

Finnish experiences from the Grundtvig Programme

Psychodrama and playback theatre for “Supporting Potential Development”

PÄIVI KETONEN

■ Abstract

In the article the author describes how the Grundtvig Programme of Supporting the Potential Development using psychodrama and playback theatre was carried out in Kasvunpaikka and what were the results and main questions in the process. According to this research the people in Kasvunpaikka's group felt that the increased self-efficacy and empowerment happened through trust, reflection about personal story and serving and learning from others. The main techniques in this project were sharing personal experiences, taking roles of another person and concentrating to other's issues. Difficulties in making international research are also processed in this writing.

■ **Key words:** *psychodrama, playback theatre, Morenian pedagogy, retraining, self-efficacy.*

Esperienze finlandesi nel programma Grundtvig

Psicodramma e playback theatre per il progetto “Supporting Potential Development”

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■ Sommario

Nell'articolo l'autrice descrive come il progetto Grundtvig “Supporting Potential Development” che usa lo psicodramma e il playback theatre è stato portato avanti da Kasvunpaikka e quali sono stati i risultati e le principali domande nel processo. In accordo con questa ricerca le persone di Kasvunpaikka hanno percepito che l'incremento di autoefficacia ed empowerment è avvenuto attraverso la fiducia, la riflessione sulla propria storia personale e l'essere d'aiuto e l'imparare dagli altri. Le principali tecniche usate nel progetto sono state la condivisione delle esperienze personali, l'assunzione di ruoli di altre persone e il concentrarsi su altre possibilità. Sono inoltre riportate nell'articolo le difficoltà nel fare una ricerca internazionale.

■ **Parole chiave:** *psicodramma, playback theatre, pedagogia moreniana, riqualificazione, autoefficacia.*

The idea of getting in touch with other European psychodrama and playback trainers came to Kasvunpaikka (Place for Growth) through the Finnish Playback Theatre Network. Kasvunpaikka was asked to join as another Finnish company in this project of supporting potential development to develop psychodrama and playback theatre methods. The idea

seemed to fit well with Kasvunpaikka's training program for playback theatre conductors. In this phase we were not aware that this project would be mainly research orientated which caused some problems in the carrying out this project.

What is Kasvunpaikka?

Kasvunpaikka is a small training firm that has been alive ever since from 1987. Conductors for action methods has been trained there since 1992 and directors for playback theatre from 1995. Team building, communication skills and supervision have been other main training areas.

Nowadays Päivi Ketonen is the only owner of the firm and acts as a head trainer. She is trained in learning psychology, psychodrama (TEP) and playback theatre. She is a graduate of Jonathan Fox's Playback Theatre School among the first graduates and was the main founder in Finland. She works as a private trainer and supervisor part time and since autumn 2011 her main work is acting as a Head of the Department of Performing Arts in Metropolia, University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki Finland.

She and Reijo Rautiainen, socionom, therapist, psychodrama director and playback theatre actor as well as conductor were the other team member in this project. Riitta Harilo, hospital clown, action methods leader as well as long time great playback actress was a team member to be, but in the way the project found it's way her part did not really come alive, because of the way project was finally created. In other situations different visiting trainers work in different trainings Kasvunpaikka is organizing.

Learning approach

In these studies students were working with Moreno's concepts of creativity, sociometry, tele, role theory and concretizing. The special techniques that were used were, warming up, sharing, concretizing, role taking, role reversal, mirroring and maximizing and the whole psychodrama. Students acted in the roles of protagonist, antagonist, double and audience.

The other ground viewpoints were narrative theory and playback theatre. The special techniques that come out from this approach are storytelling, and all different forms of playback like fluid sculpture, transformation, sentence, meeting, ambivalences, microcosms, free improvisation and story.

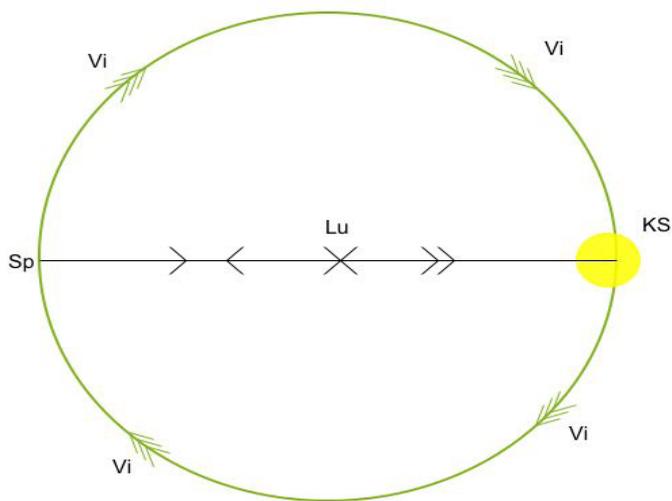
They were used fully also in this project. Participants acted in all those roles that exist in playback theatre (teller, actor, musician, audience member - witness and conductor).

This application where psychodrama, playback theatre and narrative thinking comes together is called Morenian pedagogy (Ketonen, 2006, 2008). It can be seen as a sociodynamic way to learn and it creates knowledge through socioconstructive process (Vygotsky, 1978) and creates communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

The application is described in the following pictures. The theoretical structure is starting from Moreno's cannon of creativity (*Picture 1*). Moreno is describing this phenomena with

the concepts of warming up, spontaneity, creativity and cultural conserve. The process of creativity starts with warming up (VI= Virittäytyminen in Finnish) which may awake the spontaneity (Sp) and part of that energy becomes creativity (Lu= luovuus in Finnish) and some of it may find a form in a culture conserve CC (KS= kulttuurisäilyke in Finnish).

Picture 1 - Cannon of creativity (Moreno, 1953).

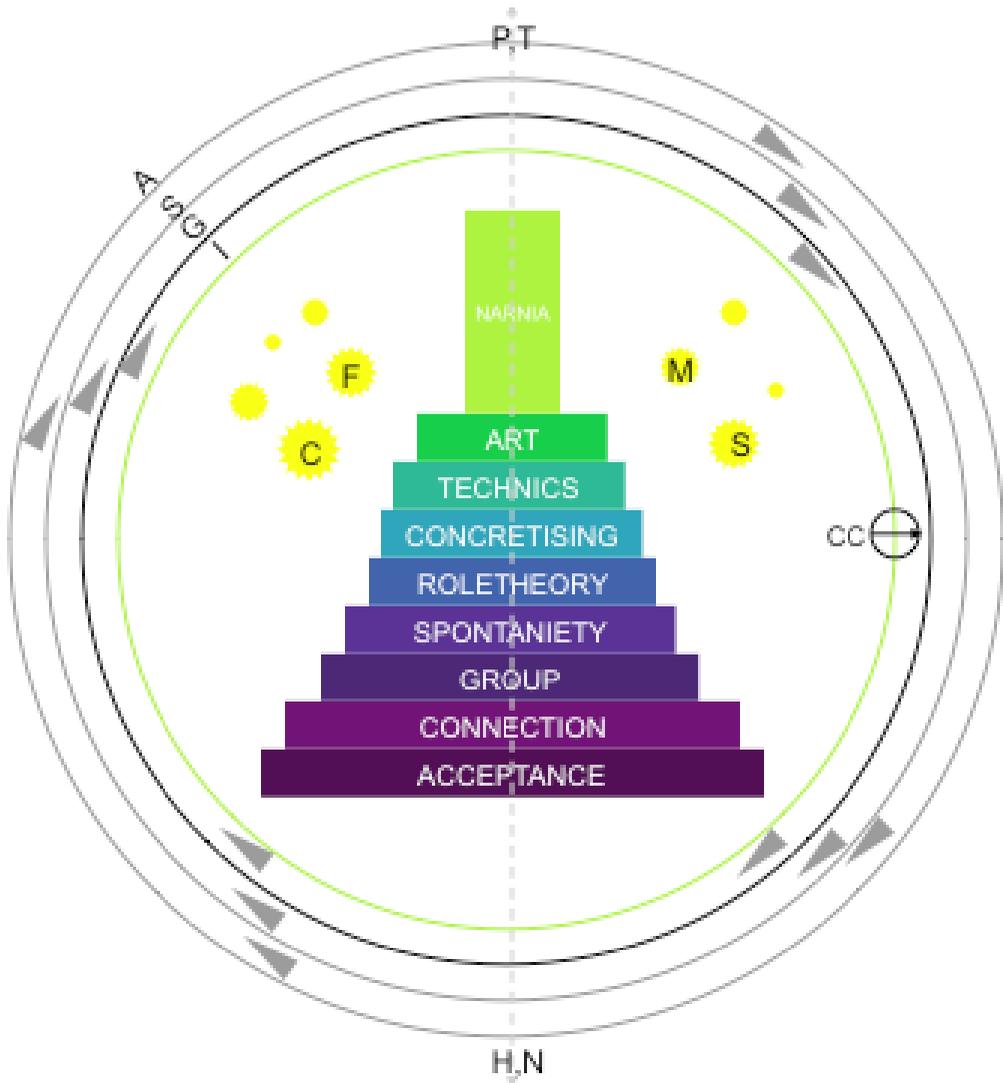


Further in this model where psychodrama, playback theatre and narrative thinking have been put together, creativity is the central focus. In the teaching the teacher is working with creativity in different levels when creating learning experiences (usually in a form of a story) and processing them. These levels of creativity (as well as levels of stories and experiences) are individual-, group-, social- and archetypal levels. Sometimes one can think also organizational and global levels.

Surrounded by and rooted in different levels of creativity (*Picture 2*) the teacher is working consciously trying to build up the learning process through different steps; which are human value, connection/tele, group, spontaneity, role theory, concretizing, techniques and art. If the teacher can create all these steps she will see how his or her students are able to open the symbolic door (called Narnia in this model) to their own learning process. In that final state the teacher does not have control over his or her students any more. Learners will do their own meaning making process of what has happened. Most often they get experiences of flow, spontaneity, increased motivation (self-esteem and self-efficacy) and they make some sort of learning outcomes that they can also give form to (cultural conserve CC).

All of this is happening in the certain time and space (T, S) and therefore learning process is always contextual. Moreno is always using the here and now when working with psychodrama and this is also the case in this work (H, N). That thinking and practice will take the work in deeper existential level.

Picture 2 - Morenian stairs (Morenian pedagogy) (Ketonen, 2008).



How was the project carried out

The project involved people who were training to become playback theatre conductors. This training lasts 2 years all together. Last two of four semesters of this group's studies were part of this project. The themes for these semesters (first two are playback acting and playback directing) were leadership and therapeutic playback theatre and psychodrama. The practical part of these studies finished in Romanian psychodrama conference in October 2011. Students will do their written thesis on the form of a book representing playback

method and their learning process. They will finish that before June 2012 and present their work in Finnish playback theatre gathering where also this project will be presented.

All of these students were highly motivated for their studies and paid their training from their own pockets. Their goals for these studies were partly personal and partly professional. All of them were working in the field of therapy, teaching (therapy, art), social work or church. Their professional goals were connected with goals of project, how to support people in danger to get alienated.

These studies happened in the period starting in January and ending in October. There were 9 students participating the program. These studies included those ten modules but in the whole had larger amount of time than any other group that participated the project.

Päivi Ketonen was their main teacher and Reijo Rautiainen joined her in the therapeutic psychodrama and playback theatre part. Riitta Harilo joined us in the beginning and hopefully she will be with us in the ending as well.

The final processing of this project in European level will be happening at the same time with Finnish psychodrama conference 2012. Reijo Rautiainen or one of the students that participated the course will be presenting our work in Finland while Päivi Ketonen and one of the teachers will be in Milan 2012 sharing the wisdom we got out from working together in this project. Hopefully we can create a connection through Skype and share some of this work also with Finnish psychodrama community.

Pre- and post-tests: some viewpoints to outcomes from Finnish process led by Kasvunpaikka

The different time orientation makes this group a special case in the whole project. This situation came out of limited or misunderstood information in the application for the project. When the reality was revealing for us we could not change it anymore but wanted to take part even with the different orientation. According to Ines Testoni, the Finnish answers gave the same result in both Finnish groups (the other group was from Finnish Playback Theatre Network) (*Graph 1*).

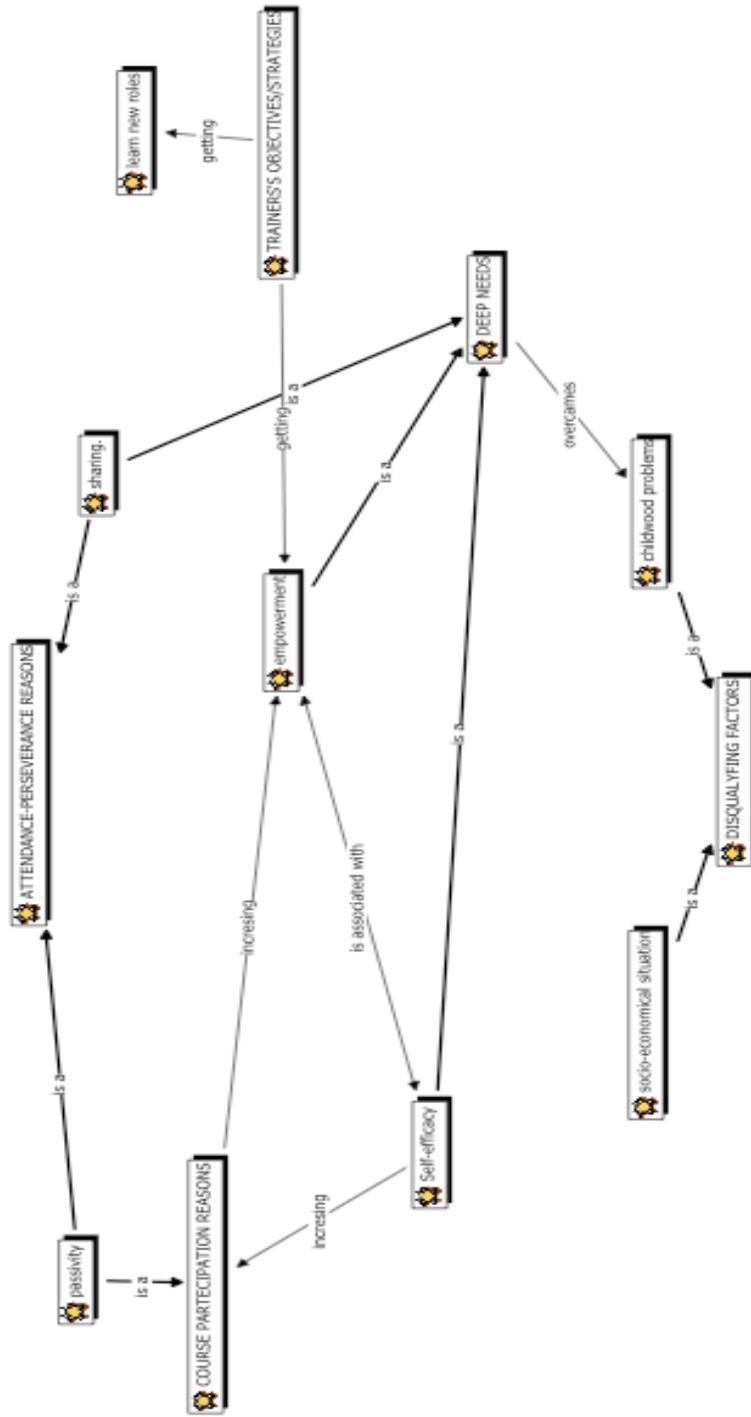
Even though already in the beginning of the project the different time orientation concerning the Finnish groups was recognized Ketonen still wants to remind of this fact. Like discussed in the beginning the different orientation to the time frame may bring some difficulties to the interpretation of the results of this research.

In autumn 2010, project participants took part in the three following training modules in Kasvunpaikka.

1. *Acting in playback theatre*
- 9-day course in acting.
2. *Conducting playback theatre*
- 9-day course in conducting playback theatre;
- a playback theatre gathering in Savonlinna, with the theme *Staying Aside*;
- a 5-day course introduction to psychodrama.
3. *Leadership in playback theatre*
- 3-day training module;
- 5-day training in psychodrama.

Graph 1 - Results of the pre-test in Finland (Testoni 2011).

FINLANDIA



After the training programme was officially finished in Finland with a one day session, the group members travelled together to Romania to participate in a psychodrama conference, with the theme *Sharing Psychodrama, Sharing Experiences*. The group will meet in a Finnish playback theatre gathering in June 2012 and present the Grundtvig project there.

The first test of Supporting Potential Development was taken before the leadership part started, but as mentioned before, students had been in the training for one year and they had already been affected by these methods. Some people often say that they find the beginning of these kinds of courses difficult and even scary, whereas others state immediately how empowering and extraordinary it is compared with their former studies. So when answering the pretest questions in this part of the process the answers might have been affected with what had already been experienced. The change between the beginning and end can also have been affected by this.

Ketonen's first conclusions of the results of "team of qualitative analysis" is that people in Finland were more passive than any other project groups and it seemed that they did not participate in retraining courses voluntarily. In later discussions, the team has clarified that they "simply want to report that Finnish students that have been participating in your courses, when answering to questionnaire, have stated that participation in those retraining courses is somehow obliged".

Ketonen wants to think this a little bit further. This brings up some special questions concerning international research projects. In different cultures different words and expressions might have different meanings depending of a context. In this case this question comes up in the possibility of different translations of the term passive and retraining. They carry contextual and hidden cultural impacts. All these different possibilities in understanding the context might cause possibilities of different outcomes in interpreting this part of the results.

First I want to comment this possibility of reading these results with this interpretation of being passive. Ketonen thinks this interpretation may hit and almost insult Finnish participants and if they read the result in the first understood way when it sounds like Finnish people or even the small training group will be interpreted to something very opposite than people in Finland tend to think about ourselves.

The old history of Finnish people fighting against huge Russia in the World War II succeeding in that fight to keep their independency and later being the tiny nation and still the only country paying their war depths to USA. This kind of coping in very difficult situations and finding a way together with their great strength is called "sisu". This sisu is part of Finnish pride and part of very deep cultural identity of Finnish people. Being seen as passive is very provocative for them and even for me as a member of research group it is difficult to keep my objectivity and openness to all kind of possible outcomes in this research. When participation is described as obliged it can be agreed and seen as the meaning was meant and understood.

Secondly in Finnish the term *retraining* can be understood in two different ways:

- meaning requalification;
- meaning further education.

In the cases of requalification the reasons for participation may differ a lot depending of a life situation of a person.

1) If someone has lost his job he needs to get new training in order to be qualified for something totally new.

1.1) The person loses his or her job because of his lack of the demanded competence on some area in the work. In these cases the worker is most often recommended to take part in retraining course. These people are not always choosing the possibility themselves and that's why their motivation may not be very high and as "team of qualitative analysis" is saying the results are telling, If this is the case the course may even deepen participants' feeling of learned helplessness and low self-esteem.

1.2) The person may lose his or her job because there are strong cultural changes in a society (like forest industry is changing strongly in Finland at the moment and many people have become unemployed because of that and not because they are bad workers). Most often people in this kind of situation are more motivated to train themselves to something new and are more active in searching new possibilities. Their experience for example of their self-efficacy might be quite high.

1.3) In the third case someone needs retraining if he has come sick or invalid to do his current job and does not have qualification for any other job. The situation is not "his or her fault". Motivation and possibilities for retraining in these cases may differ a lot depending of the person and of the reasons that led him or her to this situation.

All these different cases may have a strong impact for one's motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy. These factors effect also to the motivation and one's ability to make interventions concerning their life situations. Here we have to take again a cultural context into consideration as well. It is much more shameful to lose a job because of your own fault than because of the social situation. So motivation to go retraining may be different for these people depending on the situation and reason why they are attending the course. These different reasons may give different results for people's motivation and their experience of their self-efficacy.

According to Ketonen, who has worked many years in further education courses is assuming that people who participate retraining as further education are usually highly motivated and voluntarily participating to the course they choose and feel they need in order to be better in their profession. Most often people have to pay of further education courses and one has to be motivated to do that.

In this test the term was understood in all of these different ways. The term and question was discussed in the group before answering and participants claimed that they don't understand what does it mean. Leader gave them freedom to make an interpretation in the way participants wanted without understanding how meaningful this freedom was. Some participants choose to think how imaginary participants would react and some have thought about themselves. Therefore Ketonen is concerned how definitive interpretations can be made out of these answers and claim that Finnish people or people from some other country are like this or that in how they see people's motivation and also reasons for participating retraining courses.

On the other hand this result of Finnish people being passive Ketonen can also see the danger and possibility for passivity when the society is taking a lot of responsibility (like Finland is aiming or at least used to aim to have a high level in social care) of the welfare of its citizens.

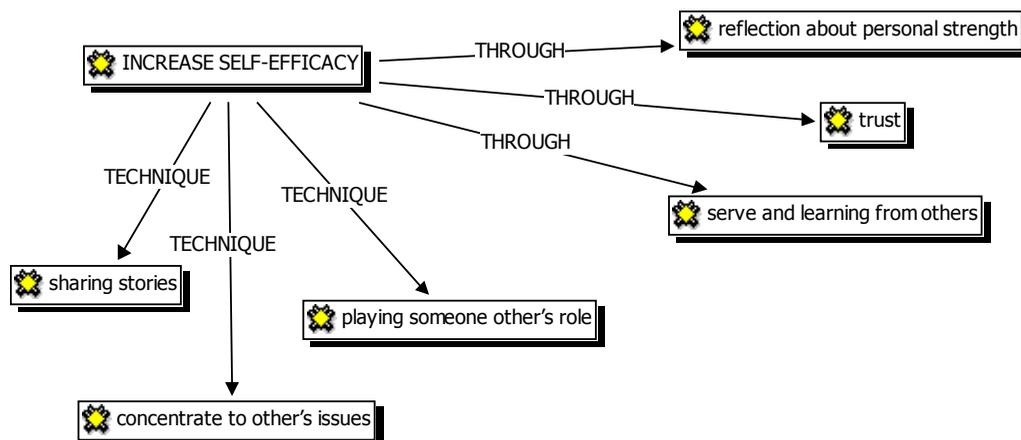
In "team of qualitative analysis" summary of Finnish people's reason to go to retraining

courses we can find the motivation for working with deeper issues concerning the childhood problems in order to survive better in life. Author assumes these goals come up mainly from people who take part in psychological retraining courses like this playback theatre conductor course was.

The post-test results with one question

These results (*Graph 2*) seem natural outcomes compared to those techniques we used in our process: sharing, role reversal, storytelling and playing back each other’s stories. It is easy to understand that participants feel that concentrating on each other and believing in each other’s possibilities increases everybody’s self esteem. Seeing other people’s life situations and their choices might increase their self-efficacy. The team report claimed that according to leader of Kasvunpaikka’s group said that she believed “meditation on your own personal strength, trust and listening to other’s experiences allow to change your own condition, and, in part to modify perception of self-efficacy”. This kind of dialogue has a great influence on seeing life from a completely new perspective and, in most cases, having more possibilities than we thought before. Even though Ketonen cannot recognize the meaning of meditating in this context, she believes that respecting and recognizing the power in everybody is crucial.

Graph 2 - Results of the pre-test in Finland (Testoni 2011).



Possibilities

Nevertheless I understand the meaning of these action method studies can be and has been very strong in the project of supporting the potential development. These methods help people to find ways in improving their coping in their lives and situations at their work. Moreno has described group as a microcosm of the world. By creating this microcosms

using psychodrama and playback theatre in the training we might succeed in supporting one to manage better in life by:

- 1) giving a strong experience of belonging and being part of some group in society. These experiences prohibit isolation;
- 2) creating possibilities to see and practice different ways to choose or cope in difficult life situations.

In this project people had the opportunity to be part of a meaningful group and get in touch with other European psychodrama or playback theatre people. This situation gave a great possibility to develop multicultural identity, which might also have an effect to strengthen the self-esteem as well as self-efficacy in larger scale.

Lifelong learning

Respect for lifelong learning is very strong in Finland. Besides the appreciation of this possibility to learn throughout ones life in the end of this project I started to wonder if lifelong learning might divide people and also deepen the differences between educated and employed people compared to uneducated and or unemployed. The well trained will be more and more trained all the time and those who lack education and work might feel more and more inadequate in that process. That might cause passivity and low self-esteem for those who don't constantly educate themselves.

There is also a danger in Finland with quite high social care that people put all the blame on the shoulders of society and escape their own responsibility in the process of making there life satisfactory to themselves. I hope action methods with strong communicative and kinesthetic emphasis, use of different experiences rather than only knowledge can bring an alternative way to learn for everybody and especially for people who are not so cognitively orientated.

Last thoughts

In this research Finnish groups were found out to be the most passive among these nations that took part in this research. Through these questions Finnish participants did not express any strategies either. Ketonen is underlining only these two results because they feel so surprising for me. I am also thinking if they tell more about leader as a trainer or do they really pick up something that I am blind to and not aware of in my own teaching or in Finnish culture.

With these results author became woken up with the remarkable responsibility of a research and of the power of interpretations. This makes me to think what we see as passivity and activity and how and what kind of information do we get in research processes and how do we use it. What if after this research people think in some parts of the European community that Finnish people in general are passive and they have no capacity for making strategies in their lives and they are tended to feel learned helpless and low in their self-esteem.

To some extent previous definitions might be true but they might also tell about some weaknesses in this questionnaire. What if the used questions are leaving some crucial information aside or they do not pick up possible cultural differences. In this project Ketonen sees that something of this happened and hopefully this viewpoint will be helpful in next project. ■

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