every student, Finnish education develops students' capacities to realize their own happiness. These capacities include, for example—thinking ability, learning skills, and self-expression.

In Finland, where the population is sparse, education plays an important role in developing able citizens for the workforce. This is exemplified by free education and the close connection between the workplace and vocational training. When each individual can leverage their strengths, regardless of their background, it benefits society as a whole.

Finnish people also place a high value on family. People feel it is their right as citizens to work and have a family, regardless of gender. In addition to labor laws and family aid, working efficiently also helps ensure work-life balance. As part of their education, people learn how to solve problems and work efficiently, as well as how to practice a well-balanced life.

Because the well-being of a society depends on each individual's well-being, Finland places particular emphasis on supporting the well-being of the individual.

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Finland Travelogue

A marriage of design and sensibility

The closest European country to Japan. A fusion of urban life and nature.

[Helsinki: a cozy city where urban life meets nature](#)

Helsinki, the capital of Finland, faces the Baltic Sea. Tourists can enjoy the history of the city on foot or by tram. Helsinki is modern, with beautiful architecture, green parks, and fascinating churches. Visitors can shop in designer stores and enjoy dining at comfortable, delicious restaurants. Local people are like and friendly to tourists, so one can have a cozy and relaxing time there.

[Lapland: located north of 66°33'N, in the Arctic Circle](#)

Located 90 minutes from Helsinki, the landscape is covered in white powder snow. The Northern Lights can be seen on clear winter nights. The home of Santa Claus, it is a quiet and mystical place.

1. Santa Claus Village, Rovaniemi
2. -20°C outside
3. Riding on a reindeer sleigh in a forest
4. Cottage in Saariselkä
5. Finlandia Hall designed by Alvar Aalto
6. The statue of J. L. Runeberg in the Esplanadi park and brilliant Christmas lights
7. Arabia factory
8. Helsinki Central railway station
9. Uspenski Orthodox Cathedral
10. Museum of Contemporary Art “Kiasma”
11. Temppeliaukio Church (Rock Church)

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[Food & Gift & Item](#)

(From the top-left)

Rovaniemi Airport / Sweets for Xmas “Joulutorttu” / Helsinki Cathedral / Salmon dish
Iittala “Taika” series / Kamppi Chapel by K2S Architects / Sibelius Park / Marimekko

Fresh berries in South Port Market / Glass products of Iittala / Home cooking / Northernmost McDonald's in the world

Skirt made of Marimekko fabrics / Tram in Helsinki / Traditional wooden cup designed by Sami / Uspenski Orthodox Cathedral

Marimekko flagship store / Finnish beer "Karhu" / Moomin character products / Reindeer dish

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History of Hanshin Edu-Care Research Society

“Grown-ups set out on a journey”

Toshie Nakanishi

Several close colleagues and I, who are nursery school directors, formed the Hanshin Edu-Care Research Society. The group takes trips abroad every year to learn about early childhood education around the world. So far we have visited Thailand, England, Germany, Canada, Australia, Spain, Singapore, Finland twice in May and October 2016, and most recently New York in May 2017. Currently we are considering locations for our 10th anniversary.

The society was founded thanks to the late Ms. Nobuko Yamamoto. We wanted to create “special something” as a token of our gratitude to her so we decided to publish this booklet detailing our trip to Finland. In every country we visited we saw children's smiling faces. At a kindergarten in Fröbel, we received a donation for East Japan Earthquake which we sent to kindergartens in Fukushima. Whether abroad or in Japan, we always felt a connection with the people.

We also owe thanks to Professor Nobuko Uchida (emeritus professor and former Deputy Director at Ochanomizu University) for introducing us to Ms. Ikuko Yamada who showed us Finnish *neuvolas*. Without her, this booklet would not be possible. We will continue our research for a while longer, trying to find the next “special something”, before handing it over to the next generation.

Toshie Nakanishi, principal at Kuise Kindergarten

Editor's Letter

Children become more and more capable everyday, and we adults eagerly anticipate their growth. In Finland, classrooms were quiet and peaceful. The strengths of Finnish education are simple and straightforward, and thus do not immediately stand out. The teachers placed importance on kinesthetics, the perception of one's bodily movement, and on movement as communication. I got the impression that the kinesthetic-based education may be a natural extension of the harsh natural environment of Finland, and part of what makes Finns who they are.

Daisetsu Suzuki, in his book *Zen and Japanese Culture*, called the basis of experience “dynamic identification”. An important idea in Zen teaching is “No reliance on words”. Tiny improvements, the result of accumulated experience, is what gives rise to innovation. I feel a strong affinity with Finland probably because of this point. Finland brought back memories of a nostalgic Japan.

In the late 20th century, computers that instantly responded to commands, brought about the Third Industrial Revolution—demanding that humans respond instantly as well. From 2011, the Fourth Industrial Revolution called “Industry 4.0” had ushered in a new era of internet and AI. The information processing capability of computers has far surpassed that of humans, ending the previous era in which human needed to quickly respond with information stored in short-term memory. In the new era, people will utilize long-term memory in order to use knowledge and information.

Finnish education reform has been ongoing since 1972 (1973) , with the slogan of “Leave no child behind”. The curriculum reform in 2016 aims at acquiring multi-skills, thinking and acting ethically, and utilizing ICT skills safely and securely. “Digital native” children are able to control technology, rather than being controlled by it, in order to lead happy lives. Early childhood educators want children to spend their six years of early childhood making lots of mistakes but enjoying the journey forward. They take a long-term perspective and believe in a bright future of infinite possibility for children

This entire Finland study tour was made possible thanks to a series of unlikely encounters. Reliable people introduced me to other reliable people, with connections being formed across generations. We

shared spontaneous moments no manual can teach. Overcoming language barriers, we were able to have many wonderful experiences. The ability to cross paths with reliable people, to believe in possibility, and to appreciate wonderful relationships is an ability only we humans possess. I deeply appreciate all the people involved with this project.

Ikuko Yamada, Kuu.365 Early Years Development & Learning

PASSPORT

“erlebte Raum”

Experienced (response and ability) space for child

What we wish children to be by the end of early childhood

Dr. Masatoshi Jimmy SUZUKI (Assistant professor, Hyogo University of Teacher Education, Japan)

The new Courses of Study for Kindergarten revised in 2018 was publicly notified in March 2017. It requires each kindergarten to make their own curriculum of early childhood education and to improve it continuously.

A study group of the Private Kindergarten Association in Amagasaki has conducted various case studies focusing on “Physical and mental health”, “Self-reliance,” “Collaboration”, “Awareness of ethics”, “Connection to society”, “Realization of ability to think”, “Relationship with nature and life”, “Interests in numbers, figures, and characters”, “Communication with language”, and “Sensitivity and expression” from the four viewpoints such as “Environment inducing playing”, “Environment easy to access and use”, “Environment supporting activities”, and “Environment making activities visible”. As an advisor of 2017, I continue to take part in the discussions after 2015 and 2016.

Message for “Children set out on a journey”

From image to action, from action to collaboration

One of the exclusive rights of children is to take immediate action right after they perceive an image.

Even though children have not been to a foreign country, they are able to create images from the story and experience of those around them. The imagination would be an extraordinary idea, however, it is real for them. Children cannot stop forming something when they receive vivid input. Output is represented as “playing” to us adults.

Children in Kuise kindergarten have expanded their imagination about “foreign countries (Russia & Finland)”, “travel”, “airplane”, and “airport”. These images were reproduced in the kindergarten, thereby leading to the activity that reconstructed the images.

Although playing starts from individual child, dialogue with someone begins immediately. When once children start playing, they want to collaborate with each other. They have the ability to create something together. Meanwhile, the children also want to show their work to the others and play with them. Sharing what they are doing with smaller peers deepens children’s learning. Actions carry its meaning only when collaborating with each other.

What the current early childhood education needs is active and interactive learning. This activity by Kuise kindergarten is an excellent practice that developed children’s self-reliance, ability to think, and collaboration through the active and interactive learning. What we need to live in our society was included in the activity. You would find the children have developed these skills in the activity including try and error, PDCA cycle, the ability to find out what you need, and thoughtfulness. Above all, some studies have shown that children’s feeling of collaborating with friends and carrying out something leads to be successful in life when they grow up since the feeling influences one’s attitude toward their life. The unforgettable experience of children must contribute to creating a great future.

<Comments from parents>

- It was experience for children to have friends who have Russian and Finnish backgrounds.
- Good opportunity to make and taste an authentic Russian food with parents.
- Cabin crews were so cute when they are speaking.
- My daughter said she wanted to be a cabin crew when she grows up.
- Excellent airplane food!
- We were happy to join the practice.
- We parents also enjoyed seeing the itinerary in the class letter.
- The passport was well-designed.
- I hope we will travel by a real airplane.

- We had an opportunity to take an airplane. My son was interested in what the cabin crews are doing.
 - When guiding me, I felt my daughter reliable.
 - By seeing the real airport, the children knew what to do there like checking baggage.
 - Saying, “I will go to Finland tomorrow!”, my son putting his stuff into the baggage.
 - Our child told that he was proud of taking a super express train to the airport.
 - Good picture taken in the airport!
 - I felt Finland closer.
 - We went our honeymoon to Finland...
 - After that, he got interested in the world map and foreign countries.
 - I think this project was tough for the teachers, but they instructed the children very well.
 - My daughter told a story of passport at home.
 - Going to the real Kansai airport could be a good memory for the children.
 - I was surprised that my son said, “I will go to Finland.”
-

Looking back on the activity

Toshie Nakanishi (principal, Kuise Kindergarten, Japan)

Since the word “passport” in a report of a practice has remained in my mind since we visited Finland last time in May, I came up with an idea that puts it into practice in our kindergarten. Ms. Yamada summarized our practice in this report. When we visited Espoo in Finland again in November last year with a preliminary edition of this report, we were glad to hear that the practice attracted attention of people in University of Helsinki.

We had a special topic of “global” this time, and the topics the children in our kindergarten learn are different depending on each season, for example, cherry blossoms in spring, fresh green and small animals in summer, the festival of Shinto in autumn. The theme of a play children act in the third trimester changes every year.

I have been told from my professor, Ms. Otsuka, that I should embrace each child’s wish. Moreover, she taught me that disconnected plays do not develop child’s mind. I just make it into practice. The professor passed away in October last year at the age of 93. An impressive phrase of her always echoes in my mind, “No matter how considerably the Courses of Study changes, take it easy!”