

Deep Talk: A Dialogic Instruction Method for Enhancing the Sense of Belonging

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we investigate Deep Talk, which is a method used in the context of early years education in Finland. The method is based on multisensory storytelling and clear phases. The method has received positive feedback from educators and children, but no prior research has been conducted on it. This data aims to determine the significant elements of the method for the individual child and the children in a group. The data consisted of 25 narrations of educators who participated in Deep Talk training and had been serving as Deep Talk instructors. The data were analyzed using a data- and theory-driven qualitative content analysis through the dialogical process of the research team. The results showed that Deep Talk consisted of several elements that had a positive effect on the sense of belonging, increasing the dialogue between children, getting children's voices heard and reducing inner speech. These effects seemed to strengthen the benefits of the method beyond the Deep Talk sessions as the method is implemented more constantly among children.

Keywords: Deep Talk, dialogue, sense of community, stories.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the current curricula for primary schools and early childhood education emphasize child-centered and child-initiative learning approaches. This is the case in Finland, where children's interest and needs are the focus of education and care (FCBE, 2014; FCE, 2018). In most cases, child-centeredness is defined as the educator intensively observing children's initiatives and responding to them. Prior research (Wylie *et al.*, 2006) has shown that a high-quality learning environment is based on rich interactions between children themselves and between adults and children. Furthermore, interaction and learning environments that foster children's sense of community can enhance their engagement in learning and mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Frederickson & Baxter, 2009).

There is a need for dialogic and child-centered learning approaches in early childhood education. In Muhonen *et al.*'s study (2020) on dialogic education in day-care centers, they observed that only a few dialogues were initiated by children. Furthermore, children rarely commented directly on each other in their dialogues. Even though the educators seemed to be sensitive to the children's responses to their prompts, the teachers were not able to enhance the children's initiatives to dialogue. According to Muhonen *et al.* (2020), the main

reasons for the lack of child-initiated discussions are the large group size and the culture of pedagogy in early year's education. More research is needed to investigate the relationships among children, how these relationships could be better developed (Elkader, 2015) and how children could feel more secure in expressing their ideas and personal thoughts, which are referred to by McMillan (1996) as the inner views or inner speech of individuals about their experience.

The forms of interaction vary and present different genres. Stories contain a narrative structure and vocabulary familiar to children (Bruner, 1990; 1983). Furthermore, stories offer a context with which children can empathize, which makes the learning contents more approachable to them. In early childhood, stories are a widely used resource, and they contain both fictional stories (e.g., in picture books) and oral stories told by children and educators. Children also learn to participate in social practices and use storytelling at an early age to structure their experiences. Encouraging children to tell stories is vital from the perspective of dialogical learning, as narration gives them the opportunity to distance themselves from their experiences, articulate them and edit them together with others (Hänninen, 2000).

In this study, we investigate the Deep Talk method, which was developed in Finland by Tuula Valkonen. Central to the

Deep Talk method are old stories and their multi sensual representations. The data used in this study consisted of 25 narratives implemented by early year's education professionals working in different day-care centers. In their stories, the educators illustrate meaningful moments while using the Deep Talk method. The data were analyzed through a dialogical process by the researchers using a qualitative content analysis. The aim was to gain research-based information on the Deep Talk method, which does not yet exist: what are the significant elements of the method, and how should the outcomes of the method be observed?

II. INTERACTION AND LEARNING

Learning is a dynamic interaction between an individual and the physical and social conditions of the learning environment (Rose & Fischer, 2009). According to sociocultural learning theories, children's thinking and learning cannot be supported without understanding the social nature of learning. The social context in which learning takes place affects learning results and shapes individual experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Earlier research has also suggested that children's engagement in learning can be enhanced if their sense of community and positive social relations are cherished (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Frederickson & Baxter, 2009). The social context prerequisite creates different ways of communicating and sharing information. The social level of learning will then be transferred to the individual level (Muhonen *et al.*, 2020). In early year's education, the social and individual levels of learning are supported and relied on by educators (Rose & Fischer, 2009).

Engagement in learning is related to motivation, persistence, emotional self-regulation, and agency (Glass *et al.*, 2013). Agency is a central concept in learning, and it closely relates to the concepts of autonomy, motivation, and investment. A completely passive learner will not learn (Lier, 2010). Agency has different forms and expressions. Children's agency in learning means that children get their voices heard and that learning is not dependent on teachers' plans but on children's authorial learning. Further, dialogue between children occurs naturally, and they learn to collaborate, negotiate, and resolve problems (De Palma *et al.*, 2006; Abd Elkader, 2015). This means that in learning, there should be multiple options for vocabulary, language, and background knowledge as well as multiple ways to present information (i.e., text, visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, media) and demonstrate understanding, knowledge, and skills (Glass *et al.*, 2013).

As we interact, we observe and conceptualize each other's speech through listening and put our own thoughts into words through inner speech (Johnson 1984). Inner speech, or the inner story, is a subjective stream of thought heard only by the individual (Vaahtio, 2011). It often has a plain and simple structure, but its meaning can be complex. Inner speech cannot be separated from interaction, while successful communication does require a more detailed framing of the message and the ability to put oneself in another person's position. Inner speech becomes richer the stranger the situations or the people an individual is involved in. In a safe

and familiar environment, where all participants share the same meanings with each other, the need for inner speech decreases (Johnson, 1984).

Examining one's inner speech and understanding its meaning is important because inner speeches can have both positive and negative effects on our actions (Vaahtio, 2011). In a social storytelling situation, a child's inner story or speech takes the form of a narrative (Hänninen, 2000). As inner speech is the way we speak, or actually feel, to ourselves and about others, it affects our interactions. Social storytelling situations foster a safe environment where children can feel 'safe to tell the truth', that is, their truly honest opinions and feelings about their inner experiences, which are essential for contributing e.g., to a sense of belonging to the community (McMillan, 1996).

Learning is socialisation. This means that effective learning must be dialogic. Dialogic teaching not only responds to children's initiatives but also leads children to ask questions and drawing children's experiences and agency into a dialogue (Matusov & Wegerif, 2014). Dialogic education can also be seen in practices require an emotionally safe environment. Participants need to have experiences of shared interests, such as learning new skills or matters that are beneficial for both the group and for the individual, by giving and expressing their own ideas and opinions without the feeling of being humiliated (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

To facilitate dialogic education, the atmosphere in a group should be warm, safe, and supportive (Matusov & Wegerif, 2014). The prerequisite for dialogic learning is embracing diversity and difference (Arnett *et al.*, 2010). This is even more important, as children are increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse (Glass *et al.*, 2013). For children to be involved in dialogues with each other, educators should create activities in which children can collaborate, disagree, negotiate, and resolve their disagreements by themselves (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996).

Relationships are established, maintained, and expanded through interaction (Lier, 2010). Listening begins by being aware of the time, place and content of a given conversation. Genuine dialogue allows all forms of communication, with verbal interaction being only one form (Arnett *et al.*, 2010). In education, this diversity of texts and languages is not always present, which leads to the absence of learners' voices. The physical world (e.g., elements of nature), the sociocultural world of artifacts (e.g., houses, roads, classrooms), the social communities (e.g., families, schools, soccer teams) and the symbolic world of ideas, histories, stories, and belief systems provide many ways to engage children in interaction (Lier, 2010). Dialogue begins with bias, progresses to learning from others and cannot be demanded. Genuine dialogue emerges between persons as a by-product of human meetings in which one's own and another's perspective are engaged with openness to meet differences. Sometimes, the monologue is also a part of the interaction (Arnett *et al.*, 2010). Thinking and inner speech can be described as attributes of dialogue and interaction. In dialogues, we learn to engage with other points of view in caring, collaborative, creative and critical ways (Phillipson & Wegerif, 2019).

III. DEEP TALK METHOD

The main elements of the Deep Talk method are associated with Godly Play (Berryman, 2004), Montessori pedagogy (Hayes & Höylänmaa, 1985) and Joseph Artigal's (1991) theory on conceptual spaces. In the Deep Talk method, Artigal's theory of meaning-making spaces is implemented in inner speech and learning a shared language within a group. At best, this method creates a physical space where individuals have the ability to process matters that touch their lives or the community surrounding them and will be able to connect with their inner worlds and experience empowerment (Valkonen, 2014).

Central to the Deep Talk method are old stories and their auditive, visual and kinesthetic representations as well as having dialogues, evoking emotions, and learning about social situations based on the stories. In the method, stories and dialogues are supported by different artifacts and common symbols, such as wooden figures and a bag of sand used in each session. Auditory and kinesthetic representations of stories aim at presenting a common symbol system that functions to create and maintain individuals' sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Sand is a central element: as participants sit in a circle around the sand, the narrator draws illustrations of the story and the participants' experiences on the sand. The common symbols foster a sense of belonging and identification, and the circle created around the sand aims at enhancing the participants' feeling of acceptance by the group and their "willingness to sacrifice for the group" in concrete and mental ways (see McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The Deep Talk method has four phases, with a clear transition between the phases. The transition helps the participants to concentrate, change their mood and express their emotions. In the transition, the participants get up, walk in a circle for a moment and sit back down to a new place. These actions enhance participation and support the emergence of dialogue. For example, at the beginning of each session, a bag of sand is opened, and the same question is asked: "Are you ready?" Other phrases, such as "Now, I'm thinking..." and "Is this good enough?" are used in the transition to different phases.

The phases of Deep Talk are the hallway phase, the narration phase, the play phase, and the celebration phase. The hallway phase is the first phase of the Deep Talk method. It aims to motivate and involve children in narration activity, listening and later dialogue. It is advisable to always implement the hallway phase in the same way: it can begin with the participants making a queue, being quiet, walking up to the session space or sitting down in a circle, and briefly discussing what's on their minds. This makes the participants ready to listen to a story and discover their inner stories. The transition from the hallway phase to the narration phase is made when the instructor opens a bag of sand and asks the participants, "Are you ready to listen to a story?"

In the narration phase, the participants listen to a story and make a connection with their inner stories. The stories told during sessions do not have a title, and the instructors do not reveal beforehand what story they will tell the participants. One of the frequently used stories is "The Diamond":

Through a desert, a person travelled with nothing. This person found a precious diamond from the desert, took it, and moved on. Then, a stranger appeared and saw the diamond. The stranger asked if he could have it. Without a complaint, the person gave the precious diamond to the stranger. Both continued their way. After a few days of travelling, the stranger turned back to find that person again. The stranger gave the precious diamond back to the person and said, "I want something even more precious from you. Tell me where you got that attitude that you can give away your most precious possession for the sake of a stranger."

In this story, the diamond represents a metaphor, a word that has a symbolic and personal meaning. This meaning is created during the interpretation process by merging the inner story with the story being presented.

The participants may acknowledge that they already know the story while listening to it. This does not matter because each time a new aspect of the story content is presented, the story is interpreted differently by the group. The story itself is usually short, but the theme is supported with items, expressions and drawings made on the sand. During the narration, the narrator does not make eye contact with the listeners. This helps listeners to focus on their respective inner stories (the truth).

Part of the narration phase is wondering. After the story is told, the instructor directs the listeners to an act of wondering through accurately formed questions: What was the best thing about the story, what would you leave out, and in what part of the story would you like to be in? Wondering transforms individuals' inner thinking into thoughts and allows them to share their meanings. This strengthens the experience of listening to and sharing their inner stories and their sense of being a part of a dialogue and the group. Nevertheless, the dialogue will gradually, and the participants begin developing the group's own economy, as reflected in the element of trade by McMillan (1996).

The third phase is called the play phase. The participants work and have dialogue on themes that are currently relevant for themselves or the community surrounding them. These individual and meaningful themes are implemented by creating a shared landscape on the sand and placing Deep Talk figures on it. Each participant may suggest details, such as palm trees, rivers, mountains, sun, clouds, or cars. In early education, these suggestions may divert from what adults think.

When the landscape is complete, the value play phase begins. The instructor may suggest a certain theme, for example, friendship, as a subject. The instructor may place a metaphorical figure (i.e., an item that has a metaphorical meaning in the story told in the narration phase) on the landscape to represent the question. Subsequently, each participant places his/her own figure in the sand. There are no right or wrong answers. Guided and strengthened by the previous phases and tools, this phase aims for the participants to have the courage to take up even painful issues, process them with versatility and listen to others. The group may be prompted to notice some good points that have come up

during the Deep Talk session (shared emotional connection, art). The play phase ends with the instructor's statement: "This is good enough."

The last phase is the celebration phase. In the Deep Talk method, the reason for celebrating is the sense of belonging and empowerment: being part of a group and showing joy for it. The celebration is emphasized by serving small snacks to everyone, such as peanuts, raisins, fruits, or crackers. What is important is not the quantity or quality of the food but the fact that everything is shared and about the different mental tasks provided during the celebration according to the goals set by the group. This helps children direct their attention to the positive aspects of life and foster positive inner stories.

IV. RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study investigates how the Deep Talk method creates dialogical spaces for children and teachers in early year's education based on the teachers' experience and how educators' word these meanings. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What elements of Deep Talk are significant to educators?
- 2) Are there differences in the narratives of Deep Talk between novice and experienced educators?

Data were collected during the autumn of 2021 through an online questionnaire, which consisted of four background questions (multiple choice or Likert scale) and five open-ended questions on the participants' experiences with the Deep Talk method. In this study, we focused on an open-ended question in which the participants were asked to narrate their meaningful observations during Deep Talk sessions. All the participants (49 individuals) underwent a Deep Talk course, and the questionnaire was sent to their personal emails with a link to it. A total of 25 Deep Talk counsellors participated in the study. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the data were collected anonymously. The research plan was assessed by the Ethics Committee of Finland and accepted on May 26, 2021.

The data were analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis. To answer the first research question, the analysis was mainly data-driven. The narratives were first read individually by the first two authors. Based on their analysis, categories for the significant elements were formed. All the authors individually read the data and coded them based on the categories identified by the first two authors. These individual codings were then compared, and the categories were refined; for example, the category of repetition was changed to the category of routines. The differences in coding were also discussed, but there was no need for a full consensus because of the nature of the data and their interpretative characteristics.

For the second research question, the data were divided into two groups based on the length of experience and frequency of using the Deep Talk method (Table I). The experienced participants had more than one year of experience, and they had used Deep Talk at least 10 times. Teachers who had just begun to implement the method had less than a year of experience and had less than 10 sessions. The codings of these two groups were compared.

At the end of the research, the findings were investigated

by Tuula Valkonen. Valkonen's findings were implemented to strengthen the reliability and trustworthiness of the study and were part of the triangulation between researchers. In the results section, straight quotes from the data were used to ensure the reliability of the analysis. The individual narratives were coded. The code contained E, which stands for educator, the number of the narrative and the information on whether the narrative was from a novice or an experienced educator.

TABLE I: ILLUSTRATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS BASED ON EXPERIENCE

Experienced participants (n=8)	Novice participants (n=17)
Length of the experience	
Over a year	Less than a year
Frequency of using the method	
Monthly	Sometimes
Weekly	A couple times
Total number of Deep Talk -sessions	
10-20 sessions	5-10 sessions
Over 20 sessions	Less than 5 sessions

V. RESULTS

A. Significant Elements of Deep Talk

Based on the narratives of the educators, seven categories were formed illustrating the significant elements of the Deep Talk method: 1) Routines, 2) Children's agency, 3) Participation, 4) Recognition of individuality, 5) SEL (social emotional) skills, 6) Individual significance and 7) Transfer effect. In the analysis, some categories were identified as part of the Deep Talk session (categories 1-3), and some categories (4-7) were described as being visible in other activities and outside the Deep Talk session. Fig. 1 presents the analysis in detail. The narratives and authors are coded, and the categories are represented by colors.

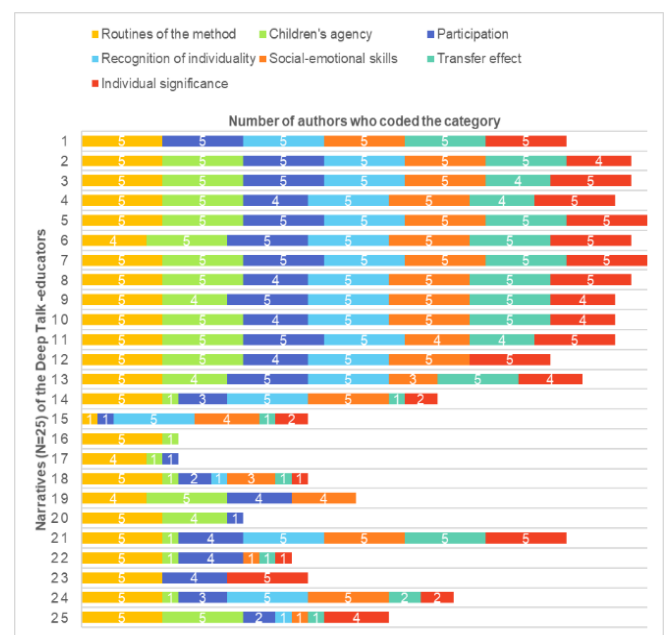


Fig. 1. Significant elements in Deep Talk.

In the following chapters, we present the results. The results of the first question were divided into two categories: those apparent during sessions and those apparent outside the sessions.

B. Significant Elements during Deep Talk Sessions

According to the analysis, the significant elements during Deep Talk sessions were: 1) Routines, 2) Children's agency and 3) Participation. In these categories, the most commonly mentioned elements were the different stories implemented during the sessions, the clear structure of the sessions, the versatile ways to participate and be active during the sessions and the atmosphere of the sessions.

The stories told by the educators in the narration phase and the stories told by the group in the play phase were considered significant. The educators stated that *the structure of the sessions helped the children focus and participate. The structure with clear phases made the sessions predictable to the children. The familiar structure helps children, and it seems to enhance their concentration, and they are always eager to tell how their day was today (...). Slowly, they have learned to place themselves at a particular point in the story.* (E5, Experienced). Some educators emphasized the clear structure by telling the same story in the narration phase more than once (contact hypothesis, quality of integration). The phrases repeatedly used during the session *"Are you ready to hear a story?" "Now, I am thinking" and "Is this good enough?"* were the ways to direct the children's attention and to remind them of the following activities: *(...) I feel that the beginning of "Are you ready to hear a story ..." is a magical sign for the children to settle into a state of hearing (...)* (E7, Experienced).

During sessions, the children had opportunities to participate in many ways and with several modalities. Aside from talking and listening to others, the method also activated the senses. The children could touch the sand and the wooden figure and hear the sound of shifting sand. One educator described Deep Talk sessions as follows: *(...) The children felt that the moments were enjoyable. They often waited to hear a new story (trust). The moment of being together and the structure were intriguing and created safety (membership). The children's faces and gestures showed their interest, and they waited to touch the sand. After that moment, the children often came close and gave hugs. (...)* (E6, Experienced).

In almost all the narratives, the educators described the children's agency as active participation, peaceful presence, and overall calmness. Most of the educators used words such as listening, being silent and sitting peacefully. The Deep Talk method seemed to give the children a sense of inner peace, and both the teachers and children enjoyed the moment: *(...) Everyone fell completely silent, and no discipline. When the Deep Talk moment passed, the kids did not want to leave the ring. (...)* (E1, Experienced). Aside from describing the activity in terms of calmness and presence, Deep Talk sessions were seen to activate children in terms of dialogue by sharing their experiences, by listening and commenting on others and by narrating their own life stories. Moreover, some children started retelling the stories and showed initiative in creating spontaneous dialogue with each other. For example, *when one child revealed that her parents were divorcing, another child started spontaneously comforting her and said that she had a similar experience* (E10, Novice).

One of the most common elements is a positive atmosphere: *(...) It is important to rejoice in the moment*

together, to hear and listen. It is a tender moment. (...) (E6, Experienced). The educators stated how the sessions created a dialogical space that enabled the children to have a sense of community and experience participation: *(...) Through the story, it is easy to talk, deepen understanding, and listen and appreciate others' perspectives (...)* *The story will be remembered and pondered for a long time...* (E9, Novice).

Ideas about the atmosphere contained some comments about the educators focusing on and being more present during the sessions than in other group activities. This highlighted the need for peaceful dialogical spaces in early childhood education. It seemed that without a specific method, these kinds of spaces did not exist in the groups. There were no negative details in the narrations. The educators always mentioned how the children waited for the Deep Talk sessions, how even the most restless children were able to concentrate and how surprised they were about the positive and peaceful atmosphere. Moreover, there was no room for dialogical moments, including seeing and hearing the children, during the kindergarten day. One educator summarized the meaning of the Deep Talk method: *(...) As an educator, I receive a lot of information about the children as individuals. I would not have gained the information without the Deep Talk moments. (...)* (E2, Experienced).

C. Significant Elements in and Outside the Deep Talk Sessions

In their narrations, the educators described several elements that could be placed in the categories of 4) Recognition of individuality, 5) SEL skills, 6) Individual significance and 7) Transfer effect. These elements were also found outside the Deep Talk sessions; this is considered in the analysis as a transfer effect and shared history.

SEL learning was evident through the mentions of emotions and descriptions of the atmosphere. There were some narrations on the dialogical moments in which the children expressed their emotions towards each other: *(...) During the last phase of the moment, a girl started to cry. She was comforted by my co-worker. Afterwards, I realized why she was crying. Her wooden figure was pushed by some other child's wooden figure on the sand. This showed how strong the symbolic meaning of the figures on the sand was. When the girl's wooden figure was pushed, the girl felt that she was pushed too. (...)* (E14, Novice). The scale of emotions was wide, and the educators emphasized the depth of emotions. Some educators mentioned empathy: *(...) In the donkey story, the children shared a lot of information about what was stopping them and making them sad (emotional safety, trust, influence, spirit, the truth). Empathy was tangible. (...)* (E1, Experienced). According to the educators, the depth of emotions was partly dependent on the stories. For example, in the diamond story (see p. xx), *the children were able to express their emotions about the precious things in life: Mother, father, siblings, friends, pets, people in kindergarten, home as a place, bed, sleeping toy, pacifier and baby bottle were mentioned in the narration of one of the educators* (E8, Experienced). The same educator also mentioned the starfish story: *(...) Caring in many ways was fun for the kids. (...)* (E8, Experienced).

There were several ideas about children's participation and dialogue in connection with multisensory activities. In their

early years, children do not have a wide vocabulary and expressing themselves verbally is challenging: (...) *The discussions were quite limited because of the age of the children and their language skills, but drawing on the sand, however, they wanted seemed to be a meaningful and important moment for the children.* (...) (E11, Novice). The educators felt that the children started interacting more verbally as they learned about the structure and stages of the Deep Talk sessions: *When the moments became familiar to the children, even the shy and quiet ones had the courage to speak up* (E19, Novice). Furthermore, during the Deep Talk sessions, the children learned new ways to express themselves and show affection to others. This helped them connect with others and participate socially. According to the educators, this meant learning to listen to others and waiting for the opportunity to speak: (...) *The sessions have taught me that you cannot underestimate children. These peaceful situations and small groups support the children in their attempts to express themselves and be heard.* (...) (E10, Novice).

According to the analysis, the sessions enabled the children to reveal their inner thoughts and feelings. Several narratives illustrated this individual significance. As the children opened up about their inner thoughts, the educators were somewhat embarrassed, as these moments aroused strong emotions in the educators as well. They felt empathy and connection to the children: (...) *We listened respectfully to the genuine answers of the youngest children and the older children's more mature answers, even some painful experiences. Nobody judged anyone. As an educator, I gained important knowledge about the children's thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Even one case of bullying came out.* (...) (E21, Novice). The narrations revealed that the children needed spaces that allowed them to tell both adults and other children about their lives. The Deep Talk method seemed to encourage the children—even those who do not usually participate to bring up meaningful issues: (...) *One of the children in my group lost an important person during the year. After the story, the child revealed that an important adult in his/her life had died. This child did not mention this previously, even though we knew about it and had been trying to support him/her. The session and the story opened an emotional lock, and we were able to talk about it.* (...) (E14, Novice). In another narration, the educator shared the following: (...) *One of the bigger boys told us that he did not have anyone at home to give him attention. For this reason, he looked for attention in the group by hitting others.* (...). *This was a way for him to get noticed* (E21, Novice). The sharing of these inner stories is one of the main aims of the Deep Talk method (spirit, the truth), as it enhances one's experience of feeling safe instead of the unravelling of locked emotions in physically stressful ways. This element of the method was the most impressive and relevant to the educators and the reason for continuously using the method.

Several narrations illustrated the transfer of significant elements outside of the Deep Talk sessions. It seemed that the spirit of the sessions created a common experience that formed a shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996). The positive spirit of the sessions was apparent in the notions, as the children asked the educators about the sandbag and the next session. Details also

showed that the children had a positive feeling about the Deep Talk method. (...) *The adult said that next we were going to [name of a teacher] club (which meant a Deep Talk session). Great! That is where I want to go.* (...) (E11, Novice). Some educators also noticed or heard from other staff members that the children talked about the themes of the Deep Talk session afterwards. According to Valkonen (2014), one of the main aims of this method is to create a shared language in a group and a space for dialogue. The educators showed how certain sentences and activities began to emerge in other situations. In one narration, the educator said that during lunch, some children wanted to start doing together what they were doing during the celebration phase in the session. The other educator showed how the children understood certain sentences: (...) *Quite soon (maybe in the third session), the children started to use the phrases "Now, I'm thinking" and "Is this good enough." When the children would argue, one would say to another, "Now, I'm thinking. Which one of us is allowed to play here?"* (...) (E2, Experienced). It seems that the Deep Talk method could gradually create a sense of shared language and community: (...) *After five Deep Talk sessions, someone said, "Now, I'm thinking. Everyone would be laughing from the bottom of their hearts. There is no right or wrong. I used the Deep Talk method until I retired, and now I'm thinking is good enough." These words are neither right nor wrong, and you are allowed to be yourself in a safe way.* (...) (E21, Novice).

D. Significance of the Deep Talk Method from the Perspective of Novice and Experienced Educators

Differences in the narratives were found when comparing the results between novice and experienced Deep Talk educators. For the novice Deep Talk educators, the details focused on the notions made during the session, and experienced learners obtained details inside and outside the Deep Talk sessions. Fig. 4 illustrates how the meaning of the Deep Talk method seems to change when it is used more frequently. The experienced educators found more elements from categories referring to the inner meanings, the transfer to other activities and the communication between the children. There was a disparity between the novice and experienced Deep Talk educators, as the novice educators did not systematically mention all categories in their narrations, whereas the experienced educators mentioned all categories

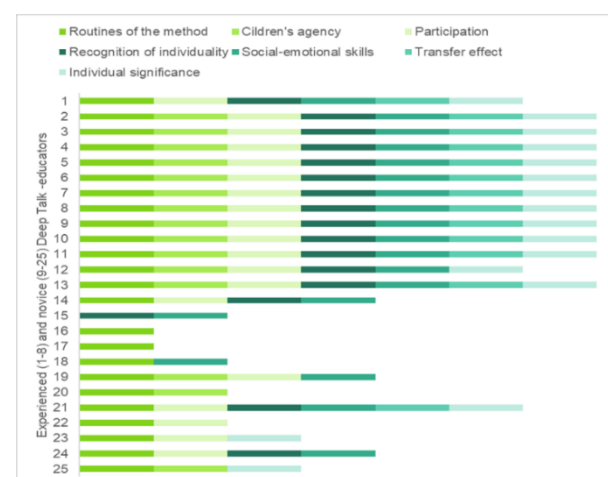


Fig. 4. Details of the narratives categorised by novice and experienced Deep Talk educators and the classification of the details in the narratives.

without exception. The narratives of the experienced educators indicated their personal growth: they noticed the children's individuality, needs and skills more, and their relationship with the children as individuals strengthened.

These findings indicate that using the Deep Talk method can affect individuals and the community. This seems to have a deepening effect: the sense of community increased with the use of the Deep Talk method because the more often and the longer the time the method was used, the greater the interpretation of the contents and connections between the elements of the method.

VI. DISCUSSION

Children are becoming more diverse in more diverse ways. To support children's equal rights in terms of high-quality care and education starting from their early years, it is important to create pedagogy that will enable them to have a sense of belonging to the group and have their voices heard. Based on this study, the Deep Talk method seems to contain elements that answer to this need. This argument is supported by the narrations of educators. They were genuinely touched by the connection they had with the children and the way the children opened up during the sessions. Having dialogue-initiated moments seemed to be rare in their groups, and thus the educators appreciated and cherished them, as well as the children. This study showed that there are benefits in using the method like Deep Talk method. The method is clear, easy to implement and does not take much time. It is a concrete and cognitively clear method for both children and educators. It creates a shared history in many ways.

According to McMillan (1996), stories (or Art) create a shared history that becomes a group's or a community's story. A shared history increases the shared emotional connection. The story, as an instructional method, works as a creator of membership by creating boundaries, a sense of belonging, a common symbol system and emotional safety, just as stories and storytelling are natural to children. Shared history and dialogue are created in safe communities. Therefore, we associated the Deep Talk method and dialogic education with the theory of McMillan and Chavis (1986) on the sense of belonging to a community. We showed that the method is a structured practice of SoC for children. The criteria and elements of SoC work together and are related in several dynamic ways (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; McMillan, 1996). Conversely, the Deep Talk method shows these elements in concrete ways. It can serve as an instructional method that provides guiding pedagogical tools for increasing the sense of community. However, instructors should be familiar with the method. The more one uses it with a group, the more the elements of SoC and the method can be practiced. The experienced educators described these elements in the data and explained the deeper meanings of the Deep Talk and SoC elements. Even the novice educators found several elements of the method, but their descriptions varied. They had individual interpretations of the method and SoC and did not find general connections between them.

Therefore, if educators use the method for a longer period (e.g., months), then they will be able to realize the deeper interconnections of the elements and interpret them more

concretely. In this study, they described the method's meaningfulness during the session and afterwards as a transfer effect outside the sessions using the concepts of SoC, such as shared history and art. Conversely, the novice educators described the method generally by explaining the session situation/moment more and/or the transfer effect less.

Twenty-five educators were involved in this study, which focused on the educators' experiences. Although these educators have implemented the Deep Talk method in at least 25 groups of children in day-care centers, more research is needed on the interpretation of the children's views about the Deep Talk method and its relationship with SoC. One of the aims of this study is to present the method to a wider community and encourage its implementation and research.

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