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# When parents and children become learning partners

Supporting mother tongue learning through socio-pedagogical methods

The aim of this functional thesis was to create a drama workshop which includes activities for parents and children based on socio-pedagogical methods. The thesis also underlines the parents' role in their children's language learning journey. The workshop was organized in collaboration with Learning for Integration association as part of their "Zmeișorii" project.

In Finland, the children who have other than Finnish or Swedish as their mother tongue, have access to mother tongue language classes starting in the first grade the earliest. So, in the early years' education there is no language support for the mother tongue offered to these children. Therefore, the parents are the ones that need to take a proactive role in supporting their children's mother tongue learning. The Romanian community is one of the smallest in Finland, so the language practice opportunities for the children who belong to this group are limited.

Through the drama activities organized during the workshop, the parents and the children had the chance to play and learn together in a fun environment. The educational materials created for the workshop were received with enthusiasm by the workshop participants. This gave the coordinators of the playgroup the idea to continue creating Romanian language teaching materials.

The workshop was well received by all the participants. During the evaluation part, the parents shared ideas of activities they do at home. They concluded that no matter what activity you engage in, it is important for the whole family to come together and do something everyone enjoys.

| Keywords | socio-pedagogical methods, mother tongue, bilingualism, partnership, parents, children, drama, play |
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Tämän toiminnallisen opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on luoda näytelmätyöpaja, joka sisältää sosiaalipedagogiin menetelmiin perustuvia aktiviteettejä vanhemmille ja lapsille. Opinnäytetyössä korostetaan vanhempien roolia osana lastensa kielen oppimista. Työpaja on järjestetty yhteistyössä Learning for Integration ry:n kanssa osana "Zmeișorii" projektia.

Suomessa muiden kuin suomen ja ruotsinkielisten lasten äidinkielen opetus alkaa aikaisintaan ensimmäisenä kouluvuonna. Näin ollen siis varhaiskasvatuksessa ei tueta muiden kielien oppimista, joten vanhempien täytyy olla proaktiivisia tukiessaan lastensa äidinkielen oppimista. Romaniankielinen yhteisö on yksi pienimpiä Suomessa, joten kielen opiskelun mahdollisuudet ovat rajoitetut.

Työpajan harjoitteiden kautta vanhemmilla ja lapsilla oli mahdollisuus leikkiä ja oppia yhdessä mukavassa ympäristössä. Työpajoja varten valmistettu oppimateriaali on otettu innostuneesti vastaan osallistujien kesken. Tämä antoi työpajan järjestäjille idean jatkokehittää opetusmateriaalia romaniankielen opetukseen.

Työpaja otettiin hyvin vastaan osallistujien keskuudessa. Työpajan arviointiosuudessa vanhemmat jakoivat omia ideoitaan kotona tehtävistä aktiviteeteista. Johtopäätöksenä oli, että aktiviteetin sisältöä tärkeämpää on koko perheen yhteinen tekeminen, josta kaikki nauttivat.

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| Avainsanat | sosiaalipedagogiset menetelmät, äidinkieli, kaksikielisyys, kumppanuus, vanhemmat, lapset, näytelmä, leikki |

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"The common belief that children are like sponges who can simply absorb two languages from their environment sounds promising, but sponges only absorb when dipped in water, not thin air or good will. A language can be present in a child's environment if s/he hears it from grandma once a week. While this can be great for the child on many levels, it probably leaves the language sponge pretty dry, and won't realistically produce fluency in the language"

Annika Bourgogne, *Be Bilingual*

# 1    Introduction

The mother tongue is the foundation of a person's development, the connecting thread of all the essential elements that contribute to a person's identity. Defined as "the first language you learn as a baby" (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2017), the mother tongue is different from the languages someone learns at school or as an adult. When living in a multicultural society where the mother tongue is a minority language, its support becomes a challenge for families.

At the end of 2015, 6.2 percent of the population of Finland had immigrant background. Out of these, 3161 persons were Romanian citizens. At the same time, in the Helsinki area 161 Romanian children under the age of 9 were registered (Statistics Finland, 2015.) These statistics demonstrate that the Romanian community is one of the smallest in Finland. With a reduced number of community members, the learning and practice of the mother tongue becomes vulnerable.

As a Romanian speaking mother and kindergarten teacher with over 9 years' experience in the work with bilingual children in Finland, I understood the need to support my children's mother tongue as early as possible. Knowing that bringing together children who speak the same language would strengthen their motivation to continue speaking the language and enhance their communication skills, in 2012 I became a coordinator for a Romanian language playgroup for children under the age of 7 in the Helsinki area. This role gave me the opportunity and freedom to use all my knowledge and expertise to create a supportive environment for children to play, using their mother tongue.

When the playgroup began its activity, the workshops were only targeted for children, without any interaction with the parents. During this time, parents expressed their worries and the challenges they were facing when it came to their children's language skills. Among these, the most common were related to the fact that the children either refuse to communicate in Romanian, or that their vocabulary was too narrow. In some of these cases, the parents have even ceased to speak their mother tongue to the children. When they joined the playgroup, they expected the children to start learning the language, which was an impossible task to do without their support. Trying to get the parents more engaged in the activities, the workshops became more family orientated. This decision came after understanding that the parents are the main supporters of their children's

mother tongue learning and the main arena where the learning takes place is their own home.

The aim of the thesis is to create a drama workshop which includes activities for parents and children based on socio-pedagogical methods. I will also focus on underlining the parents' role in their children's language learning journey. I will firstly analyse the object of learning, the mother tongue, and its importance in the children's development. For that we will look over the concept of mother tongue and its implications in the children's learning development.

Because the mother tongue, in our context, is in a development relationship with Finnish, in the beginning of the thesis I will define bilingualism and I will argument the need for support of the mother tongue in early childhood and the advantages of communicating in this language with the children. This information is meant to support and motivate the parents to take a proactive role in the children's language learning process. In the second part of the thesis I will present several socio-pedagogical methods that have been used in the workshop's activities to strengthen the parent child learning partnership and I will make an introduction on family orientated play. These will help me emphasize the special role of the parents in the learning process. I will end the paper with a presentation of the workshop and an assessment of its implementation.

The family orientated drama workshop was planned for Learning for Integration as part of their "Zmeisorii" project. Because the focus of the project is to support the Romanian language for children, the labour partner needed a special workshop to promote the family orientated activities which have as a scope the strengthening of the parents and children's learning partnership. The activities needed to have as a focus the communication between parents and children to support their mother tongue. Additionally, the labour partner solicited a set of fun and original drama games that could easily be played in the home environment.

## 2   Learning for integration

Learning for integration is a non-profit organization founded in Finland in 2012. Their mission is to support the integration of migrant, immigrant and refugee children and youth

into the Nordic society by promoting language learning and cultural sensitivity. This mission is planned to be achieved by the implementation of playgroups for pre-school children, language exchange groups, workshops about online learning possibilities and by creating a wide variety of free language learning material (Learning for Integration, 2017.).

The projects of Learning for Integration are coordinated by qualified professionals with a background in language teaching, philology and translation. Their expertise can be seen in the wide variety of activities they are involved in and by the extensive period of times some of these projects have been active.

Learning for Integration is coordinating two projects in Helsinki. One is "Zmeișorii", the Romanian playgroup and the other is Café Lingua. The latest one is an international and intercultural language exchange event that gathers about 50 to 70 participants each week. The event takes place every Monday from 7 pm in Café Mascot, in Hakaniemi and the aim is to get together people who want to practice their language skills in an informal environment with native and non-native speakers.

The learning for Integration's staff is also actively taking part in international projects as partners, coordinators, administrators and material creators. The Nordic-Baltic Café Lingua (2015-2017) is an international extension of the local project mentioned above. Language cafes are now organized in partner countries like Iceland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Demokleos project, financed by the European Union is a three-year project on rethinking the democratic awareness and collective responsibility in European schools. Other projects that Learning for Integration takes part in are CV Plus (2015-2017), Mobile Tech (2015-2017) and SupEFL (2015-2017) (LFI, 2017.).

Besides these projects, the NGO also organizes, upon request, workshops for teachers and trainers on running flash card activities and on using online tools for material creation. The translation service offered by Learning for Integration is another basic activity of the organization.

## 2.1 The "Zmeișorii" project

"Zmeișorii" is a Romanian playgroup for families with pre-school and school age children. The group began its activity in 2012. The aims of the group are to support the

learning of the children's mother tongue to create a good foundation for the learning of Finnish as a second language and to support the children's ethnic identity development from an early age. These aims are meant to support the children's vocabulary and communication through activities based on children's interests. These include free play, games, songs, stories, dance, drama and science experiments.

The playgroup is coordinated by volunteer parents with an educational background in childcare and language teaching and with extended experience in the work with bilingual children. The coordinators organize different activities where the focus is the communication and the practice of Romanian language. These activities are organized in themed workshops based on the children's interests.

The workshops are organized into two sessions a year, in the Spring and the Autumn. Each session has a total of eight workshops which take place every second Saturday in a community play park in Helsinki from 10.30 am to 12 pm. The location is free of charge since the group does not charge any money from the participants.

The group has its own song and its own identity, very well established in the Romanian community in Finland. The Romanian Embassy in Finland and Estonia is an active supporter and promoter of the activity of the group. Every year some of the "Zmeișorii" workshops have been organized at the embassy and the ambassadors and their families have been participating in the activities. This has contributed to the consolidation of the group's status in the community and among its members.

The group's activity has been financed by The Arts Promotion Finland (TAIKE) for the past years and the founds are given on yearly basis. These founds cover the cost of materials needed for the activities and a part of the work of the coordinators.

## 3 Mother tongue

The mother tongue, also known as "the first language you learn as a baby" (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2017) is one of the most important assets of a person. Is the first language you begin communicating in as a child and it defines the relationships you have with the people around you. A good support early enough in learning the mother tongue is paramount.

3.1    Mother tongue support in early childhood education in Finland

According to the Finnish National Board of Education (2017, p.11) special attention is given to the learning of the immigrant children's mother tongue, even though the main instruction is done in Finnish or Swedish. The school age children are entitled to participate in mother tongue classes, which are organized in the same school or in the area the child lives in, based on the number of children that speak the same language. Instruction in mother tongue alongside Finnish or Swedish needs to be done to reinforce the children's multicultural identity and create a strong foundation for functional bilingualism (Finnish National Board of Education, 2017, p.11).

Even though the children starting the age of 7 have support from school in developing their mother tongue, there is no support offered for them in early childhood education. The core principles of Early Childhood Education Curriculum (ECEC) in Finland include "the children's rights to warm personal relationships, to secured growth, development and learning and the right to their own culture, language, religion and beliefs, among many others" (STAKES, 2004, p.13).

Activities where the children's culture, language and beliefs are promoted are being organized in the Finnish day cares. Parents are invited to share food recipes from their own culture with the others or give their children artefacts to bring to school to show the other children. Surely these activities are valuable in making the children feel proud of their cultural heritage. However, there is no support given for the learning of their mother tongue. For this reason, the parents' role needs to become more active and to support the child's learning of mother tongue.

3.2    The role of mother tongue

To be able to have a complex view at the role of mother tongue in the children's development, it needs to be analysed from three perspectives. The first one is related to the bilingualism, the second one is viewed from the learning report with the second language and the third one is its contribution to the formation of ethnic identity.

### 3.2.1   Bilingual children

As seen above, the Finnish society is a multicultural one, where bilingualism is very common among its members. Bilingualism is the concept used to define the usage of at least two languages by an individual (ASHA, 2004). The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2004) divides bilingualism in two types. When the individual is exposed to two languages starting from birth then we can talk about simultaneous bilingualism. When the individual first learns a language and after this language is well founded he is exposed to a second language then the bilingualism is described as sequential. Usually the learning of a second language is done after the age of three (ASHA, 2004.).

This distinction between the types of bilingualism is useful to understand the dynamic between the mother tongue, usually known as the first language (L1) and the second language (L2), which could also be a mother tongue, depending of each individual case.

Sarah Shin (2005, p.15) questions the concept of bilingualism and raises viable questions regarding the language proficiency of L1 and L2 and the circumstances we can call a person bilingual. Shin (2005, p.15) argues that expecting an individual to be called full or balanced bilingual is a matter of idealisation.  There are only a small number of full bilinguals in that sense in the world (Bourgogne 2013, p.15-16). The way Bourgogne (2013, p.15-16) explains the limited number of fully bilinguals is that people usually use different languages in different circumstances, having separate purposes and needs for the two languages. She also concludes that bilingual could be called a person that uses two or more languages on the daily basis.

Along the years many bilingualism myths like language confusion and cross mixing have been developed. These types of myths still exist and are dangerous as parents are advised not to expose the children to L2 or to give up to L1 to avoid confusion (Guiberson, 2013, p.6). This phenomenon is common in America, where the minority population has lost the proficiency of their mother tongue because of assimilation. However, situations where parents do not speak their mother tongue with the children and choose to use English or Finnish with them happen in the Finnish society too. These situations have been observed in my over ten years' work experience as a kindergarten teacher with bilingual children in Finland.

Due to this reason is important to emphasize the role of the mother tongue in learning Finnish as a second language starting from a very early age. Further on, I will emphasize this role.

### 3.2.2 The role of mother tongue in learning the second language

In a complex examination of the dynamic relationship between mother tongue acquisition and the learning of the second language, Cummins (1981) concluded his research with the fact that a strong foundation of the mother tongue has a positive impact in the learning of the second language. However, he emphasizes that the quality of the language spoken to the children from birth is paramount in this process. He notifies that advising the parents to speak a non-fluent L2 with their children may result in poor communication between parents and children and their relationship could feel unnatural later in life (Cummins 1981.).

When the mother tongue is strong enough it makes the learning of the second language easier, when there is enough support for the later one. This is a result of cross-linguistic transfer, which makes it possible that linguistic skills to be transferred from one language to another (Cummins, 1981). This process is a clear asset that bilinguals have.

### 3.2.3 Towards the formation of ethnical identity

Language and ethnicity are so closely related that language is considered as defining element of the later concept (Extra and Yagmur, 2004, p.13). Fishman (1977) went so far as considering language the most important characteristic of the ethnic identity.

Even though the mother tongue has the main role in the emergence of ethnic identity, Tulasiewicz (2005, p.16) argues that the loss of it does not necessarily involve a complete loss of identity. The traditions and religion make it possible for the ethnic identity to be developed.

In the context of immigrant minority in a larger society, the perpetuation of the language from parents to children is strongly related to whether the language is considered a core value of the cultural identity (Extra and Yagmur, 2004, p. 1). This affirmation raises val-

ues related questions for entire nations around the world. If the language is not considered valuable by the emigrants, what can be done to rectify this situation? Engaging in family playgroup activities or joining community events could be reliable solutions to this problem. It could raise awareness among the minority community of the importance of the mother tongue.

## 4    The parent's role in the learning process

Raising bilingual children in a society where the mother tongue is the minority language can be a challenge for parents. Annika Bourgogne (2013, pp.18-21) talks about parents' necessity to make a plan that includes language learning goals and ways to support the goals regarding the children's language development. She mentions that parents need to be ready to put more effort as the level of the goals raises. The idea that children learn languages like sponges is true, if they are exposed to the language as much as possible, so being realistic when making a support language plan is paramount (Bourgogne, 2013, p. 21.). Parents cannot expect their children to speak fluently their mother tongue if they are not taking an active role in supporting the children's communication.

To achieve a high level of fluency in a language, the children need to be exposed to that language 30 % of their waking up time. For a child that would be approximately 25 hours a week (Bourgogne, 2013, p. 19.).

The Romanian parents, as main supporters of mother tongue development for their children, are the target group of the workshop. They are the ones that need to feel motivated to participate in the activities and become more active in supporting their children's mother tongue learning. Everything they introduce to the children becomes a learning experience. The children observe and learn from their parents to conceptualise and behave at a societal level (Natorp, 1974). The parents are the ones that guide the children's development by modelling behaviours especially in the first years of their lives. This is called social learning. Children learn through observing the people around them. This type of learning happens naturally and spontaneously (Forbes, 2009, p. 126.). So, in the relationship with their children, parents are the main source of learning for the children. This makes them the most essential pedagogues in their children's lives.

Looking at parents from this perspective, the skills of a social pedagogue could become important assets for them. These skills can be used by the parents to support the children

in learning their mother tongue, but also to strengthen their relationship. The social ped-agogue is defined by the action that he takes, action that needs to be guided by values and theory (Storo, 2013, p. 6). The parents' actions are influenced by their values, but they do not necessarily have the theoretical knowledge that is required from a social pedagogue. Aspects of socio-pedagogical practice could, however, be learned by the parents by participating in socio-pedagogical orientated activities with their children and by learning about core methods and concepts of this discipline which have been embed-ded in the activities.

The action the social pedagogue takes is an intervention in the client's life with the scope to build development, participation and learning (Madsen, 2006, p 220). Storo (2013, p 7-8) clarifies the term "intervention" as one that suggests active participation from the client, in our case, the child, and not passivity, like the definition of the word implies. This intervention in the parents' case is the active play with their children, the family quality time together where all the members engage in fun activities meant to support their re-lationship.

Further on, we will have a look at three socio-pedagogical methods and concepts that have been used in planning the drama workshop and which the parents can utilize as tools in supporting the children's language learning.

## 5 Socio-pedagogical tools

Social Pedagogy is a holistic discipline whose central activity is based on the *head, heart* and *hands* approach. The *head* symbolizes the pedagogue's understanding of why he needs to perform an intervention. The *heart* stands for the empathy the pedagogue shows towards the people he's working with and the *hand* is about the practical matters and the creativity he uses in his interventions (Boddy, 2009).

The Social Pedagogy is also a science which is constructed on the interconnection of three important pillars. These three pillars are the theory, the methods and the values. The theory is the knowledge a pedagogue needs to have, the methods are the ones that make possible the application of the theory into practice and the values represent the ground rule the pedagogue uses when working with clients (Madsen 2006.).

The socio-pedagogical concepts are the tools a pedagogue uses to develop a relationship with the client to create the necessary changes in his life that allows him to integrate him in the community. To be able do that "the client must be understood as part of a community" (Storø 2013, p. 38). These concepts can also be tools for parents in supporting the learning process of their own children.

5.1    Common Third

The Common Third is one of the underlying method of Social Pedagogy.  When the pedagogue and the child share an activity together, they develop their relationship. The shared activity is there for their meeting point, the common third (Lihme, 1988.). Lihme (1988) also reinforces the idea that the focus is not the pedagogue or the child but what they do together, the shared activity, as seen in the figure below.
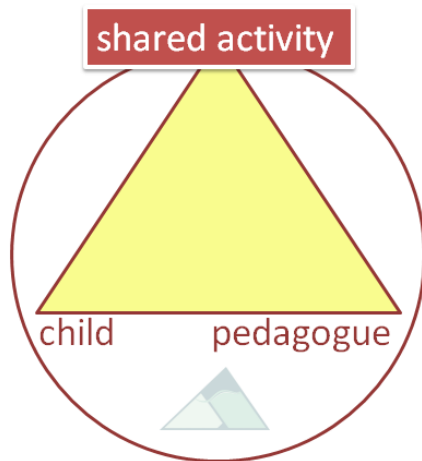


Fig. 1 The Common Third (Thempra 2017)

According to Thempra Social Pedagogy (2017), the practitioner needs to demonstrate a high level of genuineness and self -reflection when using the method of Common Third. He needs to be truly interested in the activity he does with the child. For the activity to have the expected outcome, the practitioner should involve the child in all the steps of the process. This process gives them opportunity of learning together from equal roles. The adult needs to show sensitivity to the child's needs and abilities for the child to be able to exercise his ability to engage in communication with others (Miller 2010, p.12).

The child and the adult are starting the shared activity with the intention of learning together. The Common Third method has a child-centred approach and is supposed to have the child's full participation in the activity through all the stages.  This ensures the child's equal role with the adult in the process. They become partners who learn from

each other or who learn something completely new together. The possibilities of shared activities are unlimited (Thempra Social Pedagogy, 2017.).

This socio-pedagogical method often used by professionals in the social field or in early years' education, can be successfully used by parents and children to enhance communication. Shaffer (1992) talks about the concept of *joint involvement episode* which has similar characteristics as the Common Third, meaning the adult and the child play together and focus on the same action or object. When they are involved in this type of action, the child gets a sense of security coming from the relationship with the adult Shaffer 1992).

When the parents and children focus on the same activity, not only it supports the child's participation but also it models the type of activities are worth undertaking and how they should be done. The way the adult communicates with the child during this joint activity has been found to enhance the child's access to the language resources and to have the cultural knowledge transferred to him through the language (Wells, 2017, p.61.) Wells (2017, p 61) also suggest that the best way to support a child's development is by teaching and learning with the use of dialogic inquiry where the intervention is done through spoken and written language, action and reflection.

This method can become an important tool for the parents in the process of supporting their child's mother tongue development. By engaging in shared activities with the children not only in the organized environment of the playgroup, but also in their everyday life can be an effective use of the method.

5.2   Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is another socio-pedagogical concept used in the drama workshop. This can be observed in the interaction between parents and children during the activities, which were designed to support their learning partnership.

The Zone of Proximal Development concept has been developed by the Russian psychologist Lev Semenovich Vygotsky at the beginning of the 20th century. Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) defined the term as "the distance between the actual development level as deter-

mined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peer". This means that ZPD is found between the child's actual level of development and the level that wants to be achieved thorough learning from interaction with adults or more experienced peers. This interaction, collaboration or partnership is the best way for children to learn and internalize new skills, concepts and psychological tools (Shabani 2010, p. 238.) The interaction, however, needs to be done skilfully, allowing the children the opportunity to make comments and to answer and respond questions (Miller, 2010, p.117).

Swartz (2001) suggests four different methods of supporting the children in their learning journey. It all begins with the children's motivation to learn and this can be enhanced by having an activity the children are genuinely interested in doing. The second method is about knowing what is the children's level of development. The way this is done is by engaging in dialogue with them, by observing their skills and by constantly reflecting on their behaviour. The third method Swartz proposes is the Common Third, this being a clear example these socio-pedagogical methods and concepts are deeply connected in the individuals' learning development. And the fourth part is about what kind of new skills or knowledge the children need to have to be able to lead a happy life (Swartz, 2001.). All these methods could be easily used by the parents in their everyday life to keep the children in a constant zone of proximal development regarding their mother tongue learning.

## 5.3   Learning Zone

The ZPD is also interconnected with the learning zone with whom it shares the same idea of identifying the potential learning opportunities for children in activities or in the everyday life. The latest concept is a model that helps pedagogues, teachers and parents, in this case, to plan learning experiences for children.

Fig. 2 Senninger's learning zone model (Thempra 2017)

As seen above, in fig 2., the learning zone model, which has been developed by the German adventure pedagogue Tom Senninger, contains 3 different areas. The first one is called the Comfort Zone and is represented by the knowledge and surroundings children are already familiar with. This area is important as it is their return place, where they can reflect and from where they can get to the Learning Zone. This area is the one where children learn and develop, where they discover new things and where their curiosity is sated. By going in this area, it helps the Comfort Zone to expand. The last of these zones is the Panic one, where the learning is shut down by fear. This is a place that should be avoided as it can have negative impact on the learning experiences due to their association with negative emotions. So, when inviting children to step aside their comfort zone to learn new things, a special attention needs to be given to not push them in the Panic Zone. This can be achieved through dialogue and continuous reflection (Thempra Social Pedagogy, 2017.).

## 6   Learning through play

Play represents the best way the children learn. Play helps the children develop their imagination, their language, their way of reasoning and their critical thinking. The children enjoy playing as it allows them to experiment without the fear of failure (Forbes, 2009, p.223.). The play can be either spontaneous or planned, but often they are interrelated, as a planned play activity might lead to spontaneous learning (Forbes, 2009, p.223).

The children's whole universe is about playing. It is a natural activity of early childhood. For children, there is no distinction between learning and play (Butler, 2008.). These two activities are interconnected. The adult needs to keep in mind this statement when has the intention to provide a learning experience for the children. The learning experience needs to take place in the child's universe and that is through play.

Play can take different forms. It can be active, including running, jumping or swimming, it can be quiet with activities like drawing and colouring or collaborative and social, where the child plays with others. Other types of play include: solitary play, manipulative play, creative play and dramatic play (Butler, 2008.). The parents, as facilitators of learning, can join their children in the types of play that support communication.

The drama workshop is bringing together several types of play, making the learning experience a holistic one. The activities of the workshop are about dramatic and creative play but as well as collaborative and social play as they require interaction between parents and children.

## 7    The workshop

After a discussion with the Zmeișorii playgroup coordinators about what would be the best way to promote the activities for the whole family, the conclusion was that creating a single workshop that would focus on the whole family was the best approach. The workshop where all the activities had as an objective the collaboration between the family members was preceded and followed by social media material that would support the idea of partnership between parents and children.

### 7.1    The planning process

The playgroup coordinators were receptive to the suggestion of having a social-pedagogical focused workshop which would support the learning partnership between parents and children. A discussion on the methods was done before planning the workshop. As mentioned before, a focus on the communication was required for the activities, supporting the mother tongue being the playgroup's aim.

The workshop was planned two months before its implementation and it was done in collaboration with the coordinators of the group. The idea of using drama as a topic to

promote activities based on socio-pedagogical methods came from the children's inter-
ests. Many of them were participating in drama clubs and they took part with enthusiasm
in the drama related activities organized in the past for the playgroup.

The planning phase included two face to face meetings with the playgroups' coordina-
tors, several Skype conferences and the use of OneNote as a working space to develop
the workshop. After the preliminary meeting, a thorough research on family drama games
and on socio- pedagogical methods was made. After a familiarization with these two
topics, the brainstorming phase began. This part of the planning process took quite a
long time, as the intention was not to use any of the materials available already, but to
use them as an inspiration to create a whole new set of drama activities for the playgroup.
The result was the creation of three warming up games for the circle time which were
meant to familiarize the participants with the ways of expressing themselves though the-
atrical techniques and a main activity that would give them the chance to use the learned
skills in a performance with the whole family.

After deciding on the games and activities, a discussion about the materials needed for
the games followed. For one of the warming up games and for the main activity a set of
cards was created (Appendix 4 and 6). These materials were made available for the
families to print and use after the workshop too.

Because the workshop included several activities that needed support from all the coor-
dinators, a division of labour and responsibilities was made for the implementation time.
this was recorded in the workshop's planning sheet, available for all the coordinators in
the OneNote space (Appendix 1).

The focus of the workshop was to get the parents familiar with activities that included the
socio-pedagogical methods. In the planning phase, the coordinators decided to begin
promoting this type of activities and articles before the implementation of the workshop
on the playgroup's Facebook page. For after the workshop, an A4 poster/ fridge magnet
with the Common Third symbol and ideas of activities based on it was created and
shared on the Facebook page (Appendix 2). The purpose for this was for each family to
print it and place it in their house as a reminder of how important the activities done
together are.

7.2    The implementation

The workshop took place on the 1st of April 2017 and had a total of 8 participating families and two coordinators. The workshop was divided into three parts: the circle (Appendix 3), the main activity (Appendix 5) and the evaluation (Appendix 7). The workshop began by asking every family members to sit next to each other in the circle time. The circle began with everyone singing the "Zmeișori" song and clapping their names. This is the routine that every workshop starts with and the objective is to familiarize everyone with all the participants' names. An introduction of drama as a way of expressing was made. The participants were announced the daily schedule and were introduced to the three warming up games that had as objective to familiarize them with several techniques that would help them perform their parts during the main activity.

The first game was about using the voice as a tool to express themselves. Each family was asked to get together and decide on a sound they would like to make together. The sound could've been from an animal or an action (door opening). They presented the sound to the group and the other families had to guess which sound was.

The second game was called "Pass the emotion" (Appendix 4). A member of each family pulled a card which contained a situation and an emotion that matched the situation. Each family showed the emotion with their faces and the other families guessed it. After that, they read the card out loud.

The third game was about using body language as a way of expression. For this, a Romanian version for small groups of the "Simon says" game was played. The Romanian version of the game was called "Paul spune" and the actions were intended to promote cooperation between the family members (play tennis, hug each other, pick up apples).

For the main activity, the participants played the game "Continue the story" (Appendix 6). They selected a card that contained the first sentence of a story. As a family, the participants had to negotiate and decide how to continue the story. They had to write a short script, decided the roles and choose the props and the costumes they needed. For this part, they were asked to use their imagination and make use of any materials available around them. The aims of this task were to encourage the outside the box thinking and not feel constrained by the lack of perfect costumes. This would have as an effect the use of their creativity. The families practiced their plays until all the members of the

family knew their own role. When they were ready, they performed in front of the other participants. To ensure the emphasis on the parents' role during the activity, the tasks above were written shortly on the back of each card and were also told out loud by the coordinator at the beginning of the game.

The third part of the workshop was the evaluation. This was made by splitting the participants into two groups: parents and children. The children were asked to draw or write on an evaluation form their thoughts and the parents and one of the coordinators discussed about the workshop. The key points of this assessment will be presented further on in the paper.

## 7.3    The assessment

Already in the planning phase of the project, it was decided that for the assessment part, both parents and children will be asked for their opinions on the workshop. This was another way to support the learning partnership and emphasize the equal rights in speaking their own voices. The coordinator's personal reflection on the workshop will also be presented to create a holistic view on the process.

### 7.3.1    The parents' voice

The general reaction to the workshop was positive, most of the parents showing excitement during the activities. Even though some of them seemed quite uncomfortable while performing, during the discussion they said they enjoyed it very much. More insight on the workshop can be observed from the photo collage attached to the thesis (Appendix 10).

For the discussion with the parents a set of questions was created to ensure its progress. They were asked to say things they most or least enjoyed during the workshop. The parents had appraising words for each of the activities and no one expressed any negative opinions about them. One family said they liked to see this kind of activities happening because it creates a sense of community. They took part in similar activities in a Waldorf kindergarten when they were leaving in Romania. They said in that institution, the aim of the family orientated activities was to give ideas to the parents on how to continue the learning at home. This goal is the same to this drama workshop's.

One of the parents underlined the importance of both parents having similar intentions regarding their involvement in child-centred activities. She also talked about how important is for the parents to listen to their children and see what they are interested in. Their role in that case would be to support the child, no matter if they are or not interested themselves in that activity.

The parents shared with the others what kind of family activities they do at home. There were many ideas coming through and the conclusion was that no matter what you do, it is important for the whole family to come together and do something everyone enjoys. For the future, the parents would like to take part in more family activities in the playgroup. They suggested to organize similar type of interactive and fun activities and to do more things outdoor or in other locations e.g. trips to museums.

### 7.3.2   The children's voice

The children, same as their parents, seemed to enjoy the activities. They expressed their ideas during the activities and performed very well their parts. Their giggles and joy were inspiring to all the adult participants.

The form the children filled in was divided into two sections (Appendix 8). In the first section, the children were asked to write or draw what they liked most at the workshop and in the second one what they would like to do in the future with the parents at the playgroup. They all agreed the workshop was fun and they would like to play more games, build with Legos and plant something with the parents.

The parents also saw the children's drawings (Appendix 9), which was eye opening for them as they showed how much the children appreciated the time they spend with their parents. One of the parents said she thought their family's drama performance didn't go so well, but noticed that it was her daughter's favourite part of the workshop.

### 7.3.3   Self-assessment

The topic of this thesis is very dear to my heart as it combines my love for my mother tongue, my newly gained knowledge on social pedagogy and the immense wish to make a change in the lives of young Romanian speaking generation regarding their language learning. These aspects have become my motivation in pursuing the idea of involving

the parents in the learning process and making it more about them and the children, my role becoming one of a facilitator. However, this enthusiasm and attachment to the target group could also be a downside when organizing the workshop, as I was not able to see the negative aspects of the whole process.

Taking a stand back and reflecting on the project, without feelings involved, I can see the parents' role could have been emphasized more during the workshop. If the workshop would be realized in a different environment, a special attention would have needed to be given to this aspect. I would also recommend a series of materials regarding the social pedagogy and activities with these methods to be talked though before the actual workshop. They could also be shared in the parents' social media group or via email. This way the parents would have even a clearer idea how they could support their children's during the activity.

Another aspect that could be taken into consideration was the fact that I was a facilitator but I also took part in the activities with my own family. This double role has a positive aspect, as it showed my full involvement in the workshop and it creates a team spirit with the other participants, but also a negative side, as it took away from the time I could observe the families during their preparation time. A better assessment of their drama preparation process could have been done.

Working closely with other coordinators for the "Zmeisori" playgroup gave me a chance to practice my team player skills, communication and negotiation skills. I appreciate the freedom I was given by my collaborators in planning and implementing the drama workshop. Even though the writing of the thesis was an individual task, the implementation of the workshop was very much a team orientated one. This contributed to the success of the workshop and to my professional growth nevertheless.

Planning an entire workshop based on the collaboration between parents and children was a premiere for the "Zmeisori" playgroup. Certainly, there have been similar activities in every workshop in the past, but not to this extend. I personally see this workshop as statement workshop, the starting point of a campaign dedicated to the promotion of activities done by parents and children in their everyday life. My next goal is to raise awareness among the Romanian community in Finland about the parents' paramount role in the children's learning of mother tongue. This will be done through material created for

the campaign and by posting ideas of activities on social media and on the group's web-site. In this future challenge, I am planning to involve as well the parents by encouraging them to share their own experiences and ideas about the mother tongue learning and how they support it.

7.4    Ethical considerations

Young children and their families represent a sensitive group, so the ethical aspects had to be considered when planning and implementing the workshop. Raising children and the parents' role in supporting the growth of the children are as well delicate matters. A special attention was given to the way the parents were involved in the workshop and to the way the information was passed to them. Any form of disrespect was put aside and instead, the focus was put on their own skills and strengths. The purpose of the workshop was to give the parents support regarding the learning partnership they have with their children. By involving them in the discussion and in the planning of future activities for the whole family for the playgroup, was an efficient way to support them in their relation-ship.

The parents were let know the workshop and the discussion will be used as material for writing this bachelor thesis. In the thesis, their identities are not revealed and the photos published include only persons that have given the consent for their publication.

The children's role was also taken into consideration. A special emphasis was put on the equal role between parents and children in planning and performing the drama play. This was an important aspect of the partnership between them. The same support aim was thought through regarding the children. Their voices are the most important when it re-gards matters that concerns them. In the workshop, the children's interests were taken into consideration and their wishes for future activities were appreciated.

## 8    Discussion

The process of writing the thesis has been long and challenging. I began shaping the topic already at the beginning of the year. This process took very long, as my initial in-tention was to create a whole package of documents about the organization of a family playgroup. The package would have included everything needed to establish a playgroup like Zmeișorii: planned workshops, registration forms, hints on how to rent/ book a venue,

and all the objectives and principles behind the group. This project proved to be too demanding and after a discussion with the thesis coordinator and the working life partner, I have decided to organize a drama workshop based on socio-pedagogical methods.

The planning process brought up new ideas like the creation of materials, which was a great addition to the workshop and it proved to be the starting point of a new project for the Zmeișorii playgroup. Photos of the materials have been shared on the social media after the workshop. The play group's coordinators have received several requests of purchasing them from Romanian teachers around the world. This ignited the idea of creating more educational materials for supporting the teaching of the Romanian language. Since the workshop, the coordinators have managed to create several working sheets, educational posters and other materials that will soon be available for purchase on the play group's website.

The workshop's activities done with the whole family have been praised by several Romanian parents and teachers from diaspora. A Romanian teacher from Dubai has contacted the playgroup's coordinators after seeing photos from the workshop on social media. She expressed her wish to organize a similar play group there, using similar methods as the Zmeișorii playgroup. The same wish was made by another Romanian parent living in Switzerland. Therefore, the playgroup's coordinators have decided to apply for funds at the Romanian Ministry of Romanians from Diaspora to organize similar playgroups in other communities around the world.

The core idea of the workshop, the one of the parent's role in the child's mother tongue learning, had reached high levels in the Romanian community in Finland. In September 2017 at the Romanian Embassy in Helsinki, I had the chance to take part in a discussion regarding the methods of supporting the children's learning of Romanian language with Andreea Pastarnac, the Minister of Romanians from diaspora, the Romanian ambassador in Finland and other members of the Romanian community from Finland. During this discussion, the parents' role in supporting the children's mother tongue has been the centre of the dialogue. There I had the opportunity to promote the playgroup's activities based on socio-pedagogical methods which get the parents actively involved in the children's language learning process. Together with the other participants, we underlined the necessity of a social campaign that would motivate and inform the parents of the benefits of speaking their mother tongue with the children and of methods to support their learning. The participation to this event has been a great opportunity for me as a

professional. The fact that I had the chance to discuss my thesis core principles with decision making Romanian personalities brings me the hope that the wish of making a change regarding the learning of mother tongue by the Romanian children who live abroad might not be just a dream.

Writing this thesis was great opportunity for me to get familiar with literature regarding bilingualism. Combining this new knowledge with the socio-pedagogical methods I have learned about during my studies, proved to be a beneficial experience for my professional development. The whole thesis process has taught me that an idea is not everything. Making your idea clear for everyone to understand could be more difficult than one might think of. Writing the thesis alone did not help either, as I lacked a continuous second perspective from someone as involved as me in the writing process. However, from this experience I learned that self- reflection, reading related literature and good communication with the working life partner can help greatly.

## 9   Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to create a drama workshop which would include activities based on socio-pedagogical methods and to underline the important role of parents in their children's mother tongue learning. The choice of socio-pedagogical methods as a theoretical framework for the thesis was not randomly made. These methods and concepts represent the core of early childhood education pedagogy and the thesis being about parents supporting the children's learning, it was only natural to combine them, for a better underlining of the parent's role.

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is one of the oldest principals of teaching. Every educator is familiar with this theory as part of their profession, including myself. This theory as well as the Learning Zone have been the guiding path when selecting and implementing the activities during the workshop. As mentioned above, in chapter 5, these concepts presume a good knowledge of the children's level of development by their parents as well as an understanding of the reasons why the child cannot be pushed in the panic zone during the learning process. In the Romanian culture, often the parents have high expectations and demands from their children regarding their education. Information regarding these socio-pedagogical concepts and how they can influence the child's emotional development is important to be passed to the Romanian parents. Articles or simple posters like the one made for the Common Third could be made and shared with them.

During the workshop, the way the concepts of ZDP and Learning Zone have been implemented was by putting a special emphasis on discussing and making decisions together as a family. Verbal support and guidance has been provided for the participants during the whole process.

The Common Third was a fun and interactive method to use in the workshop. The participants enjoyed taking part in the activities and proved to be the best way to support their learning partnership. The fridge magnet /poster made for them to use after the workshop was meant to work as an everyday reminder of the parents' necessity to get involved in activities with the children to support their language learning.

Overall, the workshop proved to be the statement that was hoped to be. The activities done with the parents are defining the playgroup's identity and they are the ones that continue to make the playgroup known in the Romanian community. Promoting fun and learning as a package, can raise the interest of children and parents.

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# Drama Workshop- planning sheet

Date: 1.04.2017

Number of participants: 8 families

Objectives:  Learning new words and expressions in Romanian through drama games

Supporting the parents' participation in the activities

The structure

| The parts of the workshop | Coordinator | Content | Materials | Duration | Observations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The circle | Miki & Bianca | 1. „Zmeisorii" song and clapping the names 2. Introducing the topic 3. „Make a sound„ warm up game 4. „Pass the emotion" warm up game 5. „Simon says „ warm up game | Emotion cards | 25 min. | |
| Main activity | Miki | „Continue the story" game | „Continue the story" cards, costumes, props | 20 min prepation time and 20 min performance time | |
| The evaluation session | Miki & Bianca | 1. Children's group fill in the feedback form 2. Discussion with parents about the workshop | Feedback forms | 20 min. | |

# Circle planning sheet

| | |
|---|---|
| Duration: | 25 min |
| Objectives: | Getting familiar with different theatre techniques that facilitate expression (voice, facial expressions, body language)<br>supporting the participation of all family members in the activities |
| Resources: | "Pass the emotion" cards |
| The circle: | 1. Introducing the topic – What is drama? Type of art, wehere actors express themselves through voice, face, body language, costumes, props.<br>2. Talking about voice and sounds. „Make a sound „ warm up game. Each family chooses a sound they would like to make and the other families need to guess it. (police car, door opening, animal sounds etc).<br>3. Talking about emotions and facial expressions (fear, joy, boredom, sadness, anger). „Pass the emotion" warmup game. Each family takes a card and they have to mimic the emotion written on the card.The other families need to guess the emotion. After that the family reads the situation on the card.<br>4. „Simon says" Warm up game. the families get together and make the movements told by the coordinator ( playing football, picking up apples, hugging) (Miki) |
| Key words | Voice, emotions, facial expressions, body language |
| Evaluation: | All the families took part in the sessions. There were giggles and laughs through the circle time, this being a sign of fun and joy. |
| Next steps: | Prepare more interactive games for circle time in the future. |

**PASS THE EMOTION**

**ZMEIȘORII**
www.zmeisorii.ro

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PASS THE EMOTION

You receive
a present.

JOY

**ZMEIȘORII**
www.zmeisorii.ro

---

PASS THE EMOTION

You drop your
icecream cone.

ANGER

**ZMEIȘORII**
www.zmeisorii.ro

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PASS THE EMOTION

You hear a thief
at the door.

FEAR

**ZMEIȘORII**
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You are watching
a funny movie.

HAPPINESS

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You just
missed the bus.

DISAPPOINTMENT

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You are getting
ready to jump with
the parachute.

FEAR

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You lost
your favorite toy.

SADNESS

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You run into a wolf.

FEAR

ZMEISORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You run into a
walking carrot.

SURPRISE

ZMEISORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You don't have
anything to do.

BOREDOM

ZMEISORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You find a baby bird
with a broken wing.

PITY

ZMEISORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You give
a big hig to mum.

LOVE

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You eat a bite
of a rotten apple.

DISGUST

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You get a snowball
in the face.

ANGER

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

PASS THE EMOTION

You find many gifts
under the
Christmas tree.

SURPRISE

ZMEIŞORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

## Main activity – „Continue the story"
## Planning sheet

| | |
|---|---|
| Duration: | 40 min, 20 min preparation and 20 min performance |
| Objectives: | Supporting the participation and colaboration between family members in putting together a short play<br>Learning new words and expressions in Romanian<br>Performing the family play in front of the other participants |
| Materials: | Story cards, costumes, props, blank paper, props |
| The activity | Continue the story - a game for the whole family<br>The rules of the game:<br><br>Each family picks up a card that contains the first phrase of a story.<br>The members of the family discuss and decide together on how to continue the story.<br>They prepare a short play with a duration of max. 5 minutes.<br>All the family members need to have a role in the play.<br>Any costumes, accessories, clothes or objects at hand can be used as props.<br>Rehearse the play until every family member knows the role.<br>Present the play to the other families that are present.<br><br>Have fun!!! |
| Keywords: | drama play, props, script, collaboration |
| Evaluation: | The families showed collaboration during the preparation phase. The children were involved through the whole process. The plays were fun and all family members took part. The children spoke loud and clear. |
| Next steps: | We will organize more often collaboration games for the whole family. |

**CONTINUE THE STORY**

www.zmeisorii.ro

**CONTINUE THE STORY**

Once upon a time, there was a family of dwarfs that lived in a forest...

www.zmeisorii.ro

**CONTINUE THE STORY**

Once upon a time, there was a family of mice that were getting ready for a party...

www.zmeisorii.ro

**CONTINUE THE STORY**

Once upon a time, there was a child who found a magic stick...

www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was an old man who had a magic cat...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a baby bird who was afraid to fly...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a baby rabbit who did not like carrots...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a gingerbread house ...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro
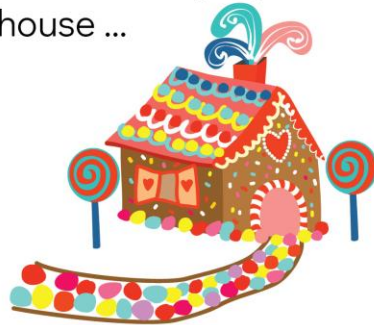
CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a child that lived in the country where there were no fruits...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a family that lived in a space ship...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a child who had a mean colleague....

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

CONTINUE THE STORY

Once upon a time, there was a family that wanted to save the world...

ZMEIȘORII
www.zmeisorii.ro

Continue the story - a game for the whole family

The rules of the game:
- Each family picks up a card that contains the first phrase of a story.
- The members of the family discuss and decide together on how to continue the story.
- They prepare a short play with a duration of max. 5 minutes.
- All the family members need to have a role in the play.
- Any costumes, accessories, clothes or objects at hand can be used as props.
- Rehearse the play until every family member knows the role.
- Present the play to the other families that are present.

Have fun!!!

Continue the story - a game for the whole family

The rules of the game:
- Each family picks up a card that contains the first phrase of a story.
- The members of the family discuss and decide together on how to continue the story.
- They prepare a short play with a duration of max. 5 minutes.
- All the family members need to have a role in the play.
- Any costumes, accessories, clothes or objects at hand can be used as props.
- Rehearse the play until every family member knows the role.
- Present the play to the other families that are present.

Have fun!!!

Continue the story - a game for the whole family

The rules of the game:
- Each family picks up a card that contains the first phrase of a story.
- The members of the family discuss and decide together on how to continue the story.
- They prepare a short play with a duration of max. 5 minutes.
- All the family members need to have a role in the play.
- Any costumes, accessories, clothes or objects at hand can be used as props.
- Rehearse the play until every family member knows the role.
- Present the play to the other families that are present.

Have fun!!!

Continue the story - a game for the whole family

The rules of the game:
- Each family picks up a card that contains the first phrase of a story.
- The members of the family discuss and decide together on how to continue the story.
- They prepare a short play with a duration of max. 5 minutes.
- All the family members need to have a role in the play.
- Any costumes, accessories, clothes or objects at hand can be used as props.
- Rehearse the play until every family member knows the role.
- Present the play to the other families that are present.

Have fun!!!

Feedback session
Planning sheet

| Duration: | 20 min |
|---|---|
| Objectives: | Evaluating the workshop |
| Materials: | Feedback form, pencils |
| The activity | The participants will be splint into two groups. Bianca will take the children to fill in the feedback form and Miki will have a discussion with the parents in the other room. The parents will share their opinion about the workshop, and share some of the activities they do with the whole family at home. They will also suggest similar activities to do for the future at the playgroup |
| Keywords | activities, drama, feedback |
| Evaluation: | Most of the parents took part in the discussion. They shared their experiences and thought about whole family activities. |
| Next steps: | Plan and implement the parents' activity suggestions. Promote whole family activities through the playgroup's Facebook page. |

**"THEATER IN THE FAMILY" WORKSHOP** ZMEIŞORII

## What I loved the most in today's workshop....

## What I would like to do together with my family....

My name:

Teatrul mi-a plăcut fiindcă a fost amuzant și distractive. Plus că a fost foarte amuzant. HA HA HA HA

Împreună cu familia, mi-ar plăcea să mai fac...

Jocuri și să construiesc.

ATELIERUL DE TEATRU ÎN FAMILIE   ZMEISORI

La atelierul de astăzi, cel mai mult mi-a plăcut...

TOTUL

Împreună cu familia, mi-ar plăcea să mai fac...

Numele meu: MA...

Împreună cu familia, mi-ar plăcea să mai fac...

ATELIR DE PLANTE