

# ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE

for children's cultural  
centers and basic art  
education institutions



## **Dear reader,**

You have picked up this guide because you are interested in egalitarian, equal and accessible art activities in accordance with Finnish laws and regulations. These are activities where people of all kinds are welcome to experience art as they are, and to experience a sense of accomplishment as they are.

Accessibility is about turning the focus towards the experiencers and creators of art. When talking about accessibility, there may be an interpretation that it is something that only concerns people with disabilities. In reality, accessibility is about embracing the fact that all people are different. We all have different abilities to do things and we all have different challenges in what we do.

Accessibility is achieved one step at a time. It's all about taking the first step – you start somewhere and work your way forward. Improving accessibility in your own work or in your work community is not very complicated, but it does require change. If nothing changes today, nothing will have changed ten years from now. Just opening this guide can be seen as a first step.

The aim of this guide is to provide tools and tips on accessibility. It was produced as part of the SATA2 Project (Accessible Art Hobby 2) as a joint effort to improve the accessibility of cultural and art activities for children and young people with special needs.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

***Aura Linnapuomi***

Keywords:

*diversity, accessibility, equality, legislation, agreements*

## **Achieving accessibility**

Every child and young person has the right to experience and make art. Participation in hobbies should be as easy as possible, regardless of disabilities, support needs, native language or family financial situation, for example. Recognizing diversity in children, young people and in oneself is the first step towards realizing the cultural rights of children and young people and towards a more equal children's culture field.

Recognizing and taking into account diversity and different ways of doing things in the planning and implementation of services can make them more accessible. Thorough accessibility is about minimizing barriers to participation in many aspects, including access to information, economic opportunities, physical environment, the use of senses, social factors and understanding. The aim is to enable children and young people to choose art hobbies and activities based on their interests, rather than limiting choice to those services that take into account the diversity of participants and the removal of barriers to access.

The better the cultural rights of children and young people are implemented, the greater is the sustainability and impact of children's cultural activities. Children's cultural operators (and subsequently other cultural operators) will gain new clients and the quality of children's cultural activities will improve. The aim is to create an **equal** children's culture field, where everyone has the opportunity to take up hobbies, participate, get training and work, regardless of their individual characteristics.



## What do international conventions and the law say?

Taking diversity into account and ensuring the accessibility of activities are not a matter of choice. International human rights conventions and Finnish law oblige us to act in such a way that children's cultural rights are realized to the fullest extent possible.

- The right to participate in cultural life is a human right enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948, Article 27).
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Finland in 1991, also guarantees children's free right to participate in cultural life (Article 31).
- The right to self-development is also mentioned in the Finnish Constitution (731/1999, Section 16).
- The Finnish Constitution prohibits discrimination on any personal grounds, such as disability, gender or language (Section 6).
- The Act on Cultural Activities in Local Government (166/2019) requires municipalities to provide cultural services in an equal manner.
- The Non-discrimination Act of 2014 (1325/2014) obliges the promotion of equality. The law requires education providers to ensure that their educational institutions have a plan for promoting equality (Section 6). The law also requires education providers to make reasonable adjustments to their services to enable people with disabilities to deal with others on an equal basis (Section 15).
- In 2016, Finland ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Convention obliges Finland to implement cultural services and recreational activities in a way that also enables children with disabilities to participate (Article 30).

## Am I an accessibility agent?

- I recognize what is meant by the concept of diversity.
- I understand that accessibility is the sum of many contributing factors. It can and should be considered from many perspectives, such as pricing, physical barriers and communication.
- I am aware that taking diversity into account and ensuring the accessibility of activities are not a matter of choice – international human rights conventions and Finnish law oblige us to act in such a way that children's cultural rights are realized to the fullest extent possible.
- I can give arguments in favor of the benefits of accessibility.



## 2. INCLUSION

***Pilvi Kuitu***

Keywords:

*inclusion, segregation, equal services*

Inclusive thinking is a tool for promoting accessible services and an equal society. The terms inclusion and inclusive education were originally used to promote services and opportunities for participation for people with disabilities. The terms refer to a way of thinking developed within the United Nations and UNESCO, which emphasizes the right of all people with disabilities to belong to general communities rather than being placed in their own separate service systems. In Finland, the concept of inclusion has been extended to guide the development of a wide range of social structures. For example, a strong inclusive value base has been defined for the development of the comprehensive school system (grades 1–9).

In an inclusive society, services and structures are created for all, taking into account the needs of a wide range of participants. In a truly inclusive society, every person is seen and perceived as a valued actor just as they are. This enables all people to participate and work together. Inclusive thinking focuses primarily on abilities and resources and sees differences and ability limitations as qualities, not as weaknesses or reasons for exclusion.

The opposite of inclusion is segregation, where special needs groups are provided with separate services based on their differences and challenges. Segregation creates structures in which people who are different or in need of special support are segregated and excluded from mainstream services and often from the rest of society.



Inclusion requires an understanding of the needs and abilities of different people, recognizing structures of inequality and courage to adopt equal opportunities policies. The basis for achieving inclusion is the commitment of the whole organization or community and each member in it to an inclusive value base. The transformation of existing segregating structures or integrating services and structures, which enable participation through special support, into inclusive ones is difficult but important and rewarding. However, it is often much easier to accommodate access to participation for a wide range of people when services are designed to be accessible from the outset.

Genuine inclusion is an important contributor to positive attitudes in society and communities. Inclusion benefits everyone, including those who do not need support at that point in time.



# 3. OPEN AND RESPECTFUL ENCOUNTERS

***Sanna Kivijärvi & Katja Sutela***

Keywords:

*attitudinal accessibility, bodiliness, learner-centeredness, pedagogical tact, interaction*

## **Open and respectful encounters as a starting point for accessible art education**

The starting point for open and respectful pedagogical interaction is encountering the student as an individual. An open encounter can be fostered through an approach of learning together: teacher and students learn from each other and deepen their skills. At their best, interactions based on learning together challenge established notions of learning and teaching and serve as a resource for teachers' professional development.

Open interaction is possible when the teacher understands its holistic nature: interaction is not only based on verbal expression but also on non-verbal cues such as body movements and tone of voice. This holistic approach applies to the learning community as a whole, so the teacher also has a responsibility to support constructive interaction between students. When teachers identify a student's need for special support, they should consciously build an atmosphere that respects the individuality of each student. In this way, support for the individual student comes naturally and does not become a focus of daily interaction, making it difficult for the student to interact with others. To promote inclusion, the teacher must ensure that all students participate in joint activities.

## Dimensions of open interaction

### **Learner-centeredness and pedagogical tact**

Learner-centered pedagogy involves providing individualized support and guidance to the student, as well as a variety of encouraging feedback, with the aim of creating and maintaining motivation to learn. This means taking an interest in the student's strengths, interests, abilities, learning experiences and support needs and incorporating them into teaching. It is essential that the learner's self-direction is supported and that activities are meaningful to them. From the teacher's point of view, education and art activities should be reciprocal and supportive of the learner's expression and decision-making. The teacher supports the student's self-direction by giving the student time and space to think and act and to make choices. This requires situational pedagogical tact on the part of the teacher, for example observing when feedback should primarily challenge and when it should encourage the student.

Pedagogical tact and respectful interaction are based on an open and respectful attitude towards the learner and their interests, knowledge and skills, as well as learning skills and potential. Unfounded preconceptions limit learner-centeredness and require self-reflection and collegial collaboration on the part of the art educator to overcome them.

### **Bodiliness in interaction**

Interaction is a bodily, holistic activity in which people communicate through words, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, postures and movements. In interaction, emotions guide an individual's message reception, decision-making and actions. At its best, non-verbal communication supports verbal expression and opens up the possibility of bodily interaction and understanding. Bodily interaction is particularly important in situations where it is difficult to put thoughts and feelings into words.

The teacher can use facial expressions, gestures and body postures to support the student's own expression.

In art activities, such as playing music, singing and dancing, interaction is mainly bodily. Singing or playing together, moving to a common rhythm, and doing exercises that combine music and movement in other ways are good examples of how participants in a learning situation can interact physically with each other. To promote accessibility, the art educator needs to think about how the students' own sensory perceptions, emotions and experiences can be used in art activities, so that different ways of perceiving and understanding can be used in pedagogical interaction.

Since art education often involves working in close contact, such as in pairs or groups, it is essential that the teacher respects the learner's body and space. A prerequisite for open interaction is that the learner has confidence that their body and autonomy are respected. Asking permission (for example, 'Can I touch you on the shoulder?') gives the learner confidence in making decisions about their body. In a respectful learning environment, learners can feel safe in every aspect.

## CHECKLIST

- Reflect on your preconceptions and attitudes about the learner.
- Reflect on where your assumptions come from and how they affect your encounter with the learner.
- Ask about the learner's interests, learning experiences and wishes.
- Consider what you are communicating through body postures, touch, facial expressions and gestures. Do they match what you are saying?
- Think about how you can use body postures, touch, facial expressions and gestures to support the learner's activities and learning.
- Ask permission to touch. Make sure the learner feels safe by asking.







## 4. ATTITUDE IS KEY

***Pilvi Kuitu***

Keywords:

*attitude, support, discussion*

### **Identifying special needs – having the courage to ask and experiment**

Adequate provision of special support is as crucial to the delivery of quality art activities and art education, as it is in any other setting. Appropriate approaches, teaching that can be adapted to the abilities and skills of the group, flexible objectives and sufficient skills to identify and respond to support needs ensure that children with varying abilities can participate.

Advance information from parents on the child's support needs will give an indication of how much support an individual child or group may need. This can involve eliminating barriers, communication support or addressing children's needs in advance, for example by reducing group size or altering the pace of activities to meet children's needs. However, planning based on a diagnosis is only part of the truth. Often the information on a child's support needs is incomplete or the needs only become apparent during the activity. Each child is an individual and each group is a unique community, and identifying their support needs and finding appropriate ways to support their participation is a process.

# Checklist for teachers and instructors

## Ask and discuss

Asking and discussing with the children and their families as early as possible often provides key information for planning activities. Sometimes it can feel difficult to talk about challenges, but almost always both child and family are aware of the child's support needs. Asking for advice is the best way to approach the issue.

What might be the best way for you to keep calm and participate? What kind of instrument would best fit your hand? What would bring you a sense of accomplishment? What do you find difficult?

## Be open

Open interaction with the child and family always brings new information to all parties involved. Be as honest as possible about the possibilities for participation. For example, if a child has difficulty concentrating in a large group for long periods of time and the group size cannot be reduced, this should be discussed openly. Good ideas and solutions often emerge from these talks. What is of primary importance is a shared desire to find ways of achieving and participating and to promote them together.

## Take time to experiment

Experimentation takes time. Almost everyone who is about to try something new is nervous whether they will succeed. Tension and fear of failure can even be a barrier to participation and accomplishment. Sometimes it makes the most sense to start a hobby or activity without any substantive goals and focus on enabling participation by taking your time to get to know the group, exploring spaces, ways of working and new concepts.

## Listen

Each child's progress and success are individual. Where mastering a challenging trick in circus class may be one child's star moment, for another child it may be arriving at the activity without having an hour-long nervous tantrum. Listen attentively to children's accomplishments and give them credit. Participation and art are not a competition.



# 5. ACCESSIBILITY IN PLANNING

***Pilvi Kuitu***

Keywords:

*accessibility, planning, objectives*

As many lifestyle guides aptly put it, 'What you focus on grows.' The same is true in organizations and communities. The values, strategies, action plans and budgets that guide our activities define what is important to us. If equality, inclusion and support for the participation of special needs groups are absent from these documents, they are unlikely to be present in the implementation of activities.

The obligations to promote equality arise from the laws, regulations and policies governing the provision of cultural services. Accessibility, availability and inclusion require will, planning, commitment and resources to be achieved. They can be set out in plans, for example, as follows:

Our activities are based on the values of equity, equality, arts and accessibility. Our activities are respectful of all people, regardless of age, background, native language, gender, abilities or attitudes. Our activities respect the right of every person to be an equal member of society. We cherish the unique opportunity created by arts and culture for individual expression and for interaction between people and its enhancement.

It is good for your organization to have an internal discussion to define together the objectives you will set for achieving equality and accessibility. It is also worth agreeing on the measures and resources you will commit to on an annual basis to promote them at different levels of activities.



## Examples

Our objectives for 20XX are:

- To implement at least two inclusive groups with at least two professional instructors and a sufficient number of assistants.
- To carry out an accessibility mapping of activities and facilities.
- To develop staff skills in supporting the inclusion of special needs groups by participating in [insert topic] training courses and by enabling staff to work in pairs with a social services professional in at least four groups.
- To develop a more accessible website and provide transparent information on the accessibility and non-accessibility of activities.
- To introduce communication-supporting pictures in all activities for children.
- To develop opportunities for children and families to participate in the planning of activities and policies.
- Quantitative and qualitative monitoring of the achievement of objectives in activity reports and statistics to provide valuable information and a continuum for improvement.

# 6. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING AND PLANNING TOOLS

***Tarja Keltto & Anu Lönnqvist***

Keywords:

*participation, involvement, planning*

In accessible art activities, children and young people with various support needs can participate in the same art hobbies as their peers. Participation in a group activity requires more courage than usual from a child or young person with a support need, so a supportive and positive atmosphere will increase the child's courage to express opinions and to participate actively in activities. Involving a child or young person with a support need in planning may require the hobby group instructor to learn new ways and means of doing things, but many aids, such as pictures, are useful for all children in the group. You can also ask the child or their parents directly what should be taken into consideration.

What are the benefits of involving children and young people in planning activities? The Handbook for Child Protection considers this from a service perspective, but the same principles also apply to planning activities in a hobby group.

## **Participation of children and young people**

- improves the quality of decision-making in the planning process, as the views of service users are taken into account from the outset

- changes adults' perceptions of children: passive objects become active agents
- strengthens children's and young people's sense of self-worth and their own opinions and gives them the opportunity to practice citizenship skills
- makes children and their situation visible and holds adults accountable for their actions
- enables adults to show respect for children's ideas
- can empower and protect children, especially those who have had a lot of experience of being marginalized and living at the mercy of chance

*Source: Mikko Oranen, Nuorten Ystävät association (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Handbook for Child Protection)*

## Planning new activities together with children

When you want to plan a new activity with children or develop an existing one, incorporate as many activities as possible into the planning workshop. Don't forget to include a snack as well or treat at the end of the workshop. If you are expecting children with special needs to participate, take into account the adults who will be assisting the children in your preparations. After the workshop, send participants a summary of what was discussed and agreed in the workshop. You may want to use illustrations (Papunet) or social storytelling tools in the summary. Remember to also report afterwards on how the ideas and wishes have been implemented.

Read more about social storytelling here: <https://viitotturakkaus.fi/tuote-osasto/tunteiden-tunnistaminen-lapset/sosiaalisia-taitoja-lapselle/> (in Finnish)

Try to organize the planning workshop on accessible premises and mention this in the invitation or advertisement. It is also a signal that all children are welcome to the activity. If the premises are not fully accessible, explain

what kind of barriers there are. Also mention if there will be assistants or interpreters or if parents can come along to assist their child. A good invitation is one that the child can look at and understand. For example, if there is a video or pictures of the premises on the website, include this in the invitation.

Ask on the registration form for information about the child's support needs, manner of communication and assistive devices. You can use this registration form on the Vamlas Foundation website and adapt it to your needs.

<https://vamlas.fi/in-english/>

However, you should consider which of the child's health details are relevant to the activity and how data security is taken into account in handling and storing the details. For more information on data security guidelines, go to <https://www.soste.fi/jarjestoipas/henkilotietojen-kasittely-jarjestoissa/> (in Finnish)

Papunet also offers an editable and printable communication passport that the child can carry with them to various activities.

<https://papunet.net/materiaalia/kommunikointipassit> (in Finnish)

An illustrated program of the planning workshop should be available for all participants to see. It gives a clear structure to the workshop. This structure helps all the children in the group to concentrate and anticipate the course of the workshop. However, it is a good idea to keep the program flexible enough so that last-minute changes to the plans do not cause unnecessary stress for anyone. ADHD-liitto (the Finnish ADHD association) and the Finnish Gymnastics Federation have produced videos with tips for teachers, instructors and coaches on how to guide energetic children. These tips are also perfect for art hobbies.

<https://www.voimisteluklubi.fi/energiset-liikkujat> (in Finnish)

Information on working with visually impaired children can be found on the website of the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired.

<https://www.nkl.fi/fi/lasten-kuntoutus> (in Finnish)

Information on hearing impairment and working with a hearing-impaired child is compiled into a booklet of tips for parents. <https://www.klvi.fi/wp-content/uploads/vinkkivihko-vanhemmille-1.pdf> (in Finnish)



## **The child as a feedback provider**

Group activities can also be planned and developed by collecting feedback regularly throughout the activity period. Depending on the age and developmental level of the child, feedback can be collected by observing the messages the child sends (gestures, facial expressions, posture, concentration, vocalization and other forms of expression) or by collecting spontaneous initiatives and requests from the participants into a wish jar or wish tree for further development.

You can also ask the children for feedback after each session. This way, even the quietest of the group can make their voices heard. In addition to verbal feedback, you can ask for children's opinions through activities that can be developed to suit the nature of the group. Much like the traditional smiley face – frowny face form, the children can also use dance, music or song, for example, as a quick way to express opinion. In the same way, children's wishes and suggestions can be collected in a traditional way in a box or jar for further development. The most important thing is that everyone in the group is able to participate in all activities if they wish, to express their opinions and to feel heard.

To support discussion and expression of opinions, you can use a variety of methods to support speech, such as pictures or drawings. To explain or guide a more complex situation, you can also use stories with pictures and text, which you can draw yourself or use, for example, the Papunet picture tool. Remember to give the child with support needs enough time to respond and to provide a calm conversation setting if possible.

Feedback from the child or young person can also come through the parents, so it is a good idea to ask parents for feedback at the end of the activity period.

Some examples on how to use pictures to support discussion, planning and activities:

- Printable quick feedback cards (in Finnish)  
<http://papunet.net/materiaalia/kyllaei-kortit>
- Video showing the use of Talking Mats (in Finnish)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBzCrMuQfSw&feature=youtu.be>
- Video showing the use of quick drawings (in Finnish)  
<https://papunet.net/tietoa/nopea-piirrosviestinta>
- Sometimes children or young people use key word signs to help them communicate. You can find more information on Papunet (in Finnish):  
<https://papunet.net/materiaalia/materiaalia-viittomakommunikointiin>

For more information on listening to the child's views, see the website of the Central Union for Child Welfare (in Finnish):

<https://lskl.e-julkaisu.com/vammaisen-lapsen-nakemysten-selvittaminen/>



# 7. BASIC EDUCATION IN THE ARTS: Different learners, adapting teaching and developing a personalized curriculum

**Lotte Nyberg**

Keywords:

*basic education in the arts, art studies, personalized curriculum, syllabus, objectives*

In art, specialty and the ability to see and experience things differently are valuable sources of creativity and expressive power. The diversity, freedom and richness of expression in our artistic culture are best realized by supporting the equal opportunities of each individual to study the arts, also in basic education. Basic education in the arts in Finland is a comprehensive network of institutions, which provides a good basis for ensuring and developing the accessibility of art education.

The Finnish curriculum criteria for basic education in the arts (2017) define a value base that respects equality:

"The curriculum criteria for basic education in the arts are based on a value base according to which basic education in the arts is built on respect for human rights, equality, equity and cultural diversity. People build their lives through interaction with other people and their environment. Basic education in the arts is based on understanding the uniqueness and dignity of each person as an individual and as a member of communities..."

The following text is intended to help you to identify the support needs of different learners and to develop a personalized curriculum in basic art education.

Equality and accessibility in art education is a value that education providers must work towards in a determined and planned way. The first step is taken at the moment of admission. The Finnish Basic Art Education Act states that student admission is decided by the education provider, and applicants must be subject to equal selection criteria. The education provider should therefore consider how equality in admission is implemented and communicated to different learners.

The term Different Learners includes a broad heterogeneous group of learners with learning difficulties ranging from mild reading difficulties to extensive intellectual disabilities. A different learner may therefore have mild or extensive learning difficulties, such as language difficulties (i.e., speech, reading or writing difficulties), mathematical difficulties, attention and concentration difficulties, motor, perceptual and sensory difficulties or difficulties with social interaction. Participation in education may also be affected by learning difficulties resulting from different forms of disability, such as sensory or motor impairment, intellectual disability or a neuropsychiatric disorder. A different learner may have cognitive learning difficulties or, for example, only sensory and motor impairments. The provision of education for different learners may include both general curriculum-based education, where different learners receive support for learning alongside other learners, and specially designed and adapted special needs education for groups or individuals, where the curriculum, syllabus and teaching format are adapted to suit, for example, a person with an extensive learning disability.

Around one in five Finns has a learning difficulty. Multichannel and intrinsically motivating art pedagogy helps students to study art despite their learning difficulties and by highlighting their strengths. Modifying the learning environment, finding learning techniques that suit the student, increasing teaching time and possibly using learning aids are ways of supporting the student to achieve the objectives of the curriculum. Sometimes, however, a



student's special educational needs require a planned adaptation of teaching and a personalized curriculum to enable progressive learning and base learning on experiences of accomplishment in order to maintain learning motivation.

The curriculum criteria for the general and advanced syllabus in basic art education (2017) define the principles for personalizing the curriculum as follows:

"The education provider shall describe in its curriculum the procedures for personalizing the syllabus, where necessary, to meet the studying and learning abilities of the student. When personalizing the syllabus, the procedures shall be documented in a manner decided by the education provider. A personalized curriculum shall be drawn up for the student in cooperation with the student and their caregiver. Personalizing may involve personalizing the objectives, content, duration of study, teaching method, necessary support measures and assessment procedures. Personalizing shall be done in such a way that the student can develop their skills on their own merits. The possibility of personalizing the syllabus shall be communicated to parents."

**TIP:**

*Special support needs is a special education term included in the three-tier support system introduced in comprehensive school education in 2013. If a student has difficulties with their studies, the most appropriate form of support is determined: general support, enhanced support or special support. An art education institution can monitor the accessibility and equity of its own teaching by comparing and recognizing that 29% of students in comprehensive schools received some form of support for learning, and 17.5% of these received enhanced or special support. The most frequent need for a personalized curriculum in the arts is among learners who are also receiving enhanced or special support at school. In comprehensive school education, students with special needs are provided with an IEP (Individual Education Plan), which is a personalized plan for arranging education.*

## General or advanced syllabus?

Depending on the school, students have the option of following a general or advanced syllabus in basic art education. If the institution offers both, it is worth considering which option will support the student's wishes and objectives. The advanced syllabus of basic education in the arts includes 1,300 lessons: 800 lessons for basic studies and 500 lessons for advanced studies. The general syllabus of basic education in the arts includes 500 lessons, consisting of 300 lessons of common studies and 200 lessons of thematic studies. The calculated length of a lesson is 45min.

Once the appropriate syllabus has been chosen, a personalized curriculum can be created. Ideally, there is a possibility to switch between the different syllabuses. An institution may start teaching students with special needs according to a general or an advanced syllabus. The emphasis is on either individual or group teaching, depending on the art form.

When choosing the scope of the syllabus, parents should be guided to consider the cost of the art education. Although the most appropriate option for a student with special needs in terms of objectives and volume of teaching may be a general art syllabus, the institution may be in a situation where it does not receive public funding to provide teaching for this syllabus. As a result, tuition fees for the general syllabus are often higher than for the advanced syllabus.

Regardless of the syllabus, the personalized curriculum is drawn up with an emphasis on personalizing the objectives, content, learning time and syllabus according to the student's needs.

### **TIP:**

*The reasons for needing special support may have no impact on intelligence and learning ability, but they do require measures to enable and organize learning and to find an effective teaching method. When choosing the syllabus, you should avoid preconceived ideas. It is worth bearing in mind that, for example, autism may be associated with memory and abilities that exceed normal levels when the topic is of special interest. Finnish examples of study paths that have led*

*to successful employment include a chief of medical staff with CP, a deaf-blind attorney and a large number of artists with autism spectrum disorder.*

## **Personalized curriculum: General issues affecting learning and the organization of the learning environment**

### **Checklist**

- Discuss general issues related to the student's learning and daily life. What are the challenges of learning and what are the student's strengths and areas of enthusiasm?
- Discuss the student's assistance/interpretation needs and whether they have access to mobility and learning aids.
- Also discuss the accessibility and functionality of the learning premises for the student and whether the student has any special restrictions or preferences relating to accessibility or timing.
- Encourage caregivers to share their views on the student and try to get an overview of the student and information on the learning method that works best for them at the moment.
- Discuss whether there are any health issues affecting the student that the teacher should be aware of during lessons.
- Consider whether the caregivers would like any of the issues discussed to be recorded in the student's records or personalized curriculum. After all, the issues recorded relate to adjustments to the teaching, not to the individual characteristics of the student.
- Record issues related to the support provided to the student, such as solutions related to the learning environment as well as study and communication methods.

### **TIP:**

*Allow sufficient time for discussion. Inform the caregivers and the student that the discussion is confidential. The discussion atmosphere should emphasize the student's strengths and efforts to make learning as effective and successful as possible.*

## Recommendations for drawing up a personalized curriculum

The personalized curriculum of a student with special needs is drawn up in consultation with the student, their caregiver, the student's teacher(s) and the principal/assistant principal. The curriculum is recorded in the student management software used by the educational institution (e.g., Eepos). The personalized curriculum is stored in a way that no one outside the school can have access to it. The personalized curriculum provides the student's family and the educational institution with the necessary information about the student's future studies. The personalized curriculum can be modified and built upon as the student progresses in their studies. As the student's study and art skills develop, the personalized curriculum can be expanded or, for example, temporarily reduced if the student's life situation so requires. It is a good idea to have a designated teacher who is responsible for the student's personalized curriculum. This teacher will pass on the necessary information to the student's other teachers and caregivers and support the student in achieving their goals.

A central idea in the development of the personalized curriculum is to make the art studies meaningful, progressive and possible for the student, at a pace that suits the student. Art studies should bring joy and add to the student's resources. The content of the personalized curriculum should be reviewed and updated, for example, once a school year. The education institution should consider in advance how and at what intervals the personalized curriculum will be updated: for example, at an annual meeting between teacher, student and caregivers, where a document will be drawn up and submitted to the school principal for approval and recording of changes.

### **TIP:**

*Talking to parents can give you an idea of the forms of support and specialists the student has in their daily life. Specialists should also be invited to be part of the personalized curriculum discussion for art activities. For example, the student may have an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or psychologist who will be happy to be involved in creating the best possible practices for the student's art hobby.*

## Personalized curriculum: Syllabus, objectives, study duration and assessment

The subject-specific curriculum is discussed with the student and caregivers and the most relevant teaching objectives and content for the first school year are selected for the personalized curriculum. Next, you should consider any necessary changes to the objectives of specific subjects and record these changes. Also consider the number of lessons and teaching methods that will enable the student to achieve the chosen objectives and record those study modules where the student has an individual syllabus and an adapted teaching method. The scope of the content of the modules can therefore be modified and, if necessary, subdivided into smaller parts. The personalized curriculum must also include long-term and short-term learning objectives. What will the student learn in one school year and how are their studies estimated to continue and be distributed over the coming years? It is important to be flexible about the study duration and to set short-term objectives that are realistic and motivating for the student. It is a good idea to involve the student in the planning process, to inform the student about the content of the studies and to find out about any areas of enthusiasm and interest the student may have. The personalized curriculum can also be used to record the student's own objectives. The syllabus can therefore be made less extensive or, alternatively, it can include a broader range of elements that are important to the student. Assessment is carried out in accordance with the objectives of the personalized curriculum. If the study method differs from the assessment method, this should be recorded in accordance with the practices of each education institution.

### **TIP:**

*Discuss the learning methods that best support the student's learning. For example, whether the student needs individual guidance, whether group learning is a possibility or whether there is a need for e-learning. If there are challenges to participation in group learning, consider whether participation in group learning could be one of the student's long-term objectives. It is worthwhile to try to increase study skills and competences as art studies progress and to give the student the opportunity to develop through new but controlled challenges. For example, in the case of participation in group teaching, the aim could be to initially observe teaching and then later to participate actively.*



# 8. ACCESSIBILITY IN COMMUNICATION, PRICING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

***Aura Linnapuomi***

Keywords: *communication, accessibility guidelines, pricing, environment, accessibility*

## **Accessible communication 101**

The accessible communication of a children's cultural center or a basic art education provider has a significant impact on whether information about the activities reaches families and children with different limitations or support needs.

**The accessibility of written communication can be improved by:**

1. using a sufficiently large and clear font (commonly used and therefore familiar fonts, such as Arial, tend to work well – font size should be at least 12 points, but preferably 14-16 points)
2. adequate darkness contrast between text and background
3. not placing text on top of images

**The comprehensibility of communication can be improved by:**

1. using clear and correct standard language
2. avoiding complex words
3. keeping the content short enough

4. dividing the text into paragraphs and using subheadings
5. supporting the written text with images

**When planning the language options and accessibility of your communication, remember to consider the following:**

1. Access to information also in sign languages. For example, you can upload sign language videos of your basic activities on your YouTube channel and include links to them on your website or make sign language videos for your website or sign language versions of your website. In addition to Finnish sign language, Finnish-Swedish sign language is used in Finland.
2. Access to information also in plain language. For example, you can produce a brochure in plain language about your general activities or include a plain language page on your website or make a plain language version of your website.
3. The possibility of communicating in a way that takes into account the linguistic minorities in your area. For example, you can produce brochures about your basic activities in different languages or include information on your website in different languages.

**To improve the accessibility of your website and other digital services such as e-learning platforms, make sure that:**

1. your website complies with the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). The Finnish Act on the Provision of Digital Services (306/2019) requires that websites are made accessible. The law applies to, among others, municipal and state operators, and operators with more than half of their funding from the public sector.
2. the accessibility and usability of your website has been tested by experts in the field of accessibility of online services for people using different aids. Experts can be contacted, for example, through Annapura (Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired) or the Papunet web services unit (Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities).

3. the downloadable files on your website are accessible. Guidelines for making files accessible can be found, for example, on the Celia website at <https://www.saavutettavasti.fi/saavutettavat-asiakirjat/> (in Finnish). Ideally, the content should be directly accessible on the website, i.e., there should be no need for downloading files separately. PDF files, for example, can be cumbersome for screen reader users.
4. accessibility is also achieved in social media channels. Celia has produced guidelines on social media accessibility (in Finnish): [www.saavutettavasti.fi/](http://www.saavutettavasti.fi/). You should also see the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired's videos on social media accessibility (in Finnish): <https://www.nkl.fi/en>.

## **Always remember to mention your accessibility solutions in your communication!**

Accessibility information helps children, young people and families to assess how easy it is to access facilities and services. This information can help plan participation and visits in advance and assess whether, for example, assistive devices or an assistant will be needed. It is also important to communicate any shortcomings. It is also a good idea to include accessibility symbols to make the information clearer and more accessible. You can read more on the Kulttuurikaikille website: [www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/accessibility](http://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/accessibility).

It is also worth creating a "social story" about your activities using pictures and text to explain the order in which things happen and where they actually happen. The social story can be used by the child or young person, together with a caregiver or teacher, to prepare for a visit to a children's cultural center or art school.

**At the very least, provide the following accessibility information. Is/are there...**

- an accessible entrance?
- an accessible toilet?
- accessible parking spaces?
- accessible routes?
- an elevator?
- an induction loop?
- wheelchair spaces?
- free entrance for assistants and interpreters?
- someone who can provide more information on accessibility?

## **Accessible pricing**

Discounts on enrollment, courses and events are important factors that enable participation for children and young people from low-income families. For some families with financial difficulties, full free access, for example in the form of tuition-free education, may be a prerequisite for their children to be able to participate at all. Costs associated with the activity may also arise from transport and the purchase or borrowing of equipment such as musical instruments. It is essential that children from low-income families have access to the same hobby activities and events as other children and young people.



## **Make sure you guarantee at least the following:**

- discounts, such as sibling discounts
- discounts or tuition-free education based on the family's financial situation
- free courses
- free events
- opportunities to borrow equipment, such as a musical instrument, free of charge
- working with the family to find solutions to avoid excessive travel costs

## **A functional environment for all!**

Accessibility in the built environment is influenced by both the exterior and interior of buildings. It is essential to ensure that moving around, hearing, seeing and understanding is easy in the facilities. Indoors, accessibility must be achieved not only in the lobbies, teaching and performance areas, but also in the staff areas. Location and accessibility, signage, accessibility of entrances and interiors, and assistive devices such as a hearing aid induction loop all contribute to the functionality of the facilities for different users.

On premises where accessibility is not or only partially achieved, it is important to provide access to activities on accessible premises if needed. When selecting new premises, accessibility should always be one of the main criteria. If the existing premises are not accessible, efforts should be made to ensure that they are made accessible. In the case of possible renovations and other refurbishments, it is important to improve accessibility at the same time, with the help of experts.

For new buildings, the Government Decree on Accessibility in Buildings (241/2017) requires buildings and their exteriors to be accessible. When designing a new building and its exterior spaces, it is advisable to include accessibility experts in the design teams from the very beginning.



## **To guarantee accessibility in the built environment, make sure that:**

- it is easily accessible by public transport. The recommended distance from a public transport stop is no more than 300–700 meters and the route to the stop must be accessible in terms of the material and slope.
- marked accessible parking spaces are provided close to the premises.
- access routes to the entrance are easily visible, smooth and non-slip.
- there are clear signs with symbols and text, and that they are consistently placed.
- the signs have good darkness contrast and are easy to read from both sitting and standing heights.
- where there are level differences (stairs) at the entrance, there is also a ramp or elevator.
- there is a platform of at least 1.5 x 1.5 meters in front of the external entrance.
- the external door opens automatically or is easy to open. It is recommended that the force required to open the door should not exceed 10 N, i.e., the door should 'weigh' no more than 1 kg upon opening.
- the minimum width of the door is 85 cm, and the maximum threshold height is 2 cm.

- if the main entrance is not accessible, an accessible entrance is ensured elsewhere and that the route to it is indicated with signs.
- the customer service counter is accessible. At least part of the counter is between 750 mm and 800 mm high.
- an induction loop for hearing aid users is available at the customer service counter and it is indicated with a symbol.
- if the building has more than one floor, an elevator of at least 1.1 m x 1.4 m is provided.
- the building has an accessible toilet.
- The narrowest part of any walkway is at least 900 mm wide.
- if the width of a walkway is less than 1,500 mm, it has turning space of 1,500 mm every 15 meters.
- there are several wheelchair spaces in the auditorium.
- there is an induction loop in the auditorium, and it is indicated with signs (including coverage).
- access to any stage is barrier-free.
- there is also a quiet and peaceful area for resting and talking.
- There are seats with armrests and backrests for resting.
- Some of the coat racks are positioned so that they can also be reached from a seated height (from 1.1 m to 1.2 m).



# 9. NETWORKS, COOPERATION AND AIDS TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

***Tarja Keltto & Anu Lönnqvist***

Keywords:

*aids, additional information, networks, support, interpretation, training*

## **When planning the activity**

How can you locate families whose child with special needs would be interested in participating in the hobby activity you offer? It is a good idea to ask local peer groups for parents of children with special needs to pass on information about your activity. In many localities there is a peer group of Leijonaemot ry (Lioness Mothers), which brings together families with children with a range of activity support needs. Other local patient and disability associations can spread the word to their members. You can also advertise your activity to kindergartens, schools, disability services and family centers. Rehabilitation professionals are also interested in the range of children's activities available in their community and are happy to advertise these to their client families. Don't be shy about advertising – there are rarely too many activities for children and young people with special needs! Be sure to clearly mention that the activity is for all children and use the Accessible Art Hobby badge for this purpose. You will find more information about this in Chapter 11 of this guide.

When a child or young person with special needs joins your group, you can seek help for yourself and the child from many sources. The most important source of information is the child. Find out from them what they think their strengths are and what kind of support they need. Here it is particularly important to remember that a diagnosis does not tell you everything about

an individual's ability to function. Despite having the same diagnosis, children can have very different abilities. The diagnosis is therefore less important. Sometimes a child with special support needs or the assistive devices they use will raise questions among the rest of the group. If necessary, you can ask the child or parent to talk about their child's communication or assistive devices to the group.

The Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired has put together a package of materials to help people deal with diversity and learn about visual impairment.

If you find it difficult to establish a way of communicating with the child, ask their parent or caregiver for help. Parents are great sources of information anyway and are motivated to find an art hobby that their child enjoys. Set aside time to talk about the activity, the facilities, equipment, materials and what kind of activity it is. Parents can be asked for information about their child in advance by filling in the registration form at <https://vamlas.fi/in-english/>. It is worth investing in cooperation with parents in the early stages, as a good start will contribute to the success of the child's hobby.

With the permission of the parent/caregiver (in addition to the child's permission), you can, if necessary, obtain further information from the professionals responsible for enabling the child's activities: for example, you can talk to their physiotherapist about mobility and mobility aids, to their occupational therapist about their functional abilities, activity control and related aids, and to their speech therapist about their communication.

If the child has a personal assistant, their job may involve assisting the child with the activity you are organizing. If the assistant has worked with the child for a longer period of time, you can get more tips from them on what helps help the child to participate in the best possible way. For more on this topic, see section 'Art assistant and personal support' in this guide.

## During the activity

The child's experiences and feedback from their hobby sessions are essential information. As with all children, communication with parents is particularly important. The rehabilitation professionals in their support network are also there to support you, and your feedback on how the activity is going is important information for the team responsible for the child's rehabilitation. Always provide your feedback through the parents. A personal assistant or art assistant continuously develops their understanding of the skills and challenges of the child, so it is good to work closely with them.

In addition, local disability associations and other actors in the field can contribute their expertise. You can ask them to tell their members about the activities you offer. They may be able to give you more tips on the materials and equipment you will need. Remember that you should only do all this after you have discussed it with the child and parents! If there is no suitable local association in your area, you can ask the central associations for advice and tips.

## Assistive devices and aids to support activities

Assistive devices and aids that are suitable for all children include

- thicker pens, brushes, drumsticks or aids to make them thicker so that they are easier to grip and hold
- a non-slip mat to help hold the work surface (such as paper) in place
- contrasts between the surface of the table and the paper help with perception (for example, dark table surface and white paper). Also make sure that the surface does not reflect too much light.
- active cushions, which make it easier for the child to sit and concentrate
- weighted stuffed toys, which create a sense of weight when placed, for example, on the child's forearm while working at a table. The weight is calming and can help the child to concentrate better.

- Braille music, which supports the child in writing and reading music <https://www.opipistenuotteja.fi> (in Finnish)
- Kuvionuotit® ('shape sheet music') is a sheet music system with shapes, developed by Kaarlo Uusitalo, director of the music school Resonaari, to help everyone learn to play instruments <https://www.helsinkimissio.fi/resonaari/kuvionuotit> (in Finnish)

These products are sold by companies such as Tevella Oy:

<https://www.tevella.fi/>

## Pictures

- Pictures suitable for all children to support activities can be downloaded free of charge from the Papunet website of the Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. For example, the contents of hobby equipment cabinets can be badged with pictures to make equipment easier to find. For activity guidance, you can use pictures to structure the flow of the activity. There is also a lot of information on alternative communication and communication support. <https://papunet.net/materiaalia/kuvatyokalu> (in Finnish)
- Bildstöd is a free image bank with editable material in several languages. You can also insert text in your preferred language or create your own material. The website requires a login. <http://bildstod.se>

## Aid box

Mirka Nokka, producer of art education services for the City of Helsinki, has done a thesis on accessibility in art education as part of her cultural management degree. In her research, she acquired aid boxes for art classes.

"The aid box contained hearing protectors, a Time Timer, pen supports, objects for fidgeting, support pictures, spring scissors, a DVD on communication and active cushions. The hearing protectors soothe children



with sensory sensitivity to sounds. Active cushions help children with motor restlessness to concentrate. Pen supports enable the right pen grip, and the Time Timer makes it easier to keep track of time if the child doesn't know how to tell the time yet. Hand-held bump balls are ideal as stress balls, for massage and tactile activation. Support pictures make it easier to communicate with children who have problems understanding speech, for example."

*Nokka, Mirka (2017). Saavutettavampaa taideopetusta erityislapsille ('Adding accessibility to art education for children with special needs').*

<https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/124880>

## Personal aids for children and young people

Children and young people may have their own personal aids when they come to the activity. If the art educator needs to know how to use the aid, the child/young person and their caregiver or personal assistant should instruct the educator in its use. The acquisition of an aid is an individual process based on the needs and objectives of the child/young person. The need for an aid arises when the child has a functional problem that is thought to be solved by an aid. The need for an aid is identified either by the person who needs the aid, by a relative/caregiver or a professional working with the person. The need for a new aid may also arise from a new hobby. If you notice a possible need for an aid, tell the family about it so that they can contact the relevant care provider. It is the responsibility of primary health care to refer the person who needs an aid to the right services.

With the caregivers' permission, you can also ask the child's occupational therapist, physiotherapist or speech therapist about the aids used by the child in your activity.

It can sometimes be difficult to obtain reimbursement for the more expensive personal aids used in the child's activities from the Social Services and Health Care Division or Kela. In such cases, the family can be advised to seek funding from other sources. One such source is the Vamlas Foundation, which distributes grants twice a year. For more information, see <https://vamlas.fi/hae-apurahaa/> (in Finnish)

Another source of funding is VKTT ry (Support for the Education and Employment of People with Disabilities). Through this association, families can also apply for tuition grants for their children's hobbies.

<https://www.tukilinja.fi/apurahat/> (in Finnish)

## Interpreting

If a child needs interpretation, this is usually known at the start of the activity and the child has access to an interpreter or assistive device to help them communicate. All work with an interpreter is subject to certain guidelines:

- The positioning of people to be interpreted in the space is important. It is a good idea to position the parties involved in a triangle shape. You and the child should be facing each other, and the interpreter should be at the 'tip' of the triangle.
- Speak directly to the child (and listen to the child's response by looking at the child), not to the interpreter. The interpreter interprets your and the child's speech in the first person.
- Speak clearly and pause at appropriate intervals so that the interpreter has time to interpret your speech. Give the interpreter time to finish interpreting your message.
- Take into account that the interpreter is there as a language specialist, and that you are the expert on the content of the conversation. The interpreter may need to refer to a dictionary or ask for clarification. Clarify and explain as necessary.
- Make names, numbers and addresses particularly clear, repeat them and ask the child control questions to make sure they have understood correctly.

For more on this topic, see the Kela website (in Finnish):

<https://www.kela.fi/documents/10180/1152184/TULKIN+KANSSA+TYÖSKENTELY.pdf/5339ce57-dc88-4985-ba8e-4dfaec3f6c65>

## **Sign language users**

Kela organizes personal interpreting for people with a hearing impairment, a hearing and visual impairment or a speech impairment. The service is free of charge and can also be used for hobby activities.

## **Spoken language interpretation**

Spoken language interpretation is used when the child's native language is a language other than Finnish, Swedish (or English), i.e., a language that the art educator does not speak. Parents can apply for interpretation through the social services.

If you need to communicate with the child quickly, you can also use drawings, pictures and, for example, a translation app on your smartphone.

## **Public service interpreting**

A public service interpreter is needed when two people do not have a common language or when the language used is difficult for an outsider to understand. The interpreter aims to create the conditions for understanding despite language and cultural barriers.

## **Puhetta korvaavat apuvälineet**

A child may use speech replacement aids (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) such as a communication folder, a communication board, a talker or a communication program. Ask the caregiver or assistant for guidance on how to use them.

<https://papunet.net/tietoa/puhetta-korvaava-kommunikointi-eli-aac>  
(in Finnish)





## Art assistant and personal support

An art assistant can be a personal assistant who is specially trained to assist in an art activity. The SATA2 project, in cooperation with Inclusion Finland KVTI and other actors, has produced a training video on specializing in the work of an art assistant. You can watch it here:

<https://www.lastenkulttuuri.fi/sata2/sata2/koulutukset/taideavustajakoulutus/> (in Finnish)

A child or young person may have a personal assistant service through the disability services, which is also intended to be used in hobby activities. Each family applies for the personal assistant service from the municipal social services for people with disabilities. A personal assistant is an assistant assigned to a particular child and not a general assistant for the activity group. You can read more about personal assistance here:

<https://vamlas.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/katsaus-lasten-ja-nuorten-henkilokohtaiseen-apuun.pdf> (in Finnish)

## Training and information sharing

Training and networking events in this field are organized and advertised by the following associations, among others:

- Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Centers [childrensculture.fi](http://childrensculture.fi)
- Federation for Basic Arts Education, TPO ry <http://www.artsedu.fi/etusivu/en>

The Culture for All Service provides a wide range of information and materials. <https://www.kulttuuriakaikille.fi/en.php>



The Säättöä method guide on how to take into account the sensory adjustment difficulties of museum visitors is a guide published by the Theater Museum and the Alvar Aalto Museum, with information on sensory processing difficulties and practical tips on how to reduce sensory strain through changes in the museum environment. Pay particular attention to the links, materials and contacts at the end of the guide (in Finnish).

[https://www.teatterimuseo.fi/documents/Saatoa\\_opas.pdf](https://www.teatterimuseo.fi/documents/Saatoa_opas.pdf)

Video on personal assistance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9701dIElbo&feature=youtu.be>

Video from UNICEF's On Board campaign featuring Ruska, who wants to join an art hobby: <https://www.unicef.fi/unicef/tyomme-suomessa/mukana-2/mukanatahdet--ruska/>

Accessibility checklist of UNICEF's On Board campaign (in Finnish):

<https://www.unicef.fi/unicef/tyomme-suomessa/mukana-2/esteettomyys--ensiaskeleita/>

Nokka, Mirka 2017, Saavutettavampaa taideopetusta erityislapsille (Adding accessibility to art education for children with special needs), thesis for the Master's Degree Program in Cultural Management. HUMAK University of Applied Sciences.

<https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/124880>

If the child has a Metku book to support rehabilitation, it can also be used for art activities: <http://metropolia.e-julkaisu.com/lapsen-metkut/aineisto/metkukirja-lyhyesti.pdf>

Printed guide on group activities with a visually impaired child (in Finnish): Oo mun kaa! Leikkejä ryhmään, jossa on näkövammainen lapsi, Anna Latva-Nikkola, Näkövammaiset lapset ry

<https://www.silmatera.fi/nakkarila/oo-mun-kaa-kirja/>

# 10. EXPERIENCES AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

In this chapter, practical examples are given to illustrate the experiences of parents, children with special needs and educators in art activities.

## CHILD AND PARENT PERSPECTIVES

***Jenni Barnett-Erlandsson***

As a mother, my hope is that my child will be received first and foremost as a child and an individual, not as a diagnosis. Especially in hobby activities, it is enough that the child is accepted exactly as they are. A special needs child is very aware of their situation and the older the child gets, the more painful their 'difference' can become.

*"When I need help, help me, but don't give me too much attention. Treat me the same way you treat everyone else. You can talk to me in a normal way. Just because I need special support doesn't mean I want special treatment. It can quickly affect my friends as well, and they can also start to think I'm somehow different."*

My child has ADHD and autism spectrum disorder, so their support needs are not visible. This makes it easy to badge them as a troublemaker, disobedient, weak, etc. For us, the attitude and understanding of the hobby instructor has played a very important role.

*"It would be good to understand that us neurodivergent people see the world differently from others and may think about things differently, so don't think that things have to be done in a certain way, that there are no alternatives to how things are done."*





*You have to be a little flexible so that things don't have to be done exactly the way you want. If you're not flexible, we start to get annoyed and upset that we can't do it, and then we give up. If you are flexible, we feel that we are doing a good job, and things go much better."*

The child always has a reason for their behavior. For example, they can be very influenced by the stress that accumulates during the day. Stress can be caused by things like transitions, lighting, sounds, smells or feeling rushed.

*"If there's a lot of noise or a lot of things going on in the group, I find it hard to concentrate on anything. On top of that, if there's a topic that's not that interesting to me, it's even harder for me to concentrate and I feel like giving up. The commotion can also make me cranky or I might start to feel sick, so it would be good to have a quiet place where I can go and try to calm down if I start to feel bad."*

A special needs child may get stuck in one negative experience, and it can be very difficult to let it go. In our case, my child dropped a hobby altogether when one bad experience stuck so firmly in their mind that they no longer wanted to take part in the hobby.

*"For me, it has been helpful in hobbies to have the instructions explained more slowly and repeated a few times. In addition to the instructions, it would be nice to be shown what to do, for example on a separate sheet of paper. Then it would be easier to understand the instructions. If the instructions are given quickly and only once, I usually miss them. Then things go wrong, and it doesn't feel nice. I feel like going into a corner and thinking, now what?"*

*But when the instructions are explained properly so that I understand, it's nice to be able to be part of the group."*

It's worth dividing the activity into smaller sections and being there to motivate and encourage the child in difficult moments.

*"If I feel like giving up, you shouldn't give up on me."*

The parts in italics are the thoughts of a 12-year-old child with ADHD and autism spectrum disorder on activities and hobbies.

## THREE EXAMPLES OF INSIGHT – THE COURAGE TO TRY AND FAIL

***Riku Laakkonen***

I have been making art in different communities and applying my skills for over 20 years. Experimentation, continuous application and co-invention have characterized these years. In this text, I will share my insights and observations from the diverse world of art application through three examples.

### **Example 1**

The year is 2009. I am the recipient of a one-year Myrsky grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation. In my application I have promised to start a theater group for children of families with mental health issues in Tampere, Finland. Initially, there are problems with getting the group started – interested children sign up for the group, but they don't show up. Later, it turns out that the reason is that the families have no money. The children have no money for bus tickets and this problem is solved through financial aid.

In the following example, I am not yet aware of this issue, and a 13-year-old boy attends the group. This boy shows up but refuses to talk. He sits and listens to what I am saying and communicates with facial expressions and gestures but does not speak. The mother, who enrolled him in the group, has not explained why the boy does not speak. As an artist, I am challenged. The boy is clearly interested in theater because he shows up, but it is my job to figure out how we can communicate. I think about it and come up with the idea of trying to write a letter. We sit facing each other, I take a blank sheet of paper and start writing the first letter. I tell him things about myself and ask him about his interests. The first letter is not long. I hand the letter to the boy and wait to see if he will reply. The boy reads the letter, takes a sheet of paper and a pen and writes me a reply.

Thus begins our correspondence, which continues for about two and a half months. Every week we meet and sit quietly and write letters to each other. In addition to these letters, we always say hello when we meet and goodbye when



we part. During these months, we use the letters to get to know each other and write a play together: we come up with the characters, the settings and write the dialogue.

After this couple of months, the bus ticket issue is solved, and other children join the group. This boy, who has chosen silence, continues in the group and is responsible for writing the scripts of the group's short plays. He never speaks in the group, but through creative writing we are able to connect, communicate and create a shared world of drama.

## **Example 2**

Cultural Center PiiPoo's The Perhesirkus (Family Circus), a group of families with children with and without disabilities, is on an educational trip to Ireland. We are playing 'conductor and choir' in Galway. The rules of the game are as follows: One volunteer stands in front of the other participants standing in line. This volunteer is the conductor, who gets to make whatever movements they want, and the others have to mimic the conductor's movements as best as they can. A four-year-old Irish girl with intellectual disabilities is now the conductor. Around 40 people mimic the girl's movements. Something truly wonderful is crystallized in this moment. Art in play speaks to all of us present and we are caught up in imitating the girl's movements. Accessibility needs a lot of work at the level of institutions, facilities and structures, but in this moment of play, accessibility becomes agency, imagination and play captivate us, and we are a group in which each member is equally needed.

To make this memorable moment possible, The Perhesirkus group had to travel a long way. On this journey, with all its stages, we learned how to make art – in this case, circus – by constantly coming up with creative solutions and having a courageous attitude. In this way, even big dreams can come true and magical moments can arise, such as this Irish four-year-old girl's role as the choir conductor.

### Example 3

In Tampere, there is a family home for minors who have come to Finland alone and have been granted a residence permit. I was contacted by this family home. The children living in the family home were entering puberty and needed to talk about sexuality. The worker at the family home wondered if art could be used to do something about this and I suggested trying out puppetry as a means of communication. The worker was enthusiastic about the idea and so I went to run a puppetry club for these young people. Their Finnish language skills were still very limited and communicating about sexuality was already difficult enough for cultural reasons.

There were a lot of Barbie dolls in the family home. The problem with these dolls is their stiff joints. They are not meant to be used in puppet theaters. We experimented with different puppet theater exercises to see how the puppets could be animated and how their movements and actions could be used to talk about sexuality.

As the exercises progressed, I became familiar with the participants and the puppets began to come alive every now and then. The actual application of the Barbie dolls happened in one exercise. The Barbie and Ken dolls were on the table stage. The dolls were being animated by a girl and a boy. A romantic scene was to take place between the dolls, with the girl falling in love with the boy and being the active participant. When the scene started, the girl and the boy ‘forgot’ about the dolls: they held on to the dolls but started acting out the scene themselves. The dolls were left in place, and the boy and the girl did the acting. Without the dolls, the scene would have been impossible. The dolls provided metaphorical protection and made a difficult issue accessible and possible to deal with. At the same time, as the director, I had to step away and let this situation happen. This also enriched the puppet theatrical expression.

In all three examples above, as an artist myself, I have learned and realized the potential of art to act as a bridge between people and to enrich the world of both the artists and the experiencers. These examples have helped me to develop and apply each artistic tool in a more accessible way.

## **CASE MALMITALO AND THE ART TRAIL FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: EYES IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD AND THE ABILITY TO PREDICT – WHAT CAN YOU PREPARE FOR?**

***Mirka Nokka***

When a group of neurodivergent children is coming to an art activity, there is a lot you can do to prepare. It's a good idea to get a variety of sensory aids for the neurodivergent children beforehand, such as active cushions, hearing protectors, support pictures, plastic gloves, small objects for fidgeting and a Time Timer. Pay attention to the space: the ideal art classroom is a large, clear and clean space without too much sensory stimulation (bright colors, loud air conditioning, messy open shelves, etc.). You should have a few Fatboy beanbags for resting and speakers for a soothing musical moment.

It's a good idea to keep the number of students to a minimum. The maximum number of students in the art trail courses for children with special needs at Malmitalo was six. In addition to the art educator, there was an art assistant on the courses, whose value was proven many times over. Before the Malmitalo courses started, the children's caregivers had been asked to fill in an information form to find out what should be taken into consideration for each child: whether the child had any sensory sensitivities, was using assistive devices, had a medical condition requiring medication or had any other special characteristics requiring special attention, such as violent behavior.

After the preparations, it is time for the first session. The children are nervous, they are in a new place, surrounded by new people. They don't know the other students and for many of them it is a strange situation: they may not have any previous experience of hobby activities, and their only experience of a group situation may be their own familiar school classroom. The art educator and the assistant have prepared for this moment in advance and the children are made to feel as welcome as possible: they are given name tags and directed to their seats. The educators introduce themselves to the children and the children

have the opportunity to introduce themselves. No one is forced to introduce themselves and the atmosphere is kept as relaxed as possible.

Ideally, the art lesson gets off to a good start and the children relax while making art. In reality, one of the children may have woken up in a bad mood. Another child may have had a recent change of medication and it makes them feel strange and restless. A third child might not have wanted to come at all, and a fourth child has such a strong special interest that the art lesson could not be less interesting. Amid all these emotions, desires and activities, the art educator is trying to get on with the lesson.

Unfortunately, none of us have eyes in the back of our heads, even though that quality would be very useful. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, in a handicrafts class at Malmitalo, one of the children poured a bottle of soap into the sink in a matter of seconds, creating a huge bubble bath. In that same second, the child spread the foam all over the walls and course mates and ran into the corridor to spread the foam everywhere. The soap was kept hidden after that.

On the first lesson of an art course, a reluctant student took out his anger by kicking the door. He was annoyed because he didn't want to come to the course at all. Who would have guessed that a little boy's kicks could shatter the fireproof glass of a fire door? The boy was as confused as the adults. He was frightened by what had happened and never returned to the art course. What a shame! How could the educator have foreseen something like this?

Having eyes in the back of your head and even the best imagination cannot help you avoid all tricky situations. Over time, art educators will become more familiar with the children and know what to prepare for. To preserve this tacit knowledge, it is important that art educators can continue to work with the same children year after year, or at least pass on information about the students to the new educator. If a child is very unpredictable and difficult to interpret, you might consider having someone familiar to the child accompany the art lessons. It is very clear from the experience of the five pilot courses at Malmitalo that it is not worth saving on the number of instructors. When there are enough adults, there are more pairs of eyes, and many unfortunate situations can be prevented. Even if art educators don't have eyes on the back of their heads, perhaps over time they can grow feelers to help them read the students!







# FULL SPEED AHEAD TOWARDS THE WORLD OF THEATER AND FILM

*Tommi Nevala*

## What was it all about?

In spring 2019, Cultural Center Valve, the Oulu-opisto education institution and Oulun Kehitysvammaisten Tuki ry (Oulu intellectual disabilities support association) organized a pilot for the SATA2 Project (Accessible Art Hobby), called Tuhatta ja sataa, meaning 'full speed ahead'. The art forms selected during the application phase of the pilot were theater, for which Oulu-opisto was responsible, and filmmaking, for which the Valve film school of the Oulu Culture Center for Children and Youth was responsible. The aim was to develop a working pair approach to film education and theater expression, which would teach media, interaction and expression skills to children and young people with intellectual disabilities. The aim was also to promote the inclusion and cultural rights of children and young people with intellectual disabilities. A common view shared by the pilot partners was that people with disabilities should have equal access to artistic and cultural services and the right to develop their artistic talents.

## Activities start

Both groups were led by two educators – a teacher responsible for pedagogical content and an art assistant with experience in guiding children and young people with special needs and intellectual disabilities. The aim of the teaching situation was to find ways of making the methods of basic art education and film education work with special needs groups.

Oulu-opisto's Tuhatta ja sataa theater course continued uninterrupted throughout the spring term. The course consisted of 15 sessions and the group also went to see a play together. The group included seven participants aged 11–42. The course introduced the basics of theater through exercises

and games in a relaxed atmosphere. The film education by Valve film school was divided into two separate clubs. In the Tube club, which met six times, young people aged 15–16 tried out youtubing with real-life YouTube star Kaoru Kitsune. In the other film-themed club, the eight-session Animation club, young people aged 12–16 made their own animated film using characters cut out of cardboard and iPads for filming and editing. The theater and film group sessions lasted 90 minutes each.

## **Findings from the activities**

Participants in both groups were active, imaginative and enthusiastic. There was a good atmosphere and a lot of fun. In the Tube club, some participants had difficulty performing in front of the camera and therefore it was difficult to produce content in video format. When filming, it was difficult for them to remember plans, or they were nervous to perform in front of the camera. As a result, the content often changed with each filming or rehearsal. A similar observation was made in the theater course. This was not a problem at all; it was about being present in the performances and executing them in a personal way.

There were no such problems in the Animation club. Everyone was able to participate using their own strengths. For the most part, the same methods were used to make animations as in Valve film school's regular activities. When working with special needs children, it was necessary to make sure that several separate phases were not being worked on at the same time. This could have made things difficult to understand and for the participants to maintain concentration. Each phase was worked through as a separate entity, so that the work was logically structured into ideation, crafting, filming and editing. The active presence and involvement of the educator and the art assistant, who led by example, drove the activity forward.

The young people taking part in the theater course were looking forward to showing their skills to their families. Sharing and performing meant a lot to them. The theater course also tried out the same exercises that are used in regular theater groups. The use of mental images and physical expression was a good way to engage the students from the very beginning.

Interaction skills, presence and listening to others could be challenging for the participants. These skills were practiced by giving everyone positive feedback and often applause. On the theater course, the involvement of the educator and the art assistant in the rehearsals was also important. This encouraged and guided the participants to get more out of the rehearsals.

A key finding was that theater and film were an excellent medium for self-expression and creativity for children and young people with special needs. Participants were able to communicate and express themselves through theater and film. The sessions were often fun and there was a lot of laughter. It was important for the groups to always start the sessions in the same way, for example by having everyone gather in a circle and asking how they were. It was also important to plan the end of the sessions so that every session was closed in the same way.

In addition to the educator, an art assistant was involved to help the young people to enjoy making art in a new environment. The working pair approach between the educator and the art assistant made it possible, for example, to divide the participants into two smaller groups, allowing for a more individualized approach to the strengths and ideas of the participants. For teachers, the pilot was a rewarding and instructive experience. You don't have stick too much to your plans – instead, you can be present in the situations and make adjustments. The pilot also improved understanding of different ways of learning.

## **More to come**

Both clubs were well received, and participants hoped for a continuation. By the end of spring term, a decision on continuing the project had to be made quite quickly. The conditions continuing were excellent. The pilot had built a basis on which it would be possible to develop the activities further. A lot of work and communication had been done to get the groups together. There were enthusiastic young people in the groups who wanted to continue the activity. The educators had also gained valuable experience and were keen to continue running the activities. In the end, the decision to continue was surprisingly easy and straightforward. Cultural Center Valve and Oulu-opisto

decided to make the courses and clubs part of their general activities by offering similar content for the fall term. The starting point and rationale was a shared vision that long-term work has a welfare impact on the children and young people involved, as it strengthens social skills, increases self-confidence, provides experiences of being heard and a sense of community.

The Tuhatta ja sataa pilot met its objectives well. The pilot was a starting point for developing cultural and art education for special needs groups in film and theater. Through film education and theater expression, children and young people with intellectual disabilities were provided with a tool for interaction, empowerment, communication of information and emotions, and self-expression. The pilot confirmed the idea that different forms of drama are well suited as methods for children with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. All parties involved – producers, educators and of course the young people themselves – are already looking forward to the start of the fall term.



## THREE EXAMPLES FROM THE PIRKANMAA TUTUSTU TAITEESEEN PILOT (GET TO KNOW ART)

*Jenni Barnett-Erlandsson*

### **Small maraca, big emotions**

In one session, we made maracas and decorated them with yarn. Gluing the yarn around a yoghurt bottle required a lot of concentration and precision, which were not within the strong points of one of the participants.

The child watched as the others finished their maracas one by one. The child then started to get stressed and irritated, which led to a further loss of concentration.

The situation was very close to boiling point.

The instructor sat down next to the child and asked the child to take a deep breath. At the same time, the instructor said, 'We can do this.' They glued a small section of yarn and again the instructor asked the child to take a deep breath. The instructor also communicated non-verbally that there was no hurry.

The instructor stayed by the child's side the whole time for support. They glued one section at a time and again took a breather. Time passed, but the child and the instructor persevered, gluing in small sections.

No words can describe the look on the child's face when they finally proudly presented the finished maraca to the rest of the group. The child happily went home with the maraca. When the session was over, the instructors sat down to discuss the session.

The instructor in question was emotional because they were so happy for the child and because they had accomplished the task together. In this way, both the child and the instructor were motivated by the accomplishment. We also realized the importance of breaking the task down into small parts for motivation.



## Wow!

After the first session, the parent of an energetic child came to pick the child up.

The parent arrived with their shoulders already slumped and sighed that the session must have been terrible, already prepared for the negative feedback that they must be familiar with from many activities.

However, this time the feedback was not negative. We told the parent about all the child's accomplishments and all the things that had gone well, and the parent spontaneously let out a 'Wow!'

Parents of energetic children are well aware of the challenges their children face. They don't need to be reminded every single time. What these parents hear far too seldom is all the good things about their children and all the things they are capable of. Praise also plays a very important role in a parent's ability to cope with everyday life, and by supporting the parent, we also support the child.





## **Goozy goozy goo**

We had painted sticks to make our own drumsticks, and the plan was to continue working on them by decorating them in the next session.

However, at the end of the day, one of the children was so excited about their drumsticks that they wanted to take the drumsticks home, even though the paint was still wet. When the child was told that they could not take the drumsticks home just yet, the child became nervous. The child ran and hid under the benches, refusing to go home.

The instructor took a seat on the floor next to the benches and told the child that they understood perfectly well that the child was upset. 'I would be upset too. I would also be upset if I forgot to bring the drumsticks back here for the next session, while the others are busy decorating theirs.'

The child stopped to listen and asked when the next session would be. The instructor replied that the next session would be in six days. The child quietly counted to six. Then the child looked at the instructor and asked them to stay still. The child climbed out from under the bench, grabbed the instructor by the cheeks and said, 'goozy goozy goo.' Then the child left and shouted at the front door, 'See you next time!' Children want reasons for things and are happy when they get an explanation.

# 11. ‘ACCESSIBLE ART HOBBY’ ATTITUDE BADGE



**Accessible  
Art Hobby**

The Saavutettava taideharrastus (Accessible Art Hobby) attitude badge is a communication tool for art operators, which can be downloaded in Finnish and Swedish. Above all, it is an attitude badge that shows the operator's willingness to support all children in their art activities. An operator who uses the badge is willing to at least try to see if a child with special needs could participate in their activities.

The badge is a message to caregivers and families of children with special needs that the art activities are inclusive of children of all abilities. It also sends a message that it is safe for families and caregivers to tell the art operator about a child's support needs. Families often have difficulty in finding activities that they can take part in without worries to see if the activities are suitable for their children. This badge helps families to find art hobbies for their children and brings new children into the activities.

If an organization or art operator adopts the badge, they should be serious about adhering to the principles behind it. This means, for example, internalizing the content of this guide and having the will to ensure the accessibility of activities. By adopting the badge, the operator is signaling its commitment to certain objectives.



## **With this badge we commit ourselves to the following objectives:**

- We want our work to support children with special needs, and we will communicate this openly and actively by using this badge.
- We are acquiring skills in working with children with special needs and/or are willing to experiment with inclusion.
- We don't think we know everything, which is why we need to work together with the child's caregivers.
- Caregivers can tell us openly and confidentially about their child's support needs. Together with the child and the caregivers, we will consider how we can best support the child's art hobby.
- Our aim is that every child can experience a sense of accomplishment in our activities.
- We are firmly anti-bullying and have developed an anti-bullying policy in consultation with children and staff.
- Our accessibility policy is clearly communicated.
- We aim to operate in fully accessible facilities.
- An assistant, parent or other close adult can support the child in the activity. The child's companion can always join the activity free of charge.
- We offer video-based art assistant training to the assistant, thus supporting the assistant in their task.
- Our activities can also be joined without having to pass an entrance exam.
- We adapt the art education to the child's needs.

## How can I get the badge?

For more information on the Accessible Art Hobby badge contact:

[info@lastenkulttuuri.fi](mailto:info@lastenkulttuuri.fi)

The badge is available in Finnish and Swedish, in both color and black and white. You can use one or all versions of the badge. For example, if the logo is added to a website, it must include an alternative text, which can be found under 'Merkin seliteteksti'. The criteria for the use of the badge must also be included in the alternative text. When positioning the badge, please ensure that it is clearly legible and that it is placed on a white or light monochrome background.

## What should an organization do upon adopting the badge?

### 1. Inform everyone in your organization about adopting the Accessible Art Hobby badge

You can organize an information session, raise the issue at a weekly meeting or even at a staff day. Ensure the success of the communication by using as many communication channels as possible.

At the very least, it is a good idea to explain the following:

- what the badge is about
- what accessibility means
- why adopting the badge is perceived as important in the organization
- where the badge will be used
- the criteria for adopting the badge
- Share this accessibility guide and other possible sources of information or training materials on the subject for everyone to read (e.g., by sharing the SATA2 project's material bank and the video training for art assistants).



## **2. Integrate the badge into your communication**

Add the badge to your website, printed material, newsletter, etc. Whenever you use the badge, remember to communicate what the badge is and what it means for your activities.

### **Example of a short description of the accessibility badge**

We have adopted the Accessible Art Hobby badge! This means that we are committed to promoting accessibility in our hobby activities. We are inclusive of children of all abilities in our art activities. Families and caregivers can safely let us know if their child needs support. Our aim is for every child to feel accomplished in our activities.

For more information on the Accessible Art Hobby badge, please contact [info@lastenkulttuuri.fi](mailto:info@lastenkulttuuri.fi)

## **3. What else can you do?**

Challenge other art operators to adopt the badge.

## 12. FURTHER LINKS AND TIPS

The website of the Association of Finnish Children's Cultural Centers [www.childrenculture.fi](http://www.childrenculture.fi) contains a list of useful sources of information and actors promoting accessibility.



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of websites), pilot course for accessibility mappers.

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Nordlund, Marika (2018) Presentation on the accessibility of built environments during the pilot course for accessibility mappers in spring 2018.

Guide by the Finnish Federation of the Visually Impaired to designing a clear publication (in Finnish):

<https://www.nkl.fi/fi/ohje-selkean-julkaisun-suunnitteluun>

The checklist on accessibility in built environments has been reviewed by Johanna Hätönen, an accessibility specialist at the ESKE Accessibility Center of the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities in November 2019.

## 9. NETWORKS, COOPERATION AND AIDS TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

In the meeting places for families with children in Eastern Finland, inclusive activities have been developed and planned together with children:

- A day of planning an inclusive children's event was organized at the Iisalmi Familyhouse (in Finnish): <https://www.tukiliitto.fi/toiminta/perheet-ja-vertaistuki/tue-lapsen-osallisuutta/>

A checklist on the inclusion of children and families and tools for inclusion (in Finnish):

<https://www.savas.fi/app/uploads/2021/11/Saavutettavan-perhetapahtuman-muistilista.pdf>

Checklist for accessible activities (in Finnish):

<https://vamlas.fi/saavutettavuusopas-perheentaloille/>



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