The Cycle of Creative Resources

The creative process and creative well-being from the perspective of picturebook illustrators

Laura Valojärvi
The Cycle of Creative Resources

The creative process and creative well-being from the perspective of picturebook illustrators

Laura Valojärvi
Author
Laura Valojärvi

Name of the doctoral dissertation
The Cycle of Creative Resources: The creative process and creative well-being from the perspective of picturebook illustrators

Publisher School of Arts, Design and Architecture
Unit Department of Media
Series Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 39/2021
Field of research Visual Communication Design
Date of the defence 21 April 2021
Language English

Absolutely acknowledge the complex nature of creative personalities and show empirical evidence for an association between creativity and mood disorders. Yet, there has been surprisingly little discussion of creative professionals who have lost their work motivation and creative spark. A critical discussion of this phenomenon is often reduced instead to conversations focusing on some variation of the idea that the unifying characteristic of creative people is that they all love what they do. This perspective does not reflect the reality of the working lives of creative professionals and ignores those creative individuals who have lost their passion for their creative work. In the studies presented in this thesis, I focus on addressing this gap and attempt to provide a more in-depth understanding of the creative process.

This thesis examines creative well-being and the complexity of the creative process from the perspective of picturebook illustrators. The methodological basis of the thesis is a qualitative approach called grounded theory. The term "grounded" refers to the idea that the theory emerging from the research is grounded in data, instead of having its basis in a particular theoretical framework. I collected the research data by documenting my own picturebook illustration process and by conducting narrative interviews with eight Finnish picturebook illustrators. Initially, my aim with the thesis was to gain a better understanding of the creative process of illustrating a picturebook. I started by trying to answer the question: what is the creative process of illustrating a picturebook? However, the more I examined my data, the clearer it became that it suggested a new kind of theory about the work-related well-being of creative professionals in general. Consequently, I ended up posing and answering two further questions: what are the main elements of creative resources, and what are the main factors contributing to creative well-being?

This interdisciplinary investigation draws not only on studies of the picturebook illustration process, but also on research on creativity and creative processes in general. It concludes by providing two visual models that have emerged from the studies presented in this thesis. The first – the Picturebook Illustration Model – presents the four-stage process followed when illustrating picturebooks. The second – the Cycle of Creative Resources – proposes that creative well-being could be observed as a cycle of six states of creative resources that have been identified in this thesis. Where on the Cycle of Creative Resources a creative professional finds herself has a direct impact on how fulfilling or draining she experiences the creative process. This thesis suggests a new way to approach, achieve, and sustain creative well-being. It concludes by proposing that creativity in itself does not increase or diminish in a person – it is always there, ready to be used and explored. What increases or decreases are the creative resources. This, I propose, is at the core of creative well-being.

Keywords Creativity, well-being, creative process, picturebook, illustration, practice-led research

ISBN (printed) 978-952-64-0311-3 ISBN (pdf) 978-952-64-0312-0
ISSN (printed) 1799-4934 ISSN (pdf) 1799-4942
Location of publisher Helsinki Location of printing Helsinki Year 2021
Tekijä
Laura Valojärvi

Väitöskirjan nimi
Luovien voimavarojen kehää: Luova prosessi ja luova hyvinvointi kirjankuvittajien näkökulmasta tarkasteltuna

Julkaisija
Taiteiden ja suunnittelun korkeakoulu

Yksikkö
Median laitos

Sarja
Aalto University publication series DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS 39/2021

Tutkimusala
Visuaalisen viestinnän muotoilu

Väitöspäivä
21.04.2021

Kieli
Englanti

Monografia
Artikkeliväitöskirja
Esseeväitöskirja

Tiivistelmä
Vaikka lukuisissa empiirisissä tutkimuksissa osoitetaan yhteys luovuuden ja mielialahäiriöiden välillä, tutkimustietoa luovan alan ammattilaisten hyvinvoinnista sekä työmotivaationsa ja luovuutensa menettäneistä luovan alan ammattilaisista on yllättävän haastava löytää. Aihetta käsittelevän kriittisen keskustelun korvaa usein ajatus: luovia yksilöitä yhdistää se, että he rakastavat sitä minkä parissa he ovat luovia. Nämä vaikuttaa luovan alan ammattilaisten todellisuutta ja sivuuuttaa ne toimijat, jotka ovat menettäneet intihamon luovaa työtään kohtaan. Väitöskirjassani pyrin luovan prosessin syvälliseen ymmärtämiseen ja selvitään, millä tavoin alan teoriaa olisi tältä osin mahdollista täydentää ja päivittää.


Avainsanat
Luovuus, hyvinvointi, luova prosessi, kuvakirja, kuvitus, käytäntölähtöinen tutkimus

ISBN (painettu) 978-952-64-0311-3 ISBN (pdf) 978-952-64-0312-0

ISSN (painettu) 1799-4934 ISSN (pdf) 1799-4942

Julkaisupaikka
Helsinki Painopaikka Helsinki Vuosi 2021

Sivumäärä
285

# Table of Contents

List of Images ......................................................................................... iii  
List of Figures ........................................................................................... v  
List of Tables ......................................................................................... vii  

Acknowledgements ................................................................................ ix  

1. Introduction .................................................................................... 1  
   1.1 Dissertation structure .......................................................................................... 3  
   1.2 Objectives ............................................................................................................ 4  
   1.2.1 A new theory about the well-being of creative professionals .................. 4  
   1.2.2 Reframing the discourse around picturebook illustration ...................... 6  
   1.3 Research questions ............................................................................................. 8  
   1.4 Key terminology .................................................................................................. 9  
   1.4.1 Creativity and the creative professional ................................................... 9  
   1.4.2 A picturebook illustrator ................................................................................. 11  
   1.4.3 A picturebook vs. picture book vs. storybook vs. children’s book .......... 13  

2. Theoretical foundation .................................................................. 17  
   2.1 Historical review ............................................................................................... 18  
   2.1.1 Purposes of illustration and early precursors ........................................ 18  
   2.1.2 Development of the discourse ...................................................................... 19  
   2.1.3 19th and 20th century - Golden age of picturebook illustration .......... 21  
   2.1.4 Globalization and the 21st century ............................................................. 23  
   2.2 Literature review .............................................................................................. 23  
   2.2.1 Creativity and the creative process .......................................................... 24  
   2.2.2 Picturebook illustration ................................................................................. 30  
   2.3 Summary ........................................................................................................... 37  

3. Research methodology ................................................................... 41  
   3.1 Qualitative research and grounded theory ................................................... 42  
   3.1.1 Understanding the process of illustration ............................................. 44  
   3.1.2 Interviewing professional illustrators ...................................................... 45  
   3.2 Summary ........................................................................................................... 49  

4. The creative process: a personal perspective ................................. 51  
   4.1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 52  
   4.1.1 My path as an illustrator ............................................................................. 54
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>4.2 Planning Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.2.1 Understanding the story and creating the vision of illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>4.2.2 My emotional landscape while planning the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.3 Creating the illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>4.3.1 In quest of effective illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>4.3.2 My emotional landscape while creating the illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>4.4 Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>5. The creative process: a professional perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>5.1.1 The interview process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>5.1.2 The interviewees and the question of anonymity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>123</td>
<td>5.2 Analysis of the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>5.2.1 Planning the picturebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>5.2.2 Creating the illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>146</td>
<td>5.2.3 Finalizing the picturebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>5.2.4 Post-process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172</td>
<td>5.2.5 The fascination of the picturebook illustration process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182</td>
<td>5.3 Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185</td>
<td>6. Emerging visual models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>6.1 Research implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186</td>
<td>6.2 Picturebook illustration process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188</td>
<td>6.2.1 Visual-verbal picturebook illustrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>192</td>
<td>6.2.2 The Picturebook Illustration Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>6.3 Creative resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208</td>
<td>6.4 Creative well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213</td>
<td>6.4.1 The Cycle of Creative Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>229</td>
<td>6.4.2 Navigating in the Cycle of Creative Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>238</td>
<td>6.5 Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>239</td>
<td>7. Conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>240</td>
<td>7.1 Answering research questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>242</td>
<td>7.2 Reliability and validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>244</td>
<td>7.3 Limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>7.4 Future research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>7.4.1 Creative well-being and the Cycle of Creative Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>246</td>
<td>7.4.2 The impact of artistically ambitious picturebooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248</td>
<td>7.5 Final words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>267</td>
<td>Appendices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Images


Image 4.1: *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, Mikkanen and Valojärvi (WSOY, 2013) ........................................... 52

Image 4.2: Process-reproduction setup for documenting the illustration process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .... 54


Image 4.6: The final version of spread number 11, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* ........................................... 58

Image 4.7: First page of the manuscript of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .................................................. 59

Image 4.8: The final version of the spread number 5, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* ........................................ 60

Image 4.9: Sketch of the spread number 5, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .................................................. 63

Image 4.10: Storyboard, part 1 of 2, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .............................................................. 67

Image 4.11: Storyboard, part 2 of 2, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .............................................................. 68

Image 4.12: Sketches for the spread number 7, from the storyboard of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .............. 70

Image 4.13: Excerpts from the sketching process of the spread number 7, part 1 of 2 .............................. 73

Image 4.14: Excerpts from the sketching process of the spread number 7, part 2 of 2 .............................. 74

Image 4.15: Book cover for *Prinsessa Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti*, Lehtinen and Valojärvi (WSOY, 2012) .... 77

Image 4.16: Sketch for the spread number 10 and the book cover of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* ................. 78

Image 4.17: The collage technique experiment with the spread number 1, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .......... 82

Image 4.18: Progress of the spread number 3, the sketch and the final painting, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* ...... 85

Image 4.19: Color-mapping for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* ................................................................. 87

Image 4.20: Excerpt photographs from the painting process of the spread number 7 .................................. 89

Image 4.21: Final illustration for the spread number 7, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .................................... 89

Image 4.22: Excerpt photographs from the painting process of the spread number 9 .............................. 91

Image 4.23: Final illustration for the spread number 9, *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .................................... 92

Image 4.24: Final cover illustration for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* .......................................................... 93

Image 4.25: Excerpt photographs from the painting process of the cover illustration ............................. 95
Image 5.2: Book covers by Sari Airola .................................................................................. 115
Image 5.3: Book covers by Linda Bondestam ........................................................................ 116
Image 5.4: Book covers by Liisa Kallio .................................................................................. 117
Image 5.5: Book covers by Katri Kirkkopelto ......................................................................... 118
Image 5.6: Book covers by Mika Launis ................................................................................ 119
Image 5.7: Book covers by Marika Maijala ............................................................................. 120
Image 5.8: Book covers by Salla Savolainen .......................................................................... 121
Image 5.9: Book covers by Virpi Talvitie .............................................................................. 122
Image 5.10: *Molli*, Kirkkopelto (Lasten Keskus, 2013) ........................................................... 129
Image 5.11: *Piki*, Kirkkopelto (Lasten Keskus, 2016) ............................................................. 129
Image 5.12: *Keinulauta*, Parvela and Talvitie (WSOY, 2006) .................................................. 134
Image 5.14: *Mia Tiu ja sata sanaa*, Airola (WSOY, 2006) ...................................................... 141
Image 5.15: *Miljoona biljoona joulupukkia*, Motai and Maijala (Schildts & Söderströms, 2016).......................................................................................................................................................................... 149
Image 5.16: *Pikku Papun värikäs sirkus*, Kallio (Tammi, 2019) ............................................. 159
Image 5.17: *Pikku Papun orkesteri*, Kallio (Tammi, 2016) ..................................................... 181
Image 5.18: *Kissa kissa kissa*, Korolainen and Talvitie (Lasten Keskus, 2013) ..................... 181
Image 7.1: *God and a man*, Valojärvi, V. (ca. 1978) .............................................................. 239
List of Figures

Figure 6.1: The Picturebook Illustration Model................................................................. 193
Figure 6.2: The Cycle of Creative Resources................................................................. 215
Figure 6.3: The state of creative mania in the Cycle of Creative Resources..................... 216
Figure 6.4: The state of creative flow in the Cycle of Creative Resources......................... 219
Figure 6.5: The state of creative stability in the Cycle of Creative Resources.................... 221
Figure 6.6: The state of creative anxiety in the Cycle of Creative Resources..................... 223
Figure 6.7: The state of creative melancholy in the Cycle of Creative Resources................ 225
Figure 6.8: The state of creative depression in the Cycle of Creative Resources................ 227
List of Tables

Table 2.1: Categories of picturebooks with word and image interaction, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) .......... 32
Table 5.1: Modified narrative interview model for artist-to-artist interviews ........................................................ 112
Table 5.2: Summary of the interviewees ................................................................................................................. 114
Table 5.3: Organization of the findings from the analysis of the narrative interviews ................................................. 124
Table 5.4: Findings related to stage 1 of the illustration process ........................................................................... 124
Table 5.5: Findings related to stage 2 of the illustration process ............................................................................ 140
Table 5.6: Findings related to stage 3 of the illustration process ............................................................................ 146
Table 5.7: Findings related to stage 4 of the illustration process ............................................................................ 155
Table 5.8: Findings related to the fascination of the picturebook illustration process .......................................... 172
Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have received a great deal of support and assistance from individuals whose assistance was a milestone in completing this project.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Masood Masoodian, for the support of my thesis and especially his continuous patience and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me in all the time of writing of this thesis and brought my work to a higher level. Besides my supervisor, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Associate Professor Sirke Happonen, whose expertise was invaluable in understanding the phenomenon of picturebooks better. Her insightful feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking throughout the process.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Professor Lily Díaz-Kommonen, the rest of the Doctoral Programme Committee and the programme of Visual Communication Design at Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture for believing in my topic. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Maria Lassén-Seger and Päivi-Maria Jaatinen for taking the time to evaluate my work, and for their insightful comments.

In addition, I wish to show my gratitude to Martin Salisbury, Marja Seliger, Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen, Arja Karhumaa, Maria Laukka, and Sonja Kniivilä for their comments and encouragement, and for the questions which helped me to widen my research from various perspectives.

I am grateful to the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Emil Aaltonen Foundation, and the Finnish Illustration Association for providing me the funds to conduct this research. Without their support, this project could not have reached its goal.

In particular, I am deeply grateful to the illustrators whom I had the privilege to interview as part of this thesis. So, thank you Sari Airola, Linda Bondestam, Liisa Kallio, Katri Kirkkopelto, Mika Launis, Marika Maijala, Salla Savolainen, and Virpi Talvitie for your participation. This thesis and its outcomes as they unfolded, would not exist without your contributions.

Finally, I could not have completed this dissertation without the support of my friends, who helped me to rest my mind outside of my research. I would like to give special thanks to Lana Gaardbo and Tanja Hidén for always being there for me. Frederik Jølving – thank you so much for taking the time to review the visual models and helping me to communicate the information in them more clearly.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family. Thank you, äiti and isä. Thank you Silja and Aino. Thank you Teemu, for patiently supporting me throughout writing this thesis. I dedicate this thesis to my children, Väinö and Fanni. Thank you for illuminating the world around you by simply existing.

Laura Valojärvi, Helsinki 23.3.2021
This is a story about a little girl, once upon a time, who loved, more than anything, drawing paper dolls. She was the type of girl who, after waking up, looked out of her window, hoping to see thick, grey clouds and drizzling rain. She was not looking forward to sunny days, because that meant she had to grab her swimsuit, a pile of Donald Ducks, and a towel and go to the beach with the rest of the family. Of course, there was nothing wrong about going to the beach, and surely there were countless happy moments during the sunny days as well, like, for example, digging her big sister into the mud and out of the mud. Nevertheless, the boring thing on the sunny days was that they took the girl away from her drawings and especially her paper dolls. And that was all she would have wanted to do in the first place. Draw, and draw, and draw, and while drawing, create stories. In fact, there would not have been any of the drawings or any of the paper dolls either without the stories, as the paper dolls and everything in their papery paper doll lives were the result of different types of needs in the stories.

There were two paper doll families – Rabelais and Molière – whose lives needed to be filled with all sorts of things, as if they were real – food, strollers, toilet paper, furniture, clothes, and people. The paper dolls had to have couches, so the little girl learned how to draw one. And another one. And another one, until she was happy with the result and her skills as a couch designer.

At the school of the daughter Rabelais, the needs were completely different. Obviously, there had to be best friends – typically, the most beautiful girls in the class. Also, there had to be the most handsome boys – the amazing, gorgeous boys that the little girl would never have dared to talk to in real-life, not to mention kissing. The kind of guys called something like “Sporty-Andy” or “Brian the Funny” with a great resemblance to some of the boys in the little girl’s school.

Sometimes the stories had surprising turning points, which led to the need for characters the little girl did not see coming in the first place. For instance, when the daughter Rabelais got bored with all of her beautiful best friends and ran off with a girl named Kikka, Kikka had to be drawn. The little girl loved this new, courageous friend of hers, who was living wildlife outdoors and whose ripped shirts were filled with inspiring power sentences. All this, until the sun came out.

Because as already mentioned, when the sun came out, the papers and pens were moved aside, and the little girl had to go outside, breathe fresh air, and do all those things that all the children should do on sunny days according to their parents. Luckily the little girl lived far, far away in the North – in a country where cloudy, rainy days were not that rare, quite the contrary. This meant several blissful days spent indoors with the stories and the new papery friends.
This thesis examines the complexity of the creative process from the perspective of picturebook illustrators. The starting point for the study lies in my personal experience of the creative process – I started making the thesis after noticing a lack of interest towards my own picturebook illustration practice. After working as a full-time picturebook illustrator for several years, I noticed cynicism growing within me, and found myself wondering why anybody would want to work as a picturebook illustrator, which, in my own experience, was not only an incredibly draining profession but also highly underpaid, undervalued and an uncertain one. I was curious to find out whether other illustrators – established professionals who had been creating picturebooks for several decades – had found a way to overcome the challenges of the creative practice and tap into a more positive and rewarding way of working. Was this manic-depressive roller-coaster between the highest of heights – the most rewarding flow experiences – and the lowest of lows – the extremely draining moments of self-doubt and anxiety – just my own inability to find balance as a creative professional?

In this thesis, my main focus will not be on picturebook as an artifact, or in the technical aspects of illustrating a picturebook. While analyzing the research material and aiming to understand the creative process of illustrating a picturebook better, I will make observations about the technical aspects of creating a picturebook as well – for instance, drawing a storyboard. However, the core purpose of this thesis is to understand the emotional landscape of the illustration profession better, and how this emotional landscape affects the creative process during the task of illustrating a picturebook.

The research material that I use in this thesis was collected through documenting my own illustration process, as well as observing and interviewing Finnish picturebook illustrators. The decision to focus on picturebook illustrators in this thesis was influenced by the academics Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén (2014: 10-11). They suggest that a researcher should always take advantage of, and make the best use of, what is already accessible and close to oneself – to stay with and within the positions and frames of one’s own practices. Therefore, I will observe the themes discussed in this thesis through the phenomenon of picturebook illustration, as it forms the basis and background for my professional expertise. However, one of the objectives of this thesis is to provide new knowledge and theory that could be applicable to other creative fields besides illustration as well.

### 1.1 Dissertation structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In Chapter 1, *Introduction*, I present the thesis background, objectives, research questions, and the key terminology used in this thesis. Next, in Chapter 2, *Theoretical Foundation*, I will give a short overview of picturebook illustration history and discuss related research and theory. In Chapter 3, *Research Methodology*, I present the methodological approach of this thesis and the methods used to collect and analyze its data.

In Chapter 4, *The Creative Process: A Personal Perspective*, I analyze my creative process while illustrating the picturebook *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* (Mikkanen and...

In Chapter 6, *Emerging Visual Models*, I bring together the findings from the process and interview analyses and present the research implications that I draw from my results. Here, I will also present the new theory developed as the result, depicting the evolving nature of the creative process. In Chapter 7, *Conclusions*, I will focus on answering the initially proposed research questions and summarize the implications of the findings of this thesis. In this chapter, I will also consider the reliability and validity of the thesis, as well as make suggestions for future research.

### 1.2 Objectives

#### 1.2.1 A new theory about the well-being of creative professionals

The main objective of this thesis is to increase our understanding of the picturebook illustration process and to unveil the aspects that impact how much illustrators manage to enjoy the creative process and their profession. Through the increased understanding of the nature of the picturebook illustration process, this thesis aims at creating a new theory about creative practice in general.

One of the things that got me interested in this subject was when after struggling to enjoy my illustration practice, I started noticing other suffering creative professionals around me – illustrators trying to cope with depression, art directors taking time off work due to stress symptoms, photographers turning into gardeners after failing to enjoy their creative profession anymore. Why did these incredibly talented people end up hating the creative practice they once had loved? Why was this source of happiness turned against them and, so it seemed, sucking the creativity out of them now, instead of fulfilling them? “I hate music”, a musician and a close friend of mine stated, just like I had started to hate creating illustrations.

A recent survey of health and well-being in the creative sector by Gillian W. Shorter, Siobhan O’Neill, Lisa McIlherron (2018) validates my observations presented above, in that it is exceedingly common among creative professionals to overexploit their creativity and end up feeling uninspired, blocked, and burned out in their creative practice. The numerous often-cited studies show that creative personalities have unusually high rates of psychopathology (see, e.g., Karlsson, 1970; Andreasen, 1977, 1987, 2008; Goertzel, Goertzel and Goertzel, 1978; Richards, Kinney, Lunde, Benet and Merzel, 1988; Jamison, 1989, 1993; Ludwig, 1994, 1995, 1998; Post, 1994; Sass, 1998; Kinney, Richards, Lowing, LeBlanc and Zimbali, 2001; Kyaga, Landén, Boman, Hultman, Långström and Lichtenstein, 2012; Reddy, Ukrani, India, and Ukrani, 2018). Shorter et al. (2018: 5) found that people working in the creative industries were almost three times more likely to suffer from mental health problems than the general population. The most commonly diagnosed disorders were anxiety and depression. Sixty percent of the creative workers who took part in the study spoke of having suicidal thoughts (Shorter et al., 2018: 5).

---

1 In this thesis, I will use quotation marks when I’m using my own translation of a book that I mention, and leave the quotation marks out, if the book has been translated to English.
According to the creativity researcher Kari Uusikylä (2012: 101) the arts and other creative fields have received relatively little attention from researchers, compared to testing creativity and problem-solving. Maybe because of this, some creativity theorists do not seem to fully acknowledge the complexity of the creative process from the perspective of the ones who work in the creative sector. For instance, the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihályi (1996: 240) argues that “creative persons differ from one another in various ways, but in one respect, they are unanimous: they all love what they do”. This relatively narrow perspective on creative persons is further discussed and endorsed by others (see, e.g., Sternberg and Kaufman, 2010: 480; Keong, 2013; Järvallehto and Järvallehto; 2019: 105). The creativity scholar Yew Kam Keong (2013: 2) writes: “Creative people love what they do. It is not the hope of achieving fame or amassing wealth that drives them: rather, it is the opportunity to do the things they love the most. They feel an inner glow that exudes a sense of happiness”. I propose that this perception should be re-examined critically from the perspective of creative professionals.

The art historian Päivi-Maria Jaatinen (2015: 31) has identified four major areas of research that seem to have special interest in the visual arts and well-being, apart from art therapy. These four areas are:

1. Research conducted mainly in the fields of health and social sciences. Most of this research can be considered as empirical case studies with the aim of linking art with possible positive outcomes.
2. Critical studies of cultural policy which argue especially against the relevance of the studies of the social impact of the arts.
3. Research – mainly in the fields of psychiatry and psychology – linking creativity with mental disorders.
4. Critical studies raising questions about the aforementioned connection and the methodology related to these studies.

Despite the increasing interest in understanding the connection between creativity and well-being, as Jaatinen (2015: 232) points out, the artistic process, specific mechanisms of a particular visual art form, or visual artworks themselves are rarely examined or analyzed in existing theoretical approaches. Furthermore, only few researchers have explored the question of the relevant theoretical frameworks (Jaatinen, 2015: 30). “The underlying belief of the research could be described as ‘art increases well-being’, without the need to examine what exactly is the problem for the artist to be solved in regard to well-being”, Jaatinen (2015: 232) notes. This corroborates with the above-mentioned observations about the existing creativity research. “The reflective knowledge of artists of the visual art practice should play a larger role in research”, Jaatinen (2015: 233) proposes.

Moreover, this thesis investigates not only what it is like to be a creative professional,
but more specifically, how to remain one without ending up feeling uninspired, blocked, or burned out during the creative process. Many professionals in the creative fields experience phases in their careers when their work becomes challenging for them to conduct, and they fail to enjoy the creative process. These phases can be extremely intense and agonizing, and lead the creative professionals to “hate” their work, instead of “loving” it. However, even when this hatred starts to manifest itself, the craving and the ability to create often remains. For people who do not work in the creative fields, this might be difficult to imagine and understand. Why a person who is following her calling, and who has managed to find a profession in the highly competitive creative fields, should fail to enjoy what she is doing?

Finding creative joy and creative self-expression can support mental health and help people manage negative emotions (see, e.g., Stucky and Nobel, 2010; Uusikylä, 2012). When a person is creating freely, she builds her own identity and can experience profound moments of happiness. According to Uusikylä (2012: 11), nobody becomes more creative on a “crash course”. Increasing creativity requires time and surroundings that allow creativity to take place, Uusikylä notes. By understanding the creative process better, and with the help of a new theory, I believe that it is possible to find ways to improve the working conditions and well-being of picturebook illustrators and other creative professionals.

1.2.2 Reframing the discourse around picturebook illustration

Picturebook illustrators encounter belittling and negative underlying attitudes about the amount of their work and their professional contribution. According to the illustration scholar Martin Salisbury (2004: 6) illustrating picturebooks is a profession that attracts more than its fair share of comments along the lines of “I could do that”. However, as he also notes, “what can appear effortless and spontaneous may turn out to be the tip of the iceberg in terms of the amount of work involved in drawing, designing, and conceptualizing”. This is something that many people do not seem to understand, often not even those who are part of the picturebook project teams, for example, people working in the publishing sector. The underlying, dismissive attitudes towards picturebook illustration is something that many illustrators recognize. In the eyes of the art world, picturebook illustration seems to be considered as a playground for wannabe artists, who are not real artists because they want money for what they do, but not actual designers either because they are not tough enough or smart enough to demand as much money for their work as they could. And also, because much of their work is targeted at children, who, for some reason, are not always considered as a significant audience as adults are.

One of the most respected picturebook authors and illustrators of our time, Maurice Sendak (quoted by Marcus, 2012: 205), has said: “I’ve been struggling with the constraints of being a children’s book illustrator/writer for years. The discomfort has nothing to do with my passion for children, but with grown-ups, there’s always the subtle implication that your work is not very important. That’s always plagued us in this business”. As this thesis has focused on the professional aspects of picturebook illustration,
the discussion about the appreciation towards the illustration art form cannot be ignored.

Children and their responses to picturebooks, their role as one possible target audience, and their assumed or proven expectations of picturebook illustrations are not central to this thesis, although these themes will be occasionally addressed and discussed\(^4\). According to Salisbury (2007: 6), there is much debate about what constitutes an “appropriate” visual diet for children. Different cultures seem to have widely divergent views and traditions on the matter, Salisbury notes. I have encountered several strange and underlying assumptions in the Finnish publishing houses about what kind of illustrations children like, want, or need the most. While working as a picturebook illustrator in Finland, it has been common for me to receive requests from the publishing editors to modify my illustrations based on the “fact” that “children like it better”. Usually, these have been wishes regarding the color palette in use or, for instance, the density of the outlines. “Children like bright colors”, I have been told. Another request was once “to add another color besides blue to the cover, because children like to have lots of colors”, while another publishing editor once emailed me: “We would really appreciate it if you could draw the characters with a black and solid outline because, you know, children like it”. These assumptions that I have confronted are typically based not on actual research but are in fact contradictory to some existing studies\(^5\).

However, this kind of aesthetic guidance – while often misunderstood – is in fact the reason we have to look at the illustrator’s work in an open-minded way, sustained by flexible judgments (Schwarcz, 1982: 7). The tendency to simplify picturebooks in order to make them “more suitable for children” or “less artistic” or “less radical” diminishes and limits the possibilities and potential that picturebook illustrators hold as visual artists, while also underestimating children’s visual reading skills without a valid reason. By doing so, the potential and possibilities of the picturebook itself are diminished and limited. In this thesis, the picturebook illustration is, primarily, valued as an art form in itself – regardless of the reader – with endless possibilities to sequentially convey and communicate ideas, information, thoughts, and emotions through visual means.

Positioning picturebook illustrators on the broad landscape of art, design, and literature has proven to be challenging for the representatives of media, the fine art world, audience and the commercial sector. Susan Doyle, Jaleen Grove, and Whitney Sherman (2018: 4) discuss in *History of Illustration* that this is due to the non-autonomous nature of illustration, “On the basis of its lack of autonomy, the fine art world has historically dismissed illustration”. It seems likely that the primacy of words over images is connected with these centuries-old attitudes and practices. With this thesis, I join the old, yet still ongoing, debate about the status of picturebook illustration and take the conversation further.

New research that is being carried out around the world about illustration as practice\(^6\), as well as the rising, proud attitude of many illustrators is starting to affect the whole scenery. According to the illustration scholar Alan Male (2017: 11), successful, forward-thinking illustrators no longer settle for operating the way many did in the

---

\(^4\) This topic will be discussed further in Section 1.5.3. Picturebook vs. picture book vs. story book vs. children’s book.

\(^5\) This topic will be discussed further in Section 2.2. Literature overview.

\(^6\) Some of these studies will be presented in Chapter 2.2. Literature overview.
past, and some still do – as merely “coloring in technicians”. The self-awareness of illustrators is starting to affect the way their unique knowledge is being valued and utilized. New research that sheds light on the creative illustration process can help the illustrators themselves – but also other people – to recognize, for instance, the visual-verbal potential of their work.

1.3 Research questions

With this thesis, I aim at building a new understanding of the picturebook illustration process and the well-being of creative professionals. The first research question is concerned with the picturebook illustration process in particular. The following two questions, on the other hand, will examine the creative process from a broader perspective, by focusing on identifying different elements of what will be defined as creative resources, and the creative well-being of creative professionals. My research questions are:

1. What is the creative process of illustrating a picturebook?
2. What are the main elements of creative resources?
3. What are the main factors contributing to creative well-being?

By answering the first research question – *What is the creative process of illustrating a picturebook?* – I aim at better understanding of the complex and ambivalent nature of the picturebook illustration process. The main focus of the studies presented in this thesis will be in mapping out the emotional landscape of the picturebook illustration process and how it affects the technical aspects of illustration.

Through an increased understanding of the picturebook illustration process, I aim at developing a new theory about creative processes in general. By answering the second research question – *What are the main elements of creative resources?* – I aim at identifying and defining, what I have termed, creative resources from the perspective of creative practitioners. Following this, by answering the third research question – *What are the main factors contributing to creative well-being?* – I aim at identifying the components that can help creative professionals to approach, achieve, and sustain work-related well-being.

This thesis is built on a qualitative methodological approach called grounded theory. Rather than having its basis in a particular pre-defined theoretical framework, the grounded theory begins by gathering data which the researcher then uses to develop a new theory on a particular issue (see, e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 274; Muratovski, 2015: 97). By observing my own illustration process, I will create the basis on which I continue the thesis through narrative interviews of professional illustrators. I take the first approach to better understand the picturebook illustration process, and the second approach to investigate how much my own process resembles that of others, in order to generalize the findings from the first approach. The methods used in this thesis will be presented in more detail in Chapter 3, Research Methodology.
1.4 Key terminology

1.4.1 Creativity and the creative professional

To be able to join and reframe existing research conversation about creative processes, “creativity” has to be defined first. In this section, I present the basis on which creativity will be approached in this thesis.

Pursuing creativity does not necessarily mean or require living a life that is professionally or exclusively devoted to the arts. Everyday creativity is a theme that has received a considerable amount of both public and academic attention in recent years. Over the past 50 years, research on creativity has merged the interest in creative persons with that of human dignity, out of which has emerged respect for everyday creativity (see, e.g., Runco and Richards, 1997; Runco and Albert, 2010: 16). “Creativity is not the preserved of an elite few. Creativity is what human brains do”, as the neuroscientist David Eagleman (2019) has said, or as defined by the intuition researcher Asta Raami (2016: 116): “Every human being is innately creative”. Fulfilling creative endeavors both at work, as well as in free time has immense benefits for the well-being of a human being. Several theorists and other authors devoted to examining creativity agree on the fact that everybody and anybody can be creative, regardless of their education, intelligence, or profession (Cameron, 1992; Uusikylä, 2012; Gilbert, 2015; Raami, 2016; Eagleman, 2019; Järvinen and Järvi, 2019). For instance, the author Elizabeth Gilbert (2015) considers “creative living” as living a life driven more strongly by curiosity than fear. Similarly, Raami (2016: 116) sees creative activity in everything where inspiration drives us forward. “Creativity is the ability to see connections and discern meaning”, Raami writes. According to the philosopher and academic Lauri Järvinen and the designer Paavo Järvi (2019: 6), creativity is observing the world from multiple angles simultaneously – to see options and to find new ways to use different things, to get ideas and execute them, and to use a different path than yesterday. I fully agree with Brené Brown (2016) – a researcher on shame, courage and vulnerability – when she argues that: “There are no such thing as non-creative people. There are just people who use their creativity and people who don’t”. Creativity is possible to anybody, and any work can be creative work.

According to Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 15), without creativity, it would be difficult to distinguish humans from apes. “We share 98 percent of our genetic makeup with chimpanzees. What makes us different – our language, values, artistic expression, scientific understanding, and technology – is the result of individual ingenuity that was recognized, rewarded, and transmitted through learning”. The different ways of making a home is a simple example of the “everyday creativity” of a human being that separates us from animals. The shape of a sparrow’s nest always resembles what is typical for the species, whereas the human homes come with various forms, colors, size, decoration, and ambiance. The human home is a unique reflection of the owner, with a brain capable of creative thinking. By its very nature, creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain or transforms an existing domain into a new one (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996: 77-78). As simply stated by the art critic Jerry Saltz (2020: 5):

7 Nevertheless, there are examples also in the world of omnithology, which might make the viewer question the theory suggested here: the male bowerbirds, for instance, are renowned for building highly unique structures and decorating them with sticks and color-coordinated objects – often blue – in an attempt to attract a mate.
“Creativity is what you do with your imagination”.

Gilbert’s (2009) observations about creativity from the perspective of ancient cultures provide an interesting alternative viewpoint to the subject that is often dictated by the modern Western ways to approach creativity. According to Gilbert, in ancient Greece and ancient Rome, creativity was not considered something that came from human beings. Instead, creativity was believed to be a divine attendant spirit that came to a person from some distant and unknowable source, for distant and unknowable reasons. Gilbert emphasizes how this “distance” as a psychological construct, would protect the artists from the results of their work – both in good and bad – but also, from too much narcissism, as well as excessive self-criticism. According to Gilbert, this is how people thought about creativity in the Western world for a long time. However, after the Renaissance, the mysticism was replaced with individualism, and the human being was put at the center of the universe, above the gods and mysteries. Through this “rational humanism”, people started to believe that creativity comes entirely from the self of the individual. This approach, Gilbert argues, tends to create unmanageable expectations about the creative performance, as well as too much responsibility to put on a “fragile, human psyche” (Gilbert, 2009).

The educational psychologists James Kaufman and Ronald Beghetto (2013: 12) discuss that while some instances of creativity occur every day, other instances of creativity redefine the way things are done, or even transform history. Most investigations of creativity tend to take one of the two directions: everyday creativity and eminent creativity (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009: 1). In an effort to broaden the concept, Kaufman and Beghetto developed a “more nuanced, developmental model”, which they call the “Four C Model of Creativity” (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009, 2013). This model suggests the following levels of creative expression:

1. mini-c – interpretive creativity.
2. little-c – everyday creativity.
3. Pro-C – expert creativity.

The first – the “mini-c” – level of creativity is inherent in the learning process, and defined as “the novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions, and events” (Beghetto and Kaufman, 2007). The second – the “little-c” – level can be found in nearly all people with contributions made by every day, while the third – the “Pro-C” – level is defined as individuals who are professional creators and experts in their field but have not reached the eminent status. The fourth – the “Big-C” – level of creativity focuses on “legendary”, eminence-levels of creativity, with lasting, transformational contributions (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009, 2013).

In this thesis, my focus will not be on examining creativity from the viewpoint of everybody or anybody, and the role that creativity plays in everyday life. Therefore, this thesis primarily taps into the Big-C and Pro-c dimensions of creativity. I will focus on understanding creativity from the perspective of creative professionals – those
employed for the extraction of skills in creative endeavors.

It is typical for some creativity studies to define creative professions in both scientific and artistic fields. In this thesis, I use the term “creative professional” to refer to more specifically to artists, designers, and other people working in the creative industries. Creative industries – often also called the creative sector – most commonly include illustration, advertising, architecture, crafts, fine arts, design and designer fashion, digital and entertainment media, film, video and photography, publishing, software, and electronic publishing, television and radio, music and visual and performing arts. Of course, there are many companies and instances outside creative industries as well, that might employ creative professionals for their creative skills. More specifically, I will focus on examining creativity from the perspective of picturebook illustrators. Scientific occupations are not included in this scope.

1.4.2 A picturebook illustrator

According to Uusikylä (2012: 11), when talking about creativity, the most crucial task is to ask, what are the best circumstances for creativity to emerge fully and to thrive, instead of trying to figure out who is creative. In this thesis, creativity is approached by observing the creative process of illustrating a picturebook, meaning the process where the illustrator actively and consciously – but often also subconsciously – uses her creativity to develop a series of images for a picturebook.

An illustrator is a person who typically has a strong desire, intention, and ability to communicate ideas and information visually. Capturing the essence of things is one of the most fundamental skills of the illustrator. “If someone is asleep in bed dreaming, you don’t necessarily want to see the bed, but you might want to look at the dreams”, as pointed out by the illustrator Quentin Blake (Marcus, 2012: 18). Simply put, illustration is visual communication through pictorial means (Doyle et al., 2018: xvii). According to Male (2017: 5), there is nowadays much emphasis on the acquisition of transferable skills and the ability to multi-task inside the craft. It is not uncommon for individuals to have a status of “illustrator-writer” or “illustrator-designer” along with some more unusual, varied, and disparate combinations (Male, 2017: 5). The identity of being purely or even primarily an illustrator is fading, but the intention to visually communicate meanings and messages remain. Doyle et al. (2018: 2) discuss that “to illustrate, is to signify and lend clarity to a subject by visual (usually pictorial) means”. Illustrators may properly consider themselves visual practitioners who shed light on subjects and ideas as part of a larger cultural enterprise (Doyle et al., 2018: 5).

Being a picturebook illustrator means having an everyday relationship with stories, and interpreting those stories visually and, in most cases, sequentially. It should be noted, however, that illustrating picturebooks is not always a process where illustrations follow a written story – sometimes the text follows the images, sometimes the other way round, and sometimes the illustrations and words start growing and molding into a story side by side. Nevertheless, for a picturebook illustrator, the medium of telling these stories is usually a book – an artifact with a front cover, back cover and a

---

8 In this thesis, I will often use the term “the illustrator” rather than “an illustrator”. I have done this to emphasize the “role” of the illustrator.
variable number of pages (typically 32) in between.

What is a story then? There have been multiple ways and attempts to approach and define the term “story” within linguistics. The literature theorist Gerard Genette (1980: 27) proposed to use:

1. \textit{Story} for the signified or narrative content.
2. \textit{Narrative} for the signifier, statement, discourse, or narrative text itself.
3. \textit{Narrating} for the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or a fictional situation in which that action takes place.

The Routledge Dictionary of Literary words (Childs and Fowler, 2006: 148) defines “narrative” as “The recounting of a series of facts or events and the establishing of some connection between them”. Simply said, narrative means anything that tells a story. For instance, it may be a novel, a newspaper, a painting, a picture, a film, an advertisement, a dance or a comic strip. By following Genette, the literature scholar Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1994: 2) discusses “story” in relation to “narrative fiction”. By “narrative fiction”, Rimmon-Kenan (see also Tomashevsky, 1965: 66) means the narration of a \textit{succession of fictional events} that, by her definition, differs it from some other literary texts, such as lyrical poetry or expository prose. According to Rimmon-Kenan, the term “narration” suggests:

1. A communication process in which the narrative as a message is transmitted by the addressee to the addressee.
2. The verbal nature of the medium used to transmit the message (this distinguishes narrative fiction from narratives in other media, such as film, dance, or pantomime).

The act of telling a story is relatively simple. According to the philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1980), someone puts a number of actions and experiences into a sequence. If we consider events in isolation, they appear to us as simple propositions that describe independent happenings. However, if they are composed into a story, how they are related allows us to perceive the meaning-production operation of the plot. It is the plot that gives coherence and meaning to the narrative. It also provides the context in which we understand each of the events, actors, descriptions, goals, morals, and relationships that usually form a story (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 59).

“Story” designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text, and reconstructed chronologically, together with the participants in these events (Rimmon-Kenan, 1994: 3). The cartoonist and writer Will Eisner (2008b: 3) suggests in \textit{Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative} that all stories have a structure – they have a beginning and an end. In between lies the plot – a thread of events laid upon a framework that holds beginning and end together. In this thesis, I will be using the word “story” in a loose manner and without a firm standpoint – mostly leaning on Rimmon-Kenan’s definitions above, and suggesting that a story is not just a listing of events, but an attempt to link them both in time and meaning.
Rimmon-Kenan (1994: 3) argues, “Whereas ‘story’ is a succession of events, ‘text’ is a spoken or written discourse which undertakes their telling. Put more simply – the text is what we read. In it, the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order, the characteristics of the participants are dispersed throughout, and all the items of the narrative content are filtered through some prism or perspective”. A picturebook illustrator is a person who visualizes stories and communicates ideas and information through, and with the help of, stories. However, instead of using letters, words, and sentences, she is talking with her line – with her personal visual language of lines – graphically testing, defying, and breaking the boundaries of the story’s chronological order.

1.4.3 A picturebook vs. picture book vs. storybook vs. children’s book

The picturebook becomes a space between incidental discovery and educated understanding, between the viewpoint of an adult and that of a child. It’s a space of interaction between the right and left halves of the brain, a space that sparks dialogue between the brain and the heart, between play and perseverance. A space for doubt, curiosity, and fragility, because something feels important. Between memories and dreams, longing and wonder. The picturebook becomes a place where words and images need one another and interact with one another yet aren’t required to say the same thing.  

Stian Hole (2015)

What are we dealing with when somebody is illustrating a picturebook? How does the process differ when illustrating a picturebook in comparison to any other illustrated book type? As pointed out by the literature scholar Kai Mikkonen (2005: 329), picturebook moves in the borderline of fine arts and literature, and as such, is a combination of both.

Existing literature presents two variations of the word: picture book (two words) and picturebook (one word). However, a sufficient definition of the actual differences between these two is surprisingly difficult to find. The children’s literature scholars Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2001: 8) use the version “picturebook” for the phenomenon they are discussing in How Picturebooks Work, to distinguish it from “picture books” or “books with pictures”, but also from the discourse that ignores the vast diversity of word-image intercourse. In this thesis, I have also taken a firm standpoint by adopting the spelling “picturebook” because it illustrates the seamless relationship of words and images better than the version where the words “picture” and “book” are separated.

The illustrator and author Uri Shulevitz (1985: 15-16) has explained the unique nature of a picturebook by comparing it to a storybook. His explanation is simple, yet it illustrates clearly the main difference between these two media. “A storybook tells a story with words. Although the pictures amplify it, the story can be understood without

---

9 In this thesis, the term “picturebook” refers specifically to illustrated picturebooks, and not to other book mediums where visual artworks play a central role – for example, photography books or artist’s books.
them. A true picture book\(^{10}\) tells a story mainly or entirely with pictures”, Shulevitz writes. In other words, if we remove the images from a picturebook, the meaning will be affected because much of the narrative is conveyed by the images alone – a picturebook says in words only what pictures cannot show. “It [a picturebook] could not, for example, be read over the radio and be understood fully”, Shulevitz points out. In a picturebook, the pictures extend, clarify, complement, or take the place of words – here, both words and pictures are “read”, which naturally leads to a need for fewer words – or sometimes none at all, as in the case of wordless picturebooks (Shulevitz, 1985: 15).

In some cases, storybooks that include illustrations are called, simply put, “illustrated books”. In these types of books, the synergy between word and image is not as firm and interactional as in picturebooks (Happonen, 2001b: 113; see also Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000; Rhedin, 2001). This is often the case in a predominantly verbal narrative, where pictures are usually subordinated to the words (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000: 227, 2001). Typical examples that fall into this category include, for example, fairy tale books, folktales or illustrated editions of Bible stories. Sometimes in illustrated books – though not always – it is characteristic for illustrations to have a decorating rather than an “essential” function, or in other words, they enhance the book aesthetically but add nothing or little to the actual story. Here – contrary to “true picturebooks” referred to above – the story can be read and understood without looking at the pictures.

In this thesis, the medium of picturebooks is not synonymous with children’s literature, although it is often seen that way. As noted by the literary scholar Sirke Happonen (2005: 58) – interpreting the picturebook theorist Perry Nodelman (1988: 2-5) – “the old idea of book illustration as something addressed to children is linked to the conception that pictures give children both pleasure and easily approachable information”. The literature critic Barbara Wall (1991: 2) argues that “Is it a children’s book?” is a specific question to which a specific and precise answer can in fact be given. “If a story is written to children, then it is for children, even though it may also be for adults. Suppose a story is not written to children. In that case, it does not form part of the genre writing for children, even if the author, or publisher, hopes it will appeal to children”. Wall suggests three forms of “address” that characterize children’s literature. The first one is “single address”, when a text is directed simply at a child reader. In the second form, there is the “double address”, in which the text slips in meaning for an adult reader “over” the child reader. In the third form, there is the “dual address”, where a text speaks clearly to both children and adult audiences at the same time (Wall, 1991: 9).

Although Wall’s categorization is convincing, one may, however, ask how relevant it is to the picturebook illustrator herself – or picturebook as a form of art. The illustrator Shaun Tan (2002b) writes: “Picture books are synonymous with children’s literature. But is this a necessary condition of the art form itself? Or is it just a cultural convention, more to do with existing expectations, marketing prejudices and literary discourse?” Research confirms that at its best, picturebook illustration is a subtle and complex art form that can communicate on many levels and leave a deep imprint on a reader’s consciousness (Colomer, Kümmerling-Meibauer and Silva-Díaz 2010: 1). Furthermore, the art and literary historian Joseph Stanton (1998: 5) notes, that one of the

\(^{10}\) In the direct quotes, I will use the same wording as used in the original source.
considerable advantages of the picturebook is that it is the only form of sophisticated art that many families experience on a regular basis, also those who are not willing or able to visit museums or galleries. “The picture book offers nourishment to many in our society who are starved for great art” (Stanton, 1998: 5). Similarly, Salisbury points out, together with the literature scholar Morag Styles, that “the very best picturebook become timeless mini art galleries for the home – a coming together of concept, artwork, design, and production that gives pleasure to, and stimulates the imagination of, both children and adults” (Salisbury and Styles, 1992: 50).

Typically, picturebooks are considered as sequential art. The term was first proposed by Eisner (1985) to describe and analyze the comics medium in his influential book *Comics & Sequential Art*. Like comics, picturebooks are simply a group of images “deployed in a specific order” (Eisner, 2008b: xvii). After Eisner, many have offered their definitions for the term sequential art. Male (2007: 94) defines sequential imagery as a series of images, each following on from the previous, to form the essence of the contextual message to be conveyed. The cartoonist and comics theorist Scott McCloud’s (1993: 20) definition of comics illustrates perfectly the sequential nature of picturebooks as well when he notes that comics are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response”. The literary scholar Maria Lassén-Seger (2014: 114) raises another important insight that is gained from research: “picture books are not a literary genre per se, but a medium that includes a number of different types of narratives, encompassing everything from fantasy to everyday realism”. Nevertheless, as Lassén-Seger further notes, certain predisposition for various types of “distancing” from reality can be regarded as typical of picturebooks (2014: 114).

I find Lassén-Seger’s and the picturebook scholar Barbara Bader’s definitions of a picturebook most distinctive, yet explicit. Both of their definitions correlate perfectly with how a picturebook is considered in this thesis as well. Bader (1976: 1) writes: “A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost, an experience for a child. As an art form, it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of turning the page”. Furthermore, as defined by Lassén-Seger (2014: 120), “it [a picturebook] is a designed entity which shapes its narrative using images and – in most cases – text. Thus, the art form is based on the symbiosis or interaction between text and images”.

Introduction
Let us get back to the little girl for a while. With the help of the paper dolls, the girl learned how to draw and love stories, which was about to be useful for her in her future career. But she did not know that yet, and even if she would have, it would not have been interesting for her. She just wanted to draw because she had a story to tell – a new story almost every day, which was impossible to tell by just using words. And she loved every second. Until one day, the big, dark clouds she had so eagerly waited for did not stay outdoors anymore. One of them sneaked in and made a nest above her drawing table.

This was one of those families that had experienced such great sorrow that it was almost too much for the members of the family to cope with. Despite the sorrow, the family had its good days, lots and lots of those, when they laughed and sang, and had fun – when the children ate cotton candy in the amusement parks and did all the things happy people tend to do. And like the other happy people, they were happy too. However, because of the sorrow, the happiness had to drag a shadow along. Not a normal shadow – related to the height and volume of the light – but a shadow that had a particular melancholy nature. It was the type of shadow that went to sleep with all the members of the family in the evening, after having a wonderful day at the merry-go-round. The shadow wanted to stay with them as if it had been replacing the little boy, the son, the brother of the little girl, who had drowned before the little girl was born.

What does it have to do with the paper dolls, you might ask? Well, the day when one of the clouds sneaked in was the same day when the little girl saw drawings that were made by her brother when he was seven years old. Same age as the little girl was now herself. There was something magnetic in the drawings, but the girl was not quite sure what it was. To her, it looked like there was a line there and a line here, not even close to her own skills to change a paper doll’s dress into velvet with watercolors – the skill she had been really proud of the day before.

But what she understood was this: her mother and her father were not praising her velvety dress, at least not the way they were praising a drawing of an older man created by the brother who was not there anymore. According to them, the drawing represented God, with a tiny man standing next to his beard. And for a minute or so, while looking at the drawing, the parents looked genuinely happy, and genuinely proud. For a minute or so, the melancholy shadow did not exist. That is when the girl decided that she would do whatever it takes to make her parents as happy as they were at that moment. She would learn how to draw – and not just God, but everything else as well.

2. Theoretical foundation
2.1 Historical review

Primarily, this thesis is focused on understanding the complexity of the creative process better, from the perspective of picturebook illustrators. However, it is essential to have some knowledge of the history and current status of picturebook illustration as an art form to understand the themes discussed, reflected upon, and commented on this thesis.

Most scholars agree that printing, like paper, originated in China (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 12). The impact of ukiyo-e’s – inexpensive single-leaf prints or sets of prints – produced by hundreds of Japanese illustrators, cannot be underestimated, not to mention the illuminated Islamic manuscripts or illustrated textiles that were highly appreciated in Sub-Saharan Africa for their aesthetics cross-culturally, but also used locally as a means of communication (Doyle et al., 2018: 132). The evolution of pictorial storytelling and the development of printing techniques worldwide had a significant impact on what happened to the Western book illustration during the 19th and 20th centuries. In this brief overview, I will focus on the historical phases, prominent figures, discourses, and other factors, especially in Europe and the United States, that impacted on how the current phenomena of illustrated picturebooks evolved. One should bear in mind, however, that when discussing the development of the art form, the way we know picturebooks in our society might not necessarily correlate with how they are considered in other countries and cultures, as Nikolajeva (2003a: 236) points out. “The view of children’s literature in different countries may vary, and thus in some countries picturebooks may have purely entertaining purposes, while in others they may be chiefly used for educational and ideological goals”, Nikolajeva (2003a: 236) writes.

2.1.1 Purposes of illustration and early precursors

The art historian Alan Gowans (1971) suggests that illustrations can be considered as serving one or more of the following four purposes:

1. To document: to create a visual record of a thing or person
2. To narrate: to explain or entertain – i.e., for storytelling
3. To persuade: to establish, maintain, or discredit ideas
4. To ornament: to enhance life or to concretize identity through decoration

By Gowans’ criteria, most visual works created before the advent of mass communication, and curated in modern times as “fine art”, qualify as illustration (Doyle et al. 2018: xvii). For instance, Christian or Buddhist devotional art served the purpose of communicating and explaining teachings important to the faithful. Egyptian reliefs on the walls of tombs and temples were often painted and carved with the intent of helping the Pharaohs in the afterlife and to ease the soul’s journey back to the mummified body, giving it breath and life. Sometimes the reliefs were simply reflecting the ancient life, presenting, for example, boats sailing on the river Nile with the deceased on board. Therefore, based on Gowans’ categories, the purposes of Egyptian art were often
anchored in documenting and narrating, when not merely ornamenting burial objects and artifacts of everyday life. The oldest surviving illustrated book is said to be an Egyptian papyrus roll, the Dramatic Ramesseum Papyrus, dated to around 1980 BC. Illustration is one of our chief sources of information about vanished cultures that set the course of art history. Without the surviving vases and mosaics, it would have been impossible to know what Greek mural paintings looked like. Furthermore, without the Gospel illustrations made by master mosaicists for early shrines, or copies of them in silverwork, as well as manuscript illuminations – manuscripts in which the text is supplemented with such decoration as initials, borders, and miniature illustrations – Byzantine art would remain a mystery (Gowans, 1971: 106). Similarly, the medieval illuminated manuscripts are generally seen as the forerunners of the modern illustrated book (Salisbury, 2004: 9).

Of course, pictorial storytelling can be traced back as far as the earliest cave and rock paintings. Examples in the cave of Altamira in Spain, Lascaux caves in France, and paintings in Sulawesi Indonesia which can be traced back as far as 40 000 BC, as well as more recent examples in the massive rocks of Astuvansalmi in Finland (around 3000 BC), show a profound need in human nature to communicate with others and present events and figures in a visual form. They are figurative in both senses of the word – representing both forms observed from life, and metaphors for abstract ideas (Doyle et al., 2018: 2). Salisbury and Styles (2012: 10) note how “we can only speculate as to the purpose or meaning of this art, but the images would have been one of the most important means of communication at the time – and continued to be so long after the arrival of the spoken and the written word in the earliest civilizations”.

Various examples reinforce Male’s (2007: 94-99) notion that “sequential imagery must be the earliest form of visual language externalized autographically”. These examples include Egyptian hieroglyphics and cave paintings already referred to above. A classic example of early sequential illustration in a historical context is the Bayeux Tapestry – thought to date to the 11th century. This embroidered tapestry is nearly 70 meters long and 50 centimeters tall, and depicts the events leading up to the Norman conquest of England, and culminating in the Battle of Hastings.

2.1.2 Development of the discourse

Even though Gowans’ categorization, and the examples presented above, reveal that illustration – in its broadest sense – has been present in visual arts as long as there has been narrative painting, the discussion of “art” has generally excluded illustration – at least since the blossoming of the idea of connoisseurship in the 18th century (Doyle et al., 2018: xvii). This is because of the utilitarian purpose of illustration, its association with commerce, and its mechanical reproduction – as opposed to the unique creations of the fine art world, which Gowans (1971) refers to as the “precious objects for exhibition”. Illustration often appears in complicated contexts, in relation to other visual and textual elements. As mentioned, due to its lack of autonomy, the fine art world has historically dismissed illustration. “In fact, when artistic opinion did find merit in an illustrator’s work, it was usually suggested that the achievement had transcended illustration to become Art – the capital A denoting the supposed difference”, Doyle et al. (2018: 4) write. In other words, illustration was at its best when it ceased to be itself.
As Happonen (2005: 56) points out, there has also been another attitude which could be called “the fear of image”. For instance, for the Frankfurt School\textsuperscript{11}, the regime of the visual was associated with the mass media and the threat of a manipulative and industrially produced culture (Mitchell, 1994: 3-5; Happonen, 2005: 56). As a result, objects we now associate with illustration, such as advertising, comics, and periodicals, have mainly been excluded from histories of art. As such, critical discourse about what constitutes illustration as a distinct field, and consideration of its artistic valuation and practice have also been suppressed. Illustration suffered further loss of status when influential media and culture critics questioned the value of mass communication media, popular culture, and advertising in general in the 19th century (Doyle et al., 2018: xvii). Partly because of these influences, text and image started to evolve into a hierarchical, gendered relationship. Here the “superior” verbal arts were considered masculine, powerful, and intelligent, whereas the pictorial arts, referred to as the “lesser arts”, were aligned with the feminine attributes of mimicry and attractiveness (Doyle et al., 2018: 224). “A backward movement surely have we here, from manhood – back to childhood; for the age – Back towards caverned life’s first rude career. Avaunt this vile abuse of pictured page! Must eyes be all in all, the tongue and ear. Nothing? Heaven keep us from a lower stage!” declares the poet William Wordsworth (1888) in his sonnet titled “Illustrated Books and Newspapers” from 1846, encapsulating the art and literary elites’ attitude of the time, according to which the new visual media threatened high culture, “genuine art”, as well as the status of the word.

The history of picturebooks is directly linked to developments in printing technology. One of the earliest illustrated children’s books is \textit{Kunst und Lehrbüchlein} with Jost Amman’s woodcut illustrations, published in Frankfurt in 1580. Another often mentioned example as the first children’s picturebook in the Western world, is John Amos Comenius’ \textit{Orbis Sensualium Pictus} – a textbook for children published in 1658. According to Nikolajeva (2003a: 236) \textit{Orbis Pictus} was “exactly what we today call a picturebook, with pictures supporting words”. Even an earlier example of a book with type and image printed together is Ulrich Boner’s \textit{Der Edelstein}, published in 1461. When Johannes Gutenberg introduced mechanical movable type printing to Europe around 1439, it started the process which ultimately led to the era of mass communication. However, this progress did not properly take place until the middle of the 19th century, following the inventions of photography, lithography, and the mechanical press (Meggs, 2016: 158-162).

According to Salisbury and Styles (2012: 14), the color was usually added by hand until the 1830s, when a process for printing color from woodblocks was invented. This innovation was done by George Baxter and Charles Knight around 1835, independently of each other (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 14). Two books that are often mentioned as having some of the most direct influences on the modern picturebook are \textit{Der Struwwelpeter} (1845) by Heinrich Hoffmann, and \textit{A Book of Nonsense} (1846) by Edward Lear.

One of the key figures in the history of picturebooks is the poet, painter and printmaker William Blake. As Salisbury (2004: 9) notes, Blake was the first one to truly

\textsuperscript{11} A school of social theory and critical philosophy associated with the Institute for Social Research, at Goethe University Frankfurt. The Frankfurt School brought together intellectuals, academics, and political dissidents that were dissatisfied with the contemporary socio-economic systems of the 1930s.
explore the integration of text and image on a page. These experiments were taken fur-
ther by the illustrator Randolph Caldecott in, for example, The House that Jack Built
(1878) and Hey Diddle Diddle and Baby Bunting (1882). Before Caldecott, illustra-
tions generally duplicated the story conveyed by the words. However, in Caldecott’s
illustrations, the two became fused, making complete sense only when viewed as a
whole (Salisbury, 2004: 11). This interaction is accurately described by Sendak (1988)
as: “He [Caldecott] devised an ingenious juxtaposition of picture and word, a counter-
point that never happened before. Words are left out – but the picture says it. Pictures
are left out – but the words say it. In short, it is the invention of the picturebook”.

2.1.3 19th and 20th century - Golden age of picturebook illustration

Illustration has only been recognized as a distinct discipline fairly recently. The rising
interest in illustration as an art form is related to the concept of a “pictorial turn” — a
visual turn in contemporary culture and theory in the 20th century, argued by the liter-

As Gowans (1971: 106-107) points out, illustration was the “great art” of the 19th cen-
tury in many respects and for many reasons. According to him, it was in fact the typical
art of the 19th century in England, France, Germany, and the United States — the same
way as sculpture was the art of the 5th century Greece, architecture that of the 13th
century France and painting that of the 16th century Italy. According to Gowans, the
largest proportion of pictures painted during the 19th century were illustrations.
Alongside these, the art of printed book illustration truly began to flourish in the 19th
century (Gowans, 1971: 106-107), often with the same artists engaged in both forms of
art. In the United States, the importance of illustration in a broader sense was recog-
nized by the founding of the Society of Illustrators in 1901 (Male, 2017: 9).

The period during the latter half of the 19th and the early 20th century has come to
be known as the golden age of children’s books, a time when there was a coming to-
gether of developments in printing technology, changing attitudes to childhood, and
the emergence of several notable picturebook artists (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 18).
This development took place across the whole of Western culture.

In Finland, the first forms of picturebooks were illustrated children’s books, novels,
and epic poems in the 19th century. The author Zacharias Topelius wrote a collection
of tales in a book Sagor (1847, “Fairy tales”), which Emilie Topelius illustrated. Stories
and novels written by Topelius were later illustrated by some of the most respected
artists of the time — for example, the artist Albert Edelfelt. Edelfelt continued with book
illustrations in, for example, Vänrikki Stoolin tarinat (1900, The Tales of Ensign Stål,
Swedish original title: Fänrik Ståls sägner) — an epic poem written by the national poet
of Finland, Johan Ludvig Runeberg.

At the beginning of the 20th century, other artists started to show interest in picture-
book illustration as well. One of the central figures of the “Golden Age of Finnish Art”,
Akseli Gallen-Kallela, was maybe best known for his illustrations of the Kalevala — the
Finnish national epic, which was compiled by Elias Lönnrot, and first published in

12 Mitchell models his phrase after the philosopher Richard Rorty’s (1979: 263) term “linguistic turn”. While the linguistic turn
called attention to the role of language in culture, theory, and everyday life, the “pictorial turn” registered a renewed interest in
images, non-linguistic symbols and metaphors (Mitchell, 1994).
1835. Along with the Kalevala, Gallen-Kallela illustrated, for instance, Seitsemän veljestä (1908, Seven Brothers) by Aleksis Kivi.

The first actual picturebooks in Finland were translations from other languages. The first one published in Finnish was probably Kaisa Rouva ja hänen kissansa (1865), based on an English nursery rhyme the Old Trot and Her Comical Cat (Kuivasmäki, 1985: 23-24). The illustrator who made the grayscale imitations of the original illustrations for the Finnish version is unknown. The Finnish version of Der Struwwelpeter – Jörö-Jukka – was published in 1869. The first entirely Finnish picturebook, Lapsien elämästä (“From the Life of Children”) was published in 1875, with original illustrations by Rudolf Waldemar Åkerblom.

Maybe the most influential illustrator in the early history of Finnish picturebook illustration was Rudolf Koivu. He illustrated several books of fairy tales by, for example, H.C. Andersen and Raul Roine. Koivu illustrated the Finnish version of One Thousand and One Nights, Tuhannen ja yhden yön satuja (1945) – the classic collection of Middle Eastern folk tales. Along with another eminent Finnish illustrator of the 20th century, Martta Wendelin, Koivu impacted the way picturebook illustration is appreciated in Finland Nowadays. As a sign of this, the Rudolf Koivu Prize was established in 1949 in his honor, and it is still awarded biennially to Finnish illustrators of children’s books.

With the strong impact of Rudolf Koivu and Martta Wendelin, the status of picturebook as an art form was established in Finland, and it became highly appreciated by both the audience and the visual artists. Illustrators such as Erkki Tanttu and Maija Karma, among many other artists, were focusing more and more on the medium of picturebook in their work. Internationally, the most recognized Finnish children’s book author and illustrator – Tove Jansson – illustrated only three actual picturebooks, but her impact on the whole art form is undeniable. The first of Jansson’s picturebooks – Vad tror du hände sen? (1952, The Book about Moomin, Mymble and Little My) – pushed production limits in the entire Western world, with the cutaway peepholes between the pages – as with, for instance, Eric Carle’s The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969).

Salisbury and Styles (2012: 29) point out that from the 1950s an increasing number of graphic designers, including, for example, Saul Bass and Paul Rand, were drawn to the medium of picturebooks. With this change, words became less central to storytelling as an understanding of the potential of the page as a multimedia grew (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 29). A cultural shift began to occur, and the line between the artist and the author started to blur. Author and illustrator Maurice Sendak’s Where the Wild Things Are was published in 1963. Since Sendak used every element of his artistry to convey his story powerfully, many of the rules which picturebooks had primarily adhered to up to this point were broken (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 38). Similarly, due to the work of several other experimental and explorative picturebook illustrators of the 20th century, the field of picturebooks started to enjoy a greater breadth of expression and attention as a robust and meaningful area of contemporary book publishing (Doyle et al., 2018: 430). The author and literature scholar Paula Havaste (2001: 54) has written about the Finnish picturebook’s evolution that culminated in the “great picturebook boom” of the 1970s and 1980s, with several Finnish illustrators becoming more and more fascinated in the creative possibilities of this medium.
2.1.4 Globalization and the 21st century

According to Salisbury and Styles (2012: 43), it is reasonable to expect an increasingly global picturebook market in the 21st century, as the entire society is becoming increasingly global. The awareness of picturebook illustration as an art form is growing, and many smaller countries and cultures are increasingly recognizing the importance of preserving their own languages and traditions (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 43).

In 2002, the Swedish government established the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award – an international children’s literary award, which has helped the wider audience to better understand the importance of picturebooks and become more familiar with some of the most remarkable illustrators and picturebook makers of our time. The first artists to receive the award in 2003 were the illustrator Maurice Sendak, together with the author Christine Nöstlinger. Since Sendak, several other picturebook illustrators have received the award, including the illustrator Kitty Crowther, and the previously cited Shaun Tan. With books such as _The Red Tree_ (2000) and _Cicada_ (2018), Tan has expanded the idea of the target audience of picturebooks, as well as exploring the potential of visual storytelling with multiple overlapping meanings.

Currently, there is a broad interest in the potential of visual and non-verbal meaning-making in storytelling (see, e.g., Goodman, 1968; Bal, 1991, 1997; Jenkins, 1995; Happonen, 2001, 2005, 2007). Although the appreciation and new understanding of picturebook as a “hybrid” art form is starting to emerge, many illustrators still recognize the underlying attitude of the primacy of words over images (see, e.g., Sousanis, 2015). As Lassén-Seger (2014: 116) points out, society’s view of text as superior to image is very persistent. “Reviewers may still evaluate picture books solely based on the textual narrative and hardly comment on the illustrations at all. It is as if pictures are regarded as so immediate that they require no words or investigation of their own – which of course is a mistake” (Lassén-Seger, 2014: 116).

Fortunately, new publishing options and more experimental approaches towards the medium have started to enter the Finnish picturebook scene. While ten years ago self-published books interested mainly amateur writers in Finland, these days, some well-known illustrators and authors also end up publishing picturebooks by themselves (Heikkilä-Halttunen, 2015). Small, but aspirational and artistically ambitious, publishing houses like Etana Editions (founded in 2014) have affected the way many illustrators are seeing their own artistic value, and their creative possibilities in Finland.

2.2 Literature review

This thesis is based on an interdisciplinary investigation that draws knowledge not only from the studies of picturebook illustration but also of creativity and creative processes. As is typical for grounded theory studies\(^\text{13}\), the primary purpose of this thesis is to generate theory on the basis of data, instead of having its basis in a particular theoretical framework (see, e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 274; Muratovski, 2015: 97). This does not mean that the researcher must start her work with

\(^{13}\text{Grounded theory as a methodological basis for this thesis will be referred to further in Section 3.1. – Qualitative research and grounded theory.}\)
“a tabula rasa”. As the social scientist Ian Dey (1993: 229) puts it, “an open mind not an empty head” guides this process. Indeed, as the nursing theorist Phyllis Stern (2007) explains, the role of a literature review in a grounded theory study is not only to ensure academic honesty but to demonstrate how the study builds on and contributes to extant knowledge within the field.

Having said that, in a grounded theory-based research, it is often advisable to refrain from forming specific hypotheses about what might be found before starting to analyze the research material (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015: 275). This is due to the conception that too much advanced knowledge of earlier research regarding a topic may limit a researcher’s ability to be open-minded about how to analyze and interpret the newly collected data (see, e.g., Glaser, 1978; Leedy and Ormrod, 2015). Similarly, Brown (2012: 252) suggests that the grounded theory researcher has to let go of her own interests and preconceived ideas to “trust in emergence”. Because of these reasons, the primary purpose of this literature overview is to simply map previous research and theoretical approaches, instead of engaging in a critical analysis at this early stage, which could lead to strong, and possibly limiting, initial hypotheses. As Dey (2004: 82) notes, grounded theory is an attempt to “liberate theory from the seductive comforts of the armchair and empirical research from the uninspiring and restrictive confines of analyzing variables or verifying hypotheses”.

Therefore, in this literature overview, I will mainly focus on defining the theoretical background for this thesis – instead of formulating a theoretical framework – in order to understand the current discourse around existing research on creativity and illustrated picturebooks. I will categorize and narrow down the extensive theoretical basis of these two disciplines, and pose a few key questions. Some of the central theories discussed in this review will be used later on to reflect and evaluate the findings of the studies presented in this thesis.

### 2.2.1 Creativity and the creative process

**What are the central approaches in previous creativity research from the perspective of this thesis?**

According to the creativity scholars Mark Runco and Robert Albert (2010), the history of research on creativity began with recognizing that research constitutes an effective and practical way of learning about, and understanding the world around us. “Aristotle, Kant, and many other luminaries had much to say about creativity, but they often included it in genius and other expressions of exceptionality, and they did not base their ideas about it on rigorous empirical evidence”, Runco and Albert (2010: 4; see also Rothenberg and Hausman, 1976) continue. According to the psychologist Robert Sternberg (2006: 87) the field of creativity as it exists today emerged primarily as a result of the pioneering efforts of the psychologists Joy Paul Guilford and Ellis Paul Torrance. The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1974) remain the most widely used assessments of creative talent. The speech given to American psychologists

---

14 See Chapter 6, Emerging visual models.
in 1950 by Guilford is often mentioned as a landmark of modern research on creativity (Uusikylä, 2012: 17). Although virtually every prominent 20th century psychologist – see, e.g., Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Otto Rank, Jean Piaget, Carl Rogers and Burrhus Frederic Skinner – has taken creativity seriously and explored what it means to be creative, yet not long ago, there were very few empirical articles and scholarly publications dealing specifically with the subject of creativity (Guilford, 1950; Albert, 1969; Feist and Runco, 1993). In the new millennium, however, creativity research has been booming. Runco and Albert (2010: 4-5) discuss how the field of creativity research “can be described only as explosive”. According to them, the maturing of a professional interest in creativity can also be seen in the growth of its journals. Creativity research now has its own scholarly journals, such as Creativity Research Journal, and Psychology of Art, Creativity, and Aesthetics. Creativity has also attracted increasing attention in the media and popular press (Runco and Albert, 2010: 4-5).

There have been multiple attempts to define creativity in both academia and other theoretical contexts. Together with the psychologist Todd Lubart, Sterberg defines creativity simply as “the ability to produce new and adapted ideas to a situation” (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999). According to the philosopher and theologian Donald MacKinnon (1964: 485), true creativeness fulfills at least three conditions. Firstly, it involves a response or an idea that is novel, or at the very least, “statistically infrequent”. Secondly, while novelty or originality of thought or action is a necessary aspect of creativity, it is not in itself sufficient. If a response is to lay claim to be a part of the creative process, it must, to some extent, be adaptive to, or of, reality. It must serve to solve a problem, fit a situation, or accomplish some recognizable goal. Thirdly, true creativeness involves sustaining the original insight, an evaluation and elaboration of it, and its development to the full. By MacKinnon’s definition, creativity is “a process extended in time and characterized by originality, adaptiveness, and realization” (MacKinnon, 1964: 485).

Furthermore, according to Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), most definitions of creative ideas comprise three components. First, they agree with MacKinnon by claiming that creative ideas must “represent something different, new, or innovative”. Second, they argue that creative ideas are “of high quality”. Third, they note that creative ideas must also be “appropriate to the task at hand”, or some redefinition of that task. In other words, creative response is novel, good, and relevant (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2007).

Theories of creativity have focused on various aspects. The dominant factors are often identified in terms of four components – the “4Ps”. The 4P model was initially proposed by the educational scientist and creativity scholar Mel Rhodes in 1961, and it has been further discussed by many other creativity researchers as well (see, e.g., MacKinnon, 1978; Ekvall and Ryhammar, 1999; Plucker and Renzulli, 1999; Runco, 1999; Botella, Glâveanu, Zenasni, Storme, Myszkowski, Wolff and Lubart, 2013). The four components in the model are:

1. Person
2. Process
3. Product
4. Press (environment)
Based on this model, my focus is mainly on examining creativity in relation to the process, and to some extent, in relation to the person as well.

According to Lubart (2000, 2015), the creative process is defined as a succession of thoughts and actions, leading to original and appropriate productions. In his classic book The Art of Thought (1926), the social psychologist Graham Wallas has summarized the four primary stages of the creative process. Although different variations of the creative process were developed during the 20th century, Wallas’ four-stage model or a variant of it has served, and continues to serve, as the basis for understanding the creative process (Osborn, 1953; Taylor, 1959; Stein, 1974; Taylor, Austin, and Sutton, 1974; Busse and Mansfield, 1980; Cagle, 1985; Ochse, 1990; Goswami, 1996; Uusikylä and Piirto, 1999; Lubart, 2000). The stages in Wallas’ model are:

1. **Preparation**: During the preparation stage, the mind prepares for the creative solution, which requires study and thinking intently on the subject.
2. **Incubation**: A germination period follows. The person steps away from the problem and takes up some form of activity, such as daydreaming, walking, or meditation.
3. **Illumination**: Often, like a flash, a brilliant idea shoots across the mind, frequently during a mundane task or while one is involved with something else.
4. **Verification**: The idea is tested to determine its validity.

The psychologist Carl Rogers’ (1961: 347-355) definition of the creative process is that it is “the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other”. Unlike, for instance, Kaufman and Sternberg (2007), Rogers (1961: 350-352) does not make distinctions between “good” and “bad” creativity, or “good” and “bad” purposes in the creative process. In other words, there is no moral basis on what kind of actions and products are considered as creative or not. “One man may be discovering a way of relieving pain, while another is devising a new and more subtle form of torture for political prisoners. Both these actions seem to be creative, even though their social value is very different” Rogers (1961: 350) writes. His essay *Towards a Theory of Creativity* (1954) offers interesting perspectives on the creative process. In this essay, Rogers goes on to suggest three key determinants of creativity:

1. Openness to experience.
2. An internal locus of evaluation.
3. The ability to toy with elements and concepts.

The psychologist Abraham Maslow is one of the key figures in shaping modern discourse around creativity. He argues, “My feeling is that the concept of creativeness and the concept of the healthy, self-actualizing, fully human person seem to be coming
closer and closer together and may perhaps turn out to be the same thing” (Maslow, 1963: 4). His argument shows the esteem with which humanistic psychologists view human nature. Creativity is essential to growth as the individual learns and adapts to her environment and an inner sense of values. Maslow’s statement indicates that creativity is part of being a healthy human-being. Humanistic psychology brings wholeness to the human-being and the creative process by arguing that creativity infuses all of life, and every person inherently has elements of creativity (Uusikylä, 2012: 41).

One of the key theorists on creativity is Mihály Csíkszentmihályi – already referred to before – who is widely known for recognizing and naming the psychological concept of flow as a highly focused mental state conducive to productivity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990; 1996; 1997). Csíkszentmihályi’s book Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention (1996) was the culmination of 30 years of work into creativity. In it, Csíkszentmihályi uses his flow theory to explore the creative process and discusses such ideas as to why creative individuals are often seen as selfish and arrogant, and why the “tortured genius” is mostly a myth. Csíkszentmihályi succeeds exceedingly well in understanding the complexity of the creative process from various angles. However – as already discussed before – I do not fully agree with him when it comes to his way of defining creative persons: “Creative persons differ from one another in a variety of ways, but in one respect they are unanimous: they all love what they do” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996: 240). Similarly, the psychiatrist Carl Jung (1923) argues in his famous quote: “Creative mind plays with the object it loves”. Both Csíkszentmihályi and Jung – but also some other creativity theorists (see, e.g., Sternberg and Kaufman, 2010: 480; Keong, 2013: 2; Järvillehto and Järvillehto, 2019: 105) – seem to forget the existence of many creative people, who feel like they have fallen out of that “love” and struggle with their creativity because of that. Due to this gap in recognizing many creative individuals, I find these statements as being highly romanticized. With this thesis, I aim at finding out whether this gap is in fact real, and necessary to fill with updated knowledge and theory about the creative process and creative individuals.

Finally, the philosopher and psychologist John Dewey’s Art as Experience (1934) provides a philosophical approach to analyzing the process of creating. Dewey’s theory is an attempt to shift the understanding of what is essential and characteristic about the art process from its physical manifestations in the “expressive object” to the process in its entirety, a process whose fundamental element is no longer the material “work of art” but rather the development of an “experience” – something that personally affects one’s life.

What is the current Finnish discourse in terms of creativity research?

In Finland, creativity has already been studied for several decades by, for instance, scholars Jane Piirto and Kari Uusikylä. Uusikylä is one of the most respected Finnish researchers on creativity and talent, and has written numerous books about creativity, including: Luovuus kuuluu kaikille (2012), Isät meidän: Luovaksi lahjakkuudeksi kasvaminen (1996) and Lahjakkuus ja kasvatus (1992), as well as Luovuus: Taito löytää, rohkeus toteuttaa (1999), co-authored with Piirto.

Other theorists in Finland interested in creativity include Nando Malmelin and Petro Poutanen, who have written about the idea of creativity in work environments and
organizations in *Luovuuden idea: luovuus työelämässä, yhteisöissä ja organisaatioissa* (2017). In this book, they investigate whether it is possible to learn and develop creativity, and attempt to identify characteristic of the kind of environments that support creativity the best. Malmelin and Poutanen criticize the existing studies focusing on creativity, which, according to them, often stay at the level of “superficial innovation talk”, even though creativity is born and lives in the everyday communication of people. In this context, the creativity scholar Jorma Heikkilä considers creativity and innovativeness as the driving forces behind development of communities and organizations in his book *Luovasta ideasta innovaatioon – Luovuus ja innovatiivisuus selvitymiskeinoina* (2010).

Päivi-Maria Jaatinen is one of the few Finnish scholars who has observed creative practice specifically in relation to well-being. In her doctoral dissertation, *Rethinking Visual Art Practice in Relation to Well-Being – A Conceptual Analysis* (2015) Jaatinen provides relevant theoretical support for a new connection between the visual art practice and hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. In this, Jaatinen has formulated a new conceptual framework for situationalized and contextualized research. The conceptual framework focuses on “the intertwining aspects that may influence hedonic and eudaimonic well-being of the participant in regard to the visual art practice locally and at the state level” (Jaatinen, 2015: 263). Furthermore, Jaatinen (2015: 286) proposes that eudaimonic well-being can be enhanced through the practice of visual arts if the practice is considered as not only having value, quality and meaning, opportunities for personal growth and self-expression, but also, if the activities and engagement are intrinsically motivated. “These notions are conceptualized as the meaningfulness of the visual art practice”, Jaatinen (2015: 286) notes.

Many theories around creativity and creative processes often approach themes like talent, as well as intuition and perfectionism. The design scholar Asta Raami has researched creative processes specifically from the perspective of intuition. I find Raami’s doctoral dissertation, *Intuition Unleashed: On the Application and Development of Intuition in the Creative Process* (2015), and her other research outcomes –many of them concerning the relationship of the design process and intuition – most useful for this thesis, in terms of understanding the role of intuition in the creative process. The outcomes of Raami’s (2015: 10) doctoral dissertation suggest that highly intuitive personal experiences are usually extremely meaningful to the person concerned, and that those experiences have an essential role when creating. Nevertheless, such personal experiences are kept private due to the common tendency to hide and deny the role of intuition in creativity. Raami suggests that bringing these experiences into consciousness, and sharing them with others, helps an individual build a deeper understanding of the personal creative process. As such, I find Raami’s insights highly valuable for this thesis because they are filtered through her own practical understanding and experiences of the creative process, and hence, resonate with the practice-led approach.

---

15 Treating well-being as hedonia and eudaimonia originates from the long history of Western philosophy, and especially from the theories of Aristotle (Jaatinen, 2015: 208). The psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (2008: 2-3) divided research in the psychology of well-being as following two traditions: 1. the hedonic tradition, focusing on using just positive affect and negative affect to index happiness, and 2. the eudaimonic tradition, concerned with living well or actualizing one’s human potentials. Furthermore, for example, Veronika Huta and Alan S. Waterman (2014) have provided a theoretical analysis for understanding eudaimonia and its distinction from hedonia.

16 The practice-led approach will be discussed further in section 3.1.1 Understanding the process of illustration.
taken in this thesis. Raami has also written about intuition in her book Älykäs intuitio ja miten käyttämme sitä (2016), where she discusses the different forms of intuitive knowledge and how to tap into receiving this knowledge.

In recent years, there have been many authors outside academia as well, who have been interested in different issues around creativity in Finland. For example, in his book Luova järkevyys (2014) the author and entrepreneur Saku Tuominen discusses his approaches and viewpoints on “true creativity”. Furthermore, Lauri Järvillehto’s and Paavo Järvillehto’s book Pim! Olet luova (2019) aims at increasing creative potential in everyday life with the help of philosophical, practical, and methodological approaches. The most recent non-academic Finnish publications about creativity include the author and entrepreneur Henri Hypponen’s book Luomiskertomus: matkalla luovuuden tulevaisuuteen (2020), which looks for new directions for creativity by observing the deep structures of creativity in relation to technological breakthroughs.

**What does the discussion outside academia provide to this thesis?**

In this thesis, I attempt to observe creativity from less academic perspectives as well – in addition to the purely academic perspective – although the previous academic research on the subject creates the basis on which I approach creativity in this thesis. By doing so, this thesis aims at understanding the broader discourse around creativity – not just the one taking place inside academia – often participated by creative professionals. Because practice-based and practice-led approaches in creativity research are still surprisingly scarce (see, e.g., Candy & Edmonds, 2018), in this thesis I have relied on some non-academic sources by creative professionals who have honestly depicted their creative processes.

Jerry Saltz has written about the challenges of the creative process from the perspective of a former visual artist. For example, his book How to Be an Artist (2020) and the essay My life as a failed artist (2017) illuminate the struggle that many professional artists experience in their career. How to Be an Artist offers insights and advice about breaking through creative blocks and navigating career challenges, to find joy in the creative work. The teacher and author Julia Cameron’s book The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity (1992) is a valuable source about the creative well-being, creative blocks, and creative process from the artist’s perspective. The Artist’s Way aims at supporting people with their artistic creative recovery, teaching techniques to assist struggling creative people in harnessing their creative talents and skills. Another source that I have found useful in understanding the creative processes from the artist’s perspective is Gilbert’s Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear (2015). The book focuses on understanding the concept of “creative living”, overcoming self-doubt, and avoiding perfectionism, among other topics. Finally, the book Creativity Inc. (2014) by Ed Catmull – the president of Pixar Animation and Disney Animation – provides highly valuable viewpoints on the creative process. In his book, Catmull shares his experiences about managing a creative business, and aims at mapping out the blocks to creativity, while also providing active steps to protect the creative process.
What role does the existing research about design processes play in this thesis?

Studies in design methodology provide various structured approaches to the design processes. Early design methods and techniques are discussed in, for example, classics like *Notes on the Synthesis of Form* (1964) by the design theorist Christopher Alexander and *Design Methods* (1970) by the design scholar John Chris Jones. Later, many modern theorists and organizations have suggested various design process models that the designers can use to organize their thoughts to improve the design process. These descriptions include visual models such as the Double Diamond (The British Design Council, 2004), The Basic Design Cycle (Roozenburg and Eekels, 1995), and Munich Procedural Model (Lindemann, 2005). Books that provide definitions of the visual design process, and suggest alternative graphic design models to approach the process include, for instance, *Graphic Design Basics* (2007) by the art and design scholar Amy E. Arntson and *Type and Image: The Language of Graphic Design* (1992) by the designer and historian Philip Baxter Meggs.

Even if the methodology around various design models and processes might offer interesting insights and viewpoints to the topics researched here, I have excluded these approaches from further review in this thesis. Instead, I will be focusing on integrating the theories of creativity in terms of the process and the person – as discussed earlier, and the theories around picturebook illustration – which will be discussed in the following section.

2.2.2 Picturebook illustration

What are the main approaches in previous research towards understanding picturebook illustration process?

The creative process, especially from the illustrator’s point of view, is discussed by Alan Male – already referred to earlier – in his books *Illustration: A Theoretical & Contextual Perspective* (2017) and *The Power and Influence of Illustration: Achieving Impact and Lasting Significance Through Visual Communication* (2019). Male is dedicated to exploring and explaining what it is to be an illustrator and discusses the role of illustration in documentation, commentary, storytelling, persuasion, and identity.

Uri Shulevitz’s book *Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children’s Books* (1985), in turn, is one of the most profound sources about the creative process of illustrating picturebooks. Shulevitz argues that to create a good picturebook or storybook, the picturebook illustrator must understand how the two differ conceptually, and how this should affect the way picturebooks are created.

Martin Salisbury – also already referred to earlier – has identified the characteristics of a picturebook in his various articles and books, including, for instance, *Illustrating Children’s Books* (2004) and *100 Great Children’s Picturebooks* (2014). In *Children’s Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling* (2012), Salisbury – together with the co-author Morag Styles – traces the evolution of the picturebook as a storytelling medium while exploring different illustration techniques and other central aspects of a picturebook, both as an artifact, as well as a medium for visual thinking. This book also
discusses the creative processes of prominent picturebook illustrators and present case studies of their seminal works.

Shulevitz’s, Male’s, and Salisbury’s approaches to the illustration process are notably different from those defined by many other theorists because they have all worked as illustrators themselves, and therefore know what it feels like to be in the process of creating illustrations. Therefore, their knowledge and viewpoints are not based on purely theoretical analysis, but rather, on a concrete understanding of the nature of illustration and the possibilities and challenges of this art form.

What are the central themes of focus in previous picturebook illustration research?

Academic theorists analyze various aspects of picturebooks from a range of perspectives. According to the literature scholar Ulla Rhedin (2001: 17), the anthology Aspekte der gemalten welt (“Aspects of the pictured world”) – published in 1968 by a group of German researchers – entailed a basis for the research in illustrated books. Over the past few decades, picturebook illustration research has been evolving rapidly. As Lassén-Seger17 (2014: 110) notes, these days, more doctoral theses are being written in the Nordic countries about picturebooks than ever before. Outside Finland, the relationship of words and images, as well as the unique character of picturebooks as an art form has been studied in recent decades by several theorists and scholars, including, for example, Nina Christensen, Jane Doonan, Elina Druker, Vanessa Joosen, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, William Moebius, Maria Nikolajeva, Penny Nodelman, Ulla Rhedin, Martin Salisbury, Joseph Schwarcz, Uri Shulevitz, Carole Scott and Morag Styles.

As discussed by e.g., Happonen18 (2005: 66), picturebook analysis is often rooted in semiotic ideas, seeking to consider both visual and verbal codes. The literary theorist Roland Barthes’ (1986) notion of the textuality of all processes of signification is considered as one of the bases for this type of discussion. According to Barthes, the two most easily identified linguistic messages concerning images are “anchorage” and “relay”. With anchorage, the text directs the reader through the connotations of the image – “remote-controlling” the reader towards a meaning chosen in advance by the author. With relay, text, and image stand in a complementary relationship, and the unity of the message is realized at the level of the story (Barthes, 1986: 71-92).

Narratology, as discussed by, for instance, Mieke Bal, Seymour Chatman and Gérard Genette, has been a useful application to relate and combine the narrative meanings of both visual and verbal reactions (Happonen, 2005: 66; see also Moebius, 1986; Nodelman, 1988; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, 2001). According to Mikkonen19 (2005: 329), picturebook research is located between two disciplines: literature research and art history. However, as Mikkonen further notes, in both of these disciplines, the interest in the interplay of words and images has been relatively small.

Most picturebook theorists argue that it is the unique rhythm of pictures and words, and how they work together, which separates picturebooks from all other forms of both

17 Discussed later in this section.
18 Discussed later in this section.
19 Discussed later in this section.

In How Picturebooks Work (2001), Nikolajeva discusses together with the co-author Carole Scott the ways picturebooks were typically treated in scholarly work until the beginning of the new millennium. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 3) note that in these kinds of studies, the specific sequential nature of picturebooks has sometimes been ignored, as individual pictures have often been taken out of context and mainly considered without their relationship to the narrative text. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 11-27) suggest five ways to describe word and image interactions in picturebooks – symmetrical, enhancing, complementary, counterpointing, and contradictory (see Table 2.1). These five variations fall somewhere between the two extremes in the word-picture dynamic – a text without pictures and a wordless picturebook (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001: 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symmetrical</th>
<th>Enhancing</th>
<th>Complementary</th>
<th>Counterpointing</th>
<th>Contradictory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both text and image present the same information.</td>
<td>The image significantly amplifies or reinforces the text, or vice versa.</td>
<td>Either text or image fills in the gaps left by the other.</td>
<td>Text and image provide alternative information.</td>
<td>An extreme form of counterpoint, when text and image (seemingly) take the story in the opposite directions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Categories of picturebooks with word and image interaction, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001).

As Nikolajeva and Scott further point out, terms presented here are not absolute, and the boundaries between the various categories are not always easy to perceive. Drawing rock-solid lines between different ways to approach word and image interaction are, in many cases – especially in the cases of the best picturebooks – almost impossible and also unnecessary, even if the categorization might help to understand the different possibilities of picturebooks better.

Similar categorizations in which words and pictures cooperate have also been suggested by, for example, Schwarzc (1982), Nodelman (1988) and Rhedin (2001). The picturebook theorist Joseph Schwarcz discusses the functions of illustrations in Ways of the Illustrator, Visual Communication in Children’s Literature (1982), by observing them through the following categories: congruency, elaboration, specification, amplification, extension, complementation, alternation, deviation, and counterpoint. In Bilderboken: på väg mot en teori (2001) Rhedin, partly leaning on Nodelman, suggests three picturebook concepts:
1. The epic, illustrated text
2. The expanded (or staged) text
3. The genuine (the actual) picturebook

According to Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 3), literary studies have often neglected the visual aspect of picturebooks or treated picturebook illustrations as secondary — arguing how general surveys of children’s literature, reviews, academic papers, and conference presentations often focus on, for instance, the depiction of society, ideological values, and adult control, rather than the dynamics of the picturebook form. However, Salisbury and Styles (2012: 90) discuss how studies over the last 30 years have looked at, and recognized, not only the dynamic relationship between words and images in children’s picturebooks but also the importance of visual design and the multiplicity of meanings offered by the picturebook form. According to the literature scholars Teresa Colomer, Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, Cecilia Silva-Díaz (2010: 1), the number of studies that investigate the role of the illustrations has increased worldwide, as the artistic effects of picturebooks have developed considerably due to intensive experimentation with the interplay of word and image.

In *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* (1993), the art historian and critic Jane Doonan focuses on the aesthetic sides of a picturebook, as she analyzes the form, line, and artists’ particular styles of illustration. Schwarcz (1982: 169), in turn, discusses how a child’s world is filled with objects that compete with her attention. Schwarcz further notes that even though picturebook illustrators are not the only ones who offer aesthetic objects to children, they are the first to produce these messages and symbols, especially with children in their minds. Picturebook illustrations are the first and almost the only pieces of art in children’s lives made explicitly for them (Schwarcz, 1982: 169). According to Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 3), Doonan’s and Schwarcz’s approaches offer an essential counterbalance to those studies of picturebooks where pictures are ignored or treated as mere decorations. In Doonan’s and Schwarcz’s work, the focus is on the pictures in picturebooks and their specific way of conveying such elements as space and movement (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001: 3). The same applies to the approaches presented by, for instance, Shulevitz and Salisbury, as already discussed earlier.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 3) discuss how in previous research picturebooks are sometimes treated mainly as part of children’s fiction, with critics using a literary approach and discussing themes, issues, ideologies, and gender structures. Similarly, Nodelman (2010: 11) argues that picturebook is the one form of literature explicitly invented for a child audience. “Despite recent claims for a growing adult audience for more sophisticated books, the picturebook remains firmly connected to the idea of an implied child-reader/viewer”, Nodelman writes. However, Nodelman’s approach to picturebooks is not as simple as the previous quote might reflect. In his article *Words Claimed: Picturebook Narratives and the Project of Children’s Literature* (2010: 11-26), Nodelman notes the relationship of children’s literature and picturebooks, and criticizes how children’s literature exists in confirmation of the adult view that children are different from, and less than adults, who need childlike texts that show them less than adult readers know.

Children’s responding to illustrations in picturebooks has been central to, for
instance, the literature and educational scholar Janet Evans’s studies. In *What’s in the Picture* (1998) and *Talking Beyond the Page* (2009), Evans covers several issues related to picturebooks – for example, their role in early literacy and in developing reading skills, as part of intellectual and emotional development, the use of picturebook as a learning resource and as an aid to aesthetic development. Similarly, the literature educationist Agneta Edwards’ contribution to understanding the ways children approach picturebooks is worth mentioning. In *Bilderbokens mångfald och möjligheter* (2019), Edwards discusses the potential of picturebooks as a pedagogical tool from, for instance, the perspective of preschool and kindergarten teachers and librarians.

A considerable amount of research has also been done in several countries to determine what children prefer and why (Schwarcz, 1982: 7). Some of these studies imply, for example, that children would prefer lighter and darker colors rather than bright colors, which contradicts with the frequently held assumptions by adults (Amsden, 1960). However, it is worth noting that this type of research is not overall very convincing, no matter how carefully carried out, because, as indicated by Schwarcz (1982: 7): “knowing what does not solve the question why”. Schwarcz (1982: 7) argues that it is hard to believe that the why – the long-term, in-depth, and partly unconscious influence, which is in the nature of art and literature – can be detected and gauged by children’s responses to questionnaires or open-ended interviews.

Finally, it should also be noted that picturebooks have not always received such enthusiastic critical attention as they have in recent years. According to Colomer et al. (2010:1), picturebook research underwent considerable changes by the end of the twentieth century. Initially, historical perspective dominated the field, with most surveys focusing on the emergence and development of picturebooks. However, in the 1980s the picturebook research began to be regarded by scholars as either an art form or an educational tool for learning new languages, but also as an introduction to literature and visual literacy (Colomer et al., 2010: 1). Similarly, Lassén-Seger (2014: 111) notes that “It was only in the late 1980s and in the 1990s that interest in the theoretical analysis of picturebooks began to grow steadily in academic circles, going on to expand into a global, almost explosive trend in the 21st century”.

At the university level, interest in and research around the subject of picturebooks has tended to divide between the practitioners in the art and design sector and the theorists in the education sector (Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 7). Furthermore, as Lassén-Seger (2014: 111-112) points out, there has also been a certain tension between text-oriented literary scholars and image-oriented art historians. However, as she highlights, “the hybrid nature of the picture book has necessitated a fruitful collaboration between these two fields because their object of study, the picture book itself, requires a cross-disciplinary approach. Studying picture books obviously requires skills in both text and images” (Lassén-Seger, 2014: 111-112).

The Centre for Children’s Book Studies of Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge has played an essential role in expanding how picturebooks are approached from a scholarly perspective. Due to an emphasis on practice as a vital tool for research and development, illustration for children’s books has become an especially important aspect of their work. Anglia Ruskin University is still one of the only places globally, which offers specialized education at the doctoral level for picturebook illustrators who are also interested in researching the subject.
How has the Finnish discourse evolved around picturebook illustration theory?

It is still relatively challenging for a picturebook researcher to position herself in Finland and find colleagues from the field. This is especially the case for practitioner-researchers. Picturebooks were researched to some extent in Finland during the 1990s (Rättyä and Raussi, 2001: 7). However, according to the art educator Elisse Heinimaa (2001: 144), most studies focused on text rather than image until the end of the 20th century. Since then, research interest towards the role of illustrations in picturebooks – as well as other visual aspects of illustrated books – has increased. In Finland, the most central theorists and scholars who have been focusing on the various aspects of illustrated picturebooks include, for example, Sisko Ylimartimo, Riitta Oittinen, Kai Mikkonen, Mia Österlund, Maria Laukka, Sirke Happonen, Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen, Martina Paatela-Nieminen and Maria Lassén-Seger.

At the beginning of the 21st century, picturebook illustration – and illustration in general – began to attract various theorists’ attention in Finland. Books such as Kuvituksen monet muodot (2002, “The many forms of illustration”), edited by Ismo Loivamaa and Niklas Bengtsson, as well as Kuvittaen: Käyttökuvan muotoja, merkityksia ja mahdollisuuksia (2003, “Illustration: The various forms, meanings and possibilities of an image”), edited by Sisko Ylimartimo and Riitta Brusila, explored the role of illustration especially in picturebooks but also in other media, demonstrating the communicative and visual-verbal capabilities of illustration. In Tutkiva katse kuvakirjaan (2001, “An investigative look at a picturebook”), edited by Kaisa Rättyä and Raija Raussi, several Finnish picturebook experts, illustrators, and critics approached the phenomenon of illustrated books from various angles, mainly through the Finnish discourse, but also from a global perspective. From other Finnish scholars, for instance, Riitta Oittinen has discussed the interplay of words and images in a picturebook from the point of view of translation, in particular. In Kuvakirja kääntäjän kädessä (2004, “Picturebook in the hands of a translator”), Oittinen focused on exploring this interplay when translating a picturebook, as well as discussing how various visual components, such as lines, colors, typography, and perspective affect the readability of a picturebook.

Furthermore, the interplay and relationship of words and images – especially in graphic narratives – has been central to Kai Mikkonen’s studies. In Kuva ja sana (2005, “The word and the image”) Mikkonen discusses the visual ways to convey meanings in, for example, iconotexts – documents consisting of text and images that complement each other, including comics and picturebooks – and analyzes the new, third meaning that the text and images create together in a book. Iconotexts have also been one of the many research interests of the literature scholar Mia Österlund, with an emphasis on Nordic children and young people’s literature – particularly those of Finland-Swedish.

Finnish theorists are exceptionally accomplished in their ways of understanding children’s role as picturebook audience. The art educator Elisse Heinimaa (2001: 155) notes that “a picturebook is child’s first visit to an art gallery”. Art educator Maria

---

20 The concept of iconotext, used in most studies of picturebooks today, was initially coined by the literature scholar Kristin Hallberg in a journal article in 1982. According to Hallberg, iconotext is the “real text” of picturebooks, which includes text and pictures in interaction with each other (Hallberg, 1982: 165; see also Lassén-Seger, 2006: 72).
Laukka (1989: 11), in turn, has described picturebooks as bridges that allow us to deliver messages about feelings, information, people’s behavior, nature, and society to children. She further notes how the aesthetic message sent by the illustrator often “travels to a child like a smuggled object along with the immersive story”. For Laukka, picturebooks represent highly effective tools for art education that often have a lifelong impact on the reader (1989: 11). Laukka was one of the most active defenders of Finnish picturebooks at the end of the 20th century, and the beginning of the 21st century – her significant contributions to Finnish picturebook is undeniable. Besides her written work that often discuss the different functions of picturebook illustrations and their relationship to the history of Finnish picturebooks, many Finnish researchers remember Laukka from her numerous public talks and passionate conversations.

Within academia, picturebooks and picturebook illustrations have also received attention in Finland. One of the central picturebook researchers in Finland is Sirke Happonen, whose study *Vilijonkka ikkunassa: Tove Janssonin muumiteosten kuva, sana ja liike* (2007, “The Fillyjonk at the window: images, words and the depiction of movement in Tove Jansson’s Moomin books”) explores Tove Jansson’s development of a special kind of aesthetics of movement and stasis, based upon both illustration and text in Jansson’s work. In her other studies, Happonen discusses, for instance, representation, modality, movement, and posture of the characters in children’s picturebooks. Another Finnish scholar interested in picturebook illustrations is Sisko Ylimartimo, who in her thesis *Auringosta itään, kuusta länteen: Kay Nielsenin kwitustaide ja mahdollisen maailman kuvaamisen keinot* (1998, “From sun to the east, from moon to the west: the illustrations by Kay Nielsen, and the ways to depict a potential world”), studies the picturebook illustrations of the Danish artist Kay Nielsen. Another viewpoint to picturebooks has been provided by the researcher and children’s book critic Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen, whose study *Kuokkavieraasta oman talon haltijaksi* (2000, “From an uninvited guest to the owner of your own house”) discusses how Finnish children’s and young people’s literature institutionalized and became canonical during 1940-1950. Picturebook illustrations are also at the core of Martina Paatela-Niemen’s thesis *On the Threshold of Intercultural Alices* (2000). While investigating the various illustrated editions published in English and German for Lewis Carroll’s novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), Paatela-Niimen makes intertextual analysis of their illustrations and discusses the cultural subconscious behind them.

Picturebooks are approached from a whole different perspective in Maria Lassén-Seger’s dissertation *Adventures into otherness – Child metamorphs in late twentieth-century children’s literature* (2006). In this, Lassén-Seger (2006: 9) explores different types of categories of child metamorphs, and suggests metamorphosis as a very flexible trope with both comic and tragic potentials, through which authors explore crises and concerns that are central to the lives of young people (Lassén-Seger, 2006: 257-264).

The examples presented here show that many scholars in Finland have found various aspects of picturebooks and picturebook illustration worth researching in-depth, not only in Finnish arts and design universities but also in, for instance, the bigger universities of Helsinki, Tampere and Jyväskylä, as well as Åbo Akademi University. However, practice-based or practice-led research about picturebooks or picturebook processes has not yet been done in Finland. While other arts and design processes have received significant interest within academia, the process of illustrating picturebooks
as well as other illustration processes – has remained untouched. Fine arts and design processes have been studied particularly successfully at Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, and the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki. In these universities, the methodology and terminology about artistic and arts-based research have actively been formed by many scholars, including Mira Kallio-Tavin, Juha Varto, Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vadén. Their work has had a substantial impact on the ways arts and design are researched in Finland and around the world. This has helped to increase interest in academic research in the area of illustration as well.

2.3 Summary

Summary: historical overview

The brief historical overview at the beginning of this chapter presented some of the historical phases, prominent figures, discourses, and other factors, especially in Europe and the United States, which impacted how picturebook illustration evolved in Western culture.

As discussed before, illustration has, particularly in previous centuries, been overlooked within the history of art, due to the 18th and 19th century art intellectuals’ and literary elite’s attitude, according to which the new visual media threatened high culture, genuine art, as well as the status of the word. Typically, illustration received attention and respect in the art discourse only once it stopped being illustration – in other words, when it became its own autonomous unit, and thus, real art. As a result of the 18th and 19th century contrasting, many works, which are nowadays associated with illustration, such as pictures in advertising, comics, books, and magazines, were excluded almost entirely from traditional art history. Critical discourse about what constitutes illustration as a distinct field, and consideration of its value and practice was also suppressed.

Illustration is one of our chief sources of information about vanished cultures that set the course of art history. In the historical overview in this chapter, I discussed that even though pictorial storytelling dates back to the earliest cave wall paintings, and although there are various examples that sequential imagery is in fact one of the earlier forms of visual language, illustration has only been recognized as a distinct discipline fairly recently. It has been estimated that the lack of art status for illustration only began to change around the beginning of the 21st century, when in 2001, Guggenheim New York mounted a major exhibition of the work of the illustrator Norman Rockwell (Doyle et al., 2018: 4). Serious studies of the communicative and artistic importance of
illustration have rapidly increased since 21.

The medieval illuminated manuscripts are generally seen as the forerunners of the modern illustrated books (Salisbury, 2004: 9), and the history of picturebooks is directly linked to developments in printing technology. Despite the fact that the earliest examples of books with type and images printed together were published already in the 15th century, and the earliest illustrated children’s books in the late 16th century, the picturebook did not fully blossom until the late 19th and early 20th century. This period has come to be known as “the golden age of children’s books” – a time when there was a coming together of developments in photography and printing technology, changing attitudes to childhood, and the emergence of several notable picturebook artists.

As discussed in the historical overview, in the 1950s the line between artist and author started to blur, and several famous graphic designers became increasingly drawn to the medium – writing and illustrating picturebooks, and using them as a way of exploring visual thinking and typography. However, many of these pioneering picturebook makers were reluctant to identify themselves as children’s book illustrators. These artists included, for example, Saul Bass and Paul Rand, as well as one of the most significant authors and illustrators in the history of a picturebook – Maurice Sendak.

Due to many experimental and explorative picturebook illustrators of the 20th century, the field of picturebooks started to enjoy a greater breadth of expression and attention as a robust and meaningful area of contemporary publishing (Doyle et al., 2018: 430). Picturebooks by, for instance, Tove Jansson and Eric Carle pushed contemporary production limits. Among them, several other artists continued exploring and exposing the possibilities of a picturebook by, for example, looking for new ways to experiment with juxtaposition and interplay of words and images.

The current discourse shows that the awareness of the picturebook as an art form is growing. However, even though the appreciation and an increased understanding of picturebooks and illustration, in general, has started to take root in the public conversation, the non-autonomy of illustration and the centuries old attitudes and practices continue to impact how people react to picturebook illustration. Despite the emerging recognition of picturebook as a “hybrid” art form, many illustrators still face the underlying general attitude of the primacy of words over images.

Summary: a literature overview

From the creativity theorists mentioned in the literature review, I will be mainly focusing on the publications and studies done by Rogers (1961), Csíkszentmihályi (1990, 1996, 1997, 2014), Uusikylä (1999, 2012, 2020), Jaatinen (2015), and Raami (2015, 2016) in this thesis. I have found their approaches not only to be the most insightful, but also the most pragmatic in terms of their approach to creative processes – because they manage to take into consideration the process of creativity as well as the person who is creating.

Furthermore, existing research only highlights the problematic nature of creative personalities, without much research being done to better understand the work-related
struggles faced by creative professionals. Surprisingly, these studies often seem to forget the existence of many creative people, who feel they have “fallen out of love” with their craft, and struggle with their creativity because of it. With this thesis, I aim at finding out whether this gap in recognizing many creative individuals is in fact real, and necessary to fill with new knowledge and the type of theory that would take into consideration the work-related struggles faced by creative professionals during different stages of the creative process.

One possible reason for the lack of existing research which consider creativity from the perspective of creative professionals is that creativity as a phenomenon is fundamentally opposed to scientific approach to research with its basis on logic, clarity, and repetition. According to Uusikylä (2012: 103), the deepest essence of creativity is probably best understood by a person who has discovered her creativity and continually uses it. This is exactly why research such that proposed in this thesis – creativity research conducted by the practitioners themselves – is much needed. This is also why I have decided to widen the theoretical perspective in this thesis to beyond those proposed by the academics. I find the unscholarly approaches by Cameron (1992), Gilbert (2015), and Saltz (2020) to be the most insightful and useful ones for this study.

From the picturebook illustration theorists mentioned before, I will be mainly focusing on the publications and studies done by Schwarz (1982, 1991), Shulevitz (1985), Nikolajeva and Scott (2000, 2001; Nikolajeva, 2003a, 2003b), Happonen (2001a, 2001b, 2005, 2007), Salisbury (2004, 2006, 2007, 2012), Lassén-Seger (2006, 2014), and Male (2017) in this thesis. When it comes to understanding picturebook and picturebook illustrations better, as well as the different decisions that the picturebook illustrator makes during the illustration process, I find the approaches by these authors and scholars to be the most profound and insightful. With their help, I aim at reflecting critically on the observations about the picturebook illustration process. Even though the new theory formulated in this research will be grounded in my study data, previous theoretical approaches will provide an indispensable basis for broader discussion of my findings.

The literature review shows that while many scholars have found various aspects of picturebooks and picturebook illustrations worth researching further, the picturebook illustration process has not yet been covered sufficiently well, neither from a personal perspective nor otherwise. Apart from some practice-based and practice-led studies conducted in the Anglia Ruskin University, as well as Shulevitz’s, Salisbury’s, and Male’s publications, previous research typically focuses on how the picturebooks or picturebook illustrations function, and not how the picturebook illustrators function.
As with most little girls who like drawing paper dolls, the little girl from this story also grew out of the papery world and her papery friends. She became the most skilled draftsman in her class, and after a few years, she decided to go to an art school. There she was not the most skilled kid at her class anymore. The girl did the best she could to please her demanding art teachers, but strangely enough – the harder she tried, the harder she was being criticized. “So, do you want to become a coloring book artist or a real one? Time to decide!” one of the teachers, a giant-like fine artist asked while pointing the little girl with his giant-like forefinger. The teacher was questioning whether the girl understood any of his teachings. Above all, he was concerned about the line that the girl kept using in her drawings. Day after day, he kept coming to the girl’s drawing stand, each time becoming more and more frustrated about what he saw. “They look like retarded seals in a coma!” he shouted while reviewing girls’ figure drawings.

The teacher’s words made the girl restless and discouraged. Luckily, there were other teachers who thought that there were moments of truth in the girls’ drawings – moments that were worth practicing further. And as the years passed, the girl started receiving praise for her work and her skills. She also found out that there is a way of making one’s living by making the exact thing she had loved doing when she was a child: illustrating stories that were impossible to tell by just using words.

The girl was so happy for the fact that she was now needed and wanted that she forgot to say no. Nevertheless, she did enjoy enormously what she was now doing every day and even getting paid for – for drawing stories, not just on the rainy days, but also on the sunny ones. She witnessed moments of joy she had never thought could be humanly possible by just drawing and painting. She learned how to listen to her images, how to carefully watch them grow in front of her eyes into something real. Something not made of paper, graphite, watercolor, or acrylics, but something made of bones, blood, skin, fabrics, and veins – something that had lungs of their own. She learned how to recognize when things started breathing and whispering and barking and croaking in front of her very own eyes, and that usually, this was the moment to stop.
3.1 Qualitative research and grounded theory

According to the design scholar Gjoko Muratovski (2015: 48), qualitative research is best described as in-depth research. It is generally used to gain understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Typically, qualitative researchers collect numerous forms of data from various sources and examine them from many angles. Therefore, it can be said that “the purpose of qualitative research is the construction of a rich and meaningful picture of a complex and multifaceted situation” (Muratovski, 2015: 48).

This thesis is built on a qualitative methodological approach called grounded theory. Grounded theory is an approach that, according to Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss – the sociologists who developed the approach – leads to a theory derived from data, systematically gathered, and analyzed through the research process (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 12). Instead of having its basis in a particular theoretical framework, grounded theory begins by gathering data that the researcher uses to develop a new theory on a particular issue. The term “grounded” refers to the idea that the theory emerging from the research is grounded in its data – facilitating “the discovery of theory from data” – which has been collected from a variety of sources (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1, see also Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 12; Leedy and Ormrod, 2015: 274; Muratovski, 2015: 97). However, it should be noted that although this research is built on grounded theory, it is not an attempt to provide a case for an exemplary model of this approach.

Research based on grounded theory has typically been conducted in areas that have not been studied in great depth before, especially in areas that do not have clear and definite theories associated with them, or those in which there is limited knowledge (Payne, 2007). In other words, grounded theory studies are especially helpful when current theories about a phenomenon are either inadequate or non-existent (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015: 274). It is also ideal for exploring integral social relationships and the behavior of groups where there has been little exploration of the contextual factors that affect an individual’s life (Crooks 2001). Because a well-defined theoretical framework does not exist either for the picturebook illustration process or creative well-being of illustrators – not to mention a comprehensive theory that would aim at integrating these two through an interdisciplinary approach – grounded theory offers a suitable methodological basis for the approach taken, to answer the research questions set in this thesis.

It should also be noted that in fact, to some extent, grounded theory relies on the absence of an existing theory, as its purpose is to allow developing a new theory (see, e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 37; Jones, Kriflik and Zanko, 2005; Muratovski, 2015: 98). The researcher on leadership Judith Holton (2007: 269), for example, argues that “grounded theory requires the researcher to enter the research field with no preconceived problem statement, interview protocols, or extensive review of the literature”. However, it is worth clarifying that Glaser and other “purists” are not calling for a blanket ban on engagement with existing literature (Dunne, 2011: 115). Literature can be used as “data” and continuously compared with the emerging categories to be integrated into the new theory (Glaser, 1992). As the organizational theorist Karen Locke (2001: 122) explains, “researchers integrate existing literature on the substantive topic
into their thinking as the theoretical categories and framework stabilize”. In this respect, grounded theorists are, in general, respectful but critical towards existing theories, and require “extant concepts to earn their way into your narrative” (Charmaz, 2006: 126). Indeed, as the sociologists Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson (1996: 157) explain: “The open-mindedness of the researcher should not be mistaken for the empty mindedness of the researcher who is not adequately steeped in the research traditions of a discipline. It is, after all, not very clever to rediscover the wheel, and the student or researcher who is ignorant of the relevant literature is always in danger of doing the equivalent”. Because of this, I also decided to integrate brief historical and literature reviews as part of this thesis22.

Having said that, a grounded theory researcher should always try to approach her research with a mind that is sufficiently open to allow new, perhaps contradictory, findings to emerge from the raw data (Dunne, 2011: 117). In fact, for instance, Brown (2012: 252) suggests that a grounded theory researcher would focus on developing the courage to let the research participants define the research problem. Even though I have defined initial research questions for this thesis, I aim at maintaining this “openness” while analyzing the data. In Chapters 4 and 5 – the analyses chapters – I will be strongly focusing on the observations that arise from the research material, and return to the theory basis later when discussing the outcomes of the studies presented in this thesis23.

When applying grounded theory in research, the new theory is usually developed using multiple forms of data collection and interpretations (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015: 102). According to Muratovski (2015: 98), this type of research, in most cases, focuses on a process of some kind, and the final goal is the development of a theory about this process. There are no prescribed data collection methods for applying the grounded theory, and therefore the use of any suitable method is possible (Muratovski, 2015: 98). It is typical, however, that data collection in a grounded theory study is field-based, flexible, and likely to change throughout the investigation. Interviews that rely on open-ended questions typically play a significant role in data collection. Other observational methods – documents, historical records, videotapes, and anything else of potential relevance to the research question – might be used in a grounded theory study. The only restriction is that the data collected must include the perspectives and voices of the people being studied (Charmaz, 2002, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Leedy and Ormrod, 2015). I will collect the data that I use in this research by:

1. Observing my picturebook illustration process in order to understand the process of illustration better.

2. Interviewing other professional illustrators in order to generalize the findings from the illustration process analysis.
What makes grounded theory different from other research approaches is that the data analysis process begins simultaneously with the data collection process (Muratovski, 2015: 98). The health psychologist Sheila Payne (2007: 68) remarks that “one of the unique features of grounded theory analysis is the dynamic interplay of data collection and analysis”. Dividing the data into segments and then looking for commonalities that reflect different categories or themes is an often-suggested analysis approach within grounded theory research (Muratovski, 2015: 98–99; see also Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Dey, 1999; Payne, 2007). This will be the primary way for me to analyze the data collected in this research as well. “Open coding” my research material first – the process of reducing the data to a small set of themes that describe the phenomenon under investigation – will then be followed by “axial coding” – establishing interconnections between categories and subcategories. After gathering sufficient data, I will combine the categories and their interconnections to form a storyline that describes the mechanics of the picturebook illustration process.

In grounded theory, the theory that is developed as a conclusion can take the form of a statement, visual model, or a series of hypotheses, which should depict the evolving nature of the process and describe how certain conditions lead to specific actions or interactions (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015: 274; Muratovski, 2015: 99). In this thesis, I will develop visual models to represent the research findings.

In what follows, I will provide an overview of the data collection methods used in this research, and the methodological approaches behind them. Full detail on these methods will be provided in following chapters.

3.1.1 Understanding the process of illustration

I have worked as a professional illustrator since 2008 and decided to observe and document my process while illustrating a picturebook as part of this thesis. The primary goal of observing and analyzing my own work was to gain new, in-depth, and unembellished understanding about the process of illustrating picturebooks. Uusikylä (2012: 132) argues: “No definition in the form of scientific terminology can reveal the deepest essence of the creative process in a way that creative artists are able to describe based on their own experience”. By observing my process, I aimed at revealing this “deepest essence” that can then be analyzed and mirrored with other data in later stages of the research.

When art or the processes of making art are researched, and especially when the researcher has worked or is still working as an artist or designer herself, the methods in use are nowadays increasingly grounded in qualitative research approaches such as practice-based research, practice-led research, artistic research, and arts-based research (see, e.g. Hannula, Suoranta and Vadén, 2005, 2014; Leavy, 2017; Varto, 2018;). These approaches bring knowledge and ask questions that might be missed using more traditional quantitative research methodologies. At the core of artistic methodologies lies criticality, openness, and self-reflectivity (Hannula et al., 2005; Eisner, 2008a). In other words, subjective knowledge is not seen as something that would need to be faded out of the research process. On the contrary, as discussed by Mira Kallio-Tavin (2017: II) – a scholar in the fields of art-based research and pedagogy: “subjective knowledge constructed through individual and artistic experience will be transformed into critical research knowledge, accessible to others, through critical and
transparent reflective analysis”.

According to the art education scholars Anniina Suominen, Kallio-Tavin (presented above), and Fernando Hernandez-Hernandez (2018: 101), artistic, visual, and practice-based knowledge are difficult to articulate, especially in terms of the sort of knowledge they formulate or introduce to research. This kind of knowledge was traditionally excluded from scientific definitions of research as “something too vague to pin down or unreachable for sufficient articulation, measurement, and validation” (Suominen et al., 2018: 101). Therefore, the tradition of artistic and arts-based research is relatively young. For instance, in Finland, doctoral-level research in the arts became possible at the art universities only at the beginning of the 1980s (Kallio-Tavin, 2017: II). However, during the last two decades, arts-based research has widely spread, and is now used by those seeking to broaden forms of inquiry that can take advantage of the way the arts offer unique insights into the human knowing and understanding (Barone and Eisner, 1997; Jipson and Paley, 1997; Diamond and Mullen, 1999).

When it comes to design research, the type of research that enables practitioners to reflect on and evaluate their own work is often referred to as applied research. According to Muratovski (2015: 190), this type of research approach can be found in many different disciplines, including design. In the case of design, this approach has been primarily adopted from the field of art. The two main approaches to applied design research are practice-based research and practice-led research. In practice-based research, a creative artifact is the basis of the investigation, whereas practice-led research leads primarily to the new understandings about the design practice itself (Muratovski, 2015: 191; see also Candy, 2006).

This thesis should be considered as a practice-led study. According to Linda Candy (2006: 1) – a researcher in practice-led methods for studying creativity in the arts and sciences – practice-led research is a process that “is concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice”. Here, the artifact is not at the main focus of the research. The purpose behind this type of research is the advancement of knowledge about the practice, or the advancement of knowledge within practice. Contrary to practice-based research, this type of research may be solely described in the text. According to Muratovski (2015, 191; see also Candy, 2006, 2018), inclusion of a creative outcome is unnecessary, but artifacts may be included if deemed necessary or appropriate. As such, the artifact created during my illustration process – the picturebook *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* – itself is not fundamental to what is being researched here, and therefore it will not be included in this thesis. First and foremost, this thesis aims at understanding the creative process better, and my own illustration process is primarily used as a pathway to a deeper understanding of the illustration practice in general.

### 3.1.2 Interviewing professional illustrators

The neuroscientist Nancy Andreasen (2008: 252) lists approaches that have been typically used by researchers to identify a sample to study creativity and different aspects related to creative well-being. One approach is to study a mixture of creative individuals from multiple disciplines (see, e.g., Ludwig, 1995, 1998; Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Richards et al., 1988; Kyaga et. al., 2012). An alternative approach is to identify a group of people for whom written histories are available, and to use this information as the
basis for study (see, e.g., Ellis, 1926; Juda, 1949; Goertzel et al., 1978; Jamison, 1993; Post, 1994; Ludwig, 1994; Schildkraut, Hirshfeld and Murphy, 1994; Caramagno, 1996; Beveridge and Yorston, 1999). Perhaps the most common approach, however, is to select a very homogeneous group of creative people, such as a group of writers or musicians (see, e.g., Karlsson, 1970; Andreasen, 1987; Csikszentmihályi and Getzels, 1971; Jamison, 1989; Ludwig, 1994; Ekvall and Ryhammar, 1999; Hennessey, 2010; Botella et al., 2013).

I decided to interview other Finnish picturebook illustrators as part of this thesis to generalize the findings from the analysis of my own illustration process. The interviews were arranged and recorded in 2015 and 2016. The interview material consists of 21 hours and 13 minutes of discussions with the interviewees in total. For interviewing the illustrators, I decided to use a qualitative narrative inquiry-based method, called narrative interview (see, e.g., Schütze, 1977; Weiss, 1994; Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000; Chase, 2005; Jeong-Hee, 2015; Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016).

I became interested in the narrative interview method, which was initially formalized by the sociologist Fritz Schütze (1977), because of my assumption that storytelling and framing the interview material in the form of a narrative could be a natural way for the illustrators to talk about their lives and experiences as truthfully as possible. As researchers using narrative interview techniques do not set out with a fixed agenda – rather they tend to let the interviewee control the direction, content and pace of the interview (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016: 631) – this method would also help me to prevent possible interviewer biases, caused by my own experiences of the picturebook illustration process. As such, the narrative interview is aligned with the grounded theory approach adapted for my research. As discussed earlier, grounded theory prefers interviewing methods that rely on open-ended questions (see, e.g., Charmaz, 2002, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, narrative interviewing offers a chance to study illustration and illustrators in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings which those I interview would bring to their narratives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 2).

The narrative interview method is a technique for generating and collecting stories to be used as the interviewer's research data. It is based on appreciating stories as valuable and meaningful research material. It aims to allow the researcher to find out who we are as human beings and why we do what we do, the way we do them. According to Sandra Jovchelovitch and Martin W. Bauer (2000: 59-61) – the theorists behind many books and articles about the narrative interview method – narrative interview aims to create a setting that encourages and stimulates the interviewee to tell stories. Its basic idea is to reconstruct events from the perspective of the interviewee as directly as possible. Change, transformation, and process are the things that make the stories and the research of those stories interesting (Hyvärinen and Löyttyniemi, 2005: 189-190). These are the qualities that I aimed to arise and bring forth in my interviews.

Narrative interviewing would provide me a chance to position myself as an interviewer in a way that my own experiences, feelings, and attitudes of the profession and the illustration process will not be dominating the direction of the interviews. Instead of leading the interviews to the themes that arose from the analysis of my own illustration process, I could simply invite illustrators to tell their stories about how they became illustrators, and then continue with the themes that seem to be most important
to them. Therefore, in this thesis, the concept of narrative is adapted as a means of shaping or ordering past experiences. “It is the act of telling stories, getting into particular ones, and not answering generalized questions” (Hannula et al., 2014: 40).

Storytelling seems to follow universal rules that guide the process of story production. In other words, narration follows a self-generating schema – once it has started, the beginning tends towards the middle, and the middle tends towards the end (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 60-61). Simply said, there is no human experience that cannot be expressed in the form of a narrative. According to Barthes (1993: 251-252), “Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversations. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself”.

Whoever tells a good story complies with the basic rules of storytelling. Here the paradox of narration arises, as according to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 61), it is the constraints of the unspoken rules that liberate the storytelling. In a narrative interview, therefore, the interviewer’s primary aim should be to create a non-threatening situation that maintains the informant’s willingness to tell a story about significant events. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 61), this can be done if the interviewer carefully avoids imposing any form of language not used by the informant during the interview. To do this – to restrain from using words and questions based on the researcher’s presumptions and areas of interest – can be surprisingly challenging. This is probably also the reason as to why most interviews are still done with the more traditional question-response schema. The underlying presupposition in the narrative interview is that the interviewee’s perspective is best revealed in stories, where she is using her own spontaneous language in the narration of events (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 61). This requires almost one thing only: careful, peaceful listening – ears that are open and a curious mind.

I decided to follow the version of the narrative interview method formulated and suggested by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000)\textsuperscript{24}, as it seems to provide the most approachable and useful variation of the method for my interviews. In the following sections, I will present the main stages of this type of narrative interviewing. These are preparation, initiation, main narration, questioning, and discussion.

\textit{Preparation}

The first stage of the narrative interview method proposed by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 62-63) is preparation. During this stage, the researcher deepens her understanding of the topic being researched, explores the field and formulates a list of so-called “exmanent” questions. Exmanent questions is a list of questions that the researcher might like to be answered, reflecting the interests that arise from her approach to the topic of study, from developing the literature review, and from her other preliminary inquiries. Typically, the exmanent questions also refer to research questions (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 62-63).

\textsuperscript{24} Jovchelovitch’s and Bauer’s model is based on Schütze’s initial systematization from 1977, which Jovchelovitch and Bauer made available in the English language with some elaborations (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 57-58).
Next, the interviewer formulates the initial topic for narration. The topic should be experiential to the informant to ensure her interest and a narration rich in detail. During the preparation phase, the interviewer is in contact with the interviewee and suggests the place for the interview.

Initiation

The initiation phase is all about presenting the method and the topic to the interviewee. It is preferable to formulate the initial topic as broadly as possible (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 63; see also Hyvärinen and Löytyniemi, 2005: 189-222), to allow the interviewee to develop a long story which, from an initial state of affairs, through past events, leads to the present situation.

During the initiation phase, the interviewer encourages the interviewee to use as much time as she likes. It is essential to point out that the interviewee can start her story wherever she wants and stop wherever she feels comfortable. At this stage, the interviewer can also ask for visual references to be included in the story if necessary.

Main narration

The main narration is maybe the most important part of any narrative interview, as it is the basis for the entire interview. There should not be any interruptions during the main narration, and the interviewer should only use non-verbal encouragement to continue the storytelling. According to Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 63-64), when the narration starts, it must not be interrupted until there is a clear coda – meaning that the interviewee pauses and signals the end of the story. The interviewer’s attention should be on making notes of the language and words used in the story and preparing for further questions at the appropriate time. When the interviewer notices the signal of the end of the story, she can then probe for anything else with questions like “is there anything else you want to say?”

Questioning and discussion

When the main narration comes to a natural end, the interviewer opens the questioning phase. At this point, the interviewer translates her exmanent questions into “immanent” ones. Immanent issues are the themes, topics and accounts of events that are brought by the interviewee, and appear during the narration. Anchoring the list of exmanent issues in the narration is a crucial task in the research process, which requires applying nothing but the language used by the interviewee. The exmanent and immanent issues may overlap totally, partially, or not at all (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 62-63).

The questioning phase aims at completing the gaps in the story and to encourage new, smaller ones. This is a skill that usually needs some practicing. It is more than likely that during the first narrative interviews, the interviewer ends up using the exact questions she had on her original list of exmanent questions. In that case, instead of helping the interviewee broaden and continue her story, she can end up sounding like a cross-
examiner. There are many instructions on how to avoid this from happening. First of all, the interviewer should not use any “why?” type of questions, and replace them with questions concerning events, like “what happened before or after or then?” The researcher should not ask directly about opinions, attitudes, or causes, which invites justifications and rationalizations. While every narrative will include the latter, it is essential not to probe them, but to see them occurring spontaneously (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000: 64).

Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000: 64-65) instruct that at the end of the questioning phase the tape or video recorder should be switched off, so that the discussions can develop in the form of small talk. During this “discussion” phase, the interviewer may use “why?” questions, if she still thinks they are needed.

3.2 Summary

As discussed, as part of this thesis I have carried out two studies to allow me to answer my proposed research questions. These studies are: analysis of my own illustration process, and interviews of other professional illustrators. By documenting and analyzing my illustration process, I have also aimed to create the basis for continuing the research by interviewing other illustrators using the narrative interview method. I take the practice-led approach to better understand the picturebook illustration process, and the narrative interview approach to investigate whether my own process resembles those of others, and to generalize the findings from these analyses. I will discuss each of these studies in the following two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) in detail.
What happens to the people who never say no? What happened to the girl who never said no? Quite often, those people start believing that they are invisible – that they do not exist if they are not constantly seen and valued by others. For the girl, this meant that she had to be better. More skilled, more unique. An illustrator without flaws. Perfect.

Because there are relatively many people who enjoy looking at perfection rather than humanity, the more illustrations the girl made, the more praise she received. Yet, she felt like a failure – like a cheap imitator of the French and Italian picturebook masters whose work she admired greatly. The praise she received sounded empty to her ears. “Why are they fooled so easily?” the girl wondered.

She was still eagerly trying to reach those moments of joy she had been witnessing earlier – the moments when the illustrations came to life in front of her. However, the more she tried, the fewer those moments became. Until at some point, those moments had been erased from her work, but also from her memory. She was working as a factory now – a factory of perfection.

How does it feel to make illustrations in a factory of perfection? The girl was exhausted. All she would have wanted to do was to go to sleep. Nevertheless, she had ten, twenty, hundred, three hundred illustrations to work with, and each and every one of them had to be perfect. There are 24 hours in a day, but that was not enough for the girl, so she had to create more time by being faster. While being faster, she tried to be even more perfect. Little by little, the girl started losing the connection with herself.

How does it feel to make illustrations when you have lost the connection with yourself? For the girl, it became combat of different negative emotions. On one side, there was insecurity, anxiety, and lack of skills that she thought she had. On the other side, she struggled with deadlines, constant pressure, and presumed expectations of other people. The creative process had now become a total and complete agony for her, with no glimpse of light on the horizon.
4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze my process of illustrating the picturebook *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* (2013), written by Raili Mikkanen. I am particularly interested in finding out what my emotional landscape was like, while I was illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. How did it feel like to illustrate the book? With this chapter, I aim to provide a personal and unembellished insight into the creative process to better understand the different aspects of the picturebook illustration process.

![Image 4.1: Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, Mikkanen and Valojärvi (WSOY, 2013).](image)

The process analysis will cover the planning stage of the picturebook, as well as creating and completing the illustrations. It is worth noting that the process of creating a picturebook often continues after the actual illustrations are completed, by, for example, preparing the original illustrations for printing, by choosing the paper type for the book, and in some cases by designing the layout and typography. Also, some themes often recur after a book is printed and published – for instance, evaluating the finished
book as an artifact. Such post-illustration stages and themes can also be considered as part of the picturebook illustration process. However, for me, the quality of the creative process is defined mostly by what happens while the actual illustrations are still in the making. This is where my capacity as an illustrator is stretched to the extreme, and where my thinking is solely focused on creating the illustrations and the book’s visual storytelling. Even though I often make some corrections to my illustrations with a computer after they return from the reproduction (i.e., after the illustrations have been digitized), I consider these corrections more like technical editing, rather than actual image-making. For me, the picturebook illustration process spans the time between drawing the first and the last line on the original illustrations on my drawing table. Because of this, I have chosen to focus on this particular period in this process analysis – the time between planning and completing the illustrations of *Ilvär-tonttu karkuteillä*.

I will document the illustration process of *Ilvär-tonttu karkuteillä* in a process diary, reporting on what happened throughout the process. The process diary will also include the photographs taken during the process and the notes written into the margins of the sketches and illustrations during the process. The photographing will be done with such frequency that the making of the illustrations can be viewed as an animation. I call the method that I will use for the documentation as “process-reproduction” (see Footnote 25 and Image 4.2). The illustration process documentation will provide a visual-verbal way to investigate and interpret the different factors and steps of the creative process. All in all, the process material provides a linear depiction of the events, which will help me to go back in time while doing the analysis, in order to understand the process better.

After documenting the illustration process, I will analyze the data – the annotated manuscript, the process diary, the notes and the photographs – by going iteratively through the research material, in order to identify my findings. It is worth pointing out, that like Muratovski (2015: 197) notes, in the case of practice-led research both data collection and data analysis are intertwined with the design process. “Therefore, the research process mirrors the design process” (Muratovski, 2015: 197). My process analysis will follow the natural order of how different aspects and elements of picturebook illustration appeared in the process of illustrating *Ilvär-tonttu karkuteillä*. Therefore, while presenting the findings of this analysis in sections 4.2-4.4, I will follow this same sequence of events as well.

---

25 A time-lapse video that shows excerpts from the illustration process of *Ilvär-tonttu karkuteillä* is available here: https://vimeo.com/485192527 [Accessed 20 Mar. 2021].
4.1.1 My path as an illustrator

As an introduction to the analysis of my picturebook illustration process, I will briefly go through my path to becoming a professional picturebook illustrator.

The identity of a picturebook illustrator was growing in me long before the first book of mine was even published. The first memories go way back to my childhood, when I was fascinated by Ilon Wikland’s illustrations. Wikland is particularly known for her illustrations to children’s books written by Astrid Lindgren. However, I remember being more fascinated by Wikland’s illustrations, than the actual stories. I imitated Wikland’s characters in my drawings and studied her way of ignoring an accurate perspective. Another influential role model for me was the illustrator Quentin Blake. The lightness and ease in his lines, and the intensity and humor in his characters were something I could not get my eyes off. Again, I felt that the illustrator stole the limelight from the author – the acclaimed Roald Dahl. Other illustrators that I admired when I was growing up were, for example, Rudolf Koivu, Jiří Trnka, and Björn Landström.

My love for picturebooks made me a library lover. While my mother was choosing novels for herself, I could spend hours carefully selecting the picturebooks that I would take home with me. Those selections were made purely based on illustrations. I was interested in the artistic quality of the illustrations and enjoyed making various piles of books based on the level of excellence that I found in the illustrations. The piles of the best picturebooks were tall and wobbly, but luckily my mother was the type of book-lover that the more books she had to carry home – also for her children – the happier she was. By the age of 15, when I started to study graphic design at Lahti College of Arts and Crafts, I already knew that illustrating picturebooks professionally would be a
dream come true for me. The illustration workshops by the picturebook illustrator Matti Kota had a substantial impact on me, and during the following three years in Lahti I illustrated my first two books, binding them carefully by hand. The first one of these unpublished picturebooks was Nukkumatti (1996, see Image 4.3) – an illustration to Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale Ole Lukøje (1841). It is a story about a Sandman, who gently puts children to sleep and – depending on how good or bad they are – shows them various dreams. The other illustrated book was my diploma work for Lahti College of Arts and Crafts, Laulu Uiton-virralta (1999, “Song from the River Uitto”, see Image 4.4). Between these two illustrated books of mine, this one was much more personal – an illustration of a poem written by the author Leena Krohn. Krohn wrote the poem for my parents after their firstborn, my elder brother, had passed away at the age of seven. Receiving good feedback from both of those picturebooks encouraged me to hold on to the dream of becoming a professional picturebook illustrator.

During the next seven years, I studied arts eagerly in various schools, and graduated from the Department of Art at the University of Art and Design Helsinki in 2009, with a clear image in my head – I would focus on picturebook illustrations as my profession. My first published picturebook, Ohjeita lohikäärmeiden kasvattajille (2009, “Guidebook for Raising Dragons”, written by Emilia Lehtinen) was already out in the bookstores, and the contract for the second book in the sequel was signed. Within the next four years, I came to illustrate 13 books – mainly picturebooks, but also non-fiction and novels.
Before there is a picturebook, there is an idea. First, somebody gets an idea, whether she is an author, illustrator, illustrator-author, or a publisher. Typically, the next phase is to write this idea down. This written version of the picturebook idea can be a short and descriptive synopsis or a final manuscript. There are also numerous cases when, for instance, someone who is working both as an author and an illustrator decides to start the process by designing the illustrations instead of writing the text. In some cases, an author and illustrator might further progress the idea, developing the story simultaneously both visually and verbally. However, if a picturebook includes text, then the most common order is to start with the written manuscript and then figure
out the relationship between the text and the images.

The idea for Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä came from the author Raili Mikkanen. I had worked with Mikkanen before, while illustrating her text for the non-fiction books Suomen lasten linnakirja (2011, “Finnish Children’s Book of Castles”) and Mennään sirkukseen (2012, “Let’s Go to Circus”). After these enjoyable and successful collaborations, Mikkanen presented me with the initial idea of a little elf who gets lost and starts an exciting adventure in the big wide world. Together, we suggested the project to the publishing house WSOY\footnote{Werner Söderström Ltd, https://www.wsyo.fi.}, who got interested and agreed to publish the book. Because we were both established professionals in our fields – Mikkanen has worked as an award-winning author in Finland for several decades, and I had already illustrated several picturebooks – the process of finding a publisher for the book was considerably easier than it would be for new authors and illustrators. After signing the book contract, Mikkanen completed the text with the help of the publishing editor. Once the text had been approved, Mikkanen sent it to me to illustrate. We did not have much contact with each other during Mikkanen’s writing process. Receiving a final manuscript, and then planning the illustrations for it based on the text, has been a typical working relationship for all of my picturebook illustration projects.

4.2.1 Understanding the story and creating the vision of illustrations

For me, the planning phase of a picturebook always starts, without exception, by attempting to understand the story. This usually requires one thing, and one thing only – reading. I highlight this fact also in the process diary of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä. “First, I just read and read and read and read”\footnote{The original process diary notes are in Finnish. The quotes in English are my verbal translations from Finnish.}. While I was illustrating Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, I read the manuscript several times to fully understand all the little details and nuances in the story before drawing a single line. The written manuscript of the story played the most vital role in figuring out and deciding on the right atmosphere for the entire visual narrative and the shape, style and nature of its characters. While reading the manuscript, I aimed at finding out what language the story was speaking and how to make my illustrations communicate with that language.

Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä is a story about a little elf, called Iivari, who gets lost while helping another character – Big Elf – to deliver Christmas presents to every home. In the beginning, Iivari is exhilarated about the turn of events and is more than happy to leave his exhausting job. He keenly runs into the new adventures in a big city and soon finds himself in places like the circus tent, tram, zoo, and go-kart track. However, freedom is not quite as sweet as Iivari had expected. Compared to his comfortable home in Lapland, the pace in the city is fast, tiring, and frightening. The little elf, who is thrown into the big world of the trapeze artists, polar bears, monkeys, and race cars, soon starts missing his home, as well as the warm lap of Big Elf. In the final scene, the tired and sad Iivari wonders around the streets he first got lost in. There, he, by chance, happens to bump into Big Elf again, who is happy and relieved for the reunion.

The annotated manuscript of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä (see Image 4.7) demonstrates my initial thinking process behind the illustrations. Margins of the manuscript are
filled with notes and remarks. These notes include ideas for illustrations, thoughts about the characters and their visual appearance, and initial thoughts about the most natural, exciting, or surprising places in the text for turning the page in the finished picturebook. While reading, I also highlighted the sentences, words, and events that I thought were the most critical and essential parts of the story. All of these initial notes for Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä are, without exception, verbal.

Notes that I have written on the manuscript of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä are extremely simple, and are more like sequences of words, including colors, visual details, emotions, and ideas in a rather concise way. For example, the notes where Iivari wonders around the suburbs looking for Big Elf, say: “Sad, miserable elf, a dusk, long shadow behind Iivari, terraced houses – English “row” houses? Christmas inside, trees, turkeys, pigs, Christmas trees, etc., streetlights, empty streets, blue, orange light shining in the windows” I have circled the following sentence from the manuscript: “He felt so lonely that he almost burst into tears”. While this loneliness is what I aimed at emphasizing visually in the resulting illustration (see Image 4.6) – Iivari is not quite as lonely as he thinks he is. A little boy, mentioned in the text, is looking at Iivari from one of the windows.

![Image 4.6: The final version of spread number 11, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä.](image)
Raija Mikkanen - Laura Valojärvi

Tonttu karkuteillä

- Ala painua ja tule viikkeläisti takaisin! Isotonttu komenisi ja tönäisi livari-tonttua selkään.

Livaria kiukutti. Miksi juuri minun täytyy raahata hurjan painavia lahdasäkkejä ovien taakse, se murisi itseseen. Joulupukki tulee ja vie ne sisälle, isotonttu istuu koko ajan reessä ja minä teen työn. Isotonttu laiskottelee ja Pakki saa kaiken kunnian. Mitä minä saan?

Joulupukki on jo vanha eikä jaksaa kantaa säkkejä, livari huomasi. Se lauhtui vähän.


Livari kapusi portaita monta kerrosta, puukitteli välillä ja kapusi taas. Lopulta se oli oikean oven takana, jätti säkin sen eteen, huohotti hetken ja kipitti takaisin alas. Kierros, kierros, kierros ja vielä yksi kierros.

Alhaalla käytävä tuntui yllättävän pitkältä. Vasta kulman takaa löytyi ulko-ovi, josta livari puikahti ulos.

Hetkenin! Mitä oli tapahtunut? Isotonttu, rekeä ja poroa ei näkynyt missään!


Mutta eihän livari tiennyt enää, mistä ovesta se oli tullut ulos. Se yritti ääntää ovea toisensa perään. Kaikki olivat tiukasti kiinni.

Livari seisoi hetken neuvotomana. Äkkää se kuitenkin riemastui:

- Tämähän tuli juuri oikeaan aikaan! Olen rättäväisynt. Isotonttu saa itse kantaa loput lahdakonit portaita ylös, tämä poika lähtee nyt omille teilleen! Se huudasti ääneen.

Ja niin livari lähti; kohdi tuntemattomia seikkailuja.
Many of the notes in the margins of the manuscript seem to transfer rather faithfully to the final illustrations. There are, however, several notes that cannot be traced to the finished illustrations. Almost all of the ideas shown in the final illustrations can, on the other hand, be found in some form from the manuscript notes. Only one of the images – of all the 12 illustrations in the final book – is entirely different from the initial notes in the manuscript. That illustration is spread number 5, which shows Iivari traveling on a tram. While the final illustration shows the tram from various angles (see Image 4.8), the initial notes in the manuscript paint the following image: “Grandmother with her grandchildren, children climbing on her shoulders, binoculars hanging around the neck, conductor?, tram! – old school, Iivari’s feet hanging in the air”. The grandmother – described in the manuscript – is not included in the final illustration, but replaced instead with other trams and the snowfall. After contemplating different options, I ended up visualizing and interpreting the circled sentence in the manuscript – “The Tram rattled in the streets for a good while” – in the final illustration.

Image 4.8: The final version of the spread number 5, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä.

Reading the manuscript of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä several times helped me to understand the core of the story and to visualize the events in my mind. After reading the manuscript, I knew, more or less, what I wanted to tell with each illustrated spread28, and the kind of color palette I would use. The reading phase was, without a doubt, the

---

28 Spread of an illustrated picturebook is simply a set of pages (usually two) viewed together. Nikolajeva (2003a: 242) discusses the aspect of spreads in picturebooks, pointing out that picturebooks contain “doublespreads” (or openings) rather than pages. “Unless a doublespread is one single illustration, the balance between the left-hand page and the right-hand page is essential”, Nikolajeva (2003a: 242) writes.
single most important phase while planning *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, in order to discover how the world would look and feel in the final illustrations.

The reading phase of the manuscript of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, and outlining the initial ideas for the illustrations was a highly intuitive experience for me. Decisions on what I would be illustrating later were not made based on rational thinking, or hopes of the children, author, publishing editor, or other audience of the final book. My decisions were based on relatively intuitive feelings about what would be the best way “to bring more life into the text”, as I write in the process diary.

While reading the manuscript of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* I was constantly aware of the speed and motion in the story. The rapid shifts in the atmosphere and pace that I experienced while reading the story were the basis for the resulting visual storytelling. Those were the things that I knew I wanted to highlight with the illustrations – to make the speedy events and scenes come alive, even if a reader of the book was not reading the text at all, but only viewing the illustrations. In this reading phase, I was contemplating various aspects of the text. What words and sentences resonated with me the most? What brought colors, emotions, and atmospheres to my mind? What gave me chills? What was too important not to interpret or comment on in the illustrations? What required more explanation? What amused me? What bored me or felt irrelevant to me? What was exciting? What was interesting? What felt like it was at the core of the story?

While analyzing my process diary of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, and the little notes on the margins of the manuscript, I noticed how reading the text activates questions regarding the atmosphere of the story and the language. What does the story feel like? What needs to be told, and how? How can I make the language of the story – the “wind that blows through the text” as I write in the process diary – understandable and exciting visually? These types of questions keep recurring in the process diary. In the margins of the manuscript, I also try to answer some of those questions – sometimes succeeding and cheering up due to my ability to deepen the understanding of the story, and sometimes getting frustrated due to my inability (and perceived incompetence) to bring any alternative or complementing dimensions to the events or characters.

The importance of reading and understanding the manuscript fully and carefully, noticing all the little details and nuances that are hiding somewhere between or behind the lines, seems to be at the heart of the planning phase for me. While reading the manuscript, I find myself diving into the ocean of words, with a clear aim at understanding the language that the text is whispering. I surround myself with that language, taste it, smell it, and feel it, and then – and only then – I start seeing illustrations in my head that are speaking the same language, but with my own accent.

*I am starting to get hold of the story about Iivari. It has required multiple readings, but little by little, the world has started to come to life in my mind. I want big, bold patterns – fabrics, brick walls, the fur of a polar bear. I want huge contrasts and strong spaces. I want worn out colors and a vintage atmosphere. Small Iivari who is thrown in a big world that is peculiarly twisting around him.*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*
Contemplating the relationship between the words and the images

Contemplating the relationship between the words and the images was part of the illustration process from the very beginning – already while reading the manuscript. *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* provided a relatively large amount of space and possibilities to build the story visually, as compared to some other picturebooks that I have illustrated. For instance, when Mikkanen writes about Iivari getting lost, she does not use the word “circus” when she describes where the little elf has ended up. Instead, she writes about a large tent with bright lights and a ladder that leads the elf up in the sky “filled with blinking stars”. Similarly, when Iivari finds himself in a tram – instead of mentioning the tram – Mikkanen writes of a “funny little hut that was rattling forward”. Even though the text is relatively long, these “gaps” in the text enabled me to show Big Elf in the illustrations long before he appeared in the text.

*I am thinking about Big Elf, how he found his way to the storyboard yesterday. ... Trams felt so hard, scary, and lonely. Lonely like Iivari. The reader will find out only at the end that Big Elf has been looking for Iivari all along. Toughness of the trams and the loneliness of Iivari made me feel sorry for the little elf. I wanted the reader to know that Iivari is missed. Maybe Big Elf could be something that the child could look for – if she wanted – from all of the illustrations in the book?*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

In the process diary, I came up with the idea of Big Elf attaching “missing person” posters to the walls, showing Iivari and a phone number. The notes in the sketch of spread number 5 (see Image 4.9) explain and repeat the motivation to do so. “So that the story would not be so sad”. After this spread, Big Elf can be found in most of the other spreads as well – persistently looking for Iivari, with a little lantern attached to his cap. In the text, however, Big Elf does not mention that he has been looking for Iivari when they finally meet. Instead, he simply sighs, “I have been so worried”. This was not enough for me to indicate the affectionate relationship between the two characters. Big Elf searching Iivari is a story inside a story brought to life solely through the visual storytelling.
While illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, my influence on the text was minimal. As discussed before, when I started planning the illustrations, Mikkanen had already completed the manuscript with the involvement of the editor. Although I had become friends with Mikkanen during the earlier collaborations, and even though she had asked my opinion about the story before starting the project, the thought of advising her when it came to writing the text simply did not occur to me. My deep respect for Mikkanen as an acclaimed, award-winning, and established author overtook my thoughts about the role and possibilities of illustrations. I assume that this would not have happened if I had been working as an illustrator for several decades and had gained more self-confidence regarding my status.

Although there are picturebook publishing editors in Finland who are extremely interested in the interplay between words and images, and though I have had the privilege of working with some of them, the text has always stayed more or less unchanged even after I have joined the process with my visual ideas. Typically, I have received a completed text and then simply added the illustrations to it, without any further changes. This kind of approach has often resulted in the needless repetition of different elements in the visual storytelling. This was also the case when illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. However, as discussed before, I did not question this approach when it came to my collaboration with the author, but I did not try to change it with the publishing editor either.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the manuscript to me during the picturebook illustration process. While illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I was already experienced as a picturebook illustrator. Nevertheless, I still needed the manuscript to
lead me back inside the story when I felt disoriented or convinced that I had nothing to say visually. In fact, in the process diary I mention needing the manuscript even more while illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, than at the beginning of my career. After learning more about the picturebook illustration process and about the different ways of articulating and leading a written story visually, my appreciation for the text has also increased.

*I have learned how to “share the process” with the text during these years. The text is a friend who tells me what to do next when I feel overwhelmed. It shows me the direction; it tells me what to do next, it guides me what to draw. With the story, I don’t feel that I am alone – or lonely – while working.*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

### Designing the storyboard, pace, and rhythm

During the planning stage, the illustrator usually draws the “road map” for the picturebook, either in the form of a visual storyboard or a book dummy. In it, she creates a visual plan of each spread in relation to one another in a miniature size. Some illustrators like to use both of these tools due to their slightly different way of demonstrating the image sequence. While illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I used the storyboard as my primary tool for planning the picturebook (see images 4.10 and 4.11).

The storyboard of a picturebook shows a sequence of miniature sketches of all the spreads on one to three sheets of paper – in the case of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I used two A4 size papers for creating the storyboard. In those sheets and sketches, I contemplated and controlled the composition and drama of turning the page, as well as the pace of the visual narrative by varying the size of the illustrations, by changing the viewpoint or composition, and by changing the actual visual design of the illustration on the page. Furthermore, the relationship between the text and images, not just in terms of the content but also in terms of the form, was considered while drawing the storyboard – for example, when deciding where the text goes with the spread. The storyboard was used as a tool, to give me and the picturebook team an overall impression of the entire book.

In many cases, the size of a picturebook, as well as its scale and shape – i.e., its physical format – is more or less decided either by the illustrator herself, or by the publishing house, already before the illustrator starts working on the storyboard. However, the storyboard might also be used in contemplating these physical aspects of a picturebook – for instance, how to take advantage of the endpapers, how to consider the disjunction of the pages, or where to locate the copyrights. Further to these, in the storyboard of a picturebook, the hinge of a spread has to be taken into account, so that the image will not be disturbed even if some millimeters were “eaten” by the gutter of the page.

---

29 The book dummy can be used as an early model of the book. It is a simple, rough and hand folded set of papers, either the same size of the final book or smaller, but with the right number of pages in it. The book dummy gives an impression of the final book before any of the illustrations are completed, or even started.
book. If the page format or the number of the pages have not been decided beforehand, the appropriate number of pages is likely to suggest itself during the planning phase. The number of the pages for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was decided while drawing the storyboard. This relatively intuitive feeling about the right number of the pages was not challenged later on the process. The final book consisted of 12 double-page illustrations, a title spread, a right-hand first page, and a left-hand last page. Altogether, it ended up as a very typical 32-page picturebook format that many publishers prefer. I also decided that the size of the book should be 215x280 mm, which was one of the standard sizes that the publishing house requested me to choose from.

Drawing the storyboard of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was all about contemplating, testing, and considering the rhythm between different compositions, “shot sizes”, and perspectives, as well as thinking about the world and atmosphere beyond the frames of the spread. While drawing the storyboard, I asked myself questions such as: How does the zoo look like as a whole? How would the park feel like if I was there with my children? How would the circus look if I am sitting at the front row? How would the view change if I moved further away? How would it feel like to be up there with the trapeze artists? To understand these aspects better, I visited a circus and the local zoo while planning the book. These visits helped me widen my perspective and bring some elements to the illustrations that I would have missed otherwise.

The process of designing the storyboard for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* had similarities to designing a storyboard for a movie or an animated film. The importance and influence of film studies, which were part of my education as an art student – understanding the cinematography shot sizes, camera angles, and framing rules – have significantly impacted my skills as an illustrator. It is possible, that partly because of these studies, and partly because of my love for movies, planning the storyboard of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was, in fact, an exceptionally three-dimensional and cinematographic experience for me. Filmmaking studies taught me how to draw storyboards long before designing my first actual storyboard for a picturebook.

My storyboards for picturebooks have always been extremely polished, detailed, and refined. This was the case with the storyboard of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* as well. The storyboard of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* is probably the most detailed storyboard of all the storyboards I have ever created. One possible reason for this is that I was photographing my illustration process for this thesis while I was creating the storyboard, which affected the way I was sketching it.

*I can already notice that photographing the process does affect my work, brings the tendency to show off – show to everybody how amazing sketches and process I am working on...phew.*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

In the process diary I mention the pressure to “show off” my sketching skills to other people. Nevertheless, I do not think it was my main motive for drawing a detailed storyboard. After all, I did work with detailed storyboards already before illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. Instead, it would seem that I need accurate sketches in order to “believe” in the illustrations and the whole sequential narrative of the picturebook.
Furthermore, this helps me to continue the process towards the final illustrations with more confidence.

I am really satisfied with every spread in the storyboard so far. The sketches make me want to start painting them. I guess this is one of the most essential functions of the storyboard to me – that I will believe in the illustrations enough, and to myself enough, in order to dive inside the images, in order to immerse myself into them with the help of watercolors.

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

In a storyboard, the illustrator might already make some experimentation regarding the color palette. However, often the storyboard and the book dummy have very little or no color. This is how I like to work myself, and how I worked while planning *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. The storyboard was the place for me to explore and decide on the entire dramatic structure and pace of the visual storytelling. To do this, I only needed black and white sketches to demonstrate the changes in tones. For me, the storyboard is for seeing the overall composition, movement, and rhythm of the book from a distance – deciding how everything will look in the picturebook, and what the rhythm of the entire visual story is. “I feel like at this point, it’s all about lines. Where do I want lines – big lines? Where do I want to take the reader with the help of those lines – where to carry the viewer’s eyes? Where to lead her?” I write in the process diary.
Image 4.10: Storyboard, part 1 of 2, livari-tonttu karkuteillä.
Image 4.11: Storyboard, part 2 of 2, livari-tonttu karkuteillä.
Furthermore, drawing a storyboard is not a fast and “rough” experience for me. It is a period of maximal concentration, which can easily take almost half of the entire time working on a picturebook. In the process diary, I mention how impossible it was for me to listen to music while reading the manuscript and drawing the storyboard of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. Even though intuitive decision-making played an important role during the planning phase, it seemed to have alternated with extremely focused analytical thinking that required complete silence. However, when I proceeded to creating the actual illustrations for the picturebook, listening to music became almost a requirement, as it helped me create the right atmosphere for the illustrations.

*Sketching the characters and planning the composition*

Different illustrators use different methods to contemplate and design the appearance of their story characters. Many picturebook illustrators continue to design the characters and surroundings in their sketchbooks or book dummies after the storyboard is done to further explore their rough storyboard sketches. For me, it is typical to use the storyboard as a tool for detailed sketching, and I rarely use any sketchbooks later in the process. This was also my sketching method while planning *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. Unlike most of the picturebook illustrators I know, I use the storyboard – and storyboard primarily – in designing even the smallest details of the illustrations by drawing and erasing everything in 10x6.5 cm sized sketches several times until I am satisfied with: 1) the balance between different spreads, 2) the way the visual storytelling evolves, 3) the way the dramatic turn of events are presented and highlighted visually, 4) the placing of the text, and 4) how the characters, details, and places in the story look.

While for some picturebook illustrators, sketching the characters, details, and surroundings in sketchbooks is central to their picturebook illustration process, for me sketching has been almost fully integrated with the sequential planning and drawing the storyboard. As with all the other picturebooks I have illustrated, with *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I also liked to sketch the characters inside the storyboard while simultaneously contemplating the pace, composition, and surroundings.

Separating the characters from their surroundings has never felt particularly natural, or even logical, for me. As such, while illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* it was easier for me to get to know the characters by doodling them as part of their own “living environments”. This helped me to make the characters more convincing and “alive”. Separating characters from their environments would feel like I was drawing paper dolls – as I used to do as a child – whereas designing a character for a picturebook is a very three-dimensional experience for me. Sketching Iivari while drawing the storyboard was all about trying to make the character more tangible and help him “breathe” the same air as the world around him was breathing. For me, feeling the character as a moving and breathing figure – and finding out how to make that visible in a drawing – has always been more manageable when the character is located in its surroundings.

As mentioned before, I like to read the manuscript several times to encourage visions to appear in my head. I only finish reading when I feel that I have clear and vivid characters and compositions in my head. When I start drawing the storyboard, I simply
draw, erase, and repeat, until the sketch matches the vision I have of that spread. This is probably why I did not feel the need to explore different possibilities in a sketchbook while illustrating _Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä_. I was perfectly satisfied with the first sketches that I drew in the storyboard of Iivari, simply because I felt that they reflected completely the tiny, but chubby, friendly-looking elf with an extremely long hat and big round eyes that I had in mind. This has been the case, more or less, in all of my picturebook illustration processes, and the longer I have worked as an illustrator, the faster the process of creating the characters has become.

The excerpts from the sketching process documentation of _Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä_, shown in the images 4.13 and 4.14, presents 64 of the 577 images that I took while sketching the spread number 7. From the sequence, it is possible to notice how the composition and the characters developed while drawing the storyboard. The version that I ended up illustrating (see Image 4.12, right) is very similar with the one I was sketching initially (see Image 4.12, left). Here, I will use the excerpts from the sketching process of the spread number 7, the “monkey spread”, in demonstrating how my thinking process evolved and moved while drawing the storyboard. Even though the process of drawing each spread of a book can be slightly different, the example given here represents a typical way of attempting to achieve the right type of tension in the illustration and give a two-dimensional form to my vision.

![Image 4.12: Sketches for the spread number 7, from the storyboard of _Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä_.](image)

The process diary – as well as the little notes in the margins of the monkey sketch – reveal that although the two versions shown in Image 4.12 are alike, and despite the fact that I was really satisfied with the composition and the characters in the final version (image on the right), the process to get there was a particularly challenging one. After I had completed sketching the first version (image on the left), I was extremely dissatisfied with how the sketch had turned out. The composition felt confusing, disoriented, and tight, and it lacked tension. Also, there was barely any space reserved for the text.
I must admit that I do not believe in that monkey sketch at all. I have worked with the 10x6.5 cm sketch for two whole days already. In general, I feel that illustrations that take too much time rarely succeed. But there is something that I like about the composition as well. I guess I may have just put too many shadows in it. Blah…I wonder if I need to do it all over again. It feels disorganized, extremely disorganized. I wonder what I am missing. I’m not sure.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

I could not accept the first version by thinking that it was “good enough” because it did not correspond to the vision I had in my mind. As discussed before, drawing a storyboard for a picturebook is, for me, all about trying to move closer to the vision I have, one step and line at a time. If I have not reached that vision, the feeling I have is often rather physical – I can feel it in my body, that something in the illustration is “off” and dysfunctional. Intuition is loudest when something in the sketch of a storyboard is precisely how I want it to be or completely the opposite. This was the case with the monkey spread as well. After I had completed the first version, I already knew that I would need to re-do the sketch all over again.

I just started the monkey sketch from the very beginning again. It was not a difficult decision – it was obvious to me the moment I saw the sketch this morning, for the first time after the weekend. The illustration was spread in too many different directions. It was confined, cramped, and lacking the focus. I am glad I have become at least a bit better in letting go of the bad illustrations and ideas. However, the spread with monkeys is troubling me. I have no clue how to approach the image now. I think I will just leave it for later. My self-esteem with that image is zero right now. I think that there is no point in hitting my head to the wall as long as I’m feeling this bad.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

However, when I had completed the first version of the spread, I had to put the sketch on hold for a few days, because I felt drained after struggling with the sketch for several days. This is also typical for all my illustration projects, including Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä. Instead of trying to complete everything at once, I move here and there in the storyboard, allowing some of the sketches “to rest” while completing others. The process diary of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä shows that after failing to complete the sketch with the monkeys in a fulfilling way, I moved to draw another spread in the sequence. When I felt comfortable and confident enough to return to the monkey spread, I erased everything and started again with a blank paper. It is possible to see from the excerpts (see images 4.13 and 4.14) that before returning to the monkeys hanging from the ropes, I tried to achieve a more interesting composition with the help of a tree (see Image 4.14, second row from top). However, the composition with a tree was even further away from my original vision, and soon, the sketch started to feel uncomfortable. Therefore, I decided to give another chance to the monkeys on the ropes. This time, it brought me to the final version very quickly. Removing some of the monkeys and
focusing on creating tension in the illustration – rather than focusing on the characters – helped me quickly achieve what I was looking for. Interestingly enough, it also made the characters more vivid.

The monkey illustration started to find its final form after I gave a good look at the older storyboard sketches. The original version with the five monkeys was still problematic, but I could find some potential in it. So, I decided to take it from there. I have a hunch that I will manage to figure it out now. Thank God!

Process diary, livari-tonttu karkuteillä
Image 4.13: Excerpts from the sketching process of the spread number 7, part 1 of 2, *livari-tonttu karkuteillä*. 
Image 4.14: Excerpts from the sketching process of the spread number 7, part 2 of 2, liivari-tonttu karkuteillä.
4.2.2 My emotional landscape while planning the book

The process diary shows that the beginning of the illustration process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was emotionally ambivalent time for me. In one way, I felt excited about the beautiful and energetic story that Raili Mikkanen had written. While reading the manuscript, I could easily create an emotional connection with the main character Iivari and imagine exactly how he looked. After reading the story, I had the character in mind – a lively and sympathetic little elf with a long red hat and messy black hair. The story also helped me envision the scenes, atmospheres, and color palettes in different spreads quickly and effortlessly. After reading the manuscript for a few times, I had a vivid image of the entire book in my head. I knew exactly what I wanted to achieve visually. I was eager and excited to start painting the illustrations – to start taking the steps towards the finished book. I felt highly optimistic, and I was convinced that the book would be a great success – both commercially and artistically.

*Today I felt, for the first time in a very long time that I have the coolest profession in the world.*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

However, the process diary and the notes in the sketches show that the planning process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* included extremely painful and agonizing moments as well. These types of moments started appearing in the process early on. When I started the planning phase, I was already worried about the time after completing the book. I openly share this worrying thought in the process diary. “I have some strange, anxious feeling inside me. ‘What will happen with everything’ type of feeling. What will happen with the book? How about with my career? Blah This kind of “chronophobia” – the fear of the future – has been typical for all the other picturebook illustration projects of mine as well.

Often when I start illustrating a book, I have received an artist’s grant I have applied for months earlier for the illustration work. The artist’s grants that I have received in different cases, typically from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland or the Finnish Cultural Foundation, have allowed me to focus on the creative process without the need for extra income. However, while I was illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, the grant covered only those four months that I worked on the illustrations. Therefore, when I started the illustration process, I was already concerned about the time after completing the book. I did not know whether I would receive more funding for my future illustration work.

Besides struggling with the financial uncertainty, I also had, for the first time in my illustration career, started to wonder whether I even wanted to create picturebooks anymore. I had a hard time focusing on the joy that I received from my profession, and I was tired of worrying whether I would receive the other grants that I had applied for. Also, I found myself wondering whether there would be any more books for me to illustrate. The process diary of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* shows that, when I was illustrating the book, I was more aware of the financial aspects of my job than before. I also mention the frustration that I felt because the payment that I got from the publishing
house was not enough to illustrate the book. Furthermore, I contemplate in the process diary how illogical it felt for me that the number of illustrations did not correlate with the amount of the payment that I received from the publisher.

I can see that the planning is now more affected by some aspects outside the actual image-making. For instance, I am thinking about financial aspects in relation to time management. How much time will each illustration take? How much time will the whole book? Why on earth did I make the dragon books double in size, despite the fact that the payment from the publishing house was exactly the same?

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

The process diary shows that as I was planning Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, the melancholic and distressing feelings that I was experiencing were often connected with another picturebook of mine that had been published the previous summer, Prinsessa Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti (2012, “Princess Wilhelmiina and the Coin of Destiny”). The book was not received as well as I had hoped. In fact, after it had been published, it almost felt that it was not received at all. Instead of reviews or public comments – even negative ones – there was silence. With any other book I would have been more understanding when it came to the silence, and instead seen it as an unfortunate consequence of the quieter summer season, or as an indicator of the book itself. However, with Prinsessa Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti (see Image 4.15) I felt that I had artistically succeeded better than with any other picturebook of mine before. I was proud of the book, and I was proud of the illustrations in it. Therefore, the fact that nobody seemed to notice that it had been published felt devastating to me. I return to this disappointment I experienced after Prinsessa Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti had been released repeatedly in the process diary of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä and in the margin notes of the sketches.

Why all this effort? Seriously. Insanely huge job to make a picturebook. The author receives all the glory IF there will be any glory at all. Usually, there isn’t. Wilhelmiina – maybe the best work I’ve ever done, but it just faded away. Disappeared. Who cares? I care. But who else? Nobody.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä
I have thought about Wilhelmiina a lot today. I am afraid that I will become bitter if Wilhelmiina disappears into the darkness. When it will. I have to find the passion for this work again somehow. If only I knew how.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

The process diary shows a great range of different emotions. While planning Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, some days were more intense than others and included rapid shifts from one emotional state to another. For example, one morning during the planning phase, I write about extreme frustration and low self-esteem. In the quote below, I question not only my willingness to work as a picturebook illustrator anymore, but also my skills and talent as an artist.

I am tired of this job. I cannot think clearly. I cannot come up with any ideas. I lack skills. Period. Why on earth do I continue? I could become one hell of a house painter. Or a confectioner. ... You have a talent if you have a talent. I think I have proven myself and the society that my talent is a bit comme ci comme ca. I need air. I need some air of this whole thing right now.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

However, on the afternoon of the very same day, the mood is completely changed. In the process diary, I write how excited I feel about the project again, and address the
shift in my emotions by comparing my profession to bipolar disorder: “Once again, I noticed how manic-depressive this job is. I mean really According to the diary and the notes in the margins of the illustrations, the shift, in this particular case, took place after having a conversation over the phone with my friend. After the conversation, I managed to turn the self-pitying to an active and positive working mode and drew not only a good sketch of the spread number 10, which I had struggled with for several days, but also a final sketch for the covers of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä (see Image 4.16).

Image 4.16: Sketch for the spread number 10 (top), and the book cover (bottom) of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä.
From 9 a.m. until four in the afternoon, I felt sorry for myself and feeling bad about everything. But after having the conversation with my friend, something changed. I decided to try once more, and now – the pencil started flying. It was so strange. The character in the spread number 10 simply appeared on the paper – the composition as well. Also, I managed to draw an excellent sketch for the book covers. All this after 4 p.m. So cool, absolutely amazing. All the self-pitying and accusations are gone and replaced with the feeling that this book will be GOOD.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

4.3 Creating the illustrations

Creating the illustrations of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä was in some ways different from other picturebook illustration processes of mine, mainly because I was documenting the illustration process for this thesis. It was also because of the two months break that I had in between completing the illustrations. I started planning the book at the beginning of September 2012 and completed the storyboard by the end of October. I continued the process by planning the color palette for the book with the help of color-mapping – by creating collages that helped me get closer to the ambiance that I was envisioning while reading the manuscript. This was something that I had not tried before. By the end of the year, I had completed the first few spreads in the sequence, but also the cover illustration of the book, as requested by the publishing house due to the marketing reasons. After that, I had a two-month break from creating any illustrations. In March, I rented a little apartment in Paris, intending to complete the illustrations there. By the end of April, the illustrations were completed and were sent to Finland for reproduction. After they had been scanned and color-corrected, I transferred the digitalized illustrations to the page design software and designed the layout of the book. The book was published in the autumn of 2013.

The Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä project team included the author Raili Mikkanen and the publishing editor from WSOY. In all of my picturebook illustration projects, it has been typical to meet the author and the publishing editor at least twice during the illustration process. The number of meetings has diminished over the years, as my professional skills and understanding about picturebooks have increased. When I illustrated my earlier picturebooks, I would meet the publishing editor and the author up to five times during the process. Because I did not get any formal education about picturebook illustration while I was still studying, these meetings during my earlier picturebook projects were a significant way for me to learn about the requirements of picturebooks – for instance, how the gutter of the book affects the illustrations in the printed book.

I have always enjoyed the face-to-face contact with the team members, as it has allowed me to receive feedback on my ideas and illustrations, and to consider together how to make the visual storytelling better. However, as mentioned, when illustrating Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, I was temporarily living in Paris, and therefore was in contact with the other team members mostly through occasional emails. Probably because of this, there are only a few mentions in the process diary about the conversations that I
have had with the other members of the team. However, I do write in the process diary about the request that I received from the publisher to make the book and its cover illustrations easy to approach for the child audience. In the process diary, I contemplate how this request affected the process.

I thought about the conversation that I had with the editor: she hoped that Iivari would become a “bestseller” – the kind of book that would make the book clubs excited. Somewhere in between the lines, there is a request: less artistic, please.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

4.3.1 In quest of effective illustrations

While creating the illustrations, I considered myself as a partner to the author – Raili Mikkanen – in shaping the reader’s mental image and understanding of the text, by suggesting different ways to experience the story. Throughout the process, I also felt that I had a duty to interpret the text accurately, to not mislead the reader. However, although this visual-verbal responsibility was one of the things that I was consciously considering while creating the illustrations, my main interest was in evoking certain feelings or moods in the illustrations, and creating elements that would help the reader to “bond” with the main character of the book and the world he was living in. I wanted to create illustrations that would strongly invite the viewer to experience the tempo I felt while reading the story myself, and the loneliness and confusion that Iivari was experiencing. Also, I wanted the visual storytelling to emphasize the feeling of relief that Iivari feels when he finally finds Big Elf. Even though my main focus while illustrating was on these emotional aspects, I do mention in the process diary the yearning for decorative elements as well. Often, these elements were connected with the theme around Christmas. In the storyboard notes, I can find several mentions of wallpapers, fabrics, and different types of “christmassy” patterns that I was interested in including in the illustrations.

Based on the process diary, the emphasis on expressive or descriptive elements while creating the illustration for Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä was much less compared to suggestive and decorative elements. This has been the case for all of my picturebooks. When illustrating fully fictional stories, I have paid only very little attention to “describing” anything with my illustrations. This might have something to do with my philosophy as a picturebook illustrator in general – when I illustrate for children, I have full trust in the child readers’ ability to visually read more complex visualizations as well, without any need for additional description. Then again, the expressive approach in my illustrations has been mainly connected with some individual images rather than the entire image sequence. Drawing a detailed storyboard limits my freedom to make more expressive explorations while creating the actual illustrations. Although I enjoyed the assistance that the detailed storyboard provided while illustrating Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, I mention in the process diary how I struggled to enjoy the process partly because of the rigidity that it created.

In the following three sections, I will discuss the technical aspects and methods
mentioned in the process diary that I used to create effective illustrations, and to capture in the final illustrations what I was visioning while planning the book. These aspects are: 1. technique, 2. the color palette, light and atmosphere and 3. movement and intuition.

**Technique**

I used the same technique in creating the illustrations of *livari-tonttu karkuteillä* that I have used, more or less, in my previous picturebooks. I did not use a computer to create the illustrations, but I manually painted them using watercolors and black oil-based pencils. Occasionally, I also used white gouache paint to add some extra light to the illustrations.

At the beginning of the painting process, I was extremely motivated to try new techniques for creating the illustrations. I felt that I had been working with the same technique for a long time without taking any risks. Repeating what I already knew well, had made me feel unenthusiastic about the watercolor technique and the “safe” and risk-free images that I was creating. “Bored. That is how I feel right now. I am so bored with this work that I will die of boredom soon, no doubt about that”, I write in my process diary. This observation inspired me to try the collage technique at the beginning of the illustration process to determine whether a new technique could help me feel more excited and inspired about the image-making process. “I need to come up with some new way of creating these illustrations”.

For the collage experiment, I bought some fabrics and transparent papers, and tried to add them into some of the illustrations while painting them, to add some interesting texture to the surface. However, this experiment did not succeed very well. Soon after starting to paint the spread number 1 (see Image 4.17) – “the staircase image” – I started becoming anxious about my inability to achieve what I wanted to achieve, and the difficulty in mastering an unfamiliar technique. The paper that I was using to create the collage effect was difficult to handle and made the watercolors act differently from what I was used to – for example, by reducing intensity of the colors.

Image 4.17 shows a sample of the painting process of the staircase spread, and the different stages I went through while experimenting with the collage technique. After drawing the outlines of the illustration with a graphite pencil on the watercolor paper, I used blue masking fluid to preserve some of the white areas on the paper. After adding the initial layers of watercolor, I removed the masking fluid and attached pieces of transparent paper onto the image. This, however, caused the colors to die completely. After this, I tried to revive the illustration by scraping it with sandpaper and adding one more layer of the transparent paper over the surface. This only increased my struggles with the image. I write in my process diary: “The only thing that is promising in the staircase illustration is the tiny floor area in the middle. That’s about it. All this testing with the new technique...one big mess, nothing else!”

I felt dissatisfied with the results, and for the first time in the process diary, I write about the feelings of fear that I had started to experience. These feelings were connected with the deadline, which required me to complete a certain number of illustrations in a certain amount of time. Exploring a new technique took longer than I had expected, which led me to increasingly worry about the schedule.
Image 4.17: The collage technique experiment with the spread number 1, *livari-tonttu karkuteillä*. 
I am scared. I am afraid that I will ruin something – that something will go wrong. Fear has made a nest to my work. If something goes wrong, it means that I won’t be able to stick with the schedule. That simply cannot happen. My work has turned into something that doesn’t allow me to make mistakes. There is no time for that, no room. No time to look for some new directions, because new directions open the door for mistakes.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

Although the experience that I had with this image – that it lost its vividness – is something that I can recall from my other picturebook projects as well, this was the first time that I experienced it while exploring the collage technique. Watercolor painting can be a rather sensitive technique – it is easy to “overdo” an image when working with watercolors, by, for instance, adding too many layers of paint with too much pigment. However, over the years, I have learned to master this technique and know when it is easier to start the image all over again, instead of trying to revive the same paper by adding new layers of color. The process diary shows that while I was struggling with the staircase spread, I recognized for the first time, the connection between me feeling scared and the illustration losing its vitality.

How on earth could these illustrations breathe, if breathing, for me, is almost impossible while working these days? I am holding my breath all the time, making sure that I won’t make mistakes – that I won’t color over the borders. I am demanding something from myself that I would never demand from a child. A coloring book – what a sad artifact. Be careful, Laura. Be careful that you won’t color over the borders! The sky is blue, and the snow is white – that is how it should be. Seriously Laura. I mean, seriously.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

After struggling with the staircase spread for days, I admitted to myself that the experiment with the collage technique was taking too much of my time. The schedule that I had set for myself to deliver the illustrations to the publishing house on time – was starting to fall behind. In the process diary, I consider whether I should forget the collage experiment and return to the safe and less risky watercolor technique.

Should I just create the entire book by following the same routine as always? With the same technique as always? Maybe I should just skip the experimenting for now and just complete this book with the existing skills. Should I do that?

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

The sample photographs of the staircase spread (see Image 4.17) shows that halfway through the process, I decided to start painting the image all over again. After that, I did not return to the collage technique anymore but completed the rest of the illustrations with watercolors, oil-based pencils, and white gouache.
Before continuing with the staircase spread, I put it aside for some time while completing other, easier, illustrations. I did this with many other illustrations in the book as well – when I felt that I was stuck with an image, I continued the process with another illustration, while the more challenging one was “resting”. This approach helped me in two ways. Firstly, it helped me gain the self-confidence that I had lost while struggling with a particular illustration, and secondly, it allowed me to see the challenging illustration from a distance again. In a way, instead of trying to hit my head against the wall, I took a step back and saw the door I could walk through. After allowing the staircase spread to rest for a while, I took a new blank paper, started all over again, and completed the image quickly and effortlessly.

The color palette, light, and atmosphere

As I discussed in the previous section, I have never used colors in my storyboards. However, the manuscript’s margins and the storyboard are filled with little notes and hints about how my visions look like in colors. In the manuscript, the notes are still brief and more like listings of different hues, but the further I move in the process, the more detailed the descriptions become.

For instance, while planning the spread number 3 (see Image 4.18) – the scene where Iivari has arrived at the circus and is now climbing up the stairs – the manuscript notes go as follows: “purple? blue? red stripes? gold! lights, old school feeling”. On the manuscript itself, I have highlighted the following sentences: “The bright light almost got him blind” and “He could see all the way to the night sky filled with stars”. The notes in the margins of the storyboard are not particularly descriptive either, yet slightly more informative: “Up there the light, white text over there” and “red+gold (the roof?)”. Instead of asking – as with the notes in the manuscript – the storyboard notes are providing answers already at this stage of planning.

Image 4.18 – the sketch and the final painting of the spread number 3 – shows that the decisions made in the final painting follow very faithfully the notes next to the initial sketch, and the remarks made while reading the manuscript.
Image 4.18: Progress of the spread number 3, the sketch (top) and the final painting (bottom), livari-tonttu karkuteillä.
The way of making notes in terms of the color palette is similar throughout the entire process diary and is directly connected with the notes and remarks I make about the tone, direction, and location of the light. “Where does the light come from?” or “Where is the light in this picture?” are typical questions that I ask in the margins of the manuscript, storyboard, and the paintings. The light seems to determine how strong, clean, or off-white the color palette will be, or how energetic or melancholic the illustration’s atmosphere will be like in the end.

Working with colors has been a challenge for me as long as I can remember. For some reason, using multiple colors in one illustration has always felt difficult for me. Usually, I have tried to evade this difficulty by using different tones and saturations of one color, for example, different tones of blue, or complementary colors. In the process diary, I highlight the difficulties that I experienced when using colors during the painting process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*.

Sometimes I feel that this all, painting, is only problem-solving for me. Trying to figure out what to do with certain colors. What to use next to some other color. The fact that I basically cannot combine any color in my illustrations with anything else than its own variations – it sure makes painting very difficult.

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

When I started to make the final illustrations for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I felt that I wanted to try something new in choosing the color palette. I decided to utilize the color-mapping method for this process. In practice, this meant testing out different color palettes with colorful papers and patterns that I found from a few magazines. While browsing the magazines, I looked for colors and patterns that resonated with what I was envisioning with each spread and placed them next to other papers. With the help of multiple slips of paper, I tried to take one step closer to the colorful visions that were vivid in my mind. This was an extremely physical experience for me – I could feel the warmth in my body when the colors or patterns in the magazines correlated with my visions. Color-mapping was something that I had not tried in my previous picturebook illustration processes. The decision to test color-mapping was also connected with my hope to become more motivated about the illustration process in general.

*Colors are truly my problem. What if I would try some color-mapping tomorrow? At least it would be something new if nothing more. Yes. That is what I want to do and what I need to do. Otherwise, these images – this painting – will suffocate me.*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*
Cutting and ripping the colorful magazines and creating the color palettes with their help provided me with a glimpse of the long-missed aspect of the illustration process. The process diary shows that creating the color maps brought some genuine enjoyment to my work and the illustration process.

While tearing these magazines for the color collages, I must say that I have more fun at work than I have had for a long time. I cannot remember the last time I had fun until now.

Process diary, livari-tonttu karkuteillä

Although I enjoyed doing the color-mapping, I did not find the exercise particularly helpful in the end – the patterns and color tones in the magazines where almost too bright and did not fully correlate with the atmospheres that I had envisioned. Also, the magazine images did not help me to come up with any new and interesting color combinations, but rather reinforced my earlier tendency to use only different tones of one color in each illustration – for instance, one spread is painted with different shades of red, while another one is painted with different shades of purple.

In the end, I found it easier to continue the illustration process by exploring my way of achieving the right shades with watercolors – by playing with the intensity of the
colors, by washing the layers in between, and by changing the paper if the watercolor lost its vividness. This also meant abandoning the use of color-mapping method – in addition to the collage technique, as discussed earlier – as a technical experiment. The process diary shows that like with the collage technique, the color-mapping was also taking too much time, which I did not have. Even if I would have loved to find new directions for my image-making, the approaching deadlines made these types of experiments impossible. “I simply do not have enough time, it’s too risky”, I write in the process diary.

The first illustration that I started the painting process with was spread number 7 – “the monkey spread” (see images 4.20 and 4.21). This was also one of the images with which I tested the color-mapping method in an attempt to create the atmosphere that I wanted. In the process diary, I contemplate my decision to choose the monkey spread as the first one of the entire sequence. There, I wonder whether the decision could be connected with the fact that I spent such a long time with this spread while sketching the storyboard. It would seem that my mental vision grows stronger and becomes easier to approach the longer I spend time with an illustration while drawing it in the storyboard.

This truly is peculiar – that I decided to start painting the monkey image first, of all the spreads. How much agony it created in me while I was sketching it! Unbearable sweating. But so, it happened that it felt like the most natural one to start the painting with. Maybe it felt the most familiar, as I spent so much time with it while drawing the storyboard? Maybe so?

Process diary, livari-tonttu karkuteillä
Image 4.20: Excerpt photographs from the painting process of the spread number 7, *livari-tonttu karkuteillä*.

Image 4.21: Final illustration for the spread number 7, *livari-tonttu karkuteillä*.
Movement and intuition

Earlier in this chapter, when I was analyzing the planning phase of *livari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I discussed how I used the storyboard to explore and create the overall pace of the entire picturebook’s image sequence. There, I also considered the drama of turning the page, and the “ebb and flow” of the entire picturebook. During the planning phase already, I made several decisions about the element of movement in the illustrations. However, during the process diary analysis, I noticed that when I was creating the final illustrations, the thought of considering the motion in the images was still strongly present. Although in the planning stage the focus was on the rhythm of the entire book, during the final painting stage, the focus shifted to figuring out the rhythm inside a particular illustration and creating movement between – and with the help of – different elements in each illustration. This was done through the use of color hue, the intensity of the tones and light – as discussed earlier – and through composition and ambiance. During the painting of each illustration, the decisions made in the storyboard regarding the composition were redefined and re-evaluated, and changed or fine-tuned when needed, to create the type of motion that I envisioned.

In the spread number 9 – “the kart racing spread” (see images 4.22 and 4.23) – I tried to create the movement and ambiance initially through the use of colors. I started painting the image by washing the entire background with different shades of red, which I hoped would “activate” the illustration and increase the tension in it. However, this led me further away from the vision I had in mind and stopped the motion of the characters completely – almost as if they were paused up in the red sky. As such, by using colors, I failed to create the movement that I was after, and in fact the background color seemed to actually stop the motion in the image completely – which was the opposite of what I was after. Instead of trying to achieve the intensity in the image with intense shades of red, I decided to start the illustration all over again, but with a different approach – this time strongly focusing on the flying objects and composition in the image. This decision quickly led me to the type of movement and ambiance that I was seeking. In this second version, the background is almost entirely blank, with only a light shade of pink remaining in the ground.
Image 4.22: Excerpt photographs from the painting process of the spread number 9, *livari-tonttu karkuteilla*.
As was the case with drawing the storyboard, creating the illustrations of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was also a very intuitive experience for me. The process diary reveals that during the illustration process I associated the “intuitive guidance” with the physical experiences that I was having.

*I have found myself thinking while painting – how do I know what to do next? Today I had no clue, so I did nothing. But sometimes I do have a clue. Big time. Something tells me what the right direction is. What is happening then – and who on earth is telling me that direction – that I don’t know. Intuition? Anyway, today that voice was completely silent.*

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

By listening to the signals that my body kept sending to me, I was able to move closer to the illustrations that I was envisioning – which I knew would provide not only a believable setting for the events but also *“the right kind of vibe and movement”*, as I write in the process diary.

There are several notes in the process diary where I mention the feeling of myself being connected with this *“intuitive knowledge”* that leads me forward while painting. When the colors or the light in an illustration moving in a wrong direction, I note how physically tense and anxious I feel. In contrast, when the atmosphere or motion in the illustration is correct, I note how I feel *“at ease and relaxed”* in my stomach and my entire body. These mentions of physical sensations that I felt during the painting phase...
can be found throughout the process diary. For instance, while painting the cover illustration of the book (see Image 4.24), I felt strong physical excitement when I started to reach the right kind of atmosphere in the image.

"That cover – it will be amazing!!! I am removing the masking fluid, and my entire body screams that it will be GOOD! Yes! Now we’re talking. Even the snowflakes are just perfect, after washing them with cotton buds. I love it! Who would’ve guessed!"

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

Creating the cover illustration for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was a powerful and uplifting experience for me in the end. However, it is possible to find several notes in the process diary about the frustration I felt while painting the cover illustration. For example, when I was painting the presents that Iivari was carrying, I struggled to achieve the type of “soft movement” in the image that I was trying to create using the falling packages. The image was lacking tension and focus, and at first, I could not figure out what was causing this. In the end, I managed to reach the vision I had in my mind when I captured the right type of light on the presents, and in the whole image. This, according to the process diary, brought the illustration to life and created the right type of “believable motion” that I was after.
Such a mess with the packages in the cover illustration. Unbelievable. Other than that, I love the cover. But the packages – they are completely missing the movement and the light. The publishing editor really wanted to have a bright cover, hmm. ... The light should come from the middle. From the middle! Got it?

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

I will discuss more fully into the emotional struggle that I experienced while illustrating the cover illustration in the next section, where I further analyze my emotional landscape during the illustration process of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä.

Creating the final illustrations for Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä was all about transferring the visions from my mind on to a two-dimensional surface and finding a visible form for them. By listening to my intuition, I was able to recognize when I was moving towards – or away from – those visions. Creating and completing the illustrations was exploring how each illustration felt in relation to the other images in the sequence, and how each element felt in relation to the other elements in a particular image. The atmosphere in the visual storytelling was mostly created with light, colors, and motion in the illustrations. While the planning phase required maximal concentration – as discussed earlier – creating and painting the illustrations was more flexible and “open” in its nature. Instead of complete silence, painting the images was often accompanied by listening to podcasts and various radio programs. Music was also often used as a tool to reach the right type of emotional state that helped me to create a similar type of atmosphere and pace in the illustrations.
Image 4.25: Excerpt photographs from the painting process of the cover illustration, *livari-tonttu karkuteilliä.*
4.3.2 My emotional landscape while creating the illustrations

Today in my morning run, I started thinking about how I tried to go running when I was younger, although I didn’t know how to run. When I tasted iron in my mouth and just tried to rush forward, despite the fact that I could feel my flank stinging. Today the sun was shining. I was happy, and my feet felt light. While I was running, I thought about my illustrations. How I have worked lately, with the taste of iron – taste of blood – in my mouth. Hoping to reach the target without completely ruining things on a way. Very seriously, focusing on the end result. Too seriously. How could that turn up into anything else than into something completely joyless on a paper as well?

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

The process diary from illustrating Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä reveals a rather painful and distressing illustration process. While planning the illustrations, my emotional landscape was mostly about dealing with the ambivalent feelings between the excitement of a new project and the fear of the future. The further I proceed with the illustrations – especially after starting to paint the images – the darker emotions the process diary starts revealing. Then again, it is worth pointing out that when the painting proceeds smoothly, and I am enjoying what I am doing, I am more likely to forget documenting the process in the diary. As such, there are far less process diary notes from the moments when the painting has felt easier and more enjoyable, and when I have been able to capture my vision faster. However, the notes in the margins of the illustrations reveal that distress and anxiety are in fact the primary emotional states that I was experiencing while creating the illustrations.

The process diary shows that the initial days after starting to create the actual illustrations – after completing the storyboard – were still relatively calm for me emotionally. I spent some time cleaning and preparing my workspace, and making sure that I had all the necessary tools. These “orientation days” were not seemingly productive, yet they were needed in order for me to prepare myself for the painting phase mentally. “I went to buy some watercolors and spent four full hours in unwrapping and organizing them – in organizing my desk. Fixed and hassled. Sat on my chair and swung a bit”, I write in the process diary.

Nevertheless, this procrastination at the beginning of the painting phase was also connected with the fear that I had increasingly started to feel. “I am scared of painting. I am scared that I will ruin these images somehow, that the whole thing will just explode”. The fear that I am describing in the process diary seems to be similar to the fear that I felt while I was drawing the storyboard – fear about the future and not completing the illustrations on time. However, while worrying about the deadlines in the future, my attention was simultaneously caught by my past – I found myself looking at my published picturebooks in the bookshelf, wondering how I had ever been able to finish any of them.
I am scared. What if I cannot do this anymore? If everything I touch just dies? How did I manage to complete all those other books of mine, when now I’m afraid that I will never complete even the first one of the illustrations on time?

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

This lack of belief in my skills as an illustrator and the inability to enjoy the process is the most recurring theme in the process diary. “I cannot paint anymore. It doesn’t give me joy anymore. It simply doesn’t”. A few days later, I write: “I feel tears coming out of my eyes, I feel like this was it. My career. I. Cannot. Paint. Anymore”. The process diary is filled with notes about the sadness and anger that I was dealing with while creating the illustrations – not only towards painting but also towards the whole profession. “I hate this job”, I write in the process diary. “Drawing is still okay – catching ideas. But painting…I’m not sure if I can say it out loud, but I feel that I have started to hate painting. To really hate it”. The process diary reveals that the creative blocks I was now facing were often challenging to overcome – they seemed to last for days, and became more extreme and severe the further the process proceeded.

I experienced one of these extremely persistent creative blocks when I was creating the cover illustration of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä. The beginning of creating the cover illustration was still somewhat optimistic, and although I occasionally enjoyed the process, it was already overshadowed by the lack of enthusiasm that I had started to feel towards my profession.

As mentioned earlier, I like to move particularly challenging illustrations aside and return to them later in the process. Often, this is enough to retrieve the self-confidence that has decreased while struggling with the problematic image. This is what I did with both the monkey spread, as well as the staircase spread. However, it is very typical that the publishing house wants the illustrator to deliver the cover illustration of the book several months earlier than the rest of the images, so as to prepare the book cover for marketing. This was also the case with Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä. Unlike with other illustrations of the book, I did not have the possibility of leaving the cover illustration aside, but rather, had to finish it – and succeed with it – more or less on the first try. This increased the pressure that I felt while creating the cover illustration.

The agony that I experienced while painting the illustrations was sometimes almost physically unbearable – my body was aching, and I was having trouble breathing. In such moments, instead of focusing on the process of creating, I was often concerned about how I should have done something differently earlier – how “I screwed it up” or how “I will never make it” in the future. For instance, while I was creating the cover
illustration, I found myself yearning back an earlier moment in the process, but I was also worrying whether the image in the making would be a disappointment for the publishing editor.

\[\text{I cannot do this job anymore. The packages are horrible. I should have used the masking fluid in them. Now the light is gone. Lost completely. Undo undo undo. If I could, I would take 500 strokes back. I feel like crying – my bones are aching. Why do I torture myself with this? Why could I not approve the earlier versions of the packages?? They were good enough. What was I thinking?? I know what I was thinking. I thought that the editor wants them to be brighter – happier. Happy and beautiful Christmas. But I cannot do happy and bright anymore. I just can’t. This is horrible. Simply horrible.}\]

\[\text{Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä}\]

The process diary shows that when I was confronted by more severe creative blocks, I tried to calm myself down in various ways. For example, when I was painting the cover illustration, I reminded myself that even if I would not get the illustration ready on time, everything would still be okay. “Now, Laura. Breathe. Breathe once more. And keep going”.

In the process diary, I also address the desire to enjoy the process more, instead of the agony that I was now experiencing almost daily. There, I also try to come up with different solutions that could help me take the process more lightly, in order to enjoy creating the illustrations more.

\[\text{I need to stop PUSHING these books. Otherwise, I won’t be able do them at all. I still have time to find light and joy. I have time. Tomorrow I will look for inspiration. Tomorrow is the time to experience joy. To explore.}\]

\[\text{Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä}\]

After struggling to finish the cover illustration for days, I was finally able to achieve what I had aimed for – to bring the light back into the image by using white gouache paint for highlighting the presents. I contemplate in the process diary the earlier “meltdown” that I had experienced with the image: “I panicked before because I don’t trust gouache. This was the first time I experienced that gouache would bring life to a watercolor painting. But the illustration feels right now – I feel good about the light now”.

In the end, I was extremely satisfied with the completed cover illustration. The moment I managed to give a visible form to my vision, I started feeling better about my profession as well. As my process diary notes show, these types of shifts in emotions can be very rapid during the picturebook illustration process. In fact, there is only one day in between the complete agony discussed before and the following process diary quote, where I already feel extremely satisfied with the cover illustration, but also about picturebook illustration as a profession.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

While I was creating the illustrations to Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, my mind kept stubbornly going back to Prinsessa Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti. As discussed earlier, the book was not received as well as I had hoped for, and the melancholy caused by this was already present while planning Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä. When I started with painting the illustrations, this melancholy turned into more severe moments of sadness and disappointment. In the process diary, I write: “What’s the point, to see all this effort, when the books simply disappear into the emptiness in the end? I think about Wilhelmiina a lot. How much I worked on it – how gorgeous it truly was. But no one could have cared less”. According to the process diary, this disappointment started to turn into severe skepticism and cynicism towards the entire profession of picturebook illustration. Finding motivation towards a process, which could lead to a book that nobody noticed in the end, started to feel almost impossible for me.

I feel profound disappointment towards the entire profession. Wilhelmiina. How could it just disappear to emptiness? I don’t get it. It truly was a wonderful book. Why all this effort, if the best thing I am capable of doing does not interest anyone? If nobody is interested in what I do, why should I do anything?

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

Another incident – also connected with the publishing environment – that dampened my motivation during the illustration process was the mistake that the publishing house made with the marketing of Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä. In the catalog that presented the forthcoming books by the publishing house, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä was labelled only with its author’s name, without any reference to its illustrator. This incident took place while I was still creating the illustrations. As the catalog was printed and sent to the libraries and bookstores before the book was published, this misinformation followed the book wherever it was presented and marketed. In the process diary, I write about the anger and frustration I felt after noticing this mistake.

I went browsing online bookstores again, just to find out how widely the mistake has spread. I should not have done that. It turned out that it is almost on every website – Iivari is listed as solely Raili’s book everywhere. It hurt me while I was browsing online – it hurt me so much. I felt like crying. Yet there is no time for crying now – I need to complete the rest of the illustrations in the book.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä
I contacted the publishing house, demanding an explanation. Although the publishing house representatives were genuinely apologetic about what had happened, and subsequently corrected the information on their own database and website, the mistake was already living a life of its own online. Completing the illustrations while knowing that in most places I would not be mentioned as the illustrator of the book, was challenging for me. The incident made me feel undervalued, cynical, and hurt, but what was even more devastating was that the outcome of the process started feeling indifferent to me. This was a new and uncomfortable feeling because the picturebooks that I had illustrated earlier had always felt, without exception, extremely important and close to me.

Indifference has made a nest in my mind, and it doesn’t feel good. On the contrary – it feels cumbersome. But I refuse to become a cynic. That is why I need to put this whole illustration thing on hold. Right after Iivari.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

The indifference that I felt towards the book, and the skepticism that I had started to feel towards my profession made the image-making feel different from what it had felt previously. In the process diary, I mention a new tendency to “settle” more easily on the versions that I would not have necessarily accepted as final illustrations previously. “I am not as persistent as I was before”. In the process diary, I also wonder whether this is something I should feel sad about, or think of it as just a new, healthier way of approaching illustration. Instead of expecting that art would provide the magic that I was looking for in life, I was starting to approach illustration merely as a profession.

This is only a job, and maybe that’s all there is to it. I have only recently started to think like this. Some glory from the whole thing has disappeared.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

However, after losing the passion for creating illustrations that would feel alive and enchanting to me, and instead, completing them one by one like a mere “coloring in technician”, it became increasingly challenging for me to see the reason for creating picturebooks at all. I started questioning the purpose of picturebooks, and my role as an illustrator, as well as my artistic skills. I did not see any point in creating picturebooks which felt like coloring books, and I did not see any point in being a creative professional when the only thing I could achieve with my creativity seemed to be “coloring” instead of actually “creating”.
I've become a coloring book artist. Just like my teacher predicted. I hated coloring books when I was a child. I hated to color my paper dolls. I loved drawing them, but I hated coloring them. Why do I do this to myself? Tears are falling down my cheeks. I am entirely finished. Completely done.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

The process diary shows that the more I started doubting my skills and the purpose of picturebook illustration, the more I started comparing myself to other people – sometimes to professionals from entirely different fields. For instance, when I noticed a Facebook friend of mine telling about her trip to Costa Rica, where she had been lecturing to thousands of people about free contraception, I opened up in the process diary about the shame that I felt for “this existential crisis of an illustrator, caused by some ridiculous struggles with some stupid masking fluid”. More often, however, I noticed how I was comparing myself to other, “better” and more interesting illustrators. This comparison that I mention in the process diary was something that I had not done or experienced as such before. The less I managed to enjoy the process, the less meaningful the profession felt to me.

On my way home from the studio, I read the news about who were selected as the Finlandia Junior nominees. I wasn’t there. Of course, I wasn’t there. But I wish I would have been. I feel like this work suffocates me soon. Either I would need to find joy and willingness to do these illustrations again, or get loads of money or loads of appreciation for my work, in order to get my motivation back.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä

In the process diary, I seem to be certain about what caused indifference and cynicism towards my profession. These emotions seem to have resulted from three main factors: from the disappointment I felt after Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti was published and then soon forgotten, from the publishing house forgetting to include my name in the catalogue that presented Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä, and from the overall agony that I felt during the illustration process – as opposed to feeling good and receiving joy from my work.

In the process diary, I make a statement and a decision about the time after completing Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä – the only way to prevent becoming cynical would be to completely resign from the illustration work for some time. The agony that I felt during the process had led me to a feeling of having to let go of illustration as my profession.

I just want to get rid of that book. More than I have ever wanted before. That book made me realize that I do not want to be a picturebook illustrator anymore. I became a picturebook illustrator, but I do not want to be one anymore. Not even for a day. I simply don’t care anymore.

Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä
I should also mention that I have experienced a similar type of fatigue after having completed basically every other picturebook of mine – the extremely intense period after the final deadline has always tended to bring me to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion. However, after completing the illustrations for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, this exhaustion was much more severe than ever before. For the first time, I felt physically ill – I was nauseous, and my back was hurting. I felt that my hands and skin started itching whenever I noticed the watercolors on the other side of the room. The process had brought me physically to a poor shape. I felt like crying, and I was constantly exhausted, even though I was unable to fall asleep – my mind was going into overdrive, worrying about various things that I should have done better throughout the process. Physical symptoms this severe had not been part of completing any other illustration project before. In one of the final notes of the process diary, I write about this strange and severe psychophysical state that I was experiencing.

The images are ready, and I am lying on the bed. How can anyone be so tired and not fall asleep? I feel like I never want to paint anything ever again. How did this happen? The only thing that I want to do right now is to simply empty my desk. Hide the tools that brought me so much sorrow and anxiety in the end, so much more agony than happiness. I do not want to be an artist anymore. Sell my soul and sacrifice my creativity to big businesses, project after project. I don’t want that anymore. Maybe it is not me who is tired – maybe it’s my soul. My soul needs rest now. It doesn’t have any energy left to be better or bigger than it is. Not anymore.

*Process diary, Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*

### 4.4 Summary

In the illustration process analysis described in this chapter, I have presented the path that I took while creating the illustrations for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, with all the different stages from designing the storyboard to creating and completing the final illustrations. While going through the research material of my illustration process and considering those rather technical phases of the process, the analysis was challenged by the emotional aspects I was facing. These internal aspects – challenging emotions that I felt during the process – revealed themselves to me from the process diary. “I just feel so scared. I cannot do this anymore. Death of an illustrator?” those notes were saying to me.

The process analysis shows that although I already had a strong professional understanding and know-how of creating picturebooks, the inner struggle and emotional challenges that I was facing while illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* were severe. I knew how to plan a picturebook and create an exciting and functioning sequence of picturebook illustrations. I knew how to take advantage of a storyboard that would show how well the visual storytelling was flowing throughout the book and what the possible downfalls were. I knew how to take into consideration various aspects not only
when planning the book, but also while creating the illustrations – aspects such as contemplating the relationship of words and images, understanding the story, catching the ideas and creating visions, planning the composition, creating effective illustrations by using different approaches, as well as taking advantage of different colors and lighting, in order to bring to life the visions and atmospheres that were vivid in my mind. I knew how to make a picturebook, and not just any picturebook, but a rather good picturebook – a picturebook that was not stagnant or boring, and one that succeeded in various ways in bringing another layer of meanings into the story, as well as honoring the tone and voice that the text was resonating, to endorse the pace of the story.

However, the difficulty in enjoying the process and having fun while creating, and the challenge of focusing on the process instead of the outcome, were issues that seemed to follow and overwhelm me, despite the fact that my professional status as an illustrator was blooming. When I was illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I seemed like a successful picturebook illustrator to the outside world. I was employed by several highly respected publishing houses and was granted multiple large arts scholarships. I was offered more book illustration projects than I could accept – though at the beginning of my career, I was told by several people who were working in the field that it would be practically impossible to make a living as a picturebook illustrator in Finland. I had a studio, a legal business of my own, and more or less a steady income. However, inside this exterior surface, I was struggling, lost, and confused. There were glimpses of moments when creating illustrations for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* was fun, delightful, and exciting, but most of the time the illustration process felt draining and exhausting. As an artist and a creative professional, I was not feeling well.

Professionally, I had already reached almost all of my most important goals, but as an artist, I felt like I was still at square one. My already completed picturebooks and illustrations did not provide me any relief either. During the illustration process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I kept going back to the disappointment that I had felt when the previously published picturebook of mine, *Prinsessa Wilhelmiina ja kohtalon lantti*, was soon forgotten after its publication. I could not let go of my frustration, and instead, focus on what could bring me joy while painting the illustrations for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. I was pitying myself, grieving the past, and afraid of the future. I was becoming skeptic whether I could ever finish the illustrations on time and as agreed. I had also started doubting my skills and talent as an artist. What looked like a strong and authentic illustration style to others, felt unsatisfying and nonevolving repetition of already used imagery to me. I did not feel that what I was doing was connected with what I wanted to create or what I was meant to create, but rather something I had to create. Due to the time pressure, I was unable to proceed with different technical experiments that I tried in order to find new directions to my image-making, after feeling bored and unenthusiastic with the watercolor technique I had used for a long time.

While illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, different emotions of impostor syndrome were my daily companions – such as the lack of self-confidence, negative self-talk, doubts about my abilities, and achievements, as well as feelings of inadequacy. The more I gave, and the more I worked, the less I felt that I was getting anything in return. During the illustration process, I also started to recognize changes in my personality. Cynicism towards illustration as a profession and towards this creative professional
landscape started to occur. I was complaining more about the publishing houses, grants, wages, royalties, and status of the art form. The enthusiasm of a young illustrator had turned into powerlessness and disappointment.

In the end, I did manage to complete the illustrations for *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä* on time. However, the process analysis shows that after having delivered the completed illustrations to the publishing house, I had reached an extremely fragile state, both physically and emotionally. The process analysis indicates that what I was experiencing could be considered as a severe burnout, created not only by the prolonged stress, but also depression. I was physically and emotionally finished and felt like I never wanted to draw anything again. Although I can recall similar feelings during and after the other previous illustration projects – after completing each picturebook illustration project, I have always felt like I have given everything I have got – there was something different and more severe in what I felt after having completed *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. What got my attention while analyzing my illustration process was the large number of notes that I had made about the physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, and back pain, which I experienced in addition to the emotional ones. These types of physical symptoms are, of course, often connected with prolonged stress.

Several months after completing the illustration process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I wrote in my notebook how I had started feeling “allergy” towards illustration and my image-making tools. The idea of a new picturebook project or even a smaller sequence of images made me feel ill. I could not accept new assignments, and I had to cancel the books that I had already agreed to illustrate. This was not an easy decision for me to make – the authors I had agreed to work with were not pleased with my decision either – but I felt that I had no choice. The feelings that I describe in the final notes of the process diary were not just a temporary state caused by “normal” exhaustion after having finished a picturebook project. The thoughts that I discussed earlier, of “having to let illustration go”, to maintain my positive approach towards not just my creativity but towards my life, were not part of a temporary phase. Now, they felt like they were something more permanent. This particular illustration project had led me to the state where I had to reconsider what I wanted to do with my life after illustration. “I don’t want to be an artist anymore”, I write in my process diary. After knowing what I had wanted since I was a child, and after getting where I so much wanted to be – to illustrate picturebooks – I felt that I was in a dark corner now with my creativity, in a dead-end, with light nowhere to be seen.

However, the depressive feelings and symptoms that I was dealing with when it came to my work as an illustrator did not affect much how I functioned in my everyday life away from my drawing table. This was a surprising observation to me. While I felt that I had experienced a severe burnout as an illustrator, and was now experiencing a stagnant, almost depressed state of mind when it came to creating illustrations – I was practically unable to make any kind of images – I felt perfectly happy doing other things. I was teaching, I was proceeding with my thesis, and I was starting a family of my own, and in the following years I gave birth to my two children. I still came up with various ideas on how I could start creating illustrations again – or art in any form. However, every time I tried to illustrate – even if just for my own fun – I was faced with the anxiety and distress I had felt while illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. The joy of creating was gone. I felt that the passion I had felt towards image-making earlier was

104
now replaced with something similar that I believed the people who were severely allergic to mold, or the ones who had also experienced a severe burnout could experience – perfectly fine and functioning one moment, yet suffering the minute they are exposed to what had triggered their illness in the first place. I was missing the moments of flow and happiness that I had experienced while I was still working as an illustrator, but I could not figure out a way to reach those moments anymore.
After completing the ten, twenty, hundred, and three hundred illustrations the girl had agreed to complete, she was finally able and allowed to sleep. The girl slept for two blissful years, and when she woke up, she was strong enough to decide that she was never, ever going to draw another line again in her entire life. And she lived happily ever after.

You might think now that oh – what a sad girl, what a sad story she has been telling us. But to tell you the truth, it was one of the happiest stories the girl herself could have ever imagined hearing, not to mention living. For her, it was a story of becoming free – free from the factory of perfection, free from anybody else’s line.

5.1 Introduction

After completing the analysis of the illustration process of *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, my mind was filled with entirely new questions that I was eager to find answers to. I wanted to know whether there was a way to become a more contented illustrator. I was wondering why *anybody* would want to work as a picturebook illustrator, which in my experience, was not only an incredibly wearing profession but also a highly underpaid and uncertain one. Was this manic-depressive rollercoaster, which was my experience of picturebook illustration, just due to my own inability to find the balance as an illustrator? I was interested in finding out whether other illustrators had found a way to overcome the challenges of a creative process and to tap into a more positive and rewarding way of working. Could the information that I might gain by interviewing other illustrators help creative professionals – illustrators and others – who had experienced such extreme dead-ends with their creativity as I had with mine, to find a way back to their passion?

Therefore, to get a more general perspective on the findings I had identified by analyzing my creative process, I decided to conduct a series of interviews with other professional illustrators. While preparing for the interviews, I contemplated the possibility that my own experiences of the illustration process could interfere with my objectivity as an interviewer. However, it is important to note that when I started conducting these interviews, I had been away from my own drawing table for almost two years, and as such, had a less biased view of my profession as an illustrator.

Similarly, as in Chapter 4, the emphasis in this chapter will also be on focusing on the themes and observations that arise from the research material. As mentioned previously, I will return to the aforementioned theory basis30 later when discussing the outcomes of the studies presented in this thesis31, in order to situate the findings in the appropriate theoretical and research literature, and to observe the arguments and interpretations from various perspectives. However, in this chapter, I will focus on letting the interview extracts speak for themselves, without allowing the existing literature to impact the findings. As discussed earlier, to some extent, grounded theory relies on the absence of an existing theory32, since its purpose is to allow developing a *new* theory (see, e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 37; Jones, Kriflik and Zanko, 2005; Muratovski, 2015: 98). While some sociologists (see, e.g., Glaser, 1992) point out that in grounded theory the literature can, in some sense, be used as “data” and continuously compared with the emerging categories, others (see, e.g., Dunne, 2011) highlight the importance of an “open mind” that will allow new, perhaps contradictory, findings to emerge from the raw data. In my study, I have chosen this second approach, and integrate the existing literature into my thinking only after the theoretical categories and framework have stabilized (Locke, 2001: 122).

With narrative interviews it is very important that the richness of the accounts is not lost during the analysis, in order to identify the “person’s story” throughout the data (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2016: 632-633). In other words, the researcher is encouraged to focus on the events as they are narrated, on the ways the stories are structured,

---

30 See Section 2.2, Literature review.
31 See Chapter 6, Emerging visual models.
32 See Section 3.1, Qualitative research and grounded theory.
and the meanings ascribed by the interviewee. As highlighted by the sociologists Kath Ryan, Paul Bissell and Charles Morecroft (2997: 354) the researcher might ask a number of questions while analyzing narrative research material. These questions can, for example, aim at understanding the tone in the person’s story (is it optimistic, pessimistic or something else?), what the social, cultural, moral and political issues are that the interviewee has incorporated into her story, and furthermore, what the significances of these issues are, and how the interviewee has used language to construct her story?

As referred to earlier, Brown (2012: 252) encourages a grounded theory researcher to develop the skill of letting the research participants define the research problem. Even though I have defined initial research questions for this thesis33, I focus on maintaining this “openness”, and allow the emphasis of these questions to evolve while analyzing the interview data.

5.1.1 The interview process

The narrative interview method that I have used in this research is very detailed, and as such, I decided to interview a limited number of experienced illustrators. In total, I interviewed eight Finnish picturebook illustrators34. The interviews were arranged and recorded in 2015 and 2016. The interview material consists of 21 hours and 13 minutes of discussions with the interviewees in total.

I decided to arrange all of the interviews at the ateliers of the individual illustrators because I considered that this would help them feel more natural and relaxed during the interviews, and as a result, liberate their storytelling. This would also allow me to observe the interviewees in their own work environment.

Soon after starting the interviews, I noticed that interviewing my illustrator colleagues myself had a recurring impact on how the interviews were proceeding. After testing the narrative interview guidelines created by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) with two of my first interviewees, I realized that their model was somewhat challenging from the perspective of artist-to-artist interviews – i.e., cases where one artist is interviewing another fellow artist. The biggest challenge with Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s framework was that it is not formed from the practitioner-researchers’ standpoint. Therefore, I decided to reframe the framework based on my own experiences from the first two interviews.

The most significant modification to the original framework is my suggestion to take advantage of the subjective understanding of the creative profession, and to be open about it, rather than trying to ignore one’s own expertise. I noticed that my attempts to act as a neutral interviewer as much as possible – as suggested by e.g., the sociologists Stephen Ackroyd and J. A. Hughes (1992), Robert Weiss (1994) and Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) – was only confusing my interviewees, as they were all aware of the fact that I was a picturebook illustrator myself. Instead of strictly constraining Jovchelovitch’s and Bauer’s (2000: 61) “tacit rules that liberate the storytelling”, I decided to follow my intuition and observations about the best way to achieve this state with my fellow illustrators. This required positioning myself as an interviewer in a new, less

33 See Section 1.3, Research questions.
34 The interviewees are further discussed in Section 5.1.2. The Interviewees and the question of anonymity.
strict way, as well as using my own language during the interviews, as opposed to the more distant approach suggested by Jovchelovitch and Bauer. After succeeding much better in “liberating the storytelling” while using my modified model of the narrative interview method, I decided to conduct the interviews using this less strict approach. The modified model (see Table 5.1) is, therefore, from the perspective of practitioner-researchers, and more specifically – artists who are interviewing other artists, especially fellow artists in the same field.

Jovchelovitch and Bauer suggest asking for visual references in the story during the initiation phase of their model. In the modified version of the model, I suggest including a visual ground survey in the earlier preparation phase. Before the narrative interview begins, the researcher should take time to properly get to know the interviewee’s visual retrospective as thoroughly as possible. In my case, this meant looking at as many picturebooks as possible by the illustrator I was going to interview. By going back to the picturebooks that started the career and proceeding to the present, book by book, I was able to form a visual timeline of each illustrator before interviewing them. This ground survey allowed me to return to the visual references in my mind during the entire interview, particularly the main narration, and visually understand what the illustrator was telling me. This ground survey also helped me to form the “exmanent” \(^{35}\) questions during the preparation phase.

The actual interview session starts by presenting the topic to the interviewee at the beginning of the interview. In this study, the initial topic for all of the interviews was: “Could you tell me your story – your path – as an illustrator?”

Almost all the illustrators I interviewed were also asking questions from me during the interviews. Sometimes these questions were counter-questions to the ones I had asked them during the questioning phase, and sometimes the interviewees wanted to know during their main narration if I – being an illustrator myself – had experienced similar events or feelings to theirs. In the first two interviews, I tried – due to my inexperience, and complete adherence to Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s model – to answer these questions vaguely, and quickly turn the conversation back to the interviewee. However, in the third interviewee, I decided to try a different approach – I answered the interviewee’s questions properly and in the form of stories. I noticed that this immediately had a positive impact on the interview. Talking about my own feelings and experiences as an illustrator created mutual understanding and trust with the interviewee, which would not have been possible if I had avoided answering her questions. Therefore, I decided to take this approach in the following interviews as well.

It should be noted that I do believe it is essential to stay in the role of a listener during the main narration, and as with Jovchelovitch and Bauer, I also recommend using mostly non-verbal cues to encourage the interviewees to continue their storytelling. Nevertheless, in an artist-to-artist narrative interview, the interviewee is likely to be aware of the interviewer’s background, and therefore, might ask questions from the interviewer. Answering these questions as truthfully as possible, preferably framing the answers in the form of a story, helps the interviewee to relax, and creates an atmosphere of mutual trust. In the cases of artist-to-artist narrative interviews, this shared landscape should be something to nurture throughout the entire interview, instead of fading it out, because it does seem to serve the ultimate goal of liberating the

---

\(^{35}\) Exmanent issues were explained in more detail in Section 3.1.2. Interviewing professional illustrators.
storytelling. Instead of neutralizing themselves to look and sound more convincing, I would suggest that practitioner-researchers should take advantage of, and appreciate, their own subjective expertise, knowledge, and language during narrative interviews, and join the narration if, and when, invited by the interviewee. Questions asked by the interviewee should not be kept unanswered, but instead, they should be utilized to create mutual understanding and trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Furthermore, Jovchelovitch and Bauer suggest that the researcher should turn off the recorder after the questioning phase. However, in my interviews, I recorded the following discussion phase as well, and I would suggest that this is done in artist-to-artist narrative interviews. In the modified model, I suggest that during the discussion phase, the interviewer should attempt to form a retrospective timeline of the creative outcomes of the interviewee, and ask “why?” type of questions. This is because it seems to be natural for creative professionals to talk about and look back at their history while going through their previous creative outcomes. This also opens up feelings and reminds the interviewees about the events they may have forgotten, at least at a conscious level. To be able to make observations about the images discussed during this phase, it is essential to have a recording of these conversations as well. In my interviews, I suggested a short coffee break to the interviewees before the discussion phase. When the recording was started again, the interviewees were asked to form a visual timeline of all their own picturebooks they had available. I invited the interviewees to include in the timeline also those books they had not mentioned in the main narration. While looking at the books together, new stories started arising, which I found useful to record. However, I noticed that asking the interviewees to show their books at the end of the interviews might easily prolong the discussions over an hour or so. Therefore, it might be worth considering whether an artist-to-artist narrative interview should be divided into two sessions over separate days, placing the visual timeline survey in the second session of the interview.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Basic stages of the narrative interview by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000)</th>
<th>Basic stages of the modified artist-to-artist narrative interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>• Exploring the field.</td>
<td>• Exploring the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Formulating the “exmanent” questions.</td>
<td>• Formulating the “exmanent” questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Formulating the initial topic for narration.</td>
<td>• Formulating the initial topic for narration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Getting to know the retrospective of the interviewee as thoroughly as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Proposing the interview to be held in the artist’s own studio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initiation</strong></td>
<td>• Presenting the method and the topic to the interviewee.</td>
<td>• Presenting the method and the topic to the interviewee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encouraging the interviewee to use as much time as she likes.</td>
<td>• Encouraging the interviewee to use as much time as she likes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asking for visual references to be included in the story.</td>
<td>• Asking for visual references to be included in the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main narration</strong></td>
<td>• No interruptions.</td>
<td>• Avoiding interruptions, but joining the conversation if invited by the interviewee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Using only non-verbal encouragement to continue storytelling.</td>
<td>• Using mainly non-verbal encouragement to continue storytelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Making notes of the language and references mentioned by the interviewee.</td>
<td>• Being open about interviewer’s own professional knowledge or understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Waiting for the coda (natural end of the main narration).</td>
<td>• Making notes of the language and references mentioned by the interviewee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Waiting for the coda (natural end of the main narration).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questioning</strong></td>
<td>• “What happened then?” (avoiding Why? questions, preferring questions that aim at filling the gaps in the story).</td>
<td>• “What happened then?” (avoiding Why? questions, preferring questions that aim at filling the gaps in the story).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No opinion and attitude questions.</td>
<td>• No opinion and attitude questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No arguing on contradictions.</td>
<td>• No arguing on contradictions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Using only the language used by the interviewee.</td>
<td>• Using only the shared language of the interviewee and the interviewer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Turning the exmanent questions into “immanent” ones, by using the interviewee’s language.</td>
<td>• Asking about the references mentioned in the main narration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Joining the conversation if invited by the interviewee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Turning the exmanent questions into “immanent” ones, by using the interviewee’s language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
<td>• Finishing the recording.</td>
<td>• Recording also the discussion phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why? questions allowed.</td>
<td>• Focusing on references: forming a retrospective timeline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Making notes directly after the interview.</td>
<td>• Integrating Why? questions to the visual mapping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Making notes directly after the interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1: Modified narrative interview model for artist-to-artist interviews.
5.1.2 The interviewees and the question of anonymity

According to the social scientists Benjamin Saunders, Jenny Kitzinger and Celia Kitzinger (2015: 617-618) anonymity is one form of confidentiality, in other words, that of keeping research participants’ identities secret. As Saunders et al. point out, many official ethics guidelines and textbooks on qualitative research recommend hiding the personal identities of research participants as a default position. To some extent, this has led to the “normalization” of anonymity (Saunders et al., 2015: 617; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011). At its core, this approach is based on the assumption that anonymity protects study participants from harm (Vainio, 2013). However, while anonymization of research participants has traditionally been the norm, an increasing number of researchers take a critical approach to the universalization of the anonymity principle (Wiles, 2013: 41-42, see also Grinyer, 2002; Curry and Wells, 2006; Giordano, O’Reilly, Taylor and Dogra, 2007; Stein, 2010; Tilley and Woodthorpe, 2011; Connor, Copland and Owen, 2017). One of the arguments they raise is that disclosing the identity of participants might have a strengthening and empowering effect, especially in the case of marginalized people whose voice has not yet been heard. Furthermore, some of the critics of the ethics of “anonymity by default” argue against paternalism and exaggeration of the proposed “harm” that may result from lack of anonymity (Moore, 2012).

As noted earlier in this thesis, illustrators have throughout history encountered belittling and negative underlying attitudes about their professional contributions (see, e.g., Salisbury, 2004; Male, 2017; Doyle et al., 2018). Even today, many illustrators share an experience of being considered as a marginal group of professionals, who have had no particular relevance to academic research or public recognition. In Finland, for example, there has not been any doctoral level theses on picturebook illustration practice – nor any other form of illustration practice – to date. This observation encouraged me to follow the guidelines by the sociologist Anne Grinyer (2002: 4), who emphasizes the importance of providing research participants the opportunity to use their own names. Without exception, the illustrators interviewed for this study preferred to have their names published rather than hidden. Therefore, the identities of the interviewees are disclosed in this thesis, on the grounds that this might empower them, and provide a chance for their experiences to be finally recognized and acknowledged.

Furthermore, Grinyer (2002: 4) suggests that using the research participants’ own names must be balanced with protecting them from harm. Therefore, I will quote the interviewees with their names included only when I know that it will not put them in a difficult position professionally. In the case of particularly interesting and harmless stories, I might mention the illustrator behind the quote. However, as a general rule, I will mostly use anonymous codes for each interviewee, without mentioning any individually identifiable information. Because of the same ethical reasons, the sections in which I analyze the interviewees’ experiences concerning their collaborations with publishing editors or authors, or where I list challenges regarding the financial uncertainty, I will include less direct citations than those in the other sections.

The illustrators I interviewed for this study were: Sari Airola, Linda Bondestam, Liisa

---

36 See Section 5.1.3. Reframing the discourse around picturebook illustration.
37 All these types of stories have been proofread by the interviewees, and published with their permission.
38 The codes used (A-H) are random, and do not correspond to any order of listed interviewees in Table 5.2.
39 For anonymity of the individual illustrators, I will always use the pronoun “she” regardless of the illustrator’s gender.
Kallio, Katri Kirkkopelto, Mika Launis, Marika Maijala, Salla Savolainen, and Virpi Talvitie (see Table 5.2). The most important criteria in choosing the interviewees was that I wanted them to be already established professionals – acknowledged experts in the field of illustration, with the experience of having illustrated several picturebooks. I wanted the interviewees to be able to make comparisons between their different picturebook projects, with a mature understanding of different types of challenges of their profession.

The emphasis on female illustrators among the interviewees was not planned. It is possible, and even likely, that having more male interviewees would have highlighted some of the themes discussed in this thesis or identified other themes. As such, the issue of gender could be a matter for further research. Nevertheless, the larger number of female interviewees does, in fact, reflect that the Finnish picturebook illustration scene is female dominated.\(^{49}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The interviewee</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Duration of the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sari Airola</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Master of Arts, University of Art and Design, Helsinki</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2h 49min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Bondestam</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>BA Illustration, Kingston University, London</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2h 00min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liisa Kallio</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Master of Arts, University of Art and Design, Helsinki</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2h 10min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katri Kirkkopelto</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Master of Arts, University of Art and Design, Helsinki</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2h 50min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mika Launis</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts, University of Art and Design, Helsinki</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4h 03min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marika Maijala</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Master of Science, University of Turku, Turku</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1h 12min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salla Savolainen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Master of Arts, University of Art and Design, Helsinki</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2h 22min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virpi Talvitie</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Master of Arts, University of Art and Design, Helsinki</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3h 42min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Summary of the interviewees.

\(^{49}\) This argument is based on my own observations of the field, as well as the Finnish Illustration Association database of professional Finnish illustrators: https://kuvittajat.fi/portfoliot. [Accessed 20 Mar. 2021]. The search was done by filtering all the professional illustrators in Finland who are specialized in children’s books and illustrated books. In total, the search listed 187 illustrators. Of these illustrators, 140 were female and 47 male illustrators.
Sari Airola

When I was studying at the University of Arts and Design, I didn’t have any illustration courses, and I wasn’t particularly interested in illustration. I didn’t feel like an illustrator at all. But many other people in our class later became illustrators. They were all into illustration. But when it came to me – I didn’t even know how to draw a human, so I felt that becoming an illustrator was out of the question. But then, after already having submitted my master’s thesis, I decided to go to Ohio as an exchange student. And it changed my life.41

Sari Airola, 2015


---

41 All of the interviews were carried out in Finnish. The quotes in English are my verbal translations from Finnish.
42 All the images in this chapter are used with the permission of the interviewed illustrators.
One day, I called the publishing house. A lady answered the phone and said that I should talk to this one publishing editor who wasn’t there at the moment. The lady promised that I could go there anytime to present my portfolio to them. “The only thing is”, the lady continued, “that she is here only on Thursdays”. So, I went there the following Thursday with my portfolio. The publishing editor had no idea who I was and why I was there. But she didn’t say anything, because she thought we had agreed on an appointment that she just happened to forget. So, she welcomed me in. I think she was so baffled about not knowing I would be there that she just gave me my first manuscript to illustrate right at that instant. You know – a bit of a shock effect. I was so happy! I walked home and just read and read. That was a dream come true for me.

Linda Bondestam, 2016
I remember that one time at the university – I think I was at the first or second class – when one of our teachers said: “Hear me now, I know that you all are dreaming of your very own little red house with a potato field, where you will be just sitting and illustrating children’s books. But it will not be like that. No. You will be designing logos for banks”. At some point, I ended up having a little red house with a potato field. And all I could think was – hah, in your face!

Liisa Kallio, 2015
My favorite teacher at the university was the teacher of live drawing – she was a really tough lady. She would enter the room with her heels making this click-clack sound and scream: “You do not make this kind of garbage at my class! Everybody, start all over again!” She thought we could do nothing – that we were lousy. You either reacted to that by changing the teacher, or you stayed there and decided: “I’m going to show here. Just wait and see”. And I stayed. I need someone to kick my ass and tell me to be better.

Katri Kirkkopelto, 2015

Image 5.5: Book covers by Katri Kirkkopelto: Molli ja Kumma (“Molli and Kumma”), Kirkkopelto (Lasten Keskus, 2018); Hirveää, parkaisi hirviö (“Horrible, Cried the Monster”), Kirkkopelto and Vuori (WSOY, 2005).
Mika Launis

When my time in the army was coming to an end, I heard from the others that I should apply to some school. They said that the best possible option was the University of Art and Design – if you got through the first few days of the entrance exams, you were allowed to participate in the final exams as well. And it would be two weeks altogether – a two-week vacation, just before finishing the army! I thought to myself that I would definitely use this opportunity. I wasn’t taking the exams very seriously, but after the first few days I decided to change my approach. And I got into the department of graphic design with the best grades. Moving towards illustration was connected with how important I felt that it was to master the technical skills as an artist. I felt that this could boost illustration – illustration as an art form. University of Art and Design was basically the only way to assimilate the art of illustration.

Mika Launis, 2015

Image 5.6: Book covers by Mika Launis: Myrskykirja ("The Thunderstorm Book"), Eräpuro and Launis (Karisto, 2014); Peikonhäntä (Little Troll’s tail), Vento and Launis (WSOY, 2007).
One of my first experiences of the publishing world was when I took my illustrations to show to this one publishing editor, and one by one, she slammed them. She told me she had never seen anything as ugly as my illustrations ever in her life. I also sent her a script – an almost finished work published later on by another publishing house. But again, she replied to me with just one sentence: “So what?” It felt horrible, but it just made me stronger. I remember thinking that this is not that bad at all, she just doesn’t get it – this is too good for her. But her comments, they were pretty fantastic actually, as they were so direct. A bit like something you could hear from a child.

Marika Maijala, 2016
There I was – just drawing and drawing and drawing. The floors were filled with sketches. This one man was working there, at the building, as some kind of a caretaker. His job was to make sure that all the machines were functioning correctly. Usually, he came to say hello to me, but that one time my door was closed, so he knocked. He looked at me in the middle of all those piles of drawings and sketches and asked, “Everything okay?” The next morning, when I came to work, a cleaning lady had visited my studio.

Salla Savolainen, 2015
One time, when I was still studying, my teacher said to me, quite grumpily: “Why do you want to design some wallpapers? Go – start designing wallpapers then!” Back then, it did not feel nice, because of the way he said it – it was not appreciative in any way. Nevertheless, all I could think was that wow – designing wallpapers would actually be really amazing!

Virpi Talvitie, 2015

Image 5.9: Book covers by Virpi Talvitie: Satu joka oliotta, Tapola and Talvitie (Tammi, 2004); Unilintu ja Uljas sankari, Tapola and Talvitie (Teos, 2010).
5.2 Analysis of the interviews

The analysis of the interviews followed the typical structure of the picturebook illustration process as identified in the previous chapter. This was done to allow a better comparison of the findings from the analysis of my own illustration process with those from the analysis of the narrative interviews. As mentioned before, I have divided the findings from my analysis into five sections, the first four of which relate to the “four stages” of the illustration process, and the final section relates to the fascination of the picturebook illustration process. The four stages are 1. planning the picturebook, 2. creating the illustrations, 3. finalizing the picturebook, and 4. post-process, which covers the various aspects related to the period after the book is published. After covering the four main stages of the process here, I will discuss the different themes related to the fascination of illustrating picturebooks, which the interviewees were also eager to talk about. The final section of this analysis – the fascination of the picturebook illustration process – unfolds the positive motives and aspects of the illustration process that the interviewees mentioned. Table 5.3 shows the five sections listed here, and the main topics identified in relation to each of these sections.

The analysis covers all main points mentioned by the majority of the interviewees. Therefore, the findings can be interpreted as experiences that are typical to the picturebook illustration process in general. I will exclude from the analysis those experiences mentioned in only one or two of the interviews, which are related to the experiences of individual interviewees concerned, and therefore, do not seem to have any particular connection to the broader illustration process common to most illustrators.

As discussed before, the basis for the narrative interview method is to ask for a main narration from the interviewee and then continue the interview with follow-up questions that are anchored to the interviewee’s language. All of the interviewees knew my background as an illustrator, and I assume that this affected the interviews in a way that the interviewed illustrators did not feel the need to discuss the technical aspects of the profession with me, or to share their experiences about, for example, sketching the images or creating a book dummy. Because of the themes and vocabulary suggested by the interviewees themselves, the emphasis of the analysis will be on mapping out the internal emotional aspects that the illustrator typically experiences while illustrating a picturebook, and external aspects related to the professional landscape that affect how the illustrator experiences the illustration process.
Although picturebook illustration in Finland allows more freedom for the illustrator to express herself artistically than many other forms of illustration, it is still a profession with strict deadlines and obligations, usually set by the publishing house. Therefore, the illustrator must push herself to start the process, regardless of her level of inspiration. “You know that you simply need to start” (F).

While starting a new picturebook illustration project typically includes feelings of pressure and uncertainty, the majority of the interviewees noted that they also tend to
experience “euphoria” during the beginning phase. The excitement was often mentioned by the same people who also talked about the feelings of fear, inadequacy, or doubt. “Sometimes I might feel wonderfully euphoric when I receive the text. That this is wonderful, this is an amazing piece to illustrate. But after a while, I realize that oh – there were these other aspects in it as well” (E).

Some of the interviewed illustrators pointed out that it is impossible to rely solely on inspiration when working as a picturebook illustrator – especially at the beginning of the process – if one hopes to get the book finished on time. In case of those interviewees who still had children living at home, the children's schedules determined when the illustrator was able to work on their illustrations. Waiting for inspiration during those limited working hours would make the illustration task – and completing the project on time – practically impossible. Instead of waiting for an inner impulse or motivation, illustrators often need to simply “force the process to take off” (E).

The interviewed illustrators mentioned certain “rituals” that often help them to begin the picturebook illustration process. For some, these acts meant simply reading the manuscript several times, or trying new image-making techniques. Meanwhile, other suitable strategies that were mentioned, was cleaning the studio and desk, or purchasing new tools that helped the illustrator to orientate with the new project. “I always start with a cleaning day. I buy new pencils. Just like I did when I was a child and started a new semester in school” (C).

Focusing on a new project seems to become slightly easier the longer a person has worked as an illustrator. Interviewee B noted how starting a new project used to involve considerable amount of “searching and pondering on how to do the whole thing”, but after working for several decades as a professional illustrator, this is no longer the case. “It is such a hard work to make a picturebook. You have to make those images so many times. It is a really, really long process” (H). Some of the interviewees talked about their strategies to handle the “fear of the blank page” (E, C) at the beginning of the project. Interviewee E explained how she likes to take advantage of different primer colors when she is starting to paint the final illustrations for her picturebooks. The reason for painting the white papers with different colors first, is that it helps her to deal with the fear of the blank page and to “carve the illustrations from inside the color” (E).

Interviewee C noted how she usually starts the project by inserting the text to the publishing and typesetting software. This is her strategy for overcoming the fear of the blank page at the beginning of a project. “It is such a horrible feeling to see all those twenty empty pages” (C). The same interviewee also discussed how she likes to fill the spreads rapidly in the software with color areas. “Some yellow here and some blue there!”, she explained and continued “This is a way for me to cheat a bit – as if I had done something already, when in reality, I have not” (C). Both of the approaches mentioned above could be considered as emotional strategies that can help illustrators move from a completely blank phase to a stage where there is an illusion of the images present. The process of creating illustrations has now started, even if the primer colors did not have anything to do with the final illustrations in the end.

For the interviewed illustrators, the planning phase is typically the time for new ideas and new visions. “The beginning of a project is always pretty euphoric because it is so wonderful to start a new book. I am always over the moon of it. Doing all those
sketches, it is always fun. That is in fact the phase that I like the most” (H). Beginning a new book is a chance for a picturebook illustrator to “renew her skin” as an artist. For some of the interviewees, the phase when they were still working on the storyboard and “doing all those sketches” (H), was considered as one of the most wonderful phases in the entire process. “Creating those little sketches at the beginning – that really is a nice phase” (A).

I think it is most fun when I am designing the characters and thinking about that miniature universe, while also doing the first “key illustrations”. Nothing is pressing me yet – nothing needs to be finished yet. After completing those key illustrations and coming up with the characters – that is the time when I feel terrific. That is the time when I really like my work.

Interviewee A

What also makes picturebook illustrators feel enjoyment at the beginning of the process, is the illusion of an unlimited schedule. As discussed before, the illustrator has to find a way to start the project – even by force – because she knows there is a limited amount of time to complete the illustrations. Nevertheless, the time that is still available at the beginning is more than what will be left at any other stage of the process. As such, the illustrator can immerse herself fully in the planning process and sketching the storyboard, without feeling the pressure of the final deadline, which still feels distant.

Some of the interviewees noted that after spending a considerable amount of time sketching the characters and drawing the storyboard – after planning the entire book from beginning to an end – they often feel that the project is now completed. “I always end up with the same feeling – that the book is finished now after I have managed to build the entire thing in my head”, interviewee A said. Similarly, interviewee H said: “I noticed when I was working on that storyboard that it is actually a lot of fun. Creating the final illustrations is almost the most boring phase. In a way, it is the thought process that is the most important in the whole thing, for me”.

Interviewee B noted how the time she uses for sketching the entire storyboard can range from a couple of hours to one day maximum. This was the shortest time frame mentioned by any of the interviewees when it comes to drawing the storyboard. For interviewee B, there is nothing mystical in the planning process of a book – quite the contrary – which allows her to proceed with the planning very quickly.

The majority of it is “engineering”. You just figure out how to organize everything. From experience, possibly intuitively, you bring along proven solutions that bring an artistic impression to it. In the beginning, you need to know intuitively that you can get a hold of it. You need to feel that you have enough substance with it. You have some themes, possibly some color themes and composition themes, you have thoughts about directions and so on – ideas about the content, funny comparisons and that sort of things. Things that you immediately know will work in the end.

Interviewee B
**Target audience**

When I illustrate for children, I have to think about it all the time, especially at the beginning, and when creating the story. But when I do the images – when it is there in my head – I do not need to think about it anymore. But that is the basis for the whole thing. I think this is the difference between picturebook illustrations and fine arts. When doing fine arts, I do not have to think about the receiver and the one who will be experiencing my illustrations. But these are images made for use. The meanings behind these go beyond individual illustrations. They are always elements of a larger structure.

*Interviewee A*

In Finland, picturebooks for adults does not really exist as a category. Therefore, most of the interviewed illustrators considered children as their primary target audience. Many of them also mentioned that understanding a child reader is an important part of their work. In total, seven interviewees out of eight mentioned the aspect of a target audience, and how they as illustrators take their primary audience – the children – into account in their work. However, considering the various aspects in regard to the possible expectations of the target audience seems to mainly take place outside the actual illustration process – thus, the period when the images of a picturebook are in the making. “When I draw, I do not think at all about whom this is going to be for. I just draw. And I want the book to be as good as possible”, interviewee C said.

The mentioned strategies to consider a child reader involved thinking about some particular child the illustrators knew very well, or thinking about their own “inner child” – rather than children as a larger target audience. “I cannot focus on some target group – wondering if kids would like this or that. It has to be someone concrete. I do this for a particular child” (H). Interviewee H also mentioned that another method for considering the target group is to create the illustrations for oneself: “I always try to think of some real human being, for instance, myself or some child that I know” (H).

One typical method for considering the target group is to create the picturebook illustrations for the “inner child” (F, D, A, C).

*I guess I do these [books] for that inner child of mine. It has to be a child because it would be terribly difficult otherwise. I don’t find myself being an expert in education or an expert on children – on what a “child” is. It is me. It has probably got to do with that grateful feeling that I can still get excited about, for example, a new text. It starts building those images in my head. I think that is where I go – into that inner child of mine. Although it’s a bit of a cliché. But life is a cliché.*

*Interviewee F*

Some of the interviewees mentioned the impact that their own children had on the illustration process. For instance, interviewee E mentioned how after having a child
her thoughts about the target group changed, to some extent. Now that she had a new understanding of the different phases a child goes through while growing up, she felt that she should consider this in her work as an illustrator.

> I am not interested in being a weird artist. But it’s so important what kind of text you have. If you have a radical text, then it is a radical book. It goes into a completely wrong direction if you try to do something else – if you try to turn it into a book it is not. It just doesn’t work.

**Interviewee C**

Even though many of the interviewees found it essential to respect the story’s spirit, some pointed out the responsibility that illustrators have towards children. For example, interviewee A reminded how some children are reading picturebooks alone, without necessarily any adult by their side. When dealing with difficult subjects, she felt that the illustrator has to ensure that the child reader can “cope” with the book. “Balancing a weighty subject with comforting illustrations is very important” (A).

Some of the interviewed illustrators thought that it was crucial to have at least some understanding of today’s children and the world they live in. If the illustrator does not have any children of her own, or if her own children have all grown up, this understanding can be challenging to reach. Meeting the people who consume their books – for instance, by visiting kindergartens – helped the interviewed illustrators to “build bridges” between their illustrations and today’s children.

> It is challenging if you do not have any contact with today’s children because children’s culture changes so rapidly. I think that there is a huge risk of becoming over-nostalgic very fast.

**Interviewee A**

Even though children do not usually play an active role in illustrators’ minds while in the process of creating the illustrations, they are well aware that their illustrations and books are produced for others to experience and look at. “It is important to me that the picture has an audience. ... It does not come into life in front of me – it comes into life through somebody else’s eyes”, interviewee F pointed out, while interviewee A said: “I do not make these books for myself. I think that they are made to become all worn in the hands of today’s children”.

How picturebook illustrators can support the children to deal with challenging issues in their lives, was considered by some of the interviewed illustrators as a particularly important aspect of their work. For example, some of Katri Kirkkopelto’s picturebooks have dealt with issues such as homesickness in *Pīkku Pesu ja īso iķāvā* (2012), loneliness in *Molli* (2013), and bullying in *Piki* (2016).
I like enormously doing something that has a bigger meaning – something that is not just entertainment. Literature is always more – stories are always more. I like creating something that provides tools for children in them growing up. Those characters can become real not just for me, but for the children as well. And they continue living and operating with them in their lives. ... If I can make a picturebook that helps the children avoid becoming victims or bullies – that is extremely meaningful to me.

Katri Kirkkopelto, 2015

Five of the interviewees mentioned that they would like to create picturebooks especially for adults as well. “It would be so amazing to do picturebooks for adults. That would be so much fun” interviewee D said. Three of the interviewees noted that they enjoy illustrating for adults, for instance, while creating editorial illustrations, because it liberates them from some of the considerations that they may have about children as a target audience. Some of these comments reveal somewhat conservative and old-fashioned assumptions of children’s expectations, for example, in terms of what kind of characters are “suitable” for children. “You don’t need to do a sympathetic face or necessarily a face at all [when illustrating for adults]” (E). Some of the interviewees addressed the fact that adults, as an audience, should also be able to enjoy the picturebook medium and the synergy that the text and image can create together. “Adults should have picturebooks as well, the type of books that are specially targeted to them”, interviewee F said. For some of the interviewees, their main reason for illustrating for children was the fact that – as noted earlier – in Finland, the adults’ picturebooks as a category does not exist. “Why picturebooks? Well, because adults’ books are not illustrated. And it is the whole word and image interplay that I am most fascinated about”, interviewee D said. Similarly, interviewee A pointed out, “I create picturebooks for children, as we do not have adults’ picturebooks. Or it is extremely rare.
Some have tried, but for some reason, it has never taken off”.

Some of the interviewed illustrators mentioned, that they do consider many of their picturebooks that are created primarily for a child audience to be also interesting or amusing for adults – including, for instance, such humor that will mostly be understood by adults. “It is delicious to develop these ‘visual schemes’ for myself. Not everybody understands them, but there will always be someone who gets them and picks them. They provide a possibility for that” (F). This theme of picturebooks’ ability to reach multiple audiences simultaneously was not, however, strongly represented in the interview material, but rather a sidenote in some of the interviews (F, G, H).

Most of the interviewees emphasized that patronizing children should never be the case when illustrating picturebooks. Nevertheless, many of them felt that illustrations that are primarily aimed at children, should be – at least to some extent – “understandable” (E). This does not, however, mean that they should be flat, obvious, or lack depth – on the contrary. Avoiding too cryptic meanings and symbols in the illustrations do not mean that the characters, events, or surroundings could not consist of multiple layers that leave room for multiple interpretations. “I think they need to be easy to approach. But in general, I believe that if things are easy to approach, there can be several layers to them. Then, it is possible to open the meanings behind them”, interviewee G suggested. Interviewee E pointed out how she wishes that the children would understand the emotions she is trying to visualize in the illustrations, and that the children would recognize, for example, the different animals in her forest illustration. Similarly, interviewee F pointed out how she wants the children to understand what her picturebooks are all about. Although she enjoys creating symbolic images, she prefers not to include a considerable number of hidden meanings in her picturebook illustrations. Instead, she hopes that it will be easy for children to understand what is happening in her illustrations. Similarly, interviewee G noted that nowadays she prefers doing illustrations where the symbolism can be found from the concrete, where little things start turning into larger things. “I have abandoned the approach that leans into symbolism. These days, I think that the things I make for children should – first and foremost – be straightforward and emotionally appealing” (G).

The fact that illustrating for children gives illustrators a chance to look at the world around them from the perspective of a child was also mentioned – and highly appreciated – by some of the interviewees. “The fact that I can make illustrations for children – that has been incredibly important for me” interviewee G said. For some, illustrating for children seemed to permit to stay a “childlike” themselves, which created part of the fun in the profession. For example, interviewee A noted how “luxurious it is to dive into the world of the little people in a universe that is sometimes so terribly ugly”, and “how beautiful it is to focus on bringing some kind of tenderness into the world and the difficult themes in the children’s lives”. For her, the “permission to not to fully grow up” was one of the core reasons to continue creating picturebooks.

**Illustrator as an author**

Whether the illustrator is also writing the story herself for the picturebook she is illustrating, or illustrating somebody else’s story, has a significant impact on her creative process. Most of the illustrators interviewed for this study had also written the text for
many, or some, of their picturebooks. The experiences of writing the stories for their picturebooks varied greatly between different interviewees. For some, being in charge of both the images and the text felt natural and enjoyable, while others believed that this could make the entire process more challenging.

When the illustrator is also writing the story for the book, she moves from the role of a picturebook illustrator to that of a picturebook maker. She is now in charge of the entire book – how it will sound and look like – and is, therefore, able to make even radical changes to the text when the illustrations are in the making or are completed. Adding the creative elements of the writing process often tends to increase the challenges involved in the picturebook-making process. “Writing is actually really difficult”, as pointed out by the interviewee D. However, some of the interviewees considered this added creative element also as liberating, in terms of their visual problem-solving.

I have finally started to reach what I have tried to achieve all along. It is not just illustrating, but actually creating the entire picturebook, I also mean the story. Writing the text, doing it all simultaneously. That is the thing.

Interviewee H

When also working as the author of their books, the interviewees felt that they had more freedom in taking advantage of the contradictory and complementary aspects of a picturebook. “I would like to achieve the type of level with my stories that they would, very delicately, say something a bit different than the illustrations”, interviewee H said, while interviewee G noted: “When I make [the whole book] myself, then I can edit the text freely and replace things with the image. The process is more flexible”. Usually, the illustrator considers the interplay of word and image mostly during the planning stage. However, when the illustrator is also writing the text, this can easily be done throughout the entire process. While creating the final illustrations, the illustrator is completely free to alternate between the text and the images to bring dynamics and liveliness to the book. For some of the interviewees, this was one of the most interesting and fun elements of the entire picturebook process. “I started sketching those images for a text I already did a while ago. And I was wondering how on earth I will achieve the speed in them. But it is just so much fun to add something to those poems of mine with the illustrations”, interviewee G said.

When the illustrator is also writing the text for the book herself, she is free to develop and change the story at any point during the process. Some of the interviewees noted that the most natural order for them is to write the text, more or less completely first, and then continue the process with the illustrations while keeping an eye on the text. However, for some, it felt more natural to create the text and the images completely side by side. In this case, the entire process is more about observing the dialogue that is taking place between the text and the images, and about exploring where this dialogue wants to lead the story. This kind of process allows the illustrator to change her original ideas and resolve things in the story in a completely new way at any point during the process. “Of course, you have to retain that core or ‘soul’. But the story can
lead the whole thing into a direction that will turn the images into something completely different, and everything will change essentially. And you have permission to do that — nobody has decided beforehand, what you have to do with them”, interviewee A said.

Furthermore, interviewee A discussed how her experiences as a picturebook illustrator had affected her approach towards picturebooks in general. While creating both the text and the images for her picturebooks, she has had a chance to consider, for instance, what kind of humor she would like the children to experience through her books. “Sometimes I think that we have this ‘must-fun’ attitude in the children’s culture – that it has to always be funny and make everybody laugh. But I think that it shouldn’t be forced – children’s culture should not necessarily need to be fun. It can also be just beautiful. I appreciate beauty greatly these days, also as a counterweight to the ugliness of the world”, interviewee A pointed out. When the illustrator illustrates other people’s text, she might not have a chance to influence the core message or the “tone” behind her books. While she can, for example, adapt her own sense of humor to the book through the illustrations, the nuances in the text will still have a substantial impact on how the picturebook will be interpreted in the end. Furthermore, writing the text can also help the illustrator consider and treat the text as a visual element, and as a part of the visual storytelling in itself.

It is worth noting that some publishing houses in Finland do not necessarily want illustrators to illustrate their own text, even when the illustrators themselves find the idea tempting or even when the artistic level of their stories are high enough. In the interview material, there were mentions of some publishing editors rejecting illustrators’ own manuscripts. Instead of continuing further with these project proposals, the editors preferred to continue, for instance, with a good and profitable collaboration that the illustrator already had with an author. The publisher’s preconception that the book would be better if the illustrator was in charge of the images and the author in charge of the text was noted by five out of eight interviewees.

Often, writing the text for the picturebook made the illustration process feel more personal for the interviewees. Interviewee E pointed out that when she illustrates her own text, the schedule is usually more flexible than when illustrating for somebody else’s text. This was something that other interviewees mentioned as well.

When you illustrate somebody else’s text, it is more like a commission, more like a “job job”. But when you are also writing the text, it feels more creative, maybe because it has to come from your own experiences somehow. It is also a much longer process, and not like “now it starts, and now it’s finished”.

Interviewee E

Sometimes, illustrating somebody else’s text made the interviewees feel that throughout the project they had to prove their value to people other than themselves – to convince the author or the editor that they had made the right choice when asking them to illustrate the book. When illustrating their own text, the illustrators seem to be less likely to make these types of assumptions.
When I illustrate other people’s text, I am more aware of my own image-making. I think more about what the author thinks about everything – whether it is something that she is looking for. I think that when I work with my own stories, artistic freedom is greater, because I don’t need to ask another person’s opinion. When you do your own book, you take bigger risks.

Interviewee G

Illustrating one’s own text might in fact help the illustrators to enjoy the creative illustration process – as well as the end result – more compared to when the illustrator is visualizing another person’s text. However, this issue was mainly raised by those interviewees who were confident both as writers, as well as illustrators.

Maybe I feel prouder when I have done both illustrations and the text. But of course, the shame is bigger as well. You have no-one else to blame afterward – that oh well, the text was just really difficult to illustrate.

Interviewee E

Collaboration with other authors

The collaboration with other professional authors was, in general, an enjoyable experience for the interviewed illustrators, and it often provided them a chance to receive valuable feedback about their illustration work. It is the usual practice that often the author contacts the illustrator directly and asks whether she would be interested in illustrating her text. Alternatively, the publishing house may receive a manuscript from the author and, after considering different options, asks a particular illustrator to join the project, or invites a few illustrators to each make a test image for the text. The request to create a test image was, in general, strongly criticized by the interviewees. In most cases, illustrators believed that creating test images was pointless, stressful, and a poor way to start a collaboration.

The interviewees also mentioned how they sometimes receive collaboration suggestions from amateur writers who do not have a publisher for a planned picturebook yet. The illustrators found these cases tricky, and rarely a potential for further collaboration, due to their financial uncertainty and the artistic quality of an unedited manuscript.

Those interviewees who had worked with the same authors for many years and produced several picturebooks together pointed out how the close relationship with an author can open a door for interesting and meaningful dialogues. Having reached a level of mutual understanding and trust helps illustrators share their thoughts and critique regarding the content and amount of the manuscript text. Such collaboration also

43 The cases where the illustrator herself is also the author of her book were discussed in the previous section.
provides the illustrators with a safe environment to suggest alternative – often visual – ways to convey the story. “I explained to her [the author] that if I illustrate it like this, it will already express what you are saying here. We needed the publishing editor a bit in that dialogue” (B).

The picturebook *Keinulauta* [Seesaw, 2006] locates somewhere halfway in my “picturebook life”. The collaboration with the author Timo Parvela was really unique. I had already gained some skills and certainty about myself, and had a significant role in that book. I was the one who got the idea – when we were speculating should it [the main character Pii] be an animal or a human – that the author could write about a bear and the illustrator draw a human. This was something that was a huge thing for both of us when we were creating that book. That really got us inspired.

Virpi Talvitie, 2015

According to the interviewees, this type of close collaboration that allows both the author and the illustrator to share their thoughts back and forth, is relatively rare. Whether such collaboration takes place or not has more to do with the dynamics between different people and personalities. The same illustrator can have complicated and exhausting collaborations with one author, but extremely uplifting and inspiring ones with someone else. Generally, the interviewed illustrators noted how they greatly valued the end results of good and close illustrator-author collaborations. The mutual understanding with the author usually helped the illustrator to feel appreciated in the project, and allowed her to bring her authentic voice into the picturebook and the story. “It was really motivating for me as an illustrator that I had a chance to take the story further, although the author was the one writing it. I could lead it towards my own direction, to pick a ‘big theme’ for the illustrations. It was all done simultaneously – the text was not finished at that point”, interviewee F said.

When the collaboration with an author is still very fresh, and especially if the author is an established and respected one with a remarkable career, the illustrator might feel that she does not want to “step on the author’s toes” (F). Even when the illustrator has ideas and suggestions about editing the text to make the book more interesting and appealing, she might not share these thoughts with the author. This, however, usually changes with experience, and increased self-confidence that is typically gained through several completed picturebook projects.
I have enjoyed this pretty close relationship between the author and the illustrator. ... I also like the privacy and peace, but at some stage of the project, I think it is really good to be in contact a lot and to form a team, instead of just doing some commission where you are doing your own part, and others do theirs.

Interviewee F

When the illustrator has created more than one book with the same author, she is often more willing to give suggestions to the authors and have closer collaborations with them. Having a closer collaboration with an author does not, however, mean that the author and illustrator would necessarily meet very often. Instead, it usually means that the author and the illustrator form a team – a safe entity that ideally allows and encourages different opinions and options to arise and lead the process forward, in order to make the picturebook as good as possible. “You are in it together, you form a nice protective shield, and you lift one another into that shared universe of yours, the one you have entered together” (F).

While the interviewed illustrators mostly found that forming this “entity” was relatively easy and natural, it usually required the illustrators to suggest a closer collaboration proactively. Based on the interview material, it would seem that picturebook authors do not typically recognize the need for this kind of collaboration. After the authors have completed writing the text, they expect the illustrator to take charge and suggest a meeting later in the process – maybe not until most or all of the illustrations are completed. “Many authors do not involve themselves in my work in any way. But those who do, do it, in general, in a positive way”, interviewee D said.

The creative process is rather vulnerable in its nature, and finding people with whom the illustrator can safely share her illustrations and sketches is not always easy. “You really need to think carefully. At least at the beginning, but also in the end. At the beginning, you are maybe too sensitive. Some might ask you ‘What is that? That is really not a good idea’. Then the whole idea is ruined”, interviewee C pointed out. Based on the interview material, the people with whom illustrators share their unfinished illustrations are rarely the authors – however, there are exceptions. Some of the interviewees noted that one of the most important and beautiful aspects of working with another author is the chance to find new friends who share a mutual interest in picturebooks. In some cases, the collaboration between the illustrator and the author can help them to form an artistic understanding together, and protect this ‘joint vision’ when, for example, being criticized by a publishing editor. “One time she [publishing editor] suggested that some of my characters should smile. The editor asked me why they looked so angry. But the author said, absolutely not – no smiling is needed. It was really important to me”, interviewee C said.

Not being in contact with the author almost at all during the process is also a surprisingly common way of working for Finnish picturebook illustrators. As I will discuss in the following section, the publishing editors are not, in general, active in challenging this long-established way of creating illustrations and text separately for Finnish picturebooks. Some of the interviewees felt that other team members did not always approve their attempts to influence how the text should be edited to increase its
interaction with the illustrations. The interviewees even felt that sometimes these attempts had affected the way they were viewed as professionals. “I have had a bit of a reputation for being difficult because I want to have an impact on how things are done”, interviewee B mentioned.

However, having a close collaboration with the author is not always what the interviewed illustrators are looking for. “It depends on personality. I am one of those people who likes doing things by herself in her own chamber. So, it is sometimes challenging for me to work and be with other people”, interviewee H said. Some of the interviewees noted that they are more than happy with their freedom to work on their illustrations without any pressure to show them to anybody during the process.

In some cases, the collaboration, which had started with great enthusiasm for both the illustrator and the author – with a mutual intention to compose the picturebook more or less together – turned out to be very challenging. Collaborations that could be successful when implemented in the traditional “illustrator illustrates a finished manuscript” way, sometimes turned out to be rather tense, and even agonizing when attempts were made to adopt a simultaneous and more “open” process.

Some of the interviewees noted that those projects where the author was prone to suggesting alternatives to the illustrations, or criticized them too harshly too soon, were challenging for them. The illustrators felt that they could often see from the end result – even after several years – whether the collaboration with the author had been successful or not – picturebooks that were done under pressure and criticism were often considered by the interviewees as being disappointing or “ugly” (E, A) in terms of their artistic quality.

Rather than having a close collaboration where the illustrator and the author would consider different options together and edit each other’s work, it is often more natural for the illustrators to contact the author only about more practical issues. For example, the illustrator might suggest to the author to remove unnecessary or passive characters from some scenes in the story. The illustrator might also ask the author to remove or change some elements from the text that the illustrator would find particularly challenging to draw. “I am not a technical drawer. Sometimes when there is a tractor or something, I might ask the author if it needs to be a tractor. And tell her that I don’t want to draw a tractor, that I don’t know how, even if I wanted to” (C).

A good relationship with the author can help the illustrator suggest alternative solutions – typically, visual ways to represent certain things – for the text, when she is given a particularly long picturebook manuscript. A large amount of text in picturebooks is a common headache for illustrators, and something that all of the interviewees
mentioned having struggled with. Often, picturebook authors tend to illustrate the events and characters so fully in their stories that illustrators find it challenging to interpret them visually with their illustrations. Some of the interviewees noted how they like to look for the illustration ideas in “between the lines” (F). If the text is extremely descriptive and leaves little room for imagination – if there is practically no space between those lines to look for ideas – their options as illustrators are very limited, as the imagination is more tied to the details already presented in the text. In fact, this problem can move the illustrator from being the illustrator to being the illuminator – someone who embellishes the text visually instead of articulating, challenging, or complementing it in various ways.

The long and descriptive manuscripts made many of the interviewees feel that instead of illustrating a picturebook, they were illustrating a children’s novel or storybook. Although illustrating a children’s novel or storybook might not be any less interesting as an assignment, the requirements and possibilities for the picturebook are different. In general, the interviewees felt that it is easier for them to use their imagination and their full potential as picturebook illustrators when the manuscript is more “open” in its nature. Contemplating the relationship between the images and the text, however, often requires a considerable amount of time and support from the publishing editor.

*It was extremely difficult for the author to shorten the text. ... So, I made a shorter version of it and sent it to her. And then she continued editing it. I was a bit afraid of what she might say – many would not like it. But we had worked together for a long time, and trusted each other.*

*Interviewee D*

**Collaboration with publishing editors**

As discussed above, the interviewees believe that often when working with an author, they are not necessarily able to use their full potential as illustrators because a long and extensive picturebook manuscript diminishes their possibilities in conveying the story visually. Rather than having to suggest different ways to edit the text to the authors themselves, in order to increase the interplay between word and images, most of the interviewees generally hope that the publishing editor would be in charge of this dialogue. However, according to the interviewees, not many publishing editors in Finland have the necessary competence to do this.

In Finland, the path to becoming a publishing editor has traditionally been through university studies in Finnish literature. This has affected the way picturebooks are typically produced in Finland. Some of the interviewees felt that the Finnish publishing editors do not, in general, have the necessary background and vocabulary to conduct a discussion about illustration and visual storytelling. Instead, they put a considerable amount of time and effort into developing and editing the text separately from the illustrations, before discussing the story with the illustrator.

Often, when the illustrator is invited to join the process, both the publishing editor and the author feel that the manuscript is more or less ready. At this point, the length
and content of the text are rarely questioned. Instead of asking the illustrator’s opinion about the story and storytelling, the publishing editor often expects the illustrator to proceed with the finished text, and to complement it visually. According to the interviewees, in Finnish publishing houses the picturebook process is traditionally considered to be a linear one – as a path from point A to point B. However, the illustrators themselves would rather see the entire process as a somewhat radial one – as something where every aspect of the book is considered in relation to every other aspect throughout the process. For instance, if something can be said visually, and if the illustrator has an excellent vision of how this could be done, then there should be more flexibility in editing the text based on the visual storytelling as well, not only the other way around.

The publishing editor’s lack of understanding of illustration and visual storytelling significantly impacts the picturebook illustration process. The most concrete impact that the interviewees mentioned was the lack of proper feedback. Some of the interviewees noted how typical it is to “become blind” (D) to their own work during the creative process, and to the possible flaws in their visual storytelling. Since a picturebook consists of multiple spreads that all impact one another, it can sometimes be challenging for the illustrator to see what should be done to improve the storytelling. Therefore, during this illustration process, it would be beneficial for the illustrator to receive feedback from someone else who knows the story well, and can evaluate the storytelling both visually and verbally. Although ideally this person should be the publishing editor, based on the interviewees’ opinion, this is often not the case.

According to the interviewees, picturebook illustrations are often delivered to the publishing house at the end of the illustration process, with only very little dialogue with the publishing editor while the illustrations are being created. Most of the dialogue, if there is any, takes place through e-mails. However, many of the interviewees found this e-mail exchange process exhausting. “My biggest problem is those e-mails. I get them enormously. And I always think that yes, I need to answer to this, but later. That is why I start all of my e-mails with the words ‘I’m sorry.’ I mean, all of them. It is starting to become a joke, really” (C). In general, the interviewed illustrators felt that the dialogue via e-mails disturbed their creative process. Often, they also experienced that although they were obliged to answer to the e-mails they received, they did not necessarily get the answers to their own questions as fast as they had hoped. In some cases, the interviewees noted not getting answers to their e-mails at all, which made them feel they were illustrating the books completely on their own, without any support from the publishing house.

Most of the interviewees found the “old way” of creating picturebooks better for themselves and for the book – meeting face to face at some point during the process and receiving feedback for their illustrations and the relationship between the text and the images. While some of the interviewees enjoyed the freedom of making their own decisions during the process of creating their illustrations, the majority of them believed that the lack of proper feedback made the illustration process feel as if they were “walking on thin ice” (F) – merely hoping that the result would be successful.

The contrast to the amount of support illustrators got for their work in the past was highlighted by many of the interviewees. For them, it felt like the process of creating picturebooks in Finnish publishing houses has changed radically over the past few
years. The lack of proper feedback did not make the interviewees feel more appreciated – in that other people in the team trusted the illustrator so much that they chose not to interfere in her work – but instead, it made them feel that nobody is genuinely interested in their work and what they have to say, and that nobody is taking their work seriously.

However, even a bigger problem than not getting any feedback during the creative process seemed to be the quality of the feedback when it was received. This, the interviewees believed, was because of all the emphasis on the text by Finnish publishing editors, as already discussed before. Instead of giving proper explanations as to why something in the illustrations or the visual storytelling should be changed, the publishing editors often seem to base their suggestions on undefined personal opinions and vague hypotheses on children’s expectations. These opinions often did not seem to match the illustrators’ own understanding. For example, demands to add more color to the cover illustrations, because “the children like colorful covers”, did not help the interviewees to understand how this would make the picturebook better in any way.

All of the interviewees had also experienced successful and rewarding collaborations with publishing editors, where they felt that they were appreciated and respected as visual experts of the team, while also receiving feedback and constructive criticism for their work. However, examples of these collaborations were very few and often followed by sentences like “I wish it were still like that” (D) or “I wish it could always be like that” (A). The unifying factor in an excellent illustrator-editor collaboration discussed by the interviewees was the publishing editor’s willingness and patience to look at the images together with the illustrator and identify things that would make the visual storytelling, the word and image interplay, and in the end, the entire picturebook better.

One publishing editor mentioned by all of the interviewees was Pirkko Harainen, a now-retired publishing editor from one of the biggest Finnish publishing houses WSOY. Although her method for giving feedback to the illustrators was extremely straightforward, the interviewees appreciated her opinion. Harainen had the ability to argue her notions clearly and challenge the illustrators to become better at their work. According to the interviewees, Harainen was one of the few publishing editors in Finnish publishing houses who truly understood picturebook as a medium, who had the ability to read both the text and the images, and who would ask for the illustrator’s opinions regarding the text. These skills, and this kind of help from the publishing editor, are much desired by the picturebook illustrators during the process of working on the picturebook illustrations.

I liked it – I liked that she [Harainen] kicked my ass. I remember when I was illustrating this book about monsters, and she said: “These are no monsters at all! There is nothing monster-like in them, no dirt, no mud. They look like they were washed in a washing machine!” At first, I felt like, oh no…but then I realized that she is only thinking about what is best for the book, and through that, what is best for us picturebook illustrators as well. And I like it – I like it when people say what is really going on.

Katri Kirkkopelto, 2015


5.2.2 Creating the illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Creating the Illustrations</td>
<td>• Inspiration and enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intuition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5: Findings related to stage 2 of the illustration process.

Inspiration and enthusiasm

“Then, after completing all those sketches and the storyboard, the entire process just starts feeling so much fun. It is just so fun” (E). The storyboard is usually done by this stage, and the illustrator has a good understanding of what the story is all about.

It is so great to make illustrations when I am in a good mood, feeling good about everything, because everything looks so amazing then, no matter what is on the paper. If the atmosphere is good, I feel that I can do anything. Everything is amazing what I do. But that feeling cannot be created artificially. It just exists or not.

Interviewee H
At the beginning of the second stage of the picturebook illustration process, “the page” is no longer completely blank. The illustrator has most likely come up with some visual framework for the book – for instance, in terms of the technique or color palette – and maybe completed some of the initial images. Yet, “the page” is still empty enough to be filled with the most aspirational visions and imaginative dreams the illustrator has for the picturebook. Some of the interviewees pointed out how, at the second stage of the process, they have already worked with the story and the sketches so intensively that they feel like everything is starting to be, more or less, under control. “I am looking downhill somehow. Standing on the top of the hill and seeing everything that is still waiting for me, feeling confident that I will get it done. It is a good feeling – a feeling that I’ve got it, that it is all coming together” (F).

You just start doing the illustrations, and somehow you figure out how they should be done. For example, Mia Tiu ja sata sanaa – I simply knew what the girl should look like, and what kind of world she should live in. In a world that is blank at the beginning, but then all those colors start to appear. You find some great ways of expressing different things, also outside the characters, and the whole thing starts to become alive. You get all those ideas. The middle stage of the process – that is definitely a wonderful one.

Sari Airola, 2015

Some of the interviewed illustrators discussed how during the second stage of the illustration process, they start to better understand what their story characters want and need from the illustrations, and what is required for the individual illustrations to complement the entire sequence. Three of the interviewees mentioned that this feels almost like a conversation they are having with their characters, scenes, and sceneries, rather than with themselves. Instead of being the ones making the decisions in the illustrations, they follow the impulses that the characters and the images send to them.
It is like going behind the picture. And that is really strange in this work – that you are doing this alone but spending time with the characters – how real they become. You know precisely the voice the character would be using, and what it could say. Or how it reacts with its body or face to different situations. You just know because they are so real. Sometimes it makes you feel quite spooky - what is actually the line between fiction and fact!

Interviewee A

Some of the interviewees, who had illustrated other people’s stories as well as their own, said that this experience of “going behind the picture” felt strongest when they were also writing the text themselves. “When you are illustrating your own text, you don’t have to ask for permission from anybody else”, interviewee A said, and noted that freedom helped her to create a stronger interaction with her characters and images. However, based on some other interviewees’ comments, these types of moments of flow and genuine inspiration are a recurring part of the picturebook illustration process, regardless of whether the illustrator has written the text she is illustrating or not.

Flow

The word “flow” was mentioned in seven out of the eight interviews conducted in this study. The interviewees were mostly using this term to talk about the state when they feel that creating the illustrations was extremely easy, and the process was filled with enjoyment rather than agony. In the state of flow, the interviewees felt that their visions were, in general, more effortless to transfer from the mind into a visible form than in any other stage of the process. Also, in the state of flow, ideas were flowing more freely, and instead of criticizing them, the interviewees felt that they were more open to them. “You may not even be so critical. Or you can simply accept why something is not working”, interviewee C pointed out.

You get so many ideas about how things should be done. You know that you need to change something or remove some of the illustrations. You realize why you were not excited about something before – you realize that it was really poor before, but that won’t stop you from doing it all over again. That is how it’s like – a bit like a child playing, at its best.

Interviewee C

These recurring moments of “inspiration driven flow” (H) were easy to locate and talk about for the interviewees. These moments tend to be rather unpredictable – the illustrator rarely knows in advance, which one or ones of the illustrations will come about more easily than the others. “That feeling cannot be created artificially. It just exists or not” (H). However, despite the unpredictable nature of the flow states, the interviewees seemed to agree that these moments of genuine inspiration and enthusiasm are in fact something that tends to emerge in almost all of the picturebook
illustration processes – even if for a while. “It is a wonderful feeling if some illustration emerges quickly. Usually, there is maybe one illustration in each book that is born almost without any help”, interviewee F said, while interviewee C mentioned: “For me, the state of flow can last for a week, or two at max. I haven’t had longer ones”.

For the illustrator, the moments of flow are the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of the picturebook illustration process in general. “Being in that flow – that is truly wonderful. That is the best there is. You are completely in your own universe, and actually, pretty manic as well. You have the energy to work more, so you work and work, and all the pieces in the puzzle go to the exact right places. That is wonderful, simply wonderful”, interviewee C said. Some of the interviewees were also wondering whether these types of moments were something that they were in fact trying to reach out for throughout the entire illustration process.

This kind of flow is something that you are always kind of chasing. And you do register it in your mind that here we go, and realize that this is something that you were aiming for right from the beginning.

Interviewee D

Moments of flow that the illustrator experiences during the process can be extremely intense. However, the interviewees did not experience this intensity as something that was draining or exhausting. Instead, in the state of flow they noticed themselves fully enjoying the powerful feeling of achieving their “highest potential” (F). Some of the interviewees also noted how they wanted to accept those moments as fully as they could, and dive into the creative process to the fullest. “You are deep inside your own bubble. It is absolutely amazing. Almost like you were some kind of a crazy artist”, interviewee C said.

Although moments of flow cannot be forced, the interviewed illustrators identified the elements that might lead them to such states of inspiration and enthusiasm more easily. For instance, some of the interviewees pointed out that the story itself can significantly affect how smoothly the process proceeds, and how likely it is for them to tap into flow. “There are texts that are more difficult to digest than others. You just don’t quite understand the story or the feeling in it, or it is somehow challenging to relate to it. Then there are texts that you understand immediately and that you can easily envision. You just know what to do. Those moments of inspiration, I think they can have a lot to do with the text”, interviewee D mentioned. Yet another interviewee said, “Maybe, it [the state of flow] happened, because it was so free – the story I mean. Very reflective somehow. It provided freedom for flow to happen” (E). Interviewee A noted that, for her, historical subjects and stories are more challenging to illustrate because they tend to require more concentration and paying attention to the accuracy of the historical details. This often slows down the process, as compared to the more fictional stories. “When I am illustrating something completely fictional, nothing is restraining the process. I can just unleash my image-making and let my intuition guide me, instead of double-checking details all the time, as with historical stories” (A).

However, some of the interviewees noted that even with the most fascinating and
relatable story, they might still get stuck if they are not able to have a peaceful working environment. Allowing the state of flow to enter the process requires creating mental and physical spaces for the project. For interviewee D, it simply meant that while diving into the process of creating the illustrations, she allows herself and her workspace to be “messier than normally”. For another interviewee (C), moving her work to the summerhouse and not answering any phone calls offered her the peace required to dive into the illustration process more fully. Many of the interviewees noted that tranquility allows them to concentrate on their work, which in turn helps them immerse themselves in the story more fully and allows the feelings of inspiration and enthusiasm to enter the process. “When you get into the story, then this work is just so much fun. But you have to genuinely step into that world and get to know your characters – understand how they act in different situations. Stepping into that world requires much concentration”, interviewee A said.

Some of the interviewees highlighted how frustrating it often is for them if, for some external reasons, they are somehow distracted while in the state of flow. These kinds of distractions that were mentioned by the interviewees were, for example, family issues or careless criticism by others. “It is really annoying if you have been in the state of flow, and you have been working intensely with your drawing, and you consider it the best you’ve ever done. And then somebody comes and starts criticizing it. That is horrible. So horrible. It is almost impossible to get back into the state of flow from that”, interviewee C pointed out.

Intuition

Five out of the eight interviewees used the word “intuition” to talk about the way they proceed with their image-making, how this is connected with inspiration and enthusiasm, and other – more analytical – ways of approaching illustration during the picturebook process. The interviewed illustrators also noted that while illustrating a picturebook, they need to make sure the sequence of the images includes certain facts and components to create a coherent and credible visual story. Interviewee E pointed out that “from the 15-16 spreads, about one third has to be clear and recognizable”. The rest, she said, can have more to do with intuition – in terms of the way the illustrator makes the decisions during the process and intuitively decides to highlight some of the words, settings, characters, or other elements of the story. “Intuition helps you to know in advance, whether they [the ideas] will work or not”, interviewee B noted. Similarly, interviewee H said: “You just know when something is working or not working”. For the interviewed illustrators, intuition seemed to correlate with the experience that nothing in their mind was telling them that things were not working. In other words, it was their impulses and emotional responses that things were moving into the “right” direction, instead of the “wrong” one.

For some of the interviewees, intuition was also a way to explain their choices during the process, or rather, a way not to explain them. “People have asked how I make the interplay between the word and images or why I want this or that type of illustration
in a particular part of a book. I think it is incredibly difficult to explain because I make those choices so intuitively”, interviewee H said. Another interviewee (D) explained that she prefers relying on her intuition rather than creating clear and structured plans – for instance, storyboards – for her picturebook illustrations. Unlike most of the others, interviewee D often likes to “follow her intuition” while creating illustrations instead of planning or drawing a detailed storyboard. “I do not have any plans with this one that I am working with now. Instead, I only do what I feel like doing. My intuition on how to proceed with this one is very strong” (D).

Some of the interviewees defined intuition simply as “one of the tools in the toolbox” (B) – as a combination of memories, knowledge, emotions, and the experience of how to proceed with the illustrations, as well as an understanding of the equipment they were using. “If you get stuck, you can intuitively find a way to return to square one”, interviewee A pointed out. “Organizing those components in the image almost like an engineer but filtering the decisions through emotions – I think that is what it [intuition] is all about”, another interviewee (B) said.

The human mind is like a computer. It either approves or disapproves. When you draw a line or a facial expression, mouth, hand, or something else, it gives an impulse to everything in your mind, in your memories, in your feeling. Often, you deal with the knowledge-based information intuitively, in relation to everything else. In the composition, everything. It moves through the layer of memories, and it gives you a response on how it fits the whole thing. Then, you receive a simple “approved” or “disapproved”. I think that this is precisely how my brain capacity works. It is extremely rapid movement.

Interviewee B

Some of the interviewees believed that learning to better trust their intuitive knowledge had helped them to enjoy the illustration process more, and to connect with their feelings of inspiration and enthusiasm, and through that, they can also get to the state of flow more easily. However, they noted that trying to follow the process very rationally, by solving all of the arising questions intellectually, was something that they had to often consciously resist. Allowing the analytical approach to take control of the entire process had a direct and fatal impact on the end result. “Often, when I start doing the illustrations or editing the story rationally, I notice myself being prone to repeat the same, basic narratives” interviewee H said. Learning how to rely on her intuition over the years has led interviewee H to create better and more authentic, as well as more original picturebooks.
Illustrating a picturebook is a long process that typically takes several months to finish. Based on the interviews and the analysis of my own illustration process, expecting the entire process to proceed smoothly and efficiently from the beginning to the end seems to be somewhat unrealistic. “When you have to think about the story and the illustrations, and what is in them, and all the technical aspects on top, with printing and all...it truly is a long project”, interviewee H pointed out, and continued: “Sometimes you just lose faith and start thinking that no – it is not going to work out”. Another interviewee (F) also noted the extent of the process: “It is such a huge project. At some point you always feel that you fall somehow and feeling that you are just so alone with the project”.

I do not work chronologically at all. I do a bit from the beginning and leave the most difficult illustrations to the last. That is horrible because you still have a huge work to do when you already think that you are more or less done – a massive mountain to climb, really.

_Interviewee C_

Besides calling the third stage the “the panic phase”, the interviewees portrayed it with words like “battle”, “struggle”, and “horror”. “Then, it starts feeling heavier. You just try to get everything done with pure willpower yet trying to maintain the lightness. If I don’t achieve the lightness, I have to redo the illustrations until I do. I don’t want anybody to see the battle behind the images” (A).

_I think what happens there is a panic effect. You cannot think clearly and be calm. You start hurrying and giving up easily and starting all over again. You feel as if you had been drinking 200 cups of coffee. The nervousness is in your body, and your hand is not working the way it could. You pay attention to all the wrong things: what kind of illustrations you think you should be doing, and that you should have 50 illustrations ready by now, et cetera. This is the moment when you start throwing things. It is almost like one of those cry-kick-rage” moments a small child could have. You can actually provoke yourself into a very similar state._

Interviewee A
According to the interviews, different periods of agony, frustration, comparison, and self-critique are natural and almost an inevitable part of the process of illustrating a picturebook. They do not necessarily happen in every project, but they are something every illustrator I interviewed recognized and mentioned without being asked. “Usually around the middle of the process, you get that disbelief and exhaustion. You start questioning the entire profession. It is a bit of a schizophrenic feeling. In one way, you are extremely excited about it, but on the other hand, you are wondering does it make any sense – I mean all of it”, interviewee G said.

Some of the interviewees pointed out how hopeless and agonizing those moments can be when at their worst: “It is a really familiar feeling. You are just crying here at the studio during the small hours. The family has really had to suffer for that. And even that is not the worst, but that unexplainable shame that comes afterward. That I have been so false. Can they not see that? But nobody is going to come and say that you have been so false” (F). For some of the illustrators, the severity of the moments of frustration and agony is often connected with the feeling of losing hope in the process. Instead of feeling excited about the outcome and the process, the illustrator might start questioning her skills, opinions, and even her intuition. The feelings of inspiration and enthusiasm might now be replaced with shame and regret. “Sometimes, you just lose faith. Maybe it happens when you lose the connection with what you were trying to achieve or do. I have noticed that if I have a firm opinion about something, and someone comes telling me that this or that is not working – that you should try something different – that might make lose my faith and stamina”, interviewee H said. Six out of the eight interviewees mentioned a compulsive need to finish the challenging illustrations while finalizing the picturebook. “When the work is not proceeding, it is extremely difficult for me to leave the work to rest. I just work and work, and if I am facing a wall, I simply go through the wall” (F).

**Prolonged state of flow**

Some of the interviewed illustrators described that if the state of flow is prolonged, it might cause the process to turn into a draining and unhealthy way of working. “The flow phase can last so long that you just start feeling extremely drained” (C). This “sinking in the process” felt, for some, manic and obsessive rather than hopeless or shameful, as discussed earlier. “For some time now, I have just felt so tired, I wouldn’t want to do anything, no images, nothing. It was preceded by an extremely manic phase when I just did and did. I was here [at the studio] for a day, and then I went home, and, in the evening, I just continued drawing and painting something else. I think that I drained myself somehow. I couldn’t do it again. But that is how it’s like. I would need to learn how to balance things” (H).

However, the interviews also show that it is often challenging for illustrators to recognize what causes their state of flow, and the feelings of inspiration and enthusiasm to turn into frustration and agony – and in some cases, vice versa. “I always have that stage when it is just wonderful, and every piece in the puzzle just finds its place. And you understand that here we go – this is how it is supposed to be done. But before that for several months, I did only horrible illustrations, one after another” (C). Even those interviewees who did not analyze the reasons behind the shift were well aware of the
different stages and suggested that often it has maybe something to do with the length of the process and the large number of illustrations. “I guess there were all those stages in that process because it was such a massive book” (A). Some of the interviewees also wondered if the shifts between agony and joy had more to do with their limited skills as illustrators, rather than being a natural and integral part of the creative process. “Sometimes, I do find myself thinking that this truly is a job for a fool and wondering whether it is just me and myabilities. Because one day, you are in that state of flow. Everything works out, and you are like yes – this is amazing. And the next day, nothing works out. I still haven’t understood why it happens”, interviewee G said. On the other hand, some of the interviewees believed that there was nothing mystical about what created the agony during the process. For them, the dominant reason behind these types of moments was the pressure that tight schedules were creating for picture-book projects.

The prolonged state of flow can be extremely tiring both mentally, as well as physically. “You become exhausted, physically. When I am working like that, I get sore muscles – the drawing hand starts aching, or my neck, or my chin” (C). The interviewed illustrators mentioned how their gained experience – years of working as a professional illustrator – had helped them to define healthier boundaries for their work. Although some of the interviewees were aware of the risk of “sinking in the process”, if they tried to prolong the state of flow, many of them believed that, for example, having a family had helped them to find healthier ways of working. “Before the kids, it was even more mental. I didn’t have a studio, so I was working at home. I was always working at night, as well. I woke up at maybe ten in the morning, and I was always wearing my nightgown” (C).

Some of the interviewees also noted how gaining experience had helped them to notice when they were starting to become obsessive about a particularly challenging illustration. Through experience, they had become more conscious of the advantage of leaving the challenging illustration aside, compared to a prolonged fight with the image. “I think I have learned – little by little – that sometimes it is a really good idea to leave the work resting. If I feel stuck with an image today, I might see it in a completely different light tomorrow morning”, interviewee F said.

Being able to put aside a challenging illustration and continue with another one in the sequence was noted by four of the interviewees, as one of the most useful strategies for keeping the process joyful and moving, instead of getting stuck. “How to get back into the joy? There have been several occasions when something has been off with the illustration I started with. I may fight with it for a few days, or I might leave it or start again from the beginning. I might redo the entire composition or maybe start working with some other illustrations in the sequence. Sometimes I just realize that this part of the text cannot be turned into an image”, interviewee G said. Focusing on the illustrations that felt easier and that brought them joy, rather than trying to complete the problematic images by force, was something that often helped the interviewed illustrators to get unstuck during the process, and therefore enjoy their profession more, and create illustrations and books that are more satisfactory to them. “I think the key to everything is that the work has to feel good. You cannot do it any other way. I think you just need to focus on decreasing the things that don’t feel so good”, interviewee H said.
I think it is quite funny that exactly that book [Miljoona biljoona jouluvipukia] was selected for the illustration exhibition in Bologna. Because while I was doing that book, I had this sort of epiphany that this is how it should feel like when I am creating a book and illustrating. Although there are often some good moments in the process, it typically feels very agonizing, and I end up fighting with the illustration. But this one – it just felt so effortless. ... I think it is really encouraging to realize that if it feels good to me, it will probably feel good to others as well. But that state is not always easy to achieve.

Marika Maijala, 2016

Agony and artistic quality

A shared experience among the interviewed illustrators was that “panicking” with the images is one of the easiest and fastest pathways leading to illustrations with low artistic quality. “The quality of the illustrations you make during those creative panic attacks is unsatisfactory, no exception. Those illustrations – they are just useless”, interviewee A said. In fact, according to the interviewed illustrators, it seems like there is something that unites the works that are made during those moments of frustration or agony – when the illustrator is not connected to her creative source – in that those moments are always, more or less, weak and unsatisfactory to the illustrator. “They are horrible, those moments. You shouldn’t be doing any image then, even though you often do. No matter what you do, it looks horrible in your eyes in those moments, and that just creates more agony. I don’t know if many illustrators have this kind of problems. In my case, it probably has to do with my personality, which is often judging and criticizing me, my illustrations, and everything. That is what always creates the agony” (H).

Some of the interviewed illustrators also discussed that part of the agony during the third stage of the illustration process has to do with them realizing their limitations as artists, after fantasizing about illustrating the “most amazing picturebook ever”. “Of course, it is quite distressing to realize all those compromises in the end. That oh, I did not transform after all, and oh, I am still trapped with my own skills and my own
technique and my own ways of doing illustrations”, interviewee F said.

Some of the interviewees noted how at the final stage of the process – if they have any time left – they still might need to redo a few, or many, of the illustrations all over again. “Sometimes I look at the first version of some of the illustrations, and I am like oh dear...that is just awful”, interviewee G said. For her, the illustration that needs redoing is often the first one she started the entire illustration process with.

Sometimes the moments of frustration and agony can lead the illustrator to “fighting” with an illustration and with the characters in it. “I can see from those illustrations that I have had to fight with them. You always have that anxious feeling with some of the images, but with that book, it was more like the whole thing. I would’ve wanted to do almost every illustration in a bit different way. But I just wasn’t able to do that – I just couldn’t, despite the fact that I had some huge plans” (E). In such cases, the scenes and characters that had started to become vivid for the illustrator through the process are not obeying her anymore and are not acting the way the “director” – the illustrator of the book – wants them to act. This “fighting with the illustrations” (E, G, A) rarely leads the illustrator to a pleasing outcome. “I fought with him [the main character of a book] here, in my studio. I ranted at him: Smile! Why are you just sitting there and just looking so angry! Come on now!”, interviewee A commented on her complex relationship with one of her book characters and continued: “The first version of the illustration I managed to finish – it was simply horrible. It truly was a horrible image”.

Some of the interviewees talked about the moments when they find themselves comparing their own work to other illustrators’ works. These moments of comparison often seem to occur during the period before the process has started, and the illustrator is looking for some new inspiration for her work. However, the interviews also show that the during third stage of the process – when the illustrator is already feeling more negative and frustrated than any other stage – she might be more prone to start comparing her skills to those of other illustrators. “I have found myself thinking that oh – I wish I could do something like that as well, something so simple”, interviewee D said. Similarly, interviewee A noted: “Often you end up browsing what has been published elsewhere, even though you tell yourself not to. Sometimes, when you realize how filled the world is with all those amazing books and illustrations and ideas, it gives you a feeling of not being enough. And you start getting these thoughts that I will never come up with anything so cool”. However, many of the interviewees in fact avoid looking at other people’s picturebooks, especially during their own illustration process. Some of the interviewees pointed out that doing so could distract their process, and lead them to make comparisons instead of focusing on their own progress. By being aware of the risk, they are in some way able to protect their creative process from being affected by self-criticism and comparison.

“Sometimes, you just don’t want to accept that an illustration is simply bad. You can’t because you have sat in front of that same image for a week already, drawing and pondering. You just can’t accept that it will never work”, interviewee C said. Some of the interviewees noted how they have had to learn other alternative strategies to follow when they find themselves trying to revive or complete an extremely challenging illustration by force. “When you try to finish something by force, then it truly becomes awful – like flogging a dead horse. In those moments and days, when you realize that
it is not good and it will never be good, then it is often a good idea to something more monotonic, like leaves of a tree” (C).

I have put somewhere there in my archives – as a frightening example – this one illustration. In the morning, there were about seventeen identical illustrations on my desk, with no development to be seen.

Interviewee F

Some of the interviewed illustrators mentioned that they are sometimes forced to create new, and simpler, visions to replace the ones they were not able to finish after all. “You are all the time balancing with your own skills and capabilities, for not being good enough, for not being able to do certain things after all”, interviewee A said. Similarly, interviewee D said: “You will never be ready in this. In being the illustrator that you want to be. It can be really frustrating sometimes”.

Accepting agony

Most of the interviewed illustrators described that moments of agony and frustration seem to be an almost inevitable part of the picturebook illustration process and illustrators try to accept them as part of their creative profession. The level of how strenuous the interviewees experienced the illustration process varied greatly. Some of the interviewees noted that despite the moments when they felt powerless and incompetent, they still mostly enjoyed their profession. However, some of the interviewees noted that sometimes the weight of the process was very challenging to cope with. “Last winter, I thought – I think it was the weekend of Independence Day – when I was lying in sauna and thinking, is there anything I would really enjoy doing anymore? Is there anything I could actually do anymore? Is there any theme I would be interested in anymore? It was one of those moments” (F).

Most of the interviewees pointed out that the experience they had gained professionally has helped them deal with the moments of frustration and agony better, and accept them as a part of the creative process. “I think that I have found the balance with it all. Earlier I could panic with my work massively, but I don’t have that anymore”, interviewee A said. Through experience, some of the interviewees have learned to approach the illustration process with all its different emotional challenges more lightly, and put their work into a broader perspective. “Of course, my work is important to me, but in the end, it is in a completely different category than, for instance, my friends and family and what is going on with their lives” (H).

I do not get the type of work-related anxiety anymore that would make me wake up in the middle of the night or panic. I think it is good, and the fact that I can take the pressure – it keeps me fully functioning. I am not letting it turn into anxiety. I mean, hello, it is just a book.

Interviewee A
Interviewee B talked about the relationship between agony and relief by comparing it to the stage fright that many performing artists might suffer from:

\textit{In performing arts, people often feel tension before the show. And it can be uncomfortable. But as we know, the pressure will not necessarily go anywhere – the tension is an inevitable part of performing. But that agony, when you cannot find a way to say what to want to say, or when you are afraid that it will all fail somehow and you just want to run away – the phase that you label as the nastiest one because of the incompleteness – that might actually be close to the moment of getting it right, the moment of feeling yourself genuinely happy, even if for a while.}

\textit{Interviewee B}

\textbf{Deadlines and schedules}

The deadlines of different projects and concurrent schedules enormously affect how illustrators experience their work. The deadlines increase the feeling of pressure in the illustrator's life and force her to finish the illustrations faster than she feels is natural or healthy for her. According to the interviewees, the end of the year is usually the most challenging time. By then, it is typical that the illustrator has already completed several projects without necessarily any vacations in between. “You accumulate tremendous amount of exhaustion in this work. Sometimes I wonder, why there is never any break in between the projects that would give your mind a chance to rest a bit and to get excited about the next one only after that” (F).

\textit{You just make the hours last. Sometimes I realize that I have tied myself to this chair for 28 hours in a row. I see myself from the bird’s eye perspective and wonder what is happening to me. That oh, now I have that over-tired laughing stage, and I already know that at 2 am, there is this one stage when it is almost impossible. But if I will manage that, the next one won’t be until 4-5 am. And if I manage that, the next one will be around 8-9 am. You get into a very surreal state when you start reaching the next day. You are entirely in your own strange world. Everything is slow, and you do realize that it doesn’t make any sense. Sometimes I just give up and go to sleep, even if it means that the printing schedule will be delayed. I just need to sleep. Enough already.}

\textit{Interviewee A}

The interviewees explained that the intense rhythm of the work is a consequence of the pressure to stay active with different connections and networks. If the illustrator starts declining collaborations and picturebook projects, she might not be invited to join others in the future. Therefore, the interviewees felt some pressure to stay active in the field to avoid being forgotten. Four of the interviewees also pointed out that the text they are offered is often so genuinely interesting that they agree to participate in the project because they want to be the one who has a chance to visualize it. Mainly, the interviewees felt gratitude for being able to work as illustrators full-time – they
were genuinely happy for being offered different types of projects. However, it can be extremely tiring mentally to dive into entirely different types of universes and stories in a limited amount of time, often also simultaneously.

The interviewed illustrators felt that the rush was also present when dealing with the publishing editors. Often, the publishing editors do not seem to have sufficient time to focus on the books either. According to the interviewees, the haste and exhaustion is reflected in the finished illustrations and picturebooks. The interviewees pointed out how hurrying with their illustrations can make the images visually less surprising and original than they are otherwise capable of creating. Instead of challenging themselves to come up with new ideas when it comes to, for example, perspectives and other ways of building the images, the interviewees felt that working with tight deadlines forces them instead to imitate their old illustrations and proven ways of illustrating. This can turn out to be really unmotivating for the illustrators in the long run. Some of the interviewees referred to the discouraging feeling at the end of the year when the panic is intertwined with the disappointment of not having reached the high level of quality in their illustrations and picturebooks, which they had hoped to reach when they started the project – not being able to make “the best picturebook ever” after all.

Some of the interviewees also mentioned that at the end of a project, it can be challenging to think clearly anymore. At this stage, a thoughtless comment might have a detrimental impact on the project and the illustrations. While in the middle of the pressure of trying to get everything ready by the deadline, it is sometimes typical for an overtired illustrator to act in irrational and spontaneous ways. She might, for instance, feel the immediate need to redo otherwise perfectly good illustrations. “Towards the end, you start to become completely panicked, and if somebody comes commenting that this butterfly is too much, remove all of the butterflies...well, in that panic, I just might” (C).

Most of the interviewees discussed that to reach the level of quality they hope to reach in their illustrations, they would need a lot more time and flexibility in a project. Ideally, they would have a full one year per each picturebook. However, without an extensive artist’s grant, this is not usually possible. On the other hand, to receive such a grant in Finland, the illustrator usually needs to have several projects planned, preferably with publishing contracts already signed, which will assure the funding agency that their funding will be put into good use. This can easily lead the illustrator into an exhausting rat race, where her main focus is on finding ways to finance her professional career, instead of focusing on her creative work.

Perfectionism and compromise

As discussed before, the strict deadlines and tight illustration schedules were considered by the interviewees often as something that made it really challenging for them to focus on their image-making properly. However, some of them also mentioned that without schedules, their “inner perfectionist” would be unleashed uncontrollably and complicate finishing the process. “It is really difficult, at least for me, to be satisfied with my work. If I could correct and change the illustrations endlessly, I probably would. I would redo them and keep tuning some details in them. So, in a way, it is good that you have a deadline. Because you have to stick with that deadline, and at
some point, just let the images go. But if I could, I would never do that. I would never let them go”, interviewee A said. Similarly, interviewee C noted: “I think I often try to do something nobody has ever seen before, instead of just working in a relaxed mode. That is really annoying”.

Not being able to modify the illustrations of the book ad infinitum often requires the illustrators to compromise with the quality of one or more illustrations in the sequence. Most of the interviewees noted that typically they tend to struggle with at least one of the illustrations in a picturebook. “There is always some image that I just can’t get right. I just can’t get it out”, interviewee E said and continued: “Usually it’s one or two illustrations that are almost impossible to get on a paper”. Due to the deadline, these “filler images” sometimes need to be accepted in the book – even when the illustrator is not fully satisfied with their quality. “Unfortunately, there are always a few illustrations in a book that you are like, ‘I wish I would’ve continued that a bit further.’ You have those illustrations in almost every book. In some of the books, those images are downright horrible. And in some, they are not that extreme. It would be really nice to be able to do a homogeneous illustration”, interviewee D said. Similarly, interviewee E pointed out how “Sometimes you just give up and decide that it doesn’t matter if it is not perfect. That it’s ok. That it’s only one of the illustrations, and nobody will probably even notice”.

In general, the interviewees felt that through experience they have learned to accept these kinds of illustrations as almost an inevitable part of the process. Although they might not be fully satisfied with the end result, they have been able to complete the process and not get stuck with the challenging illustrations. “You can be really ashamed of it [the picturebook] and think that what a horrible journey, but at least I completed it” (A).

However, some of the interviewees believe that instead of accepting visual compromises, they have learned to require that they simply need more time: “Over the years, I have learned that I need to be able to complete the illustrations properly. You really wouldn’t want to do those horrible illustrations, those images just for the sake of images. Because when you get the book from the print, you always, no exceptions, open the book from that particular spread with one of those filler images” (A). While most of the interviewees noted the agonizing feeling of coming across these kinds of illustrations when their picturebook is published, they also believed that the illustrator has to learn to deal with these feelings. A picturebook is always a collection of several illustrations, and while the interviewees hoped that they could be satisfied with all of the images in the collection, they accepted the fact that they seldom are. “I am definitely not satisfied with all of the illustrations in this book. But there are always some that I absolutely love. There are just so many images in the book altogether”, interviewee B said. Similarly, interviewee E said: “Of course, it’s irritating, but many things are. It doesn’t crash the whole thing. And often at that point, you are feeling pretty ok, because the book is almost finished”.

In general, the illustrators felt that because the books tend to become so important to them, it would be vital that they would be able to stand proudly behind the end result. Because of the compromises, often caused by tight schedules, this is simply not always possible. “I have many projects that I am ashamed to admit that they are mine”, interviewee A said. While some of the interviewees believed, as discussed
before, that the deadlines can be necessary in order to complete the book on time, some felt that the schedules should be more flexible to prevent these kinds of creative compromises. “I must say that even if I would miss the deadlines and the book would be published later than it was supposed to be published, those books and those illustrations, they would still deserve to be completed properly” (A).

For the illustrator, demanding perfection from all of the images in the sequence can lead to a picturebook that will never be completed. She will end up struggling with the process more and more, feeling unable to move forward from the illustrations that refuse to co-operate. Some of the interviewees mentioned that there are still some unfinished projects they started several years, or decades, ago. These types of “haunting” projects can be something that the illustrator still plans on completing one day.

Compromises in terms of artistic quality might lead the illustrator experiencing deep frustration when the book is published. Instead of feeling fulfilment for completing the project, she is now punishing herself for the inability to achieve the quality she was after. “This work truly is tough sometimes. This is not like a ‘job job,’ but you do this with your whole persona. It can all just end in a way – you just can’t take it anymore. Especially if the expectations grow too high”, interviewee A said. Similarly, interviewee H said: “It is sometimes quite agonizing to seek approval with them [illustrations]. Whether they are good enough. ... It is really challenging to make those illustrations good enough for myself. So, I think they should be good enough for others as well if I manage to do them good enough for me”.

5.2.4 Post-process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4. Post-process | • Feedback  
| | • Reviews, awards, and nominations  
| | • The lifespan of a picturebook  
| | • Self-confidence and professional pride  
| | • Publishing environment  
| | • Managing the financial situation |

Table 5.7: Findings related to stage 4 of the illustration process.

Most of the interviewees talked about their feelings and emotional state after the creative part of the illustration process has been completed, especially after the book is published. As with the first stage (planning the picturebook), the last stage (post-process) could also be defined as a somewhat ambivalent one. Completing the creative process of illustrating a picturebook often combines not only feelings of relief and joy, but also feelings of disappointment, embarrassment, shame, and emptiness. This ambivalence seems to be typical for the post-process stage. “I think I am always a bit ashamed of my own illustrations. Of course, you can sometimes be proud as well. You can have all those emotions in one book. It is often not just either-or” (A).

Some of the interviewees noted how contented they might feel after the process if the
end result has been satisfactory to them. “If the end result satisfies me, I might feel happy, or relieved at least, for being able to get rid of the pressure”, interviewee B said. However, although post-process relief and happiness were mentioned in a couple of the interviews, the interviewees primarily discussed the ambivalent feelings they deal with after the process, and the negative emotions they often have about their finished picturebook. These feelings were considered by majority of the interviewees as a natural and almost inevitable consequence of a highly intensive illustration process. The emotional emptiness after completing the process was mentioned by five of the interviewees. “I have often discussed with my colleagues about how empty you might feel when a book is finished” (A).

In general, the interviewees felt that a newly published picturebook was somewhat challenging for them to look at. “It is often not a nice feeling to get the finished book from the printing”, interviewee D said, while interviewee G noted: “When the book is published, it is difficult for me to look at it. I need to leave it resting for a while”. Often, as the interviewees noted, this was because of the intensity and length of the process. “It is such a huge job to make all those illustrations into a book. After I have completed the process, I cannot look at the illustrations for a while” (A). Returning to the process and illustrations so soon after having completed them was difficult for most of the interviewees. “It is so intense, the process. You do not want to return to the process, really” (G). Five interviewees also mentioned how challenging it can sometimes be to look at a newly published book objectively, while recognizing fully the decisions made during the illustration process in terms of, for example, the relationship between the text and images. “I cannot be neutral with the book. Also, it is challenging to recognize the relationship of text and images in it. You are blind, for a while”, interviewee G said. Similarly, interviewee F noted: “Right after the book is finished, it might be extremely challenging for me to see whether I failed or succeeded with it.”

In many cases, the difficulty of looking at a newly published picturebook was also due to the technical challenges or flaws that had taken place during the printing. “When the book is published, I cannot usually even look at it. I always end up crying because something has gone so drastically wrong with it. I have had the same devastating feeling with many of my books” (G). In this regard, the interviewees mostly mentioned having struggled with colors and hues that were transformed into something unsatisfactory during the printing process. “Watching the layout on the computer gives you a completely different impression from what the final result will be. And all those colors as well... you might lose so much intensity of them”, interviewee D said, while interviewee C noted: “These just-released books of mine, they look so strange to me. These illustrations, they look completely different in real life, much more colorful”.

Six out of the eight interviewees noted how disappointed they sometimes feel after the colors and hues they had worked so hard on were transformed into something completely different in print. “We worked so hard on getting the colors right in the reproduction! And after all that work – this is what I got, something completely different”, interviewee A said and continued: “It is really important for me to have as clean color palette as possible – if the colors turn ‘muddy’ while being printed, it feels to me that they literally stop breathing”. Some of the interviewees also spoke about the sadness they experienced after completing a particularly disappointing picturebook. Often, this sadness was related to the fact that in the published picturebook, the
audience could not see what the illustrations were really supposed to look like. “You put such a lot of effort into the illustrations, and it is just so sad when the book is not at all what you worked so hard on” (D).

Some of the interviewees, however, mentioned that they had learned through experience not to compare the printed book with the original illustrations or how the illustrations looked on the computer screen. “After a while, when you get a little bit of distance from it, then you might be able to take a look at the images again”, interviewee D pointed out.

The disappointment, and the embarrassment and sadness, that the interviewees often felt when looking at their picturebooks right after publication was a shared experience amongst them. However, these feelings of sadness or shame after the process was completed did not typically seem to take long. Many of the interviewees talked about how they had often been utterly devastated when they saw their newly published book for the very first time, due to its flaws, for instance, in colors or layout. However, after a while, they were able to get over this type of pain and disappointment. “I have cried, bitter tears, for a day, and after that – case closed” (G). Often, simply not looking at their newly released books helped the interviewees to distance themselves from the illustrations and, after a while, start liking them again. “Usually, when the book is just published, I am panicking. Why did I do it like that? And oh no, I really blew it. At first, I simply want it out of my sight. But now this one is a few months old, and I consider it to be maybe the best one of all my books”, interviewee C said.

Most of the interviewees discussed that the disappointment and shame of a newly released book could usually last anything between a few days to months. However, some of the interviewees also noted that with some of their books, it took several years for them to be able to open those books with empathy rather than judgment. “There are some books that I felt were completely horrible when I saw them for the first time. And it has taken up to five years to be even able to open the book. But after that time, I have sometimes opened it and thought that oh – this was quite nice after all”, interviewee D said, and interviewee F mentioned: “I do notice that at least for me it is easier to look through the older illustrations, I guess I have more mercy to them. That oh – I guess there was something good in this as well”.

Feedback

Typically, picturebook illustrators receive feedback from the authors, publishing editors, or readers – who may be children or adults. The feedback that the illustrators receive from the readers was considered particularly important to them, as it helps them see how the target audience approached their books. However, most of the interviewees also felt that they were not receiving as much professional feedback for their work as they would like when their books are published.

When the illustrator illustrates someone else’s text, she typically receives some feedback from the author once the book is published. For the interviewed illustrators, this feedback holds a special importance – it was, in general, considered as something that the interviewed illustrators were keen to receive. “Often, when you are asked to illustrate a book, you feel a bit tense about what the comments from the editor will be.”
However, usually I am more nervous about what the author will think about the illustrations once they are done”, interviewee H said. Often the interviewees would be wondering whether the author would be satisfied with the visualization of their text and find the interplay between the words and images successful. “It’s not about the author judging my drawings, whether they are good or bad, but rather about how I managed to catch the feeling the author was trying to achieve with her words. That is something I find myself stressing about beforehand. It is such a relief if I have succeeded in that” (H).

According to the interviewees, receiving feedback from the publishing house after the picturebook is published is not very common. Some of the interviewees also pointed out that when they do receive feedback from the publisher, it is not the kind of feedback that is particularly helpful for them, due to the lack of understanding of visual imagery on the part of Finnish publishing editors. In general, the interviewees felt a bit jaded with the “empty praising of the publishers”, as interviewee B put it. “There are only so few people who understand anything about images, or who have any kind of education about visual thinking. The problem is that all that praising feels so empty somehow. There is no purpose to it”, interviewee D said. Rather than receiving helpful feedback from the publisher, some of the interviewees believed that the publishing houses are more used to giving “indifferent praise” without properly spending the time to consider the ways in which a picturebook has succeeded or could have been improved. For some, this approach felt ingenuine and calculating, almost as if the publishing editors were trying to compensate for the lack of financial respect with their uncritical praise. “I think that we [illustrators] do receive some sort of applauding from them [publishers]. But I think it is problematic somehow when it comes from the publishing houses”, interviewee D pointed out. Similarly, interviewee B said: “Of course, it can be nice – having the editors flattering you and patting you on the back. But on the other hand, it gives you the feeling that they can pat you and talk nicely, but how about paying something for me or supporting me somehow for the work that has not profited me at all, but them a lot”.

In contrast, most of the interviewed illustrators discussed how they have received meaningful feedback from their readers of different ages. Feedback received from the readers was considered as one of the most significant ways for the interviewees to feel respected for what they do.
The feedback you get from the readers – that is the greatest form of respect. Once a lady who has an office nearby came here to my studio. She had a little child in her lap and they stopped in front of one of those posters of Pikku Papu. The lady asked me whether I had created them and told me that they were both great fans of the Pikku Papu books. All of a sudden, the child, who had been babbling something until then, fell silent. And very slowly, she said, Pa-Pu. That was that.

Liisa Kallio, 2015

Despite their importance and value, three of the interviewees mentioned that receiving feedback from children can also be quite intimidating sometimes. After completing a picturebook, the illustrator hopes that at least some children will find the book interesting, amusing, or fascinating. However, when showing a picturebook to a child, the response can be practically anything. For some, this is “the moment of truth” – after several months of working on a picturebook, the illustrator can now find out whether the book will resonate with the target audience or not. “A child does not pretend. If she thinks that it’s poor, then it is”, interviewee H pointed out. Receiving a compliment directly from a child can be particularly important for the illustrator due to children’s absolute honesty. “Hearing from a child, that she really liked it and read it – that is maybe the best thing that I know”, interviewee A said. However, the interviewees were also well aware that their books or illustrations cannot please everybody. “Not everybody likes the same kinds of things. But if there are only a few children who like it or think that it’s the best book they have ever read, then I think it’s worth it. If there is at least one. I hope there is at least one” (C). Sometimes the illustrator might also receive feedback via mail or e-mail from the parents or grandparents of the child readers. These approaches were often also considered particularly heart-warming by the interviewees, as they gave them an insight into the discussion that their books and illustrations generated between the readers and their family members.

Asking feedback from the illustrators’ own children was not a common scenario. Either their children had not shown any particular interest in their books, or the illustrators themselves had not wanted to impose their picturebooks on their own children. “I rather read other people’s picturebooks to my children. My books are too close. I guess, after going through the book-making process so intensively, you don’t want to return to that anymore”, interviewee G said. Some of the interviewees also wondered whether their own children would feel that the illustrations are competing with them for their parent’s attention, and because of that, those illustrations were considered as
something to avoid rather than to approach. However, some of the interviewees mentioned having asked their children’s opinions about their unfinished illustrations to improve them based on their target audience’s point of view. “I have not asked them [illustrator’s own children] to analyze the images, but rather explain whether they find some ideas understandable. Though I must say that they have in fact started analyzing them as well. I think they are quite qualified to do that by now” (F).

Some of the interviewees noted the feedback which the illustrator receives through kindergartens can be particularly important if the illustrator does not have any other connections to children. The kindergartens might, for instance, contact the illustrator directly and tell her about how they have used her book. “It is really nice that some people make an effort to send you an email about what they have done with the book, and how many new friends the characters in the book have received. It shows you that those books actually have a life somewhere”, interviewee A pointed out. Also, some of the interviewees mentioned that they like to visit kindergartens themselves to understand better how their books are received and read by children. “It is so difficult to know otherwise, how your books are received and what has happened to them if you don’t do these visits yourself. It is nice to see that they are read and used” (A). Often, the illustrators are invited to visit kindergartens as representatives of their profession and tell the children about what it is like to illustrate picturebooks.

In most cases, the feedback received from the kindergartens tends to be purely positive. However, the interviewees also talked about incidents when a kindergarten teacher has approached them with various suggestions to improve the illustrations for children. This approach might be triggered by, for instance, something that the teacher has found particularly unsuitable for children. “There was this one nanny from a kindergarten, who called to the publisher shouting how she had had to glue the pages together because one of the characters in the book was smoking a cigarette. She was astounded, how anybody could illustrate anything like this”, interviewee C said.

The illustrator might also receive feedback for her work by presenting her newly published picturebook at a book fair or a book festival. Being interviewed publicly might encourage people from the audience to comment on the book or the illustrations directly to the illustrator. However, as pointed out by some of the interviewees, publishing houses are not very active in inviting illustrators to be interviewed at such fairs. Prioritizing authors of the picturebooks over their illustrators seems to be one of the underlying policies of some Finnish publishing houses. “There have been numerous cases when the author is invited to the festival but not the illustrator. This fall, I heard from many illustrators that although their picturebooks were presented at the book fair, they were not even asked to talk about their books” (D).

One important way for the illustrators to receive feedback for their books is through the illustration exhibitions. Typically, the solo exhibitions are organized by the illustrator herself. Alternatively, the illustrator might be invited to join a group exhibition organized by, for example, a library or some professional organization. Finnish publishing houses rarely organize exhibitions of the picturebooks that they publish. Most of the interviewees found illustration exhibitions as an effective way to receive professional feedback from their colleagues and other peers.
Reviews, awards, and nominations

The awards that the illustrator might receive in Finland include, for instance, Rudolf Koivu Prize, Finlandia Junior Prize, the Most Beautiful Book Prize, and the Best Finnish Creative Design Prizes. Many of the interviewees of this thesis have also been nominees for some highly respected international awards, including the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, Bologna Ragazzi Award, and the Nordic Council Children and Young People’s Literature Prize.

The interviewed illustrators believed that receiving, for instance, Rudolf Koivu Prize or Finlandia Junior Prize, can affect the number of books they are invited to illustrate by the publishing houses and increase their “professional attractiveness”. From this perspective, such prizes can significantly impact the illustrator’s income and help her focus on illustrating picturebooks as a profession. “If you do not make a picturebook that is part of a bigger series, you simply don’t see them anywhere. Unless it happens to be a Finlandia Junior nominee”, interviewee E said. Even when a book does not attract public interest in the country where it was initially published, it can still be nominated, shortlisted, and awarded different prizes in other countries. Therefore, the seemingly “invisible books” might have other chances to be noticed with the help of national or international illustration and literature awards.

However, the interest in a book is not guaranteed, even if it received several nominations and prizes. Some of the interviewees described their continued feelings of sadness and frustration about the “lost books” (A), no matter how widely they might have been recognized professionally. “If the readers do not know those books exist, why make them at all?” interviewee E wondered, while interviewee C said: “I am a little bit tired of creating them [picturebooks] because you can’t find then anywhere in the end. Do they even exist? You might be working for a year, and then the book just...is. And while this one, for instance, received excellent reviews and an award – it was the exact same thing”.

The importance of receiving prizes, awards, and nominations was questioned by some of the interviewees due to the fact that they are not, in the end, the reason why the illustrator creates picturebooks. “Sometimes it just feels so strange, because those prizes have nothing to do with the work itself. It just feels so external somehow. They are not the reason for me to be an illustrator” (A).

Another way for the illustrator to receive feedback and recognition for her work is through book reviews in newspapers. Other ways of receiving reviews for picturebooks include illustration and design magazines – often funded by professional associations – as well as literature blogs. The number of literary bloggers who also do picturebook reviews has increased over recent years. The interviewees considered some of these types of bloggers professional and insightful.

Most of the interviewees addressed the fact that the number of picturebook reviews in Finnish newspapers has decreased substantially over the past few years. “At the beginning of my career, for example, Helsingin Sanomat [biggest Finnish newspaper] had big articles and picturebook reviews. There could be an entire spread where several books were gathered together around a certain theme. But that media attention has decreased enormously”, interviewee G said.

The interviewees questioned not just the quantity of the picturebook reviews, but also their quality. Five of the interviewees pointed out that a picturebook review in a
newspaper is often written from a literary perspective. Because of that, the critics have typically focused only little on the illustrations. “It is extremely rare that any art critic would review the picturebooks. It would be so great. ... We are a strange group, us illustrators. We do not receive feedback as much as the authors receive for their words. Maybe the words are just easier to analyze” (F). Furthermore, the lack of criticism in the reviews was something that many interviewees also discussed. “If some critic in a newspaper bothers writing about the illustrations of the book, it usually is something tiny, for instance, ‘lovely colors,’ or ‘beautiful images give wings to the story.’ And you are like, ok, thanks a lot”, interviewee F said. However, Hufvudstadsbladet – the biggest Swedish newspaper in Finland – was mentioned as an exception. In this magazine, the interviewees believed that their illustrations were also taken seriously and considered equally as important as the text when the picturebooks are reviewed.

However, the interviewed illustrators pointed out that what is even worse than receiving a bad or flimsy review is the complete silence – noted as “the sound of silence” – or the stagnant moment that the illustrator sometimes faces after a book has been published, as defined by interviewee C. Similarly, interviewee F discussed: “This is the moment when you start counting and wondering, why Helsingin Sanomat never writes anything either”.

Interviewee A talked about how depressing it felt that the book she had worked on so hard for so long, just “faded into the shadows”. The “sound of silence” made some of the interviewees feel that the time had passed for their style as illustrators, or that they simply were not commercial enough to receive more attention from, for instance, the media. “I think that we are living in such uncertain times that there are not so many opportunities for an illustrator like me. And if there is, you are typically left in the marginal somehow. What’s the point then?” interviewee E wondered.

Receiving feedback for their books gave the interviewees a feeling that their work had a meaning and purpose. The interviewed illustrators pointed out that the meaning of the reviews, and possible recognitions, is that they make the illustrator feel she is being heard and that her work has an interested audience. “You do not make those books for yourself anyway. You do want to share those thoughts. And it is not the prizes in itself that matter, but the feedback that you receive”, as addressed by interviewee E. Similarly, interviewee B pointed out: “There are several sorrows in this work, but occasionally, there are little moments of joy as well. Often the joy is that somebody out there is simply interested in my work”.

The lifespan of a picturebook

Nowadays, there are three seasons in Finland when the publishing houses typically publish picturebooks: spring, summer, and autumn. Some of the interviewees mentioned that to prevent themselves from being forgotten by the publishing houses, and those who make the decisions about choosing the illustrators, they feel that they need to stay very active in this field. As each of the seasons brings new books and new illustrators to the market, some of the interviewees felt that the old titles might get forgotten fast. “Those books, they live for such a short time. If you are not publishing anything, it sometimes feels that the publishing houses forget that you exist” (A).
According to the interviewees, some picturebooks tend to stay in the market longer, whereas the lifespan of others is extremely short. Although sometimes a book gets reprinted several times or translated to several different languages, it is often impossible to predict beforehand which books will become successful in their native language, or whether they will find their way to other languages. “I never would have imagined that my book would be translated to such strange languages” (B). Sometimes it is due to the themes in the book, that it turns out to be universal and tempting for publishers in other countries.

Sometimes – in fact relatively often – picturebooks seem to disappear from the market soon after publication. It is also typical that even if a book is still in stock, it might be considered to be so marginal that it is not presented in the bookstores properly, and in some cases, not presented at all. “I went to ask [at a local bookstore] whether they had that one book of mine. And they said that yes, let me just get it for you from the storage if you’d like to have a look. I was like, no, it’s okay, but I made the book, and it would be really nice that you had it available here in the store instead of the storage”, interviewee F said.

The short lifespan and low visibility of a picturebook in the stores might increase the illustrator’s feelings of inadequacy, and make her doubt the purpose of her work and her profession. Some of the interviewed illustrators talked about the sadness they experienced after a book they believed in was ignored by the audience. The interviewees felt that this was usually because the audience was not given an opportunity to know that the book existed. “It just felt so unfair – that the book was not even given a chance. ... It would be different if the audience had a chance to see the book first, and then decide whether they like it or not and whether they find it inspiring at all”, interviewee A pointed out.

Although some picturebooks disappear quickly from the bookstores, they still have a chance to continue their lives in libraries, schools, and kindergartens. This, the interviewees found to be important for them and might counter the feelings of disappointment the illustrator might have been struggling with when the book was published. Due to the extended visibility in such institutions, the interviewees mentioned having received meaningful feedback years after their books were published. “Just when I started thinking that they do not find readers at all, I understood that in libraries they live for years. You do get that feedback often by chance after years – somebody comes saying how wonderful and amazing something was” (F).

However, although the illustrator might receive valuable feedback through institutions, this does not comfort her in those moments when she would need the feedback the most. Often, this is right after the publication, when the illustrator might be feeling particularly insecure about her work. “Those books, they do have a life somewhere. But maybe you do not receive that feedback when you needed it the most”, interviewee F said.

Nevertheless, it is not always pleasant to bump into an old book after completing it years ago. “Some editorial illustrations, they are easy, they come and go, and it doesn’t matter if you do not always succeed very well in them. Nobody saves the magazine and the illustration. But these [picturebooks] – they haunt you forever, at least in a library. You have to confront them, like, oh no – that book is still on a shelf there. It increases the pressure in creating them” (E). Most of the interviewed illustrators
mentioned experiencing shame after seeing their old picturebooks in libraries. Picturebooks and illustrations that they did not consider good enough kept “haunting” them in libraries years after years. However, this was something that, according to the interviewees, the illustrator just has to learn to live with. When working as a book illustrator, one has to accept that her learning process is visible and stays visible to others. “You learn all the time. In public”, interviewee F pointed out.

When the publishing house has printed too many copies of a book, and the book’s lifespan has come to an end in the publisher’s opinion, the remaining copies of the book that are still in the storage are destroyed. At this point, the illustrator and the author are usually offered the possibility of purchasing the copies at a reduced price. Destroying the books and the feelings that this creates were mentioned by some of the interviewees. In general, the illustrators thought that this was unfortunate, but also unnecessary. The interviewees who referred to destroying the books believed that often the real reason behind the unsold copies was not in the book itself, but the fact that nobody knew it existed due to the publisher’s passive marketing. “It is an agonizing feeling when they destroy your books. ... How can they just chop them into pieces? Somebody might have still needed them. Why were they not even in stores? Destroying them without any proper opportunity of being sold – that truly feels awful” (F).

Self-confidence and professional pride

“When we received the Finlandia Junior Prize, some press releases had the false information that I am a fine artist. I wanted it to be corrected so that I would be mentioned as an illustrator. I am an illustrator. They did correct it, but it started living its own life. The weird thing was that many people came to me saying: ‘Aaah, you should’ve kept that ‘fine artist’. That is so much fancier. Why did you go and correct it?’ It made me angry.

Interviewee F

“You will not receive any respect if you do not respect yourself”, interviewee B said. The interviewees were in agreement in that to work as an illustrator, one needs to have a high self-esteem. Mostly, this was learned through years of experience. “I still have, most of the time, a feeling that other people do not realize the amount of work behind those illustrations”, interviewee D said, and continued: “When I compare us [illustrators] to authors, I constantly have the feeling that the respect they experience is on a completely different level to ours”.

Most of the interviewees believe that even after years of working as professional illustrators, they still experience the underlying primacy of words over images, and through that, the primacy of authors over illustrators in the professional context. The sensitivity to this subject was the main reason behind why the interviewed illustrators had not been willing to talk about it publicly. “This problem is a complicated one – illustrators do not like to talk about the invisible ‘hierarchy’ between illustrators and authors. But it does exist” (B). None of the interviewees wanted to bring down the authors’ importance and their expertise, nor to “step on anybody’s toes” (F).
Talking about it feels pretty uncomfortable. Of course, there are different types of books. But this book especially – it was such an equal collaboration. This topic needs to be handled a bit carefully because you don’t – by any means – want to take the credit away from the author. However, that said, and giving credit where credit is due, the way the illustrator disappears somewhere in the background like an assistant... It is just so strange.

*Interviewee F*

Therefore, the interviews clearly show that illustrators do not always feel that their work is considered equally as important as the work of the authors. This underlying attitude can already be seen in how the picturebooks and their creators are listed in publishing houses’ catalogs. In Finland, there is an established practice in the publishing houses that the author’s name is always listed before the illustrator in the catalogs. From these catalogs, the bookstores, copyright organizations, and libraries get their information about upcoming and recently published books. This practice can cause problematic incidents, where the illustrator’s name can be left out of the list of a picturebook’s creators, although on the cover of the book both the author and the illustrator are shown as being equally important.

The interviewees noted that sometimes the illustrator’s name had disappeared from the list of creators of the book when the book was translated into another language and published in other countries. Similarly, often only the author is mentioned in the reviews or articles written about the book. “Of course, the illustrator always notices and wonders – why do they talk as if it was only the author’s book? Why don’t they talk about the author’s and illustrator’s book, even though that is what it is?” (F).

The mistakes in the catalogs of the publishing houses do not impact only the dignity of the illustrator, but also her income. For example, the copyright remunerations received from the Finnish copyright organization, Kopiosto⁴⁵, are directed only to the author or authors of the book, if the illustrator is not included in the list of the book’s creators. The interviewees mentioned several incidents from their own experiences, as well as their colleagues, when they were missing from such lists, and this was leading to financial losses.

In general, the interviewees found it difficult to understand why the illustrators so often have to put up with this type of treatment and these types of “accidents”. Some of the interviewees mentioned that they tend to accept these types of incidents more easily when it comes to children’s novels and non-fiction books. The fact that this also tends to happen in the case of picturebooks, in which the illustrations play such an essential role, felt unfair and humiliating to the interviewees. “They both should be visible there, both the author and the illustrator because it affects the book, and it affects the profession. If the illustrator’s name disappears...it is unfair, as those illustrations have such a profound and direct effect on a child. You cannot fade the illustrator out like that”, interviewee F said.

Some of the interviewees felt that it is often challenging for other people – also people in publishing houses – to understand how extensive the work of illustrating a

---

picturebook is. “It truly is difficult for someone outside to understand what can be so hard in this”, interviewee D said. The interviewed illustrators pointed out that it can be complicated to talk about the challenges of the picturebook illustration process because most people do not have any experience of similar challenges.

Four out of the eight interviewees discussed that in order for other people to take them seriously – and to really understand the enormous amount of work behind the illustrations, as well as the importance of the illustrator – they have had to learn to explain those challenges to other people. They have also had to learn how to make their position as the visual leader in the picturebook project team clear to others. “I have had to learn to really show others my professional expertise. ... It is the type of healthy self-esteem. I do not mean that my ideas were always brilliant – they most definitely are not – but I have had to learn to have the courage to say them out loud and take that space. After all, I am the one who is hired to be the visual expert in the project” (A). After learning to argue for their own ideas and speak up for themselves, the interviewees felt that other people have also started to see their professional value better and respect their work and status. “I have realized that what matters most in the end, is to trust in your own work. That is the most important thing – that I myself believe that this will be good. Otherwise, I could quit right here and now”, interviewee G said.

**Publishing environment**

Most of the interviewees highlighted the changing publishing environment and the decreased appreciation of more artistic picturebooks and illustrators in some Finnish publishing houses. The interviewed illustrators also mentioned their disappointment about picturebooks not being adequately promoted by the publishing houses after publication.

“It would seem to me that the era we live in, is not for picturebooks. I think that this is something I have to deal with constantly” (A). Some of the interviewees believed that the attitude of publishing houses towards picturebooks has changed over the years. Four of the interviewed illustrators raised a concern that in their experience, not only the number of published picturebooks had diminished, but also that the more artistic, ambitious, or radical picturebooks were not being considered as worth publishing anymore. “They said that I was too radical. Sometimes they use the word ‘artistic’ as well. It might be a prettier way to put it. But it means the same” (C).

Some of the interviewees believe that the publishing houses are increasingly prioritizing picturebook series in their publishing programs, which are often also the ones that are widely promoted and marketed. “At the beginning of my career, the publishing house had this policy of publishing two more artistic picturebooks per season, and those books were promoted as such. But nowadays, although they don’t say it out

46 The most recent statistics by the Finnish Institute for Children’s Literature do not corroborate with the claim presented here, revealing a contradiction between the experiences of the interviewed illustrators and the quantitative data about the picturebooks published in Finland between 2015-2019. The Finnish Institute for Children’s Literature’s statistics show that the number of Finnish picturebooks published, has, in fact, increased in recent years: while in 2015 only 103 Finnish picturebooks were published, in 2019 the number was 164. The number of Finnish picturebooks published has increased each year between 2015 and 2019, with a peak of 204 published Finnish picturebooks in 2017. The annual statistics by the Finnish Institute for Children’s Literature are available at: https://lastenkirjanstituutti.fi/fin-english/kirjakori-annual-statistics-of-finnish-childrens-and-youth-literature/11627-2 [Accessed 20 Mar. 2021].
“loud, everything should be easy to sell”, interviewee E noted while describing the changing environment. Also, even when a publishing house publishes more artistic or marginal books, those kinds of books are treated differently from the other picturebooks in the publishing program. “I had this feeling that they [the publishing house] just decided at some point that this book was so marginal that they will not invest in it at all. They just ignored it”, interviewee D said.

*Picturebooks are published less*, and the competition is increasing. Many excellent picturebook makers have had to witness that their books are not published anymore. Does it mean that you don’t exist? I think it is part of the cruelty of this profession. That you exist only as long as you are doing something extremely visible. It can lead to situations where your value is measured by how visible you are.

Interviewee G

Some of the interviewees pointed out that the tendency to prioritize certain types of books in the publishing program has resulted in a process in which the heavily promoted serial picturebooks are the only ones that will be noticed by the public. This, naturally, increases the sales of these books, which increases the interest of the publishing houses in the same type of books in the future as well. Seven out of the eight interviewed illustrators shared their frustration of putting a considerable amount of time, effort, and creativity into picturebooks that were not considered, so they believe, as important as some other types of picturebooks by the publishing houses. Some of the interviewees wondered why the publishing houses bother editing and publishing such books if they are not interested in letting people know that they exist once they are published. “The same books are visible in every store. Are they good because they are everywhere? They are. But there are other books as well, and I just don’t get it, why they don’t tell anybody about those books. Let’s not make them then! Let’s put all the money on the book series and skip those other books completely”, interviewee E commented in frustration.

“The publishing houses – they publish books, but they don’t sell them”, as raised by interviewee E, was a shared concern mentioned by most of the other interviewed illustrators as well. “They don’t sell those books. It doesn’t make any difference how amazing books you manage to create if they do not market it in any medium. What’s the whole point then?” interviewee A commented, while interviewee D said: “The print runs are constantly decreasing. Nobody sells those books”. Some of the interviewees pointed out that at the beginning of their career, publishing houses used to advertise newly published picturebooks in the newspapers, which helped people know that those books existed. This, according to the interviewees, affected the public interest and the sales of the picturebooks a lot.

The interviewees’ frustration with their books not being marketed, and therefore not found by the audience, led many of them to question their interest in picturebook illustration altogether. “I must say that at the moment, I have this feeling that I am not

---

47 See the previous Footnote 46.

48 A print run means the number of copies of a book produced at one time.
going to do my own picturebooks for a while. It doesn’t make any sense”, interviewee E wondered. Similarly, interviewee F said: “The lack of information about those books, I think that is what has fermented a bit of a depressing atmosphere”. Some of the interviewees said that creating picturebooks that most people do not even know exist, had increased their feelings of inadequacy, stress, fatigue, and unworthiness. “Two winters ago, I felt like leaving this profession behind – that I would stop thinking that this, illustration, is my job anymore. That I will stop looking for work. It was the thought of a tired woman. Maybe it was thought of a healthy woman” (F).

This attitude of the publishing houses made some of the interviewees feel that their work as illustrators was undervalued. Often, this also made them feel that maybe the time for their illustration style and significance as illustrators had already passed. Some also pointed out how their attempts to discuss the unsatisfactory situation with the publishing houses have been thwarted by a “threat” that many other people are interested in doing the same work with the same contract terms. This easily led to a feeling of being “dispensable” as a visual design professional. “I think that all illustrators have heard this comparison that ok – if you are not ready to do this, we have a long cue of students outside our door who are more than happy to do it” (B).

Some of the interviewees pointed out that the frustration and “depressive atmosphere” could be avoided if the publishing houses showed a little more interest in promoting the picturebooks they publish, including those they might consider more artistic or marginal. This, the interviewees noted, could give the audience a chance to decide for themselves whether they like such a book or not. The current tendency of publishing a book and then simply hoping that somebody will find it from the long list of other books in bookstores or libraries felt insufficient for the interviewees. It also transferred the marketing responsibility of newly published books from the publishing houses to the illustrators themselves. “When we organized the book launch party, the publishing house didn’t even deliver the books that the audience could have bought at the event”, interviewee D said. This, the interviewed illustrators found peculiar, because the publishing houses are, after all, the ones who are running the business. “They live completely on our work, those publishing houses. We are their product” (D).

While many of the interviewees criticized the changing environment and the lack of both appreciation, as well as marketing procedures, in some of the bigger Finnish publishing houses, the interviewed illustrators also noted that this has possibly led to the rise of the smaller and more artistically ambitious publishing companies in Finland. “I feel that it has increased the activity elsewhere. It has started spreading. Smaller publishing houses have started arising, for instance, Etana [Etana Editions]”, interviewee D said.

Some of the interviewees noted that the less they were benefitting from the larger publishing house and their support, the more appealing smaller publishing companies appeared to them. Because of the changing environment, some of the interviewees had also started considering self-publishing as a way of producing their own picturebooks. “Why have a publisher, if I have to do all the marketing myself?” interviewee E wondered, and continued: “Maybe I should just start publishing my books myself, or through these smaller publishing companies. It does not give me any benefits anymore to publish through a big publishing house”.

168
Managing the financial situation

Almost all of the interviewees noted that the single most challenging aspect of their profession is its constant financial uncertainty. Balancing their finances affects both the internal and external well-being of picturebook illustrators. The interviewees mentioned different methods of how they balance their income and make ends meet. Usually, these methods involved finding external funding in the form of artist’s grants or doing other jobs in addition to illustration.

In general, the payments, royalties, and commissions that picturebook illustrators receive from the publishing houses in Finland are not enough to cover the expenses of illustrating the books. Unless the illustrator is fortunate enough to be part of a team producing a bestseller that will be actively promoted by the publishing house and widely translated to different languages, she is, first and foremost, obliged to seek funding from other sources for her creative work. In Finland, these fundings have typically been from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland and the Finnish Cultural Foundation, as well as other smaller foundations, some of which are maintained by the bigger publishing houses.

The illustration process of a picturebook usually takes at least four months – the time differs greatly between different projects and can easily be a lot longer. In general, the payment received from the publishing house covers, more or less, one month’s work. Often, at least part of the payment will be received in royalties only when the book is published, not when the illustrator is actually creating the illustrations. Therefore, the illustrator has to find other ways of funding her work. According to the interviewees, this often feels strange, unfair, and even “absurd”.

Being obliged to apply for funding for their work themselves while working for a publishing company, and explaining to the external funding agencies as best as they can – both before the project starts – but also after – how they will use the funding if they receive it, takes a considerable amount of time and effort from the illustrator. “Writing all those grant applications, it just takes too much time” (D). However, in order to finish the picturebooks they have agreed to finish, this is what picturebook illustrators in Finland must do. Receiving the funding for the project is never, however, guaranteed. If the illustrator does not receive an extensive grant for her creative work, she might remain in a very uncertain financial situation for project after project. Some of the interviewees pointed out how difficult it is for picturebook illustrators to receive grants for more extended periods in Finland, as compared to some other creative fields.

The most challenging, and a common, scenario for Finnish picturebook illustrators is that they would sign a publishing contract, or contracts, to increase their chances of receiving funding from another source to their work, and then subsequently they might not receive any funding. In such cases, the illustrator would be in a situation where she is legally obliged to illustrate the book or books according to the agreed schedules, with only funding for one month’s work they receive from the publishing house. Without proper funding for the project, she then needs to find other ways of earning income to complete the illustrations on time.

---

49 Arts Promotion Centre Finland awards around 40 million Euros a year in grants and subsidies for the promotion of arts and culture. The longer grants for individual artists typically cover one, three or five years of creative work.
During their careers, most of the interviewees had worked on different jobs in addition to their illustration work. Although all the interviewed illustrators were currently mainly working full-time as illustrators, this is not, in fact, typical in Finland. Most Finnish picturebook illustrators work, for example, as art teachers, graphic designers, print designers, or in other design fields in addition to their work as illustrators. Often, the picturebook illustrators seek these more steady and profitable jobs to help them fund their creative illustration work. However, working on two jobs simultaneously can, in the end, lead the illustrator to feeling overtired and overworked, and make her question not only her creative profession but also the quality of her work. “Of course, it decreases the quality of your illustrations, when you need to make several things in several directions” (D). Some of the interviewees discussed how it took them years to gain the courage and certainty to leave their other jobs and become full-time illustrators. Prior to this, however, they had learned to accept the uncertainty that comes with the profession and had started to trust that they will maintain a certain level of income through the projects.

One source that provides funding for picturebook illustrators in Finland is the copyright organization Kopiosto, which is in charge of the public borrowing remunerations. The number of times each book is being borrowed from the public libraries each year affects the remunerations that the illustrators receive from Kopiosto. However, this policy does not always treat picturebook illustrators equally. For instance, illustrators who work on more commercial bestsellers – widely promoted by the publishing houses and bookstores – receive a larger percentage of these remunerations than those illustrators who produce more marginal and “artistic” picturebooks. These marginal or artistic books are rarely advertised anywhere, and people borrowing books from the public libraries might not be aware that they exist. This system of remuneration is particularly challenging for Finland-Swedish illustrators, with an even more limited target group.

Illustrators may also receive additional commissions for their work if their picturebooks are translated to other languages. However, the royalty percentages with these foreign copyright contracts are usually marginal, and because of that, such a book might not bring much extra income for its illustrator, even if it gets translated to several languages.

Regarding the issue of income, some of the interviewees felt that they had received unfair criticism from some picturebook critics for focusing on illustrating book series. However, three of the interviewed illustrators pointed out how vital picturebook series are for them financially, because they bring them steady and continuous income as illustrators. Although a book series does not necessarily offer the illustrator a chance to renew her style or be as creative as she wants to be, yet she might be obliged or willing to focus on safer and more profitable picturebook series mainly for financial reasons.

The interviewed illustrators believed that because of the established practice – in that the publishing houses expect illustrators to apply for funding for their projects themselves – publishing houses are less eager to invest in illustrators. Therefore, the situation has become even more difficult for those illustrators and projects that do not receive external funding. Furthermore, according to the interviewees, there would seem to be a strange negative correlation between the artist’s grants the illustrators receive
and the pay that the publishing houses are willing to offer them. Some of the interviewees pointed out that when a publishing house is aware of the grants that the illustrator has received, there is a tendency to think that the illustrator should be happy with even a smaller pay that she will get from the publisher. “We should always remember that the grant is not for the publisher, but for me” (F).

Most of the interviewees pointed out that they have barely any influence on their pays. Instead of receiving an increased payment based on their gained experience, the interviewees felt that their pay had a tendency to in fact decrease. This was something that seven out of the eight interviewees mentioned having previously struggled with. “The pay that you get for book illustration – it is insanely little. When you think that in ten years, the real wages of people have increased. Ours have decreased”, interviewee D said. Similarly, interviewee B said: “I feel that at some point, the payments just started to decrease”. This seems to be mainly due to the reduced print runs of the published books, financial difficulties that the publishing houses have been going through\(^5\), and the lack of overall respect towards illustrators and their work. “The payments for creating picturebooks are incredibly poor. I have often had to work with teeny tiny pay. And although I have tried to complain about that, it has not affected anything. But I guess I have approved that it’s part of the deal. ... There is no such financial improvement in this, like in many other professions, no bonuses, nothing. On the contrary, you have to compete more every year” (G).

The interviewed illustrators felt that the lack of respect was directly linked to a decrease in pay. Nowadays, it is common for the publishing houses to ask the illustrators to sign contracts with worse terms than those they got before – for instance, demands to get “full copyrights” for the illustrations have increased. Some of the interviewees pointed out that the overall attitude towards picturebook illustrators in Finland seems to be “take it or leave it” (B). These “full copyrights contracts” have found their way to publishing houses through newspapers and magazines. Their contracts have been strongly criticized by editorial illustrators, as well as Finnish illustration and design organizations for several years already. Even when the picturebook illustrators had not signed such a contract, some of the interviewees mentioned having had the experience of their illustrations being used without asking them, and without any additional pay, in, for instance, covers of the digital and audio versions of their books.

Some of the interviewees believed that the position of the illustrator is not always fair compared to that of the author, in terms of the illustrator-author collaborations. The interviewed illustrators noted that the publisher often agrees the percentage of the payment with the author first – even in the case of picturebooks, in which the images play an essential role. Only after that, the publisher approaches the illustrator and suggests a certain percentage for her, based on what is already agreed with the author. The interviewees have experienced that often they have very little choice on what is being offered to them at this point. Sometimes, they have only been offered a one-time fee for a picturebook, whereas the author has been offered a contract with a higher commission percentage. “One time, they only wanted to pay me the one-time fee, but I was offered – as a compensation – the possibility to have my name in the cover as big letters as the authors” (B).

The uncertainty of her finances and the challenging of balancing her income can, in

---

\(^5\) More about these issues in Section 5.2.4.5. Publishing environment.
itself, lead a picturebook illustrator to feeling burnt out and questioning her profession. While the interviewees appreciate the freedom that their profession provides them, they often feel that the price for that freedom is far too high, and that their willingness and love for book illustration is sometimes taken advantage of by the publishing houses. Nevertheless, despite the uncertainty of their finances, illustrating picturebooks can still be the easiest way for some illustrators to generate income because of their existing skills and contacts. However, income was mentioned as the motivating factor of creating picturebook illustrations in only one of the interviews. In most cases, money was considered solely as a distressing and distracting element of illustrating picturebooks51.

5.2.5 The fascination of the picturebook illustration process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5. The fascination of the picturebook illustration process | • The vision of a perfect picturebook  
• Words and storytelling  
• Creating universes – filmmaking between the book covers  
• Picturebook as an artifact  
• Beyond the page |

Table 5.8: Findings related to the fascination of the picturebook illustration process.

According to the interviewed illustrators, one of the main reasons why they create picturebooks is that it, simply said, makes them happy. “So, now I make books. That is still my favorite job. I like it enormously. This is without a doubt, one of the best things there is”, interviewee C said. Similarly, interviewee H pointed out: “Nowadays I do notice more and more that it is the joy I am receiving from this all. In a way, it is a bit selfish. But it just brings so much joy to my life. Creating books just makes my life so much more interesting and happier”. Most of the interviewees underlined that although they talk about the downsides of their profession a lot – for example, the lack of appreciation or income – they generally do feel happy for being able to make picturebooks for a living. While the struggle seems to be a constant and persistent companion to a picturebook illustrator, several aspects of their job make the interviewees feel privileged and grateful for their work.

I have often thought that this profession has rescued me from so many sorrows. When I have had really challenging times in my life, it has been the resource of joy, happiness, and comfort.

Interviewee G

51 As also discussed in the previous section, Managing the financial situation.
One of the aspects that the interviewed illustrators appreciated in their work was the freedom to choose one’s own working hours instead of having a “nine-to-five” job. This freedom that allows the illustrators to work on their own projects when they wish, instead of focusing on commissions given by a client at some predefined hours, was for some of the illustrators “a dream come true” in itself, as interviewee G noted, and a factor that genuinely increased their level of happiness. Five of the interviewees talked about how “lucky” they felt for being able to make picturebook illustrations for a living.

I could not have done this work for as long as I have if it was only torture. I think that mostly it’s those great moments. Lately, especially, I have been grateful for how lucky I am. How fantastic job I have – a job that I want to do. I think that creativity increases exponentially. I think that I learn more about it all the time. I don’t feel that I am fed up with it, on the contrary. Maybe I can nurture the creativity nowadays in many other ways than just sitting by the desk drawing. I have noticed that in a way, this kind of creative life is possible.

Interviewee H

Despite the fact that some of the interviewees mentioned happiness as one of the main reasons for why they make picturebooks, this was not the case for all of them. In some cases, it was in fact the opposite. “I think that happiness is much harder to achieve by making illustrations than in some daily chores. Usually, the motive behind creating illustrations is completely different rather than happiness”, interviewee B pointed out.

An interesting observation was that most of the interviewees seemed to have a somewhat ambivalent relationship with their profession, also among those who had mentioned happiness as one of their primary motivators. This ambivalence stood out clearly from the interviews. For example, all of the interviewed illustrators hoped that their work would be more visible – the sadness about the “silenced” picturebooks often led the illustrators to a depressed state of mind. The lack of visibility and feedback can, in itself, cause the illustrator to lose the motivation towards her work completely. However, although they have this strong desire to receive more visibility for their picturebooks, illustrators often seem to face feelings of shame when their books are published. The unwillingness to look at a newly published book with all the mistakes in it in terms of colors, graphics, or unsatisfactory “filling images” is an experience that all of the interviewees, without exception, shared. Most of the interviewed illustrators also questioned why they should put all that effort, all their creativity, and their souls as artists into something that is so likely to cause them pain and financial distress and, in the end, disappear completely. Yet, the illustrators kept coming back, returning to picturebook illustration again and again.
It was funny when I said to my husband that I miss that project so much. That I miss drawing those animals and the entire poetry book format – how every poem presented a new character. And my husband was like: ‘Do you remember how it was like? You do not remember it at all! Do you remember what kind of summer we had?’ We did have a lovely summer, but I guess I was pretty stressed out as well.

Interviewee C

The majority of the interviewees noted that what had helped them most with accepting and dealing with all the different stages of the process, and simply enjoying the act of creating was the routine they had developed through experience. “The routine of creating illustrations, it is just something that pretty much comes from the guts these days. The tools are familiar, and I know how they act. If I want to achieve something, I know how to achieve it technically”, interviewee A said. The interviewees discussed how the routine of creating illustrations had helped them to trust their abilities as illustrators and complete the process more consistently and joyfully, rather than through trial and error. However, the interviewees also noted that through routine and experience, they had started to feel more empathy towards themselves, and also, towards the mistakes that they make. Some of the interviewees pointed out that these “mistakes” were in fact something they had started appreciating more over the years.

Interviewee H

Although the gained experience of the profession was noted as the most central factor when it comes to accepting the process with all its different emotional challenges, the interviewees also mentioned some tried and tested strategies that had helped them to proceed through the process of illustrating a picturebook more easily, while leaning towards joy rather than agony, and to find their profession more meaningful to themselves and other people. For some, making sure that they could do their illustrations in peace, before showing them to anybody else in the picturebook project team, helped them connect with more positive feelings. “When I was working on that book, I gave myself time to think and just be, before showing the illustrations to anybody. It felt really good – that I found this way of creating illustrations. I don’t mean joyful, because often it’s not joy that it makes me feel. But meaningful. I think that’s the word”, interviewee A said.
The vision of a perfect picturebook

For picturebook illustrators, picturebooks could be considered a bit like the “immortal offsprings”. Despite the naïvety of this allegory, picturebooks do in fact resemble their creators – to the peculiar extent that many picturebook illustrators have heard looking “exactly” like their picturebook characters. At first, after “giving birth” to a picturebook, the illustrator feels exhausted. As discussed earlier, after the “birth” – completing the illustrations – many illustrators feel so utterly weary that they can barely look at their newborn. However, gradually the pain and struggle fade away, and an idea for another picturebook starts entering the illustrator’s mind, clearing the mental space of draining memories. The illustrator might receive an initial suggestion or a manuscript from an author or a publishing house, which will start the growing idea. Alternatively, the illustrator might remember an old idea that she doodled in her sketchbook ten or twenty years ago. One way or another, the illustrator starts seeing images, characters, colors, and atmospheres in her mind that reflect her current visual ideals – the utopia of a “perfect picturebook”, which is always the next one in the row, the one still undone. Little by little, the idea grows bigger, and as discussed earlier, a big enough idea is all that is needed to begin the process of a new picturebook all over again.

What moves me forward is the thought of the next book. ... You always feel that what you are doing now is not going anywhere – yet you invent something new every time, and you think that in the next one, everything will be like it should – maybe in the next book, it will all click somehow.

Interviewee H

A few of the interviewed illustrators noted that they have been carrying some picturebook ideas with them since they were teenagers. The thought of something that was still waiting to be done seemed to be tempting for them, and even one of the biggest motivators to carry on illustrating. “This is something I have thought about for several decades. And I will do it. I think now could be the time. Now I will start working on it one way or another” (B).

The idea of a “next book” was something that all of the interviewees discussed. “You always think that maybe in the next book. ... I think that is the reason why you get inspired again. Why you ever gain the strength to start a new one. That oh well, in that next book then”, interviewee A said. “You always think that the next book will be the best book ever made”, interviewee G also noted, while pointing out that maybe she tends to be a bit more realistic nowadays than when she was younger. The vision of a new picturebook and those new ideas were themes that the interviewed illustrators kept coming back to. “It is just such a wonderful feeling when you start thinking about a new thing” (D).
I truly enjoy creating illustrations. When I get a vision and manage to move towards this mental image somehow, that is when the alternative – of not creating picturebooks because of all the hard work and effort – disappears. You awaken to that new idea in a way. I think that is a pretty magnificent feeling – that I can get inspired by this, that I can get hold of that idea and actualize it. That is the feeling I think you fall in love with, in a way.

Interviewee F

Despite this initial optimism, however, the interviews show that at some point in the process, the illustrator typically releases her initial vision and the idea of a “perfect picturebook”. She becomes more realistic and starts realizing her limits as an artist again. She relinquishes the utopia, the one that got her loving her work again. “Towards the end, you start seeing what kind of book it will actually be like. Those strange illusions fade away. You start accepting that fine – maybe it will be ‘okay’ at least”, interviewee G said. The original cinematographic vision that the illustrator had in mind slowly fades away and is replaced with the things that the “book itself” suggests.

At some point, you just need to let it go. In a way, I think that the book has a will of its own. Those characters, those illustrations – they all have a will of their own, and they move the book in whatever direction they want. I wish that I could twist them into the direction of my own vision. Just for once. That would be so amazing. But then again – maybe in that next book.

Interviewee A

Words and storytelling

Giving a visual form to an idea – bringing the vision to life – is one of the most “enchanting aspects of picturebook illustration” (A). However, the interviews reveal that it is the emphasis on storytelling and words that characterizes the task of picturebook illustrators, and distinguishes illustration from many other forms of art.

Some of the interviewees noted how their art-making process moves from “outside-inside”, rather than “inside-outside”. Here, the direction is essential. Some of the interviewees highlighted that they originally started creating images early in their careers with the idea of becoming painters, graphic artists, or fine artists rather than illustrators – the latter was actually an unfamiliar career option for them when they were starting out. Nevertheless, all of also mentioned that their image-making process while working on their paintings, drawings, or woodcuts, was strongly related to words and stories, right from the beginning. These words and stories – these external impulses – that arose, for instance, from their lives, their surroundings, and experiences as children, or old mythologies, were the basis of their art. “In a way, I have always done illustrations. Even those woodcuts I did while I was still studying, those were mainly illustrations of my own life” (D).
I have always needed the impulse from elsewhere. I am not the type of artist who would start visualizing these inner things of mine. In a way, I am the one who joins that impulse. I accept the challenge, a story, or a thing that I need to symbolize with an image. Maybe that is what I have been doing all along.

Interviewee F

Many of the interviewees talked about this need for an external impulse or challenge before they feel at ease to proceed with their art. This challenge can be a simple idea, as described before, that starts growing bigger and forms the vision of a story in the mind of the illustrator. But it can also be, for example, a text, a poem, or a song. It can be a draft, or it can be a finished piece. But in many cases, it is the external impulse that starts the germination of an either verbal or visual story in the mind of the illustrator - but the initial emphasis is on the story rather than the individual images. For the picturebook illustrator, this invitation to participate in storytelling can be extremely tempting and can help her to get inspired to start the art-making process all over again.

The magic in this, for me, is the opportunity to tell a story. I come up with something that I find important and worth telling. Even when I am illustrating someone else's text, I am still telling a story. And that is something I feel I cannot do when I am making fine arts. It always happens to me that it becomes a story with some kind of a starting point, or maybe a metamorphosis, or something like that.

Interviewee A

The eagerness to create a larger story through pictorial means, instead of focusing on individual artworks, can be seen as one of the most fundamental characteristics of a picturebook illustrator. For instance, interviewee G said: “The importance of storytelling to me has started to increase over the years. It is the stories that I want to tell”. Based on the interviews, the interest and affection towards the story and the narrative seems to be fundamental to this profession. “Somehow, I would say that it’s the storytelling. It is the story that carries me further”, interviewee D said, while interviewee C mentioned: “I simply love being inside a story”.

Creating universes – filmmaking between the book covers

Making sequential visual stories is all about the rhythm of the images, and the timing, moving, and pace of the story. In this sense, there are many commonalities and overlaps between picturebook illustration and the disciplines of animation and film. The enchantment of creating a picturebook seems to be in fact closely related to the enchantment of creating a film. Filmmaking offers similar freedom to the director of a movie, which most of the interviewed illustrators considered as one of the most
fascinating aspects of creating picturebooks. While creating a picturebook, the illustrator is often the one who is “pulling the strings”, and like a film director, is in charge of making the characters and the manuscript come alive for other peoples to see. “I think that I am more like a film maker. ... When I illustrate, I can be the boss. I think it’s wonderful”, interviewee C said.

For many of the interviewees, the comparison with filmmaking was a way to describe the visual-verbal, multidimensional and extensive nature of the picturebook illustration process. Five out of the eight interviewees used filmmaking as a metaphor for picturebook illustration. “Often when I start imagining the story, it feels like a movie somehow. It is like, image, opposite image. Sometimes I feel that I am trying to edit a movie in my head” (H). To them, bringing visions and sceneries from their minds to the paper resembled the process of creating a movie from various scenes and events – but unlike movies, in picturebooks these scenes are seemingly frozen in time. “I have sometimes thought that it is almost like doing a movie – scene by scene, with the drama of turning a page having a big impact. There is always the surprise there, or shift of perspective, when you turn a page”, interviewee G said. Similarly, interviewee A explained: “With this project that I am now working on, I have that amazing movie in my head again. Those flashes and those moments, they are what I am after”.

It is an extremely cinematographic journey for me – when I think of the story and the book. It is like I was thinking of a movie. It is moving in my head, and there is a story that has the beginning, some events in between, and the end. Everything moves three-dimensionally in that world, and the characters are three-dimensional as well. I think creating animations and picturebooks is very similar. They both consist of still images from a journey – paused moments in time. That is precisely how those moments work in the picturebook.

Interviewee A

Compared to more commercial illustration mediums in Finland, picturebook illustration gives illustrators considerable amounts of freedom and responsibility on what the end result will look and feel like. For some of the interviewees, writing the text for the book – along with creating the illustrations – increases the feeling of “owning” the picturebook process. “It is easiest when I can build the entire world, also the text, myself. It is just so beautiful to come up with an imaginative world with its own logic” (A). However, interviewee C explained that even when she is not writing the text herself, she still feels that it is her – and primarily her – universe where she has the privilege to “play God”. “I think it is wonderful that besides drawing, I can make so many decisions in the book. It is my world. My characters”(C). For many of the interviewees, this profound feeling of being in charge of the process and the cinematographic nature of picturebook illustration were considered as the most appealing aspects of their profession.
Why do I always return to doing another one? I’m not sure...maybe there is some kind of magic there [in picturebook illustration] – of building a miniature universe. In a way, you are almost doing a little movie there. There it is, in between the book covers, the world where you can peep into. When you close the book – that is where it stays. It is all about creating.

Interviewee E

The interviewed illustrators believed that the possibility of being in charge of the entire sequential storytelling, and making all the visual decisions in a picturebook, is an effective way for the illustrator to develop and expand her illustration style. “For me, this is also a path to evolve as an illustrator, a chance to display my skills and my talent”, interviewee E said. While illustrating picturebooks, the illustrator has to continually evaluate her own decisions, her drawings and her choices regarding how to tell the story visually. Picturebooks – like movies – require from the illustrator the ability to maintain a specific coherency throughout the entire piece. This, as many of the interviewed illustrators believed, is at the core of the expertise of a picturebook illustrator, and an effective way to evolve as an illustrator. “In a picturebook, the possibilities are huge. The illustration has such a big role and purpose in them. In picturebooks, it is all primarily about the images, in my opinion. How the images transfer the story”, interviewee A said.

Picturebook as an artifact

Some of the interviewees talked about the meaning that the picturebook has for them as a medium for their illustrations. For some, the book itself as an artifact was one of the most fascinating aspects of picturebook illustration. Although the period after the book is published can be a difficult, and even an agonizing one for the illustrator – as discussed before – the interviewees appreciated the picturebook as an artifact greatly. “The appreciation for a book is profound somehow. It is a wonderful and somehow ingenious artifact. There you build it, and there you close it, and then, open it afterward – it is such a brilliant construction”, interviewee F said.

The rewarding feeling of achieving something concrete, and being able to return to the illustration process afterward is an aspect that was appreciated and mentioned by majority of the interviewees. “Creating picturebooks is so concrete somehow – to have the actual book after it arrives from the print. To be able to see all the work afterward. To see all those processes that I have walked through” (A). The possibility to make an extensive series of images intertwine with each other in meaning-making, and then bound them into a book felt fascinating for the interviewed illustrators. Some of them reminded how, in the end, their illustrations were only one of the components in the book, forming the final meaning together with the text in the mind of the reader.

When you succeed in the book as an artifact, then it truly is wonderful to see both the story and the illustrations perceiving something in that symbiosis. It becomes something bigger together.

Interviewee F
**Beyond the page**

Seven out of the eight interviewees talked about the different types of events and collaborations resulting from their picturebooks. For some, these other projects – for instance, theatre and music productions made based on their books, or designing products related to their books – felt extremely important, and an increasingly inspiring part of their work. For them, the most fascinating aspects of picturebook illustration were the collaborations that took place once the actual illustration process was already completed.

As discussed previously, some of the interviewees felt that the general interest in picturebooks has diminished over the years and that the attitude of the publishers towards picturebooks, and the more “artistic” picturebook illustrators, does not seem encouraging at present. This could be one reason as to why picturebook illustrators have shown an increased interest in other ways of using their skills as visual storytellers. “I think there is a certain vibe going on – many illustrators want to take time out in a way and think whether there could be some other ways to be illustrators”, interviewee F said.

Some of the interviewees highlighted the importance of creating exhibitions themselves or being invited to hold exhibitions of their picturebook illustrations. Often, these exhibitions can also be group exhibitions, where many illustrators present some of their work together. For the interviewed illustrators, exhibitions offered an inspiring possibility to take one or more of their illustrations from a book and find out whether they will bring anything new to the viewer as individual works of art. “It is fascinating to explore, could the individual picturebook illustrations be hanged on the wall – can they manage on their own?” (F).

When presenting picturebook illustrations in an exhibition, there is also a chance for the illustrator to rearrange the illustrations in a completely new order. This, some of the interviewees also addressed as an exciting way to find out whether the illustrations could be used in alternative ways. “Is the story going to be the same, or something completely new that starts growing in the mind of the viewer?” interviewee F wondered.

One of the aspects of viewing illustrations in an exhibition was the fact that it can remove the shame that the illustrator may often feel after the book has been published – as mentioned, due to the flaws in the printing of the picturebook or its design, for example. If the illustrations are not in a digital format, the illustrator is then able to see on a gallery wall the precise colors and shades that she had aimed for. “There [in an exhibition environment] I don’t need to think about the colors or whether the illustration is too close to the margins”, interviewee E said.

Taking picturebook illustrations “beyond the page” can help the illustrator feel excited about the illustrations and her profession again, if she has felt drained or unmotivated after completing the illustration process, or if she wants to find other ways to take advantage of her visual-verbal expertise. For the interviewed illustrators, different types of music, animation, or theatre productions allowed them to expand their knowledge as illustrators and be part of a larger group of creative professionals.
I have truly enjoyed creating them [Pikku Papu books with an album included]. For me, it has been a bit like jumping between different genres. While the visual concept and the content have stayed the same, it has given me a chance to explore the world of music play-school. ... It has indeed been wonderful to expand my work in different directions.

Liisa Kallio, 2015

The poem book Kissa kissa kissa was transformed into a children’s music tale, which was accompanied by Tapiola Sinfonietta. It became a little performance with a plot and a background illustration of mine. I think those kinds of things are really fascinating, because there is the essence of music and performance involved. It is also exciting to realize that you can still get more out of those illustrations that you already packed with so much meaning while creating them. Of course, there is nothing wrong for them to be waiting there in the bookshelf. However, there are so many other ways to use them as well.

Virpi Talvitie, 2015
To share the creative process with people from different creative fields was considered by the interviewees as an essential part of their collaborations “beyond the page”. Many of them pointed out that working as an illustrator can sometimes be extremely lonely. Sharing the creative process with other equally passionate people from the fields of, for instance, music or theatre, can help the illustrator feel excited about the picturebook illustration process again. Despite all these positive aspects, at least as interviewee A noted, the collaborations with performing artists have helped her appreciate the work peace she has as an illustrator, compared to musicians or actors – in other words, the freedom to do her work during the creative process without being observed by others.

5.3 Summary

_I have loved this profession, but I have also been disappointed with it. I have come to the conclusion that this is not a real profession. It is impossible to consider this as a profession. I am not sure what this is then, maybe a lifestyle._

_Interviewee F_

The responses that I received with the help of the narrative interviewing approach allowed me to dive even deeper into the process of creating a picturebook and better understand what it actually feels like to be an illustrator. While some of the interviewees’ experiences were more related to the internal aspects of the profession and the emotional landscape of the picturebook illustration process, others were more related to the external factors that had an impact on this process.

When I started to analyze the interviews, I was hoping that the interview material would help me make some sense of those emotional aspects that I had experienced during my own picturebook illustration process. As I soon came to realize, it did. Although my main focus was not on understanding myself as an illustrator better, the interview material helped me bind the emotional themes that had been suggesting themselves to me during my own process with other professional picturebook illustrators’ experiences.

The analysis of the interviews shows that many of the interviewed illustrators experienced illustrating picturebooks as a four-stage process with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Further analysis of the interview material demonstrated that this four-stage process consists of specific recurring themes and “internal aspects” – emotions, challenges, and behavioral patterns – that the interviewees highlighted facing in each stage themselves. In addition to these internal aspects, as discussed in this chapter, the analysis has also identified various “external factors” – for example, deadlines and collaboration with other team members – that have a significant impact on the picturebook illustration process. Together, these four stages form the picturebook illustration process.

Further to these, the analysis of the interviews has allowed me to identify an essential aspect of the illustration process, which I have referred to as the _fascination of the_
picturebook process. Most of the interviewees highlighted that although they talk about the downsides of their profession extensively, they generally do feel happy for being able to illustrate picturebooks for a living. While the struggle seems to be a constant companion when working as a picturebook illustrator, several aspects made the interviewees feel privileged and grateful for their work. These aspects were related to the possibility of working on future stories and eagerness about the forthcoming projects, freedom to create universes between the book covers, love of the picturebook as an artifact, and the possibilities “beyond the page” — for instance, productions and concerts that are based on published picturebooks.

Although some exceptions on how different illustrators individually experience the picturebook illustration process can always be found, the findings from these interviews suggest an emotional pattern that the illustrator typically faces while proceeding on the path from planning the visual storytelling towards completing the picturebook.
So, I told you about the girl who quit drawing and lived happily ever after. Did she? Did she really? No, I lied. Well, it did seem like a happily ever after, but not without any lines on it. One day the girl met a lady who was going to turn everything upside down. A wise lady, who held a mirror in front of the girl and said: “Look at this, this is you. I like what I see, don’t you?” For some reason, the girl believed her. Maybe the moon was in the right position, or maybe somebody had just cleaned the mirror. Or maybe the wise lady was just, well, wise enough. Nevertheless, for the next couple of days, the girl laughed louder than ever before and told more stupid jokes than ever before. And she liked it. She liked herself like this.

Little by little, the girl started drawing again. The first lines were a struggle. They made her feel the weight she had been carrying for a long time and remember all the pain and anxiety she had felt before falling asleep. However, she had something she had not had before. She had the motivation to see what the wise lady had seen when she was holding the mirror – to see herself.

This was the moment when the girl realized that the line, she had felt like imitating was not the line of the French and Italian picturebook masters – not to mention the Scandinavian ones. No. This was the moment when she realized that the line, she had been chasing for almost four decades was the beautiful and effortless line of a little boy. And this line was impossible to catch because it had drowned along with him 45 years ago. With the brother, who liked drawing and creating stories while drawing. Just like the girl, once upon a time, when she was not yet trying to be anything other than herself. When she was still drawing as if she was breathing and feeling with her hand. As if instead of using letters, words, and sentences, she was talking with her line, because, well – because she had a story to tell.

In this chapter, I will present the two visual models that have been formulated as the result of the research presented in the previous chapters, and relate them to existing theories. However, as is typical for studies utilizing grounded theory, the conclusions drawn are based on the study data, instead of having their basis in a particular theoretical framework (see, e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1; Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 274; Muratovski, 2015: 97). Therefore, in this chapter, the aim is to reflect on and evaluate the models with the help of a few central theories and other literature from the areas of picturebook illustration and creativity, instead of a further theoretical analysis.

The models bring together the findings from the analysis of the personal process diary\textsuperscript{52} and the narrative interviews of the professional illustrators\textsuperscript{53}. Furthermore, the models are used in answering the research questions set out in this thesis. The first model, the Picturebook Illustration Model (see Figure 6.1), will be used to answer the research question related to the picturebook illustration process: What is the creative process of illustrating a picturebook? The second model, the Cycle of Creative Resources (see Figure 6.2), will provide a wider perspective to the creative process. This model will be used to answer the research question that aims at identifying creative resources: What are the main elements of creative resources? By looking at both models, I seek to answer the third research question: What are the main factors contributing to creative well-being?

6.1 Research implications

The findings of the studies presented in this thesis show that the picturebook illustration process includes moments of joy and excitement, experiences of immersion and flow, as well as feelings of genuine happiness. However, the process also includes several external and internal challenges: financial uncertainty, perceived lack of respect, lack of feedback, feelings of inadequacy, deadlines, creative compromises, insufficient marketing, and difficult collaborations. In the end, after having spent countless hours, days, and weeks on planning a picturebook and creating the illustrations, the illustrator might end up experiencing the book she has worked on so hard disappearing into silence – in other words, the book is forgotten right after being published. This can be emotionally challenging for many illustrators. “Being alone at the forefront of a discipline makes a creative person exposed and vulnerable. When an artist has invested

---

\textsuperscript{52} See Chapter 4. The creative process – a personal perspective.

\textsuperscript{53} See Chapter 5. The creative process – a professional perspective.
years in making a sculpture, or a scientist in developing a theory, it is devastating if nobody cares” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996: 192). The same is true of picturebook illustration. While many picturebooks turn out to be financially profitable – sometimes even extremely profitable – a surprisingly common scenario for illustrators in Finland is that after having illustrated a picturebook, neither financial gain nor social appreciation is achieved. The illustrator might end up doubting the value of the book and her skills as an artist, and start wondering why there were no efforts on the part of the publishing house to market the book.

While analyzing the interviews of the professional illustrators, I aimed to find out how these illustrators who have been creating picturebooks for decades, have managed to maintain their creativity and enthusiasm towards picturebook illustration, despite all the challenges they have been facing. As I came to realize, the struggle that I had experienced during my illustration process was as real for the interviewees as it was for me. Many of the interviewees had also asked themselves: “Why do I still bother?” as interviewee F said, or as illustrator D wondered: “Why on earth did I choose to work like a maniac once again?” However, in the case of the illustrators interviewed in this research, the struggles and agony they were facing were balanced with incredibly uplifting and enchanting moments, during which they felt that everything they did was succeeding. Furthermore, many of them mentioned being genuinely grateful for being able to work as picturebook illustrators.

Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 136-137) notes that it is possible to make a creative discovery, even a significant one, by accident and without any great interest in the underlying topic. However, as he further argues, contributions that require a lifetime of struggle are impossible without genuine curiosity and love of the subject. The number of people who get excited about the idea of making picturebooks, but do not remain in the profession after their first book is published, is far more than that of those who become so fascinated in this art form that they decide to continue creating picturebooks year after year. Many art students, commercial illustrators, fine artists, designers, and other people dream of illustrating a picturebook and find the idea of becoming a picturebook illustrator fascinating. However, when they engage in the picturebook illustration process, they realize how challenging it actually is. In addition, they might not experience any of the five fascinating aspects of the picturebook illustration process that the interviewed illustrators referred to in the previous chapter:

1. The excitement of envisioning their next picturebook – the “perfect picturebook”.
2. The joy of being able to work with stories.
3. The powerful feeling of creating the entire universe between the book covers.
4. The enchantment of a picturebook as an artifact.
5. The excitement about the projects beyond the page – the future projects that are related to a published picturebook – for instance, concerts or plays.

Even when an aspiring picturebook illustrator experiences some of these positive aspects, the affection might not be strong enough to balance the downsides of the process and the financial uncertainty of the profession. Because of that, the commitment to this art form does not take place very often. Then again, personally I managed to finish
thirteen books, including several picturebooks, as well as nonfiction books, before I truly started questioning my profession as a picturebook illustrator. For me, there was magic, until there was not anymore.

The main difference between my own illustration process and the processes described by the interviewees was the low level of inspiration during my process compared to theirs. While the interviewees openly described the struggles that they had often experienced during their picturebook illustration process, all of them also noted the rewarding aspects they received from illustrating picturebooks, such as those listed above.

6.2.1 Visual-verbal picturebook illustrator

The synthesis of the words and pictures – entity, that is typically called an iconotext – is at the heart of the picturebook’s character. The ability to make words interact with pictures in an interesting way is not only one of the most fundamental skills of a picturebook illustrator but is also one of her primary interests. As Lassén-Seger (2014: 118) points out, “for skilled picture book creators this relationship, or interplay, seems to be virtually inexhaustible”.

Picturebooks are considered a serial art form, which requires an increased ability to understand two languages – both verbal and visual. According to Happonen (2005: 55): “These two forms of representation [the words and the images] are not simply formal matters, two different instruments, but convey deeper aesthetic and cultural meaning”. In a picturebook, the words and pictures are most of the time “speaking” simultaneously, so the reader needs to consciously or subconsciously shift and rearrange the balance between them. In fact, as Lassén-Seger (2014: 112) notes, “it is absolutely crucial to remember that this art form communicates via both textual and visual means”. She also agrees that picturebooks should always be considered with the notion of iconotext in mind (Lassén-Seger, 2014: 115). The element and skill of “reading pictures” have been discussed by several researchers of the visual arts, often emphasizing the conventional character of visual signs and the narrative and ideological implications of how we interpret them (Happonen, 2005: 55; see also Goodman, 1968; Hallberg, 1982; Bal, 1991, 1997; Jenkins, 1995; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, 2001; Mikконен, 2005; Lassén-Seger, 2006, 2014).

The nature of the relationship between words and images lies at the heart of what makes a picturebook good, bad, or forgettable. Rhedin, Oscar K. and Lena Eriksson (2013: 11) suggest that the interplay of words and images encourages and allows new interpretations and experiences during each read, which is, in fact, one of the reasons why picturebooks are typically read several times. A picturebook, like other forms of visual narratives, needs to contain a fluid union of words and images paced through the story. Happonen (2005) argues that if the illustrations and the texts present radically contradictory information, this may lead to a confusion over which one to believe – which one to take as the accepted reference point. This, however, does not mean that this contradictory aspect could not be taken advantage of, and toyed with, as many

---

54 As discussed in Chapter 4. The creative process – a personal perspective.
55 As presented in Chapter 5. The creative process – a professional perspective.
56 Discussed previously in Section 2.2.2. Picturebook illustration.
picturebook illustrators do, as highlighted by, for example, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 8)57. Similarly, Salisbury (2004: 84) notes, how the French word “décalage” is sometimes used to express the disparity of meaning between words and image in picturebooks.

The verbal language of words progresses linearly, with every word, every sentence, every page coming before or after every other one – in fact, this sequential order of the text is required for comprehension. The visual language of pictures, on the other hand, progresses in a two-dimensional fashion, across a surface usually representing space, with all its parts and detail appearing in front of our eyes simultaneously (Schwarcz and Schwarz, 1991: 4). While the words are essentially linear – and in the Western culture they are read from left to right and top to bottom – the images do not give us direct instruction about how to read them. As such, the possibilities for interaction between words and images in a picturebook are unlimited. Furthermore, the ability to spread a sequence of images over several pages – usually 32 – and create the visual ebb and flow within these spreads distinguishes picturebook illustration from many other visual art forms. Nikolajeva (2003b: 37) has defined a picturebook as a “synthetic medium” where the receiver assembles the overall meaning through the interaction between different communicative means.

Nodelman (1988: 232) notes that in a sense, the words of picturebooks are “like a voice-over narration in a film that tells us what to see in the pictures, how to interpret them”. However, as Nodelman points out, unlike in film or theater, there is an “ironic distance” in a picturebook, between the subjective focus of words and the objective wholeness of pictures. In fact, almost always, the picturebooks are both objective and subjective at the same time (Nodelman, 1988: 232). Like Nodelman, many other picturebook theorists have also discussed the relationship between not only picturebooks and films, but also between picturebooks and, for example, theatre and animation (see, e.g., Moebius, 1991; Rhedin, 2001; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001; Salisbury; 2004; Salisbury and Styles, 2012; Lassén-Seger, 2006, 2014). As Salisbury (2004: 74) points out: “Creating a picturebook is in many ways closely akin to directing a film, with all the elements of pace, suspense and rhythm that are involved”. This corroborates with the findings of the studies about the Finnish picturebook illustrators presented in this thesis, and how the picturebook illustrators approach their work. As discussed earlier58, many of the interviewed illustrators used filmmaking as a metaphor to describe the visual-verbal, multidimensional and extensive nature of the picturebook illustration process. Firstly, this was done in terms of technical aspects of the process, i.e., when it comes to “constructing” the illustrations and the entire image sequence. As Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 62) point out, “similar to film, picturebooks can make use of a variety of pictorial solutions in the depiction of setting, for instance panoramic views, long shots, middle-distance shots, close-ups or multiple scenes (that is, two or more different settings on the same spread or page)” . Furthermore, often the double-page spreads of a picturebook are likened to a theatre stage (Lassén-Seger, 2014: 116; see also Moebius, 1991). Secondly, filmmaking as a metaphor was used in a more philosophical

57 See Table 2.1, counterpointing and contradictory picturebooks, in Section 2.2.2. Picturebook illustration.
58 See Section 5.2.5, The fascination of the picturebook illustration process: Creating universes – filmmaking between the book covers; see also Section 4.2.1, Understanding the story and creating the vision of illustrations: Designing the storyboard, pace, and rhythm.
sense, i.e., in how the picturebook as a medium allows the picturebook illustrators to create their “own universes” between the book covers, and to be fully in charge of this universe – in a similar way as a film director is often seen as the one “pulling the strings” of her movie.

The way illustrators think is often intertwined with stories and sequential imagemaking. Picturebook illustrators see and think in pictures that are telling stories. Even when they do not necessarily “want” to make picturebooks, their thinking is anchored in this medium. “This is what I can do, this is mostly what I can do. In fact, sometimes I cannot help but wonder how great it would be if I could rather do something else, some ’real’ work”, interviewee A said. Similarly, I wrote a note in my process diary while illustrating *Ivari-tonttu karkuteillä* about “how I wish that this tendency of mine, this illustrator in me, could be replaced with something more conventional”.

What connects the findings from the analysis of my personal process diary and the professional interviews is the observation that for many illustrators, creating picturebook illustrations is not merely one possible career option among several others they could choose from. One might even go as far as saying that it seems that rather than illustrators choosing the medium of the picturebook deliberately, the picturebook chooses them. In other words, illustrators’ personal qualities and emphasis as artists start suggesting the picturebook as a medium for them. As the illustrator Norman Rockwell has said, “The illustrator has, unlike the painter, a primary interest in telling a story” (Wigan, 2006: 88). According to Csikszentmihályi (1996: 136-137), the first trait that facilitates creativity is a genetic predisposition for a given domain. For example, a person whose visual perception is more sensitive to colors and light will have an advantage in becoming a painter, while someone born with the ability to hear a perfect pitch will do well in music. By being better at their respective domains, these individuals will, for instance, become more deeply interested in colors or sound, will learn more about them, and as such, will be in a better position to innovate in visual arts or music with greater ease. While this fact may seem a bit far-fetched in arts, it is often easily accepted in other fields of human endeavor, such as sports. A long-distance runner, resistant to fatigue because of her aerobic muscle type – suitable for low-level contractions – quite rarely finds herself sweating to become a sprinter with large muscles, which would support high-level contractions. Therefore, it is widely accepted that the body type suggests certain sports that the person is most likely to succeed in. Similarly, just like a long-distance runner, a picturebook illustrator is also often subordinate to certain features that make her exceptionally skilled in creating storytelling by visual means.

Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that illustration as a practice should not be judged purely by one’s abilities for visual literacy, but rather it should also be acknowledged as a discipline that engenders the best intellectual engagement with the subject matter, problem-solving and visual communication (Male, 2017: 5). As Lassén-Seger (2014: 119) points out: “The images in a picture book do not just tell a story; they can also express something symbolic, emotional and aesthetic that can be difficult to capture in words”. However, suppose a person ends up working as a picturebook illustrator for a long time, illustrating *book after book, year after year*. In that case, it can be argued that her understanding of, for instance, sequential storytelling, is emphasized along with her tendency to visually interpret her surroundings and different type of
emotions and characters with, and through, stories.

Despite this, as Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 136-137) argues, a sensory advantage is not obligatory to succeed in a particular field. History has shown numerous great scientists and artists who have achieved remarkable creative results in their lives, regardless of how talented they were as children or how fully they were able to use their specific senses. For instance, El Greco seems to have suffered from a disease of the optic nerve, and Beethoven was practically deaf when he composed some of his most remarkable work later in his life. Nevertheless, a special sensory advantage may be responsible for developing an early interest in a domain – and interest is an essential ingredient of creativity. “Without such interest, it is difficult to become involved in a domain deeply enough to reach its boundaries and then push them farther”, Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 136-137) argues.

Schwarcz and Schwarcz (1991: 4) point out how the relationship of the language of words and the language of pictures is often learned spontaneously through experience. The research findings presented in the previous chapters show that this tendency – this visual-verbal way to observe the world – was something that often followed the illustrators from their childhood. From a very early age, picturebook illustrators like to play with both words and images and create stories that are often interpreted, described, or continued visually. These stories are not necessarily physically written anywhere, but exist in the unwritten, continually evolving narrative of play. Drawing, however, is often used in making these stories come alive. For example, in my own childhood, I mostly drew because the stories created around the paper doll play required those drawings. Similarly, interviewee A said how her father used to tell her fairy tales while simultaneously drawing them in a notebook. In a picturebook, the illustrator is able to return to that “play” that intertwines words and images and to perceive contents and meanings at her own discretion, with no prescribed direction.

Finally, for a picturebook illustrator, illustration is a way to be in this world, something that she ended up doing more and more over the years. For a picturebook illustrator, a picturebook is not something that she works on in the morning and then leaves behind her workplace in the afternoon. Picturebook illustrators are continually working on their illustrations and their image sequence, consciously or subconsciously, sometimes until they fall asleep at night, and “in the morning knowing how things should be done” (A).
6.2.2 The Picturebook Illustration Model

My picture books have, in the past, been recognized as “highly imaginative”, “strikingly original”, and even “magical”. There is, however, certainly nothing mysterious about the way they are produced. Each work contains many thousands of ingredients, experiments, discoveries, and transforming decisions executed over several months, compressed into a very small space, 32 pages of words and pictures. Everything can be explained in terms of process, influences, developmental elaboration, and reduction. What is original is not the ideas themselves, but the way they are put together.

Shaun Tan (2002a)

The studies presented in the previous two chapters revealed a picturebook illustration process in which excitement, inspiration, and euphoria alternate with feelings of frustration, fear, and disappointment. The Picturebook Illustration Model (see Figure 6.1) brings together and relates these findings.

The Picturebook Illustration Model shows the linear, iterative process that consists of four stages. The first three stages of the model cover the planning of the picturebook and creating and finalizing the illustrations and the book, while the fourth post-process stage refers to what happens after the book is published. It is worth noting that these stages may vary to some extent from project to project. Individual illustrators may also have slightly different ways of working, with different emphasis on how they like to create a picturebook. Furthermore, other factors, such as the story itself, publishing schedules, financial concerns, and life situations and collaboration with the other members of the project team, can impact the resulting illustration process. However, while the stages of the Picturebook Illustration Model may vary, the findings of this research indicate that these four stages do represent the generic model of the picturebook illustration process and form the basic structure that this process typically follows.

As mentioned earlier, in this thesis, my main focus has not been on formulating a new theory about the picturebook as an artifact. Therefore, while analyzing the research material, I have instead aimed at better understanding the creative process of illustrating a picturebook, emphasizing how it feels to illustrate a picturebook from an emotional perspective. However, because my research findings indicate that the emotional landscape of illustrating a picturebook is integrally linked with the technical aspects of the process, the Picturebook Illustration Model covers both the technical as well as the emotional aspects. The following sections describe in more detail each of the four stages of the model:

1. Planning the picturebook
2. Creating the illustrations
3. Finalizing the picturebook
4. Post-process stage
Stage 1: Planning the picturebook

Technical aspects, Stage 1

At the beginning of Stage 1, while planning the picturebook, the illustrator focuses on understanding the story and its overall tone. Often, this is done by writing simple notes and remarks in the manuscript and in the sketchbooks. According to Raami (2016: 146), it is typical for many designers to work with written words for as long as possible before putting their ideas into a visual form. Based on Raami’s observations, designers often tend to avoid visual thinking and giving a form to a thought until some essence of the work has crystallized for them. This corroborates with the findings of my studies about Finnish picturebook illustrators.

While reading the manuscript, the illustrator starts envisioning the illustrations, characters, colors, and the scenes of its events, making notes and formulating ideas in terms of the form, content, and atmosphere of its visual storytelling. While planning the picturebook, the illustrator is focused on identifying the core of the story and developing ideas for its illustrations at the same time. In most cases, also character design

---

59 For the Finnish version of the model, see Appendix 1.
needs to be given special attention during the planning phase. “The creation of convincing characters is fundamental to the success of a visual narrative. No matter how well other aspects of the book have been developed, they will count for nothing if the reader cannot believe in the ‘actors’ on the stage”, Salisbury (2004: 62) points out.

Sketching the scenes and characters helps the illustrator understand the story and further develop the arising ideas. Raami (2016: 141) sees sketching as an iterative, cyclic process that helps to define the core of the problem, which, in turn, helps to clarify the whole and generate new ideas. This type of expertise that the design process requires differs significantly from, for instance, a purely scientific or technical problem-solving (Raami, 2016: 141).

An exceptionally good picturebook is the result of both spontaneity and careful planning. The dialogue and interaction between the word and images are key elements of maintaining an appropriate pace and flow throughout a picturebook (Male, 2007: 180; see also Schwarzc, 1982, 1991; Shulevitz, 1985; Nikolajeva and Scott, 2000, 2001; Happonen, 2001, 2005; Nikolajeva, 2003a, 2003b; Salisbury, 2004; Salisbury and Styles, 2012). Pace itself can determine the success or failure of a sequence of images (Male, 2007: 99). The relationship between words and images, as well as different possibilities of utilizing this interplay, are typically considered while planning a picturebook.

The importance of the planning phase cannot be overemphasized, as this is when the illustrator sets up the basis for the entire sequential narration, decides on how the story develops, and also typically decides the size, shape and scale of the book. As Shulevitz (1985: 89) suggests, these decisions in terms of the physical format should be a natural outcome of the content and the mood of the story, not the “results of some arbitrary whim”.

This first stage of the process is about formulating the vision of the book and understanding its sequential structure. For the picturebook illustrator, the main tools for mastering the sequential order of the illustrations in a picturebook are the storyboard and book dummy. Both of these two tools can be considered as “thinking tools” where the picturebook illustrator ponders and evaluates her ideas regarding the: 1. purpose of the illustrations, 2. the relationship between the words and the images, 3. rhythm, pace and movement, 4. the drama of turning page, 5. composition, 6. the use of white space, 7. sense of place and atmosphere, 8. characters, 9. style and in some cases, also the 10. color palette of the picturebook. As Salisbury (2004: 82) notes, by controlling these aspects and the pace of the narrative, the illustrator can “create an ebb and flow and enhance visual interest”. The storyboard and the book dummy are platforms for sketching and planning, and places to explore, make mistakes, and come up with the best possible solutions. It is typical for picturebook illustrators, as with other creative professionals, that in the sketching phase, many alternative ideas are composed and considered, by moving flexibly between the imagination and concrete ways of implementing the ideas (Raami, 2016: 141). The storyboard and the book dummy provide an alternative visual tool for this type of contemplation. Furthermore, the storyboard and book dummy can give the whole picturebook team a better idea of how the project would progress (As Shulevitz, 1985: 67).

Despite the overall length and context of each book, the specific content and unfolding of its narrative must be the number one priority when conceiving the initial plan

---

60 Referred to further in Section 6.2.1 Visual-verbal picturebook illustrator.
for a picturebook. Regardless of whether the picturebook illustrator considers the aspects listed above with the help of a storyboard or a book dummy, or whether she uses, for example, her sketchbook for this purpose, the goal of the planning phase is to come up with a visual plan that will keep the audience interested in, and engaged with, the story. However, some illustrators prefer to keep the planning stage – including the visual plan – as “open” as possible, and in some cases following only their intuition when creating the final illustrations.

*Emotional landscape, Stage 1*

*In the beginning, everything is possible. I feel incredibly excited but also grateful for getting inspired and for the fact that I can still get hold of this – that I can still do this. ... When I receive a good text, I tend to dive into it. I find myself thinking that this will be absolutely amazing – that I will do something like never before. But at the same time, I feel anxious about the massive amount of work ahead of me and wonder whether I can make it.*

*Interviewee F*

Although all stages of the picturebook illustration process include both positive and negative emotions, it is the planning phase where the illustrator is facing particularly ambivalent emotions. Here, the two rather opposite feelings of fear and excitement alternate.

When the illustrator starts a new picturebook illustration process, she often feels happy and, in some cases, even “euphoric” about the new story and its subject. Typically, the euphoria is connected with the excitement about a new story and the endless possibilities that the text and the book provide. Building a vision around an idea and getting inspired about a new story seems to be amongst the most fundamental aspects of a picturebook illustrator’s profession. Envisioning a picturebook is an inspiring and exciting – but also a very concrete and almost cinematographic – way to “see” the entire picturebook upfront. Often, a picturebook illustrator is almost able to imagine herself *inside* the picturebook before a single line is drawn – experiencing all the events in her vision, sometimes also communicating with the characters of the book. The vision of a picturebook could be defined as a formation of a mental image, not yet present to the senses or perceived as real, but still incredibly visible to the illustrator. Typically, this vision is a reflection of the “perfect picturebook” – the one in which the illustrator is going to renew herself artistically, exceed her previous accomplishments, and express precisely what she is after. Because the story is new every time, the vision feels fresh every time, which, in turn, helps the picturebook illustrator get excited about her profession – project after project. Even if the previous picturebook illustration process might have led the illustrator to feel completely drained – as it often has – the vision of a new picturebook helps her forget this exhaustion and replace the feelings of despair and surrender with hope. At the beginning of the project, the illustrator might also feel

---

*Intuitive decision making, and how it alternates with the analytical thinking during the planning stage will be discussed further in Section 6.2.2.*
at ease because the schedule is still flexible, and the deadlines somewhere in the distant future. As such, the illustrator can immerse herself fully in the process of planning the book and sketching the storyboard, without feeling the pressure of finishing anything yet.

However, while still feeling euphoric, various self-doubts and fears often start to appear in the picturebook illustration process, and alternate with the moments of excitement and enthusiasm. The illustrator might start to wonder whether she will come up with any original ideas and whether she is qualified enough to ever finish the book, regardless of her years of experience. These paralyzing and anxious feelings at the beginning of the illustration process are usually related to the large number of images that yet need to be created – the multiple spreads and sketches in the storyboard or book dummy are waiting to be transformed into actual illustrations. This realization reminds the illustrator about the extensive scale of a picturebook project, and other external demands of the illustration process, such as the inevitably impending deadlines. Feeling motivated throughout the process, from drawing the first sketches to recreating those drawings in the final illustrations, can sometimes require a great deal of patience from the illustrator. For many, this feels like a challenge, although they accept the need to recreate the illustrations several times during different stages of the process.

Stage 2: Creating the illustrations

Technical aspects, Stage 2

After the planning phase, a picturebook illustrator needs to sit down and bring her sketches and the storyboard to life. During Stage 2, the illustrator creates the illustrations based on the visual plan that she has created in Stage 1. During the second stage, the illustrator is focused on exploring various ways to give a two-dimensional visual form to the visions created while planning the book. Various means of achieving these visions include deciding on a suitable illustration technique and style, testing different color palettes, and exploring various ways of creating alternative atmospheres. Creating movement within an image by, for instance, redefining and re-evaluating decisions made in the storyboard in terms of the composition, as well as emphasizing different elements in the illustration, are also part of the process during this stage.

Picturebook illustrators use various ways to create effective, readable illustrations. Shulevitz (1985: 130) suggests four different aspects of how illustrations typically have an impact on the viewer: descriptive, suggestive, decorative, and expressive. Sometimes it is the descriptive aspect that stands out, while in other cases, the effect is more suggestive, evoking a particular feeling or mood. Some pictures have a decorative quality, while others may emphasize expressive elements. Shulevitz (1985: 133) writes: “Often, in the best illustrations, several of these aspects are combined in a way that enriches the picture’s meaning and our enjoyment of it”. Illustrators rarely make any conscious attempts to choose one aspect over another during the process of creating their illustrations – typically, they are just interested in creating good illustrations, which can mean different things to different illustrators. Nevertheless, these aspects are often somehow considered while creating illustrations.
Shulevitz (1985: 175) further notes that: “To put feeling into a picture, you need a vehicle. Just as the entire body – not only the face – expresses a character’s emotion, every element of the picture – not only its subject matter – contributes to its emotional quality”. Space is one of the most important means of expression in an illustration. Although a picturebook illustrator considers different options for creating the space already while drawing the storyboard, it is during the second stage of the process that she truly dives deep into the visual space of individual illustrations – in other words, into the “stage” where the act takes place, and the “actors” of the story are able (or unable) to breathe freely. The arrangement of shapes across a double page spread plays a vital role in how audience reads a pictorial sequence, both in terms of directing their eyes and sensing the aesthetic balance (Salisbury, 2004: 120).

The space of a picturebook illustration can be depicted in various ways, and each way has a different impact on the resulting image. First of all, the way the empty space is used in an illustration has a substantial impact on it. In addition, creating a believable and tangible space and setting for the events has a lot to do with the type of color, hue, intensity, and light used in the illustration – elements that are used to create different types of atmospheres and motion in the illustration. Furthermore, the way the characters and different elements are located in the image – the overall composition of the illustration – defines what kind of movement takes place in the illustration. Happonen (2005: 75) observes that the intensifying and contrasting of colors, dynamic layouts, and varying perspectives between illustrations together create a strong impression of kinesis and motion in contemporary picturebooks. Although many illustrators like to consider the color palette for the entire picturebook while sketching and drawing the storyboard or book dummy, it is equally common to start thinking about the colors only when creating the actual illustrations, based on a black and white storyboard.

During Stage 2, the illustrator often also returns to exploring the interplay of words and images that she has previously contemplated while planning the picturebook. It is essential to note that because movement occurs both in time and space, the words and images in picturebooks often play their own roles in creating the combined illusion together. “Since pictures present only still images of motion, the impression of movement is created together with the flow of the words that the verbal story conveys”, Happonen (2005: 76) writes. Many picturebook illustrators acknowledge this interplay and take advantage of it consciously when creating their illustrations. However, most illustrators do this without even thinking about it, subconsciously, and often intuitively, “knowing” how to create movement in the image by combining both the visual and verbal dimensions of the picturebook.

**Emotional landscape, Stage 2**

*There is this moment when you realize that now it started moving – now I’ve got this under control. Good things are happening one after another, and somehow, I know how to express what I want. The feeling is good, and the recipient will sense it as well, no doubt about that. I do not need to check it with anybody – whether the feeling in the illustration is good or not.*

*Interviewee B*
During Stage 2, the illustrator surrounds herself with the story and focuses on making the characters and events in the story come alive. In order to do this, the illustrator is now challenged to release the analytical way of approaching the story and, instead, open herself for the possibility of connecting with her emotional guiding system, which can lead her to experience inspiration and enthusiasm more easily, as well as intuitive clarity.

Findings of the studies presented in the previous chapters show that during the second stage of the process – when the illustrator moves from planning the illustrations deeper into the actual image-making phase – it is likely for her to connect with genuine feelings of inspiration, enthusiasm, and joy more than during any other stage of the process. She now understands what kind of visual approach the story requires and what is needed to complete the illustrations. The picturebook, which is in the making, still has a chance to become “the perfect picturebook”. The air is filled with hopefulness and optimism – nothing is ruined yet, personal limitations as an artist are not revealed yet. This positive and ambitious atmosphere tends to directly impact the illustrations that are being created as well – the outcomes of the work that feels light, easy, and rewarding are typically considered as the most successful ones in the entire illustrations sequence.

Remaining in a constant, or even a particularly long, state of inspiration is an unrealistic hope for a picturebook illustrator, mainly because of the extremely long duration of the process and the large number of illustrations in a normal picturebook. However, moments of inspired action and “flow” seem to take place commonly after the planning phase is more or less done, and one or more of the illustrations are successfully completed.

As mentioned earlier, flow is defined by Csíkszentmihályi (1990: 4) as the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter – the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it. In everyday life, the things people are doing are often interrupted with doubts and questions such as “Why am I doing this? Should I be doing something else?” Most people regularly question the necessity of their actions again and again. However, in the state of flow, there is no need to wonder, because the action is driving the person forward (Csíkszentmihályi 1990: 89). During the state of flow, the ego tends to be forgotten, the “time flies”, the whole being of the creative professional is involved, and she is using her skills to the utmost (Csíkszentmihályi quoted by Geirland, 1996). The moments of flow are, in general, the most rewarding and enjoyable aspects of the picturebook illustration process for the illustrator. In the state of flow, illustration ideas are flowing more freely, and instead of criticizing them, the picturebook illustrator feels that she is more open to those ideas, which makes the process feel more experimental and expansive.

Often, the illustrator’s schedule for the book does not enable experiments or explorations with a new illustration technique or style. It takes a considerable amount of time to master a completely new image-making technique. This, the illustrator rarely has during the picturebook illustration process, due to the large number of images in a picturebook and the tight schedule set by the publishing house. This can lead to some frustration during the second stage of the process, although this stage is, in general,

---

62 Intuitive decision making, and how it is emphasized while creating the illustrations will be discussed further in Section 6.2.2.
filled with moments of excitement, inspiration, and flow.

Despite the ambitious plans that the illustrator might have for the picturebook, in this stage she starts to face the practical realities of the process, and therefore she is potentially compelled to complete the illustrations by repeating her old and risk-free illustration technique, while postponing her aspirations of artistic renewal.

Stage 3: Finalizing the picturebook

Technical aspects, Stage 3

Stage 3, during which the illustrator is finalizing the picturebook, often includes making the finishing touches to the already approved illustrations, as well as re-doing and re-evaluating a few – or many – of them. It is typical that after having completed almost all of the illustrations, some of them start feeling disconnected from the rest of the sequence. This stage of the process often also includes completing the most challenging illustrations of the picturebook – the ones that the illustrator has struggled with earlier in the process, or the ones she has postponed until now. She has to finally face this challenge – despite the emotional state she might be experiencing. As such, the illustrator’s professional expertise plays a vital role at this stage of the process. Part of being an illustrator is about managing time and keeping up with the schedule set up by the publishing house or the illustrator herself, to get the book published on time.

If the illustrator is in charge of designing the layout of the book, Stage 3 is usually the period during which she has to design the book using a page layout software. This stage should not be taken too lightly, even if the illustrations have already been completed by then. According to Happonen (2001a: 100), the placement of the text and illustrations relative to one another is essential not only in picturebooks – where they are tightly coupled – but in all types of illustrated books in general. Happonen grounds her argument on Genette’s concept of paratextuality (1997), which implies that all books are also physical objects and their materials – paper, covers, and illustrations, to name a few – have significant importance in the reading experience. Even the most extraordinary illustrations that succeed in considering the word and image interplay in terms of the content can be ruined with a clumsy layout or unsuitable typography, which does not visually combine the text and images into one entity. Due to these reasons, careful consideration must be given to all aspects of the layout of the picturebook pages. The layout and design of a picturebook should be considered as a visual bridge between these two worlds. As Salisbury (2004: 119) also points out, the excellent design extends to much more than the choice of typeface: “At every stage of the book’s development, one needs to think about how best the design can seamlessly integrate the various elements”. In other words, a picturebook has to be a single integrated organic entity, whose parts are in harmony with each other and as a whole (Shulevitz, 1985: 113; see also Rhedin, 2001: 272).

According to Doonan (1993: 85), the layout of a picturebook can either support or resist its dynamics – it always has a psychological effect on the reader/beholder. However, due to the tight schedules decided by the publishing house, the finished picturebook may not always meet the illustrator’s own expectations and aspirations in terms of its layout. This is why many picturebook illustrators take charge of the design of their
picturebooks as well. “Increasingly the design, typography, and illustration of a picturebook are inseparable, and often conceived by one person”, Salisbury (2004: 118) points out.

Before sending the picturebook for printing, the illustrator might be asked to choose the type and size of the paper to be used, and prepare the digitalized material for printing. Choosing the paper might sound like a minor detail in the entire process. However, as Salisbury (2004: 123) also points out, the choice of paper for the book will have a noticeable bearing on its “feel”. A well-designed book is an aesthetic experience and should be considered as such when considering different options for the various aspects and dimensions of the physical book. As Shulevitz (1985: 113) notes: “A well-conceived, well-executed book must be thought through to the smallest detail, from conception to production”.

**Emotional landscape, Stage 3**

*People have strange and mythical impressions that the artist works because she is too eager to stop because she is in that flow stage. That she just loses the track [of time] and works five days in a row without even realizing it. That is so not true! It is simply that you cannot sleep because you have the deadline. I do not believe that anybody wants to work like that, in an over-tired stage. It is very nice to go to sleep when you are at that stage.*

*Interviwee A*

During Stage 3, the picturebook illustrator is typically more connected with the feelings of frustration and agony than during any other stage of the process. The third stage of the process is typically considered the most painful one of all the stages – the phase when “the panic kicks in”. It is in this phase that the approaching deadlines start affecting the work, and the enjoyment and flow of the creative process is replaced with the pressure to finish all the illustrations, including the most challenging ones which the illustrator has been postponing until now.

At worst, the illustrator might feel a complete hopelessness and the need to “abandon” the nearly finished project. However, often these moments of agony can be just tiny glimpses of frustration, anger, or melancholy during the process, possibly only when dealing with the illustrations that the illustrator has had a hard time completing. Nevertheless, while finalizing the illustrations in the state of frustration and agony, the illustrator might find it challenging to leave a problematic image aside. Instead of focusing on other, possibly easier images, the illustrator might feel a compulsive need to complete the challenging image, no matter how much time it might take. This often leads to missed or delayed deadlines, which can create even more agony in this final stage of the project.

Although the moments of frustration, haste, and exhaustion at this stage are often connected with the pressure created by the approaching deadlines, there are also other aspects that can lead the illustrator to experience more agony. The extremely
rewarding states of flow\footnote{As discussed in the previous section, Stage 2: Creating the illustrations.} that the illustrator typically experiences when creating the illustrations can in fact cause extreme fatigue and hopelessness if prolonged. When the illustrator in the state of flow feels inspired by her work, she might have difficulty “releasing” the enthusiasm. Instead, she might cling on to the state of flow, hoping to maintain it as long as possible. This “prolonged flow state” might then lead to a manic way of working that can, in the long run, be an extremely tiring state to be in both physically, as well as mentally. The psychologist Kay Jamison (1993) notes in her study of artists and authors, how manic enthusiasm can often be followed by depression, where one evaluates her own work extremely critically.

As with Stage 2, the illustrator might be forced to compromise with herself artistically during the third stage of the process. In order to complete the illustrations on time, she often needs to let go of some of the most aspirational visions and dreams that she has had for the book. Accepting that the plan she made for a particular illustration – or for the entire sequence – is not working, can be emotionally extremely challenging for the illustrator. However, in order to keep her promises to the publishing house and the picturebook project team, the illustrator might need to complete the remaining illustrations “by force”. These “creative compromises” can be extremely frustrating for the illustrator and lead to unsatisfactory illustrations or the entire picturebook. Nevertheless, due to the large number of illustrations in a picturebook, it is typical that even the most satisfactory picturebook may include one or more illustrations that the illustrator would rather not look at when the book is published.

Although Stage 3 might leave the illustrator exhausted or depressed for some time after finishing the illustrations, these emotions are relatively easy for the illustrator to tolerate. Sometimes, the inevitable moments of frustration and agony might, in fact, lead the illustrator experiencing relief when completing the project.

\textit{Stage 4: Post-process}

\textit{Technical aspects, Stage 4}

Stage 4 – the post-process stage after the actual illustration process has been completed – is all about the emotions and issues that the illustrator typically deals with after the picturebook is published. During this stage, the illustrator has to face the end result – the published book – and the feelings that it generates in her. Although the illustrator feels relief after finishing the project, she might, once again, in this stage be challenged by negative emotions and feelings related to those illustrations she is not fully satisfied with – as noted in the previous section. These illustrations are often the ones completed in a hurry in order to keep up with publishing deadlines. Further to these “creative compromises”, the illustrator might also need to face the possible flaws in the printing quality. For example, the colors of illustrations in the picturebook might be entirely different from those in the original paintings (in the case of non-digital illustrations), or the paper used might be causing the illustrations to look strange. Due to such reasons, it is very common for illustrators to put their newly published book aside for some time before being able to accept it fully.
However, when the picturebook is published, the illustrator is generally hoping to receive at least some kind of feedback for her work. Typically, the illustrator might receive feedback from, for instance, the author of the book, the publishing editor or the other representatives of the publishing house or child readers. There are a number of different avenues through which the illustrator may receive such feedback directly. Some of these are: libraries, schools or kindergartens, book fairs; while presenting the newly published book, as well as exhibition audience, while exhibiting the original illustrations in a gallery. The professional recognition that the illustrator might receive after the book has been published usually comes in the form of book reviews in the newspapers or literature blogs, as well as, for instance, awards and nominations for different prizes.

During Stage 4, the attention also slowly moves from the newly released book to the next project. The illustrator might start asking herself questions such as: Where will the funding for that next book come from? Will the next book be the “perfect picturebook” which this last one was supposed to be?

**Emotional landscape, Stage 4**

> Often when the book is published, you think that now something is going to happen. Now it’s ready – now the baby is born. But instead, there is silence. Often in the fall. Often the books are published at the beginning of the fall, and then there is the silence.

*Interviewee F*

During the post-process stage, the illustrator often has to deal with ambivalent feelings of disappointment and relief. The pride that the illustrator might be experiencing for her newly published book usually alternates with feelings of embarrassment, shame, and emptiness. While such negative emotions during this stage are considered by illustrators as frustrating, they are almost inevitable and natural consequence of a highly intensive illustration process.

The tone, type, and quality of the feedback received for the published picturebook can have a significant effect on the post-process emotions of the illustrator and how she sees the value of her finished work after the creative process is completed. During this stage, the illustrator might need to face negative reviews of the book, or, in the worst-case scenario, face the “sound of silence” – as noted previously.

In general, picturebook illustrators are willing to receive more in-depth reviews, and more critical analysis of their work than they generally get, for example, in the form of book reviews in the newspapers. Often, the illustrator feels that her work is treated in a different, less analytical, and more superficial way than the text of the published picturebook. Reviews, in which the text is thoroughly analyzed, and the illustrations are largely set aside, with only one or two sentences of “empty praising” can make the illustrator feel as if her contributions to the picturebook were completely ignored.

The nominations and awards that the illustrator might receive for the picturebook can also greatly impact the way she experiences her work, and whether she feels that
she is respected professionally. Even when the newly published picturebook is not a big success financially, it might still receive a wider audience after being awarded a respected prize.

As mentioned previously, to be ignored entirely is emotionally more challenging for the illustrator than receiving a flimsy review or any other type of public reaction after the book is published. The “sound of silence” might lead the illustrator to a discouraging feeling that nobody was interested in the book after all, which, of course, is rarely true. This, the picturebook illustrators themselves also know very well, due to their visits to, for instance, libraries and kindergartens, where the lifespan of a picturebook is far longer than in bookstores.

This type of balancing act between rational and irrational thinking is typical during the post-process stage – navigating between the feedback, or the lack of it, of the finished picturebook while also maintaining one’s own personal opinion about the book. The pride that the picturebook illustrator often feels for her newly published book is one of the central emotions that she feels during the post-process stage. The ambivalence that is characteristic for Stage 4 is usually created by the contradicting feelings between this personal opinion of the book and the reactions of the external environment. Findings of the study presented in the previous chapter show that even after learning how to respect themselves and their own work fully – professional self-esteem is generally learned through years of experience – many of the interviewees still struggle with the lack of respect and feedback, which they feel they encounter right after the publication of their picturebooks.

*Alternating between intuitive and analytical thinking*

The Picturebook Illustration Model presents the alternating intuitive and analytical thinking that takes throughout the illustration process and is emphasized during different stages of the process.

According to Raami (2015: 21), while all humans continuously use intuition in their everyday life, the intuitive processing is usually subliminal and random. This emotional “everyday intuition” that people use in their daily lives differs from the “expert intuition” in many ways. Typically, the intuition of an expert is based on different information structures and functions (Raami, 2016: 83, 2015; see also Glöckner and Witterman, 2010). However, as opposed to the everyday intuition, the intuition of an expert is based on long and focused learning and experience in the field. Raami proposes that: “A huge amount of information has accumulated in the mind of an expert, which intuitively combines whenever needed”. According to her, intelligent intuition is an integral part of expert knowledge (Raami, 2016: 83). During stages 1 and 3 of the Picturebook Illustration Model, the intuitive and analytical thinking typically alternate in the illustrator’s work, whereas during Stage 2, the intuitive decision making is often emphasized.

According to Raami (2015: 10), intuition is an integral part of human thinking and, together with reasoning faculties, forms the foundation of all thinking (see also Kahneman and Tversky, 1982; Kahneman, 2011). Although the illustrator takes advantage of her intuition throughout the entire picturebook illustration process, her intuitive
knowledge is strongly intertwined with conscious reasoning and analytical decision-making, especially when planning and finalizing the picturebook. Similarly, when creating the illustrations, intuition is also one of the primary means of helping the illustrator to proceed with her work.

For a picturebook illustrator, intuition is a way to receive “inner guidance” during the illustration process. Intuitive knowledge leads the illustrator to proceed one way or another in her work and lets her know when a sketch or an illustration is satisfactorily completed. Intuition also helps the illustrator to know in advance whether some of her ideas will work or not. For her, intuition is “knowing” – often also physically feeling – whether something in an illustration – be it the color, hue, atmosphere, light, composition, characters, or movement – is working or not. “Sometimes I think all strong feelings start in the tummy; for me, they do at any rate”, as the author and illustrator Tove Jansson (2013: 45) has noted.

Raami (2015: 197) argues that humans can gain clarity from ambiguity through active and intentional intuitive processing, and not only reach beyond their domain expertise but also achieve exceptional outcomes, and surpass the limits of the mind. Intuition helps many illustrators move towards the “right” direction instead of the “wrong” one, defined by the impulses and emotional responses in their minds and bodies, and achieve results that exceed even their own expectations.

The role of the target audience

The Picturebook Illustration Model does not include the aspect of a target audience, or a representative focus group. This decision was made on the grounds that in terms of the target audience, the findings of my studies about Finnish picturebook illustrators are, in fact, rather ambiguous and ambivalent. As mentioned, because in Finland picturebooks for adults does not really exist as a category, Finnish picturebook illustrators tend to think of children as their primary target audience, and consider understanding a child reader as an important part of their work. However, the material also suggests that the conscious consideration of children seem to mainly take place outside the actual illustration process. In fact, while in the process of creation, illustrators prefer not to consciously think much about the possible target audience.

Maurice Sendak (quoted by Stoler, 2012) has said: “I don’t write books for children. I write them for myself. Children happen to like them”. Similarly, many of the illustrators that were interviewed for this thesis, mentioned creating illustrations simply for “themselves” – even when making a picturebook aimed at children. By focusing entirely on the process of creation, illustrators are, first and foremost, interested in making as good picturebook illustrations as possible – as amusing, enchanting, captivating, comforting, dynamic, emotional, exciting, futuristic, intense, mysterious and whimsical picturebooks illustrations as possible. Shaun Tan (2002b) mentions that one of the questions he is most frequently asked is, “Who do you write and illustrate for?”, to which he responds by noting that: “It’s a little difficult to answer, as it’s not something I think about much when I’m working alone in a small studio, quite removed from any audience at all. In fact, few things could be more distracting in trying to express an idea well enough to myself than having to consider how readers might react”.

204
When the picturebook illustrator does, however, consider a child reader, a relatively common approach is to do this by thinking about “the inner child”, instead of the target audience in general. Connecting with the hopes and desires of “the child within” and aiming to amuse, comfort, or challenge that child seems to be a common strategy for many picturebook illustrators to approach their work that is targeted for children specifically. Tove Jansson (2017: 205) notes that sometimes, if not always, the children’s book authors are simply considering “what they liked themselves when they were children”. Jansson (2017: 200) also points out: “We can assume that she [a children’s book author] writes because of her own childishness – either the one she has partly lost, or the one that does not fit into the society of grown-ups”.

As an alternative to “the inner child”, many picturebook illustrators like to create their images for a particular child they have in mind, instead of an abstract group of children. This child in mind, is usually the illustrator’s own or someone else’s child whom she knows personally. Indeed, for most illustrators thinking about the possible expectations of, for example, four-year-old children would feel pointless – not to mention difficult. Nevertheless, many picturebook illustrators consider it important to maintain a contact with today’s children, by, for instance, visiting kindergartens or schools regularly, in order to understand their primary reader, and prevent the risk of becoming “over-nostalgic”. This approach is also suggested by, for example, Wall (1991: 20): “Writers who set out to write for children, must look further than themselves, for they are separated from children, even from the children they once were, by a substantial barrier of age and experience, a barrier which, though it may in some ways be surmounted or traversed, cannot be removed”. According to Lassén-Seger (2006: 17), previously, for example, radical constructivists have revealed a lack of faith in author’s abilities to depict anything of which they currently have no direct experience. In fact, as Lassén-Seger points out, “grown-up authors, who were once children themselves, are viewed as incapable of creating plausible child characters and tenable representations of childhood”. However, as Lassén-Seger (2006: 17) further notes – interpreting the literary scholar Boel Westin (1997) – if that was the case and the relationships between the author, the text and the reader were to be this strictly fixed, then “women authors could not write about men, or men authors about women. In short, we are back in the narrow-minded frame of mind generated by identity politics”.

Understanding one’s main audience is an essential requirement for a picturebook illustrator. Knowing exactly what type of response is required of the audience, and whether or not they will “buy” the message being communicated, is one of the most fundamental skills for the illustrator (Male, 2017: 22). Similarly, as Wall (1991: 20) argues: “Whatever some of them have said to the contrary, writers for children must serve two masters, themselves and their chosen audience”. Interestingly enough, understanding the target audience and taking the child reader into account seems to be part of the picturebook illustrators’ professional expertise, which can, so to speak, be “turned on or off” in order to avoid these aspects from interfering the vulnerable creative process as such. Illustrator Quentin Blake (quoted by Marcus, 2012: 23) explains: “I think it’s possible to draw for an audience and to draw for oneself. That’s one of the things that has always interested me about making children’s books. You’re thinking about the young audience while also thinking about the drawing you want to do”.

Furthermore, it is possible, that the ambivalence presented here, in terms of a target
audience, mirrors the complicated aspects when it comes to publishing picturebooks. In one way, the picturebooks are expected to reach their primary target audience – the children – while also attracting the people who buy, market and publish those books. As Wall (1991: 13) points out: “If books are to be published, marketed and bought, adults must be attracted, persuaded, and convinced first”.

Finally, it should be noted that – as mentioned before – in this thesis picturebook is not considered to be synonymous with children’s literature. Instead, I firmly believe that picturebooks are ideal for reading together across generations. As Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 21) point out, “many picturebooks are clearly designed for both small children and sophisticated adults, communicating to the dual audience at a variety of levels”. Similarly, Lassén-Seger (2014: 115) points out that picturebooks are no longer aimed by default at very young children. “Nowadays we have picture books for a broad age range. Not just in that a picture book can be all-ages literature that appeals to all generations, but also in that a picture book can be published specifically with a teenage or young adult public in mind”, Lassén-Seger (2014: 115) writes. Surprisingly, however, the somewhat conventional and old-fashioned idea of a picturebook as something that is aimed either at children or adults, was not something that the interviewed illustrators were actively arguing against. As mentioned before, the theme of picturebooks’ ability to reach multiple audiences simultaneously was not strongly represented in the studies presented in this thesis, but rather a sidenote in some of the interviews. Therefore, it is not possible to draw reliable conclusions based on these studies, of how the illustrators generally feel about the matter of, for example, double or dual audiences (see, e.g., Wall, 1991; Nikolajeva and Scott, 1991), and how these aspects could be taken into account in the picturebook illustration process. As such, this could be a matter for further research.

In summary, the target audience does play a part in the picturebook illustration process, but often this is subconscious and “quiet” knowledge, instead of something that would limit the professional identity of a picturebook illustrator or her creative outcomes. Tan (2002b), for example, explains that his books are meant for “anyone who is curious, who enjoys strangeness, mystery and oddity, who likes asking questions and using their imagination, and is prepared to devote time and attention accordingly”. Nevertheless, picturebook illustrators are, in general, well aware of the fact that their illustrations and books are created for others to look at. Once a picturebook is completed, it is highly important for a picturebook illustrator that the outcome of her creative process – the published picturebook as an artifact – will be experienced and explored in the hands of other people, regardless of their age.

---

64 See Chapter 5, The creative process: a professional perspective.

65 See Section 5.2.1, Planning the picturebook: Target audience.
6.3 Creative resources

One of the main objectives of this thesis has been to increase understanding of the picturebook illustration process, in order to reveal those factors that have an impact on the quality of this process. Due to the long duration of the picturebook illustration process and the large number of images in a typical picturebook, it is a common characteristic of the process to involve a wide range of different emotional states, often at their extremes.

Therefore, it is typical for the picturebook illustrator to experience moments of extreme joy, as well as extreme agony during her illustration process, regardless of the project. However, the varying levels of how exciting, pleasant, enjoyable, wearing, distressing or intense the picturebook illustration process is, tends to differ from project to project. The picturebook illustration process for some projects may be lighter, more optimistic and more fun, filled with many moments of flow experiences, whereas others might feel extremely draining and challenging, and include frequent creative blocks. According to Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 149-150), this type of movement from one extreme to another is typical for creative personalities, as they tend to contain contradictory extremes. “If I had to express in one word what makes their [creative people’s] personalities different from others, it would be [their] complexity”, Csíkszentmihályi argues. This complexity means that creative personalities show tendencies of thought and action that in most people are further apart. “Like the color white that includes all the hues in the spectrum, they [creative people] tend to bring together the entire range of human possibilities within themselves”, Csíkszentmihályi further notes. The complexity that Csíkszentmihályi mentions – the ability to express the full range of traits – corroborates with the findings of my studies about Finnish picturebook illustrators.

The factors that affect the way the individual illustrator experiences the creative process can be related to multiple things, which can vary between different illustrators enormously. These factors can be either internal, impacting the process from inside – more to do with, for example, self-esteem or resilience – or external, impacting the process from the outside – for example, the collaboration with the author or possible financial concerns. Typical external factors affecting the picturebook illustration process may include:

1. The publishing environment.
2. The everyday life of the illustrator – for instance, her family situation.
3. Collaboration with the picturebook project team – for instance, with the author.
4. Financial situation and reliability of regular income.
5. Schedule of the picturebook project and the flexibility of the deadlines.
6. The overall amount of work and the number of overlapping projects.
7. Appreciation by others and the quality of feedback received from them.
8. The story itself, and how inspiring the illustrator finds it.
Typical *internal factors* affecting the picturebook illustration process may include:

1. Professional self-esteem, in terms of how the illustrator sees her own artistic value as an illustrator.
2. The ability, stamina, and resilience to accept creative blocks.
3. The ability to focus on the current picturebook project rather than those in the past or the future.
4. The ability to focus on the illustration process rather than the output.

Based on the findings of the studies presented in the previous chapters, I would postulate that the combination of these internal and external factors collectively defines the amount of *creative resources* available to the illustrator during the picturebook illustration process. If the level of creative resources during the process is high, then it is more likely that the illustrator will experience more positive emotions such as joy during the process. On the other hand, if the level of creative resources during the process is very low, the illustrator is more likely to experience negative emotions such as sadness, pessimism, melancholy or depression.

Catmull (2014: 9) argues: “There are many blocks to creativity, but there are active steps we can take to protect the creative process”. In the following section, I draw together the findings of the studies presented earlier from the perspective of the creative resources, and use this to define and discuss the creative process in more general terms, as well as the different elements of creative well-being.

### 6.4 Creative well-being

*If you dream about a future as a professional author, remember that what awaits you is most certainly a wearing youth, restless manhood, and insecure senescence.*

*Mika Waltari (1935: 14)*

The author Mika Waltari paints a rather pessimistic picture of the life of the creative professional. Although Waltari was only 29 years old when he wrote the quote above, it is an incisive portrayal of his later years as well. For most of his life, Waltari balanced between alcoholism, depression and extremely intense writing periods (Lindstedt and Vahtokari, 2007). Waltari’s story is only one of the many in the long list of creatives who have ended up suffering in their creative practice – before, during or after the creative process takes place. Sylvia Plath, who died by suicide at the age of 31, suffered from severe mood disorder for much of her life. Her death was preceded by a period
when she worked late into the night and got up early in the morning, writing poetry intensely (Andreasen, 2008: 251). Oscar Wilde called the artistic existence as “one long, lovely suicide” (Gilbert, 2015: 205). Moreover, Maurice Sendak (2011) talks about the creative process while illustrating his picturebook Outside over there (1981): “It also brought a nervous breakdown. Of monumental force. It slapped me to the ground”. Furthermore, for example, Georgia O’Keeffe and Emily Carr suffered from periodic depressive illness (Udall, 2006: 17), while Virginia Woolf’s symptoms fulfill the manic-depressive paradigm (Caramagno, 1996: 2). The list of struggling artists is so long, in fact, that it has become almost normal to see pain as an essential ingredient for creativity.

The myth of a tortured artist can lead to the expectation that having a creative career should come at a high price. According to Csíkszentmihályi (2016: 193), it can also create a special aura, a frailty, around the artist to say that she lives “so close to the edge”. Furthermore, Csíkszentmihályi argues that while there have been many unfortunate cases of, for instance, writers and painters, who have been melancholic and depressed, and even taken their own lives, this does not necessarily go with the territory. “I think those people would have been depressed, or alcoholic, or suicidal, even if they weren’t writing. I just think it’s their characterological makeup”, Csíkszentmihályi (2016: 193) presents, and continues, “I think it’s a myth, by and large”. Similarly, Uusikylä (1999: 65) suggests that creative people are not creative because of their mental illnesses, but in spite of them.

Jamison (1993: 2-3) discusses how the anguished and volatile intensity associated with the artistic temperament was once thought to be a symptom of genius to artists, writers, and musicians. In fact, up until the early 20th century, the word “genius” was used to refer to individuals who made creative contributions. As such, the use of the term “creativity” in relation to such individuals is relatively modern (Andreasen, 2008: 252).

Andreasen (2008: 251-252) notes that the anecdotal accounts of the lives of creative people invite an interesting scientific pursuit examining the association between creativity and mood disorders. As discussed earlier, identifying a group of people for whom written histories are available, and using this information as the basis for study has been one of the common methods on studying creative personalities (see, e.g., Ellis, 1926; Juda, 1949; Goertzel et al., 1978; Jamison, 1993; Post, 1994; Ludwig, 1994; Schildkraut et al., 1994; Caramagno, 1996; Beveridge and Yorston, 1999). However, although using written historical biographical and autobiographical material provides a sample of convenience, a problem is that the information may not be complete or accurate. Therefore, as Andreasen (2008: 252) suggests, the real test of whether there is such association between creativity and mood disorders, can only be determined by rigorous empirical studies.

Jamison’s (1989, 1993) work – based on her study as a clinical psychologist and researcher in mood disorders – reveals that often the artists that are experiencing exalted highs and despairing lows are engaged in a struggle with clinically identifiable manic-depressive illness. Furthermore, many other often-cited studies show that creative personalities have unusually high rates of psychopathology and addiction (see, e.g., Karlsson, 1970; Andreasen, 1977, 1987, 2008; Goertzel et al., 1978; Richards et al., 1988;

---

66 See Section 3.1.2. Interviewing professional illustrators.
Ludwig, 1995, 1998; Sass, 1998; Kinney et al., 2001; Reddy et al., 2018). In the light of previous academic research, the myth of a struggling artist does not, in fact, exist for no reason. The struggle that the creative professionals experience, seems to be more typical to people working in the creative fields than to the general population.

Some of the existing research show conflicting results with the studies listed above, and criticize them on the grounds that they involve small, highly specialized samples with weak and inconsistent methodologies and a strong dependence on subjective and anecdotal accounts. For example, Andreasen (2008: 254) criticizes the overall literature supporting the association between creativity and mood disorders: “A great deal of the work reported suffers from inadequate definitions of both creativity and mood disorders, reliance on anecdotal and autobiographical or biographic sources, and a lack of control groups”. Similarly, the psychiatrists Allan Beveridge and Graeme Yorston (1999) suggest that the idea of an association between creativity and mental ill-health has mainly been upheld by occasional anecdotes or biographies of great artists who struggled with depression or alcohol abuse. Furthermore, Andreasen (2008: 254) points out the relatively narrow range of types of creativity studied, discussing the obvious limitation of many of the studies, that they largely focus on writers (see, e.g., Andreasen, 1987; Jamison, 1989; Ludwig, 1994; Kyaga et al., 2012). An extensive report conducted in 2012 by Simon Kyaga, Mikael Landén, Marcus Boman, Christina M. Hultman, Niklas Långström and Paul Lichtenstein – based on a 40-year study of roughly 1.2 million Swedish people – found that with the exception of bipolar disorder, those in creative professions were not more likely to suffer from psychiatric disorders. Furthermore, while recent studies by Jamison (1993: 5) strongly suggest that writers and artists show a vastly disproportionate rate of manic-depressive or depressive illness compared with the general population, nevertheless, according these same studies, not all – not even most – writers and artists suffer from major mood disorders. “Most of the controversy surrounding the ‘mad genius’ versus ‘healthy artist’ debate, arises from confusion about what is actually meant by ‘madness’, as well as from a fundamental lack of understanding about the nature of manic-depressive illness” Jamison (1993: 136) writes.

One possible reason for the contradictory results in such studies is that there is a considerable amount of variation in how the “creative professional” is defined in these studies. For instance, in Kyaga’s research “creative professions” were defined as both scientific and artistic occupations, and only professional authors were observed in more detail. As this study shows, professional authors were in fact specifically associated with increased likelihood of schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, unipolar depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and suicide (Kyaga et al., 2012). These findings corroborate with the psychologist Arnold M. Ludwig’s findings of increased suicide rates among artists, especially poets (Ludwig, 1995)67. As Andreasen (2008: 254) also notes, the high rate of suicide and suicide attempts among creative people is, in fact, a consistent theme in much of the creativity research conducted.

While the existing studies vary slightly in the lifetime prevalence rates reported, and while the bias in terms of authors versus other types of creative professionals is

67 Ludwig looked at more than 1000 prominent people in eight creative arts and 10 other professions. He concluded that psychiatric problems were much more common among the artists. Ludwig found that roughly 20 percent of eminent poets had committed suicide, compared with a suicide rate of 4 percent for all the professions he examined. The suicide rate in the general United States population is about 1 percent, as Ludwig notes.
indisputable, most results run in the same direction – revealing a strong association between creativity and mood disorders (Andreasen, 2008: 253-254). Ludwig (1995: 4) writes: “My findings show consistently and clearly that members of the artistic professions or creative arts as a whole – architecture, design, art, composing, musical entertainment, theatre, and all forms of writing – suffer from more types of mental difficulties and do so over longer periods of their lives than members of the other professions”.

In this thesis, I have used the term “creative professional” to refer specifically to artists, designers and other people working in the creative industries. Scientific occupations were not included in this scope. In this context a research conducted in 2018 by the well-being charity Inspire, together with Ulster University, provides a relevant benchmark. The study found that people who defined themselves as working in the creative sector, including also, for example, artists, performers and writers – were almost three times more likely to suffer from mental health problems than the general population (Shorter et al., 2018: 5). The most common diagnosed disorders were anxiety (36%) and depression (32%). 60 percent of the creative professionals who took part in the study spoke of having suicidal thoughts, 37% had planned to commit suicide and 16% had made a suicide attempt. Specific characteristics of the work environment in creative sector were reported as contributing to the likelihood of developing mental health problems. Examples of these included pressure to reach high standards (both externally and internally), irregular work (including contracts, financial insecurity, irregular hours, and working outside the creative sector), the perceived lack of value placed on their work and the inadequate financial rewards for the work (Shorter et al., 2018: 5).

Creative well-being can also be considered in the light of the recent studies and surveys made on work-related stress and burnout – themes that occurred in the findings of the studies reported in this thesis as well. Burnout has been described as a chronic stress syndrome which develops gradually as a consequence of prolonged stress (Ahola, Honkonen, Isometsä, Kalimo, Nykyri, Koskinen, Aromaa and Lönnqvist, 2006). Burnout is also characterized by high levels of exhaustion, negative attitudes toward work – for instance, cynicism – and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001). Work-related burnout is most likely when job demands are high and job resources are limited (see, e.g., Lee and Ashforth, 1996; Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Hakanen, Peeters, and Perhoniemi, 2011). As the study by Shorter et al. (2018: 49) shows, increased job demands, and limited job resources are typical reasons behind the decreased well-being of people working in the creative sector. Similarly, the results of the interviews discussed in the previous chapter have demonstrated that the Finnish picturebook illustrators typically demand exquisite and extensive results from themselves while working within extremely tight schedules often set by publishing houses, and without adequate financial rewards.

A recent survey on working conditions in Finland conducted in 2019 by the Statistics Finland shows that Finnish women in particular have an increased risk of feeling burned out in their work (Sutela, Pärnänen and Keyriläinen, 2019). According to this survey, the risk of severe work-related burnout among Finnish women has more than doubled in the last five years, with almost one in five women (19%) considering it a serious risk – whereas in 2013 only 8% of women considered burnout as a risk. According to this survey, the risk of work-related burnout is the same for all women aged
While the risk of burnout among Finnish men has also almost doubled since 2013, yet it is still considerably less than that of women (11%). Similarly, while psychiatric symptoms have slowly increased in the 2000s, in the last five years women’s symptoms have increased more dramatically. The study shows that, for example, half of the women reported feeling tired or numb on a weekly basis, and third of the women were experiencing irritation, anxiety and distress (Sutela et al., 2019). The increasing prevalence of psychiatric symptoms, especially among Finnish women, is also evident in the statistics of Kela, the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Pölkki, 2020).

Despite some of their contradictory findings, existing research acknowledge the problematic nature of creative personalities and show empirical evidence for a relationship between creativity and mood disorders. Experiencing burnout, depression, mania or hypomania (mild mania), as well as distress and anxiety seem to be higher among creative professionals than the rest of the population. Yet, there has been surprisingly little discussion of creative professionals who have lost their work motivation and creative spark. According to Jamison (1993: 3), those in the best position to link psychiatry and arts – scholars of creativity – are often focused on the relationship between creativity and “schizophrenia” (which, according to Jamison, is often misdiagnosed as manic-depressive illness), or diffuse notions of psychopathology and leave largely unexamined the specific role of mood disorders in creative work. In fact, a critical conversation that would discuss this phenomenon is often replaced with the variations of the following idea about creative personalities: “what unites creative people is that they all love what they do” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996: 240, see also Sternberg and Kaufman, 2010: 480; Keong, 2013: 2; Järvilehto and Järvilehto, 2019: 105).

While the myth of a tortured artist is dangerous, the myth of an artist whose creativity is dependent on the pure love towards her craft can be even more dangerous, and should therefore be approached critically – especially from the perspective of creative professionals. Most of the creative professionals who took part in the study conducted by Shorter et al. (2018: 5) said that they felt they could not admit having a mental health, alcohol, or drug problem – those who were concerned about disclosure, cited workplace factors, personal factors, service provision and stigma as reasons for not revealing that they had a problem. Despite these valid concerns, ignoring the problem is likely to decrease the well-being of people working in the creative fields, by creating an atmosphere that does not support open conversation. In the worst-case scenario, creative professionals end up hiding their struggles and distress, to prevent themselves from revealing that they might have lost the single most crucial skill needed for their work – their creativity.

Many creative individuals end up disliking what they do, or struggle to fully enjoy the creative process. The medium or craft that they used to love does not provide them with enjoyment anymore. I do agree with Csíkszentmihályi, in the sense that experiencing unbounded love towards their medium or craft is what led the creative professionals into artistic or creative fields in the first place, and can help them navigate through the challenges of their professions more easily. However, as the studies presented in this thesis have shown, it is typical for a person working in a creative field for a long time to experience a broad spectrum of different types of emotions – including very challenging ones – without their creativity disappearing completely. I propose here, that even if the creativity of these professionals may be suppressed from time to
Furthermore, creativity in itself does not increase or diminish in a person. What increases or decreases, however, are the creative resources. The amount of these resources has a direct impact on how much the creative professional is able to use her creativity which, as noted, is always there waiting to be used and explored. Therefore, rather than trying to be more creative, the creative professional should focus on removing the obstacles that are preventing her from using and exploring her creative resources – her creative potential – to the fullest. Experiencing increased creativity is an automatic and immediate side-effect and the result of increased creative resources. This, I propose, is at the core of creative well-being.

6.4.1 The Cycle of Creative Resources

In this section I will present and discuss the second model, called the Cycle of Creative Resources, resulting from the findings of the studies presented earlier. Formulating the Picturebook Illustration Model led me to recognize and define the role of creative resources in the illustration process, as discussed above. The Cycle of Creative Resources is a visual model (see Figure 6.2) which represents the different levels of creative resources available to the illustrator during the creative process. While this model is discussed here in relation to the picturebook illustration process in particular, I propose that it could be applicable to other creative processes as well.

The model consists of six states, each representing different levels of creative resources available. Depending on where the creative professional is in the cycle, she experiences the creative process and her own creative profession as being fulfilling or draining to a varying degree. The six states of the Cycle of Creative Resources are:

1. Creative flow
2. Creative stability
3. Creative anxiety
4. Creative melancholy
5. Creative depression
6. Creative mania

Each of the states is linked with one another and can lead to one another. The closer the creative professional is to the state of creative depression, the lower the level of her creative resources will be. The closer the creative professional is to the state of creative flow, the higher the level of her creative resources will be. The creative mania is the state which borders these two extremes. While the creative mania state has an extremely high level of creative resources, in this state the creativity is already going in “overdrive”, and the resources are close to depleting completely.

According to Jamison (1993: 3), the idea of using formal psychiatric diagnostic criteria in the arts has been, in general – and almost by definition – “anathema”. However, for example, Andreasen (1987), Jamison (1989) and Ludwig (1994) investigate rates of
mood disorders in creative individuals using personal interviews of the subjects and a diagnosis that reflects modern concepts of depression and bipolar disorder (Andreasen, 2008: 253). Andreasen (2008: 252) suggests that if a researcher attempts to examine the relationship between creativity and psychopathology, she should use a standard and widely accepted set of definitions of mental illness, and “to assess its presence or absence using a structured interview of some type”. Surprisingly enough, most of the existing literature on creativity and mental illness has not used this approach, and as Andreasen (2008: 242) points out, it is nearly impossible to map the diagnoses of early investigators – such as the one’s done by the psychologist and neurologist Adele Juda (1949) – into modern terminology, and therefore to interpret the results.

My decision to use standard vocabulary of psychology and psychiatry in the Cycle of Creative Resources was done, first and foremost, on the grounds of the aforementioned approach suggested by Andreasen (2008). Secondly, I decided to adapt the chosen terminology, because terms like anxiety, depression and mania are widely accepted definitions, with established meanings that are understood in much similar ways among people who are not medical specialists in the area of psychiatric health – for example, creative professionals – and among those with an expertise on mental and behavioral disorders. Thirdly, the terminology used in the creative cycle correlates directly with the words identified from the process analysis, as well as with the terms used by the interviewed illustrators. As the studies presented in this thesis show, words like depression, melancholy, anxiety, mania, burnout and flow were commonly and frequently used to describe the different emotional aspects of the creative process.

Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing, that the states in the cycle should always be referred with the prefix “creative”. As I will discuss in the following sections, the state of creative depression, for instance, differs from clinical depression in many ways, just as creative mania has a very specific nature which is different from, for example, the manic phases of a bipolar disorder. Furthermore, there are factors that distinguish the state of creative flow from the psychological concept of “flow” recognized and formulated by Csíkszentmihályi (1990). Although all six states in the Cycle of Creative Resources are connected with various existing phenomena and mental and emotional states and disorders, they should not be considered as psychological classifications, but as creative states integrally connected with the creative process.

In the following sections I will take a closer look at each state of this model, illustrating them with quotes from the process analysis and the professional interviews discussed earlier.

---


69 See Chapter 4. The creative process – a personal perspective.

70 See Chapter 5. The creative process – a professional perspective.
Figure 6.2: The Cycle of Creative Resources\textsuperscript{71}.

\textsuperscript{71} For the Finnish version of the model, see Appendix 2.
Creative mania

I have put somewhere there in my archives – as a frightening example – this one illustration. In the morning, there were about seventeen identical illustrations at my desk, with no development to be seen.

Interviewee F

The myth of artists and other creatives as overly passionate people on the edge of insanity most likely originates from the anecdotal accounts of some well-known artists and designers (see the studies by, e.g., Ellis, 1926; Juda, 1949; Jamison, 1993; Post,
1994; Ludwig, 1994; Schildkraut et al., 1994; Caramagno, 1996), and their experiences in the most exhilarating – but also the most draining – state of the creative cycle, the creative mania.

The creative mania is an overactive and extremely ambivalent state in its nature. In the state of creative mania, a person does not necessarily recognize herself going into overdrive, but instead feels that she has reached the ultimate and ideal level of creativity – a state in which the creative work proceeds incredibly easily, and creative outputs follow one another. However, there is a downside to this effectiveness. It is possible that in the state of creative mania the rewarding and inspiring flow experiences turn into a “prolonged flow”, if the creative professional is unable to stop working excessively. As already discussed, while presenting the Picturebook Illustration Model, a prolonged state of flow can be an extremely tiring both physically, as well as mentally. When the creative professional is working in an ecstatic drive – almost without any sense of time or space anymore – she does not necessarily realize that she is not taking care of her inner creative resources either. In other words, the creative professional has forgotten the importance of nurturing her creative well-being – of “filling her creative pond” while working. Instead, she is doing the opposite, by emptying her pond and overfishing her creative resources completely.

During the state of creative mania, the focus is typically completely on the process of creation and the present moment. However, in the deepest states of creative mania, when the creative professional is already drifting towards creative burnout, the focus starts shifting from the present towards the fears located in the past and future. As discussed before, while the state of creative mania can feel extremely rewarding at first, it can quickly turn out to be unhealthy both physically and mentally. Because of that, it is not a recommended state in the creative cycle, despite the availability of extremely high level of creative resources.

Many creative professionals in the state of creative mania can rarely see the risk in their behavior because they enjoy, and attempt to preserve, the almost limitless feeling of flow and productivity. However, while taking impetuous and impulsive creative risks, the creative professional in this state is very close to drifting into creative depression due to burnout. The increased tendency to ignore self-care – for example, not sleeping, eating, or looking after personal hygiene – typically leads the creative professional deeper into the state of creative mania. The deeper the creative professional drifts, the more tired she feels. And the more tired she feels, the more pessimistic she becomes. At the deepest, burned-out state of creative mania, the creative professional tends to view and review her accomplishments extremely critically. The euphoria is then replaced with unrealistic and unjust self-criticism, and one’s whole profession and all the outcomes of one’s work start to seem empty, flimsy, and meaningless. These most extreme moments of creative mania might include outbursts of anger or frustration, often to the point of rage that is disproportionate to the situation at hand.

The state of creative mania is not just dangerous for people who have previously had difficulties with their mental health, or have a tendency to suffer, for instance, from depression, melancholy or bipolar disorder. Due to the increased risk of creative burnouts in the state of creative mania, even a creative person with a healthy, active and balanced mind might easily drift from the state of creative mania into the paralyzed,

---

72 See Section 6.2.2. The Picturebook Illustration Model, Stage 3: Finalizing the picturebook.
depressive state of creativity in the Cycle of Creative Resources – the *creative depression*.
Experiencing the state of creative mania does not always mean that the person would be inevitably going towards a lower level of creative resources or creative depression. In fact, if regarded as inspirational spurts rather than an ideal and desirable state, the creative mania can help the creative professional to go “all in” with her creativity and achieve remarkable results. Yet, it is a mistake to think that the creative mania would be a requirement for achieving such results. A person’s ability to use her creativity can be extremely high while still staying in one of the healthier states of the creative cycle – either the state of *creative flow* or the state of *creative stability*. 
This kind of flow is something that you are always kind of chasing. And you do register it in your mind that here we go, and realize that this is something that you were aiming for right from the beginning.

 Interviewee D

In the state of creative flow, creating feels extremely enjoyable. Instead of feeling the pressure of constantly doing more – as in the state of creative mania – the creative professional feels happiness and gratitude for the things she accomplishes. She knows how to fill her creative pond with different types of experiences which are not necessarily related to her work. She nurtures her creativity, and her creativity nurtures her back. The state of creative flow is, in general, very active and productive, often in a
highly optimistic way.

People in the state of creative flow are easily and frequently inspired. Experiences of flow – moments when the creative professional is “completely involved in an activity for its own sake” (Csíkszentmihályi quoted by Geirland, 1996) – are common in the state of creative flow. A person in this state is not generally afraid of losing her creativity, which helps her to take creative risks more easily. The process of creativity is approached through playful curiosity and awe, instead of caution and risk-aversion. The atmosphere of creativity is expansive, and the creative professional feels unrestricted and almost invincible, while effortlessly pushing her own limits and getting out of her creative comfort zone. In the state of creative flow, the focus is entirely on the process of creation and the present moment.

Although the state of creative flow might seem like the most desirable state in the cycle, this creative level is not usually a permanent state for the creative professional. Due to the nature of the creative process, most creative professionals are inevitably faced with different types of challenges. Therefore, the hope to achieve the state of creative flow permanently is relatively unrealistic. Furthermore, if the creative professional tries to force herself to stay creative, creativity is not likely to flow freely anymore. Alternatively, the rewarding experience of flow might turn into an obsessive and all-consuming “prolonged flow state”. If this happens, then creativity has turned into a must, which is characteristic of the state of creative mania, as discussed earlier. Rather than seeing the state of creative flow as a permanent state, it is advisable to approach it as a desirable, yet uncontrolled, state. Therefore, if the creative process naturally allows it, it will lead the creative professional to the state of creative flow and keep her there, until something happens which in turn moves the creative professional towards a more balanced state in the Cycle of Creative Resources – the creative stability – or some other state in the creative cycle.
You get so many ideas about how things should be done. You know that you need to change something or remove some of the illustrations. You realize why you were not excited about something before – you realize that it was really poor before. But it won’t stop you from doing it all over again. That is how it’s like – a bit like a child playing, at its best.

Interviewee C
As with the states of creative flow and creative mania, the state of creative stability is also one of the active states of creativity. The creative professional in the state of creative stability feels inspired and tends to be action-focused and process-oriented in her work. While being firmly anchored to the present, she is capable of taking creative risks – even if not continuously, as in the state of creative flow. Occasional creative blocks occur in the process regularly, but the creative professional accepts them as a natural part of the process. The understanding of the nature of the creative process is strong and grounded in the earlier experiences and proven strategies on how to deal with creative blocks. The focus during this state is usually on the process of creation and the present moment.

In this state, various things can trigger occasional creative blocks – for example, external or internal challenges, technical challenges, disappointing reviews, or careless feedback given by others. Usually, in the state of creative stability, the recurring blocks tend to be relatively mild in their nature and may be due to, for instance, fear of a blank page, fear of starting a new project, difficulty to proceed with the project, or seemingly thin and uninspiring ideas. In the state of creative stability, the creative blocks tend to slow down the creative process for a relatively short period of time, generally ranging from a few minutes to perhaps a few hours. Typically, the action-focused creative professional is so eager to proceed with her work that she will use one of her proven strategies to overcome the blockages. Strategies to deal with these types of creative blocks can be very personal and “ordinary” – for example, having a coffee cup with a friend, a lunch break, or listening to a particular song. Often, these strategies are also practical and might be as simple as, for instance, leaving a challenging image resting and moving to another one that feels more inspiring instead.
I think what happens there is a panic effect. You cannot think clearly and be calm. You start hurrying and giving up easily and starting all over again. You feel as if you had been drinking 200 cups of coffee. The nervousness is in your body, and your hand is not working the way it could. You pay attention to all the wrong things: what kind of illustrations you think you should be doing, and that you should have 50 illustrations ready by now, et cetera. This is the moment when you start throwing things.

Interviewee A
In comparison to the state of creative stability, the state of creative anxiety is more pessimistic in its nature. The creative professional is still actively creating, but the focus has shifted from the process itself to the end result, and from the present to the past successes and failures. Instead of taking creative risks, the creative professional tends to compare her current accomplishments with the ones from her past, as well as those of others. Imitating, comparing, aiming for perfection, and “playing it safe” have now entered the creative professional’s emotional state. Various symptoms of impostor syndrome, such as the lack of self-confidence, negative self-talk, doubts about abilities and achievements, as well as feelings of inadequacy, start to appear in the process more and more.

Accepting creative blocks as a natural part of the process is challenging for the creative professional in the state of creative anxiety. In this state, she tries to fight them back by trying to work more and harder. For the illustrator, this might, for instance, appear as forced attempts to finish a challenging image – instead of moving to a different image and letting the challenging one rest, the illustrator tries to complete the image by force, or redo it countless times.

The creative anxiety is a somewhat ambivalent state. This means that although the state of creative anxiety often includes forced and aggressive attempts to complete the project, it also typically includes procrastination and other behavior that might delay the process. However, this does not necessarily mean that the creative professional is consciously avoiding her work – she is simply unable to proceed within the given schedule. Often, this is connected with the fear of failure, which leads to decreased ability to take creative risks. Because the creative anxiety is one of the active states in the cycle, the creative professional is still working mentally on the project, even when she is procrastinating. Saltz (2020: xi) notes: “Artists are terrific procrastinators, but our creative minds are working even when we’re not; the coral reefs and tides of our inner life are still churning even when we’re covering, immobilized, from fear of work”.

Missed deadlines, caused by procrastination and inability to proceed with the project, might lead to frustration and outbursts of rage during this state of the creative process. Sometimes, these outbursts might be directed towards other people, whom the creative professional sees as accountable for her struggles. However, often the anger and aggression are directed towards one’s own self. The joy of creating has now been replaced with an output-focused, draining, and often negative attitude. Although the person in the state of creative anxiety usually still manages to accomplish her work-related tasks successfully in the end, she is unable to reach a high level of enjoyment during the process – in other words, the creative act feels like dragging a heavy load along.

The state of creative anxiety can usually take anything from a few hours to several days, or weeks, or even months. The intensity of this state depends on how motivated the creative professional is to change the course of her actions. If she recognizes the first signs of melancholy or depression, or symptoms of creative burnout, it might be relatively easy for her to move towards the state of creative stability and the rewarding moments of the creative flow. However, if the creative professional does not recognize the alarming signals, she might be heading towards the stagnant and more pessimistic state in the Cycle of Creative Resources – the state of creative melancholy.
Last winter, I thought – I think it was the weekend of Independence Day – when I was lying in sauna and thinking, is there anything I would really enjoy doing anymore? Is there anything I could actually do anymore? Is there any theme I would be interested in anymore? It was one of those moments.

Interviewee F

In the state of creative melancholy, the creative professional is rarely creating anymore. Recovering from the state of creative melancholy can often take months or even
years. The creative professional is still occasionally trying to create, but this usually leads her to imitating her own previous work or those done by other people. Focusing on the end result, while continually feeling shame and guilt for not being better and more productive, causes the creative professional to feel repulsion towards her creativity and her past ways of creating. The focus in the state of creative melancholy is firmly on the fears located in the future, as well as the past successes and failures, instead of the process of creation.

The creative professional in the state of creative melancholy is not yet completely paralyzed. Instead, she feels a considerable amount of anger and resentment towards her craft, as well as towards herself. She understands that she needs to change something in her approach to her work, but often does not know how and what in particular. The person in the state of creative melancholy is usually engaged in reminiscing about the past successes and fantasizing about the future ones. Yearning back the times when she was still “something”, the creative professional in the early stages of creative melancholy is prone to big and impulsive life changes – even changing her creative profession to a completely different career.

Failing to enjoy the creative process and her work despite all the efforts and life changes might lead the creative professional to silence the last inner impulses of creativity. Typically, this drifts her even deeper into the state of creative melancholy – into a completely passive and stagnant state filled with grief, shame, and regret over the past creative failures.
The images are ready, and I am lying on the bed. How can anyone be so tired and not fall asleep? I feel like I never want to paint anything ever again. How did this happen? The only thing that I want to do right now is to simply empty my desk. Hide the tools that brought me so much sorrow and anxiety in the end, so much more agony than happiness. I do not want to be an artist anymore.

Process diary, liivari-tonttu karkuteillä
In the state of **creative depression**, the creative professional is incapable of using her creativity anymore. The joy of creating has disappeared completely, and instead of enjoying the process or taking creative risks, the paralyzed and depressed creative professional focuses on grieving choices made in the past and fears the possibilities that await in the future. In the most severe state of creative depression, experiencing numbness is typical – where the focus is on the “nothingness”. The state of creative depression lacks movement and hope. Instead of taking any action that could move her away from this state, the creative professional is now certain that her days as a, for example, professional artist or designer are over.

People suffering from creative depression can often falsely accuse themselves of being lazy. However, as Cameron (1992: 151) notes, even the most blocked artists typically expend a great deal of energy, although this might not be visible for other people. Instead, it is something that takes place *inside* the creative professional. “The blocked artist spends energy on self-hatred, on regret, on grief, jealousy, and self-doubt”, Cameron argues.

As discussed before, moving from the state of creative mania to creative depression through creative burnout is typical. However, moving from the state of creative depression to creative mania is hardly ever likely to take place. Because the creative depression is a completely paralyzed state, and any action almost entirely appears in the form of self-accusations and regret, the transition to the overactive state of creative mania is extremely unlikely. The transition towards the higher states of creative resources is always possible, but this “creative recovery” can typically take a considerable amount of time and effort.

The creative depression is an extremely persistent state which can last for years or even decades. In some cases, if no nurturing towards one’s creative well-being is done, the creative depression can be a permanent state for the creative professional. Instead of aiming for creative recovery, she would then consider her – now, previous – creative profession to be a “wrong choice” all along. While being traumatized by her creative burnouts and paralyzed by fear and regret, she might decide never to create anything ever again. However, because creativity does not “abandon” a creative person, no matter how depressed she is, the creative professional subconsciously keeps looking for a cure for her misery. In many cases, some external help is needed to lead the creative professional back to her creative well-being.

The state of creative depression does not necessarily mean that the person would be depressed in other areas of her life or suffer from, for example, any major depressive disorder. Typically, the creative professional might feel completely paralyzed and hopeless when it comes to using her creativity, but she might function very well in, for instance, running her family or working in other types of “non-creative” jobs. This, however, does not bring much relief for the creative professional because her identity and well-being *requires* creating.
6.4.2 Navigating in the Cycle of Creative Resources

As Uusikylä (2012: 196) points out, creativity is a multidimensional phenomenon, and one of the most difficult concepts to define and measure. Creativity does not easily translate into a scientific model or theory. Nevertheless, as Uusikylä further notes, what is most needed is in fact scientific research to identify the elements that foster creativity. The Cycle of Creative Resources provides a new theoretical framework on how creative well-being can be approached, achieved, and sustained by focusing on increasing creative resources during the creative process.

In this section, I make some general observations about the creative cycle with reference to existing literature. These observations can help better understand the creative cycle and can be used to further research creative resources, creative well-being, or the Cycle of Creative Resources itself.

Cycle in motion

The Cycle of Creative Resources is a cycle in motion. This means that each of the states allow movement towards another state. It is also possible to leap over a state in this cyclic movement – the creative process might lead a person into the blissful state of creative flow but then shortly after she might experience creative anxiety. For example, a particularly challenging illustration might lead the illustrator to experience creative anxiety in the afternoon, although she was still in the state of creative flow in the morning, having extremely uplifting flow experiences with the same illustration. However, the lower the creative professional moves in the creative cycle, the slower the shifts from one state to another would typically become.

Occasional creative blocks, typically experienced in the state of creative stability, can slow or halt the process for a few minutes or hours. The severe creative blocks, often experienced in the state of creative anxiety, on the other hand, can last anything from a few hours to days. Creative anxiety is usually experienced as a more long-term state for up to several weeks. As the creative anxiety prolongs, it can start to turn into the creative melancholy. The state of creative melancholy often paralyzes the process for anywhere from several weeks to several months. Prolonged creative melancholy can be considered as a state of creative depression. The creative depression is generally a completely paralyzed state of creativity, which, in the worst case, can prevent the creative professional from creating for years or even decades, and sometimes for the rest of her life.

Movement from the state of creative depression towards creative mania is not common, unless the creative professional is already suffering from a mental disorder, making these types of unusual shifts likely. In that case, due to the nature of her mental disorder, she might experience rapid shifts from the creative depression to creative mania. It is more typical, however, to move from the lowest state of the creative cycle – the creative depression – towards the states with higher levels of creative resources through creative melancholy and creative anxiety. Typically, this is a process that requires a considerable amount of time and patience. The shift from the state of creative...
mania to creative depression, on the other hand, can take place very rapidly if the creative mania turns into a creative burnout, which in turn leads the creative professional to the state of creative depression.

A combination of different internal and external factors can move the creative professional between the different states during the creative process. The creative professional might notice the shift, or the shift might in fact occur without her realizing it – one day, the creative professional might feel the creative anxiety and find the process draining, but the next day the level of creative resources may increase and lead to a more creative experience. Personal and professional relationships can cause rapid changes in the state of the creative professional and her level of creative resources. Conscious actions – even small ones that increase the general well-being – can help a person move higher in the creative cycle, especially if the creative resources are already relatively high. As such, “navigating” in the creative cycle is used here to indicate active movement in the cycle – with the aim of consciously moving towards the states with higher levels of creative resources.

The lower the level of creative resources are, the slower the pace of strategies required – for example, different therapeutic approaches – in order to help the creative professional to navigate towards states with higher creative resources. In turn, the higher the level of creative resources are, the more the creative professional may benefit from faster pace strategies – for example, creativity workshops – in order to prevent and overcome creative blocks or anxiety. Navigating successfully in the Cycle of Creative Resources requires identifying and accepting where the creative professional is in the cycle. A creative professional in the state of, for example, creative melancholy may in fact end up experiencing even lower levels of creative resources, in case she attempts to utilize fast-paced strategies that are more suitable for someone in the state of creative stability or creative anxiety. Frustration created by a failed attempt to feel “more creative” after an intensive creativity course may be an extremely paralyzing experience for a creative professional in the state of creative depression. Therefore, exploring and utilizing level-appropriate strategies – after identifying the current and correct state of the creative resources – is crucial when attempting to navigate to a higher state in the creative cycle.

**Process of creation**

The inventor Thomas Edison has once said that creativity consists of one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996: 204). It is unlikely that one could actually assign percentages to how creativity plays out in the process, although, for instance, Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1974) has been a popular test for identifying and evaluating individuals’ creative potential. However, according to Uusikylä (2012: 55), the tests used these days to measure creative thinking are not satisfactory. For example, the reliability of Torrance’s test is connected with how creativity is defined in general. While this test can measure certain types of creative thinking – and drawing – skills, it does not show whether a person who is not successful in the test actually does have a low level of creativity (Uusikylä, 2012: 56).

However, Edison’s comment does provide an intriguing perspective on approaching
the creative process. Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 186-194) discusses how the openness and sensitivity of creative individuals often exposes them to a great deal of enjoyment, but also to suffering and pain. The greater sensitivity can cause anxieties that are not as common for other “less creative” people. Nevertheless, Csíkszentmihályi argues that when a person is working in the area of her expertise, worries, and cares seem to often fall away and are replaced with a sense of bliss. “Perhaps the most important quality, the one that is most consistently present in all creative individuals, is the ability to enjoy the process of creation for its own sake”, Csíkszentmihályi writes. In this argument lies one of the central implications of the findings of the study described in the previous chapter for this thesis as a whole:

- The less the interviewed professional illustrators were enjoying the illustration process, and the less their creative resources were at a given stage, the less they were focused on the process of creation itself. This led them to focus more on the end result, what had happened in the past, and what might happen in the future, including fears caused by these thoughts.

- Alternatively, the more the interviewed professional illustrators were enjoying the illustration process, and the more their creative resources were at a given stage, the more they were focused on the process of creation itself. In this case, instead of focusing on the end result – the finished picturebook or a finished illustration – or what they were doing the day before or even an hour ago, or what they were about to do next, they were focusing on the process. This allowed them to experience genuine satisfaction during their current process, and a state of consciousness referred to here as flow.

Jaatinen (2015: 228) proposes that it is the meaningfulness of the visual art practice which may offer the opportunity for eudaimonic and hedonic well-being and the optimal experience of flow\textsuperscript{73}. Similarly, Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 112) sees focusing on the process not only as the key to achieving flow, but also as a way to ease the struggles encountered during the process of creation. “Flow is the result of intense concentration on the present, which relieves us of the usual fears that cause depression and anxiety in everyday life”, Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 112) notes. Historically, flow is associated with a psychological phenomenon called peak experience – a concept initially developed by Maslow (1964), who described peak experiences as the moments of highest happiness and fulfilment. However, while peak experience denotes a high stimulation level, flow itself is not associated with an increased level of stimulation (Privette, 1983). In flow, the creative professional is so involved, committed, and focused on the work at hand that she tends to forget herself and her surroundings as well – she becomes a part of the task she is immersed in. Furthermore, this loss of self-consciousness leads the creative professional to a sense of “self-transcendence” that removes everyday

\textsuperscript{73} The concept of flow was discussed earlier in Section 6.2.2 The Picturebook Illustration Process, Stage 2.
frustrations from her attention. Operating entirely in the present moment brings a great sense of relief to the person experiencing flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1994).

However, it is highly important to note, that focusing on the present moment and releasing the obsessive and excessive attention on the end result does not remove the importance of the “goals” of the process. Focusing on the present moment is in fact easier when the creative professional has a clear idea where she is heading, why, and when. According to Csíkszentmihályi (1994), setting clear goals is the reason why, for instance, games like tennis or chess quickly lead to flow experiences – knowing what one wants to do at any given moment is a key element of experiencing the state of flow during the creative process. By creating attainable but at the same time challenging goals and intentions for the process – and by breaking them down into smaller goals and sub-goals – the activity becomes less vague, and this allows the creative professional to concentrate her energy in achieving the right goals. In other words, the creative professional is able to dive into the process of creation intently, instead of wandering aimlessly in the landscape of limitless possibilities. Although tight deadlines can increase the experiences of agony and distress during the creative process immensely – and they mostly do, especially in the case of deadlines that are unrealistic in terms of the workload – having an exact schedule and a good understanding of where the process is heading, allows the creativity to flow freely during the process of creation. Such deadlines might also help the creative professional to avoid unnecessary perfectionism and the fearful feelings that the resulting work will never be good enough. With a specified timeframe this “inner perfectionist” will not be able to take the lead in the process so easily and prevent the project from completion.

By focusing on the process instead of the end result, the creative professional can experience a sense of “play” – along with the flow – while working. Play has often been defined as one of the fundamental and integral elements of the creative process (see, e.g., Jung, 1923; Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1963; Csíkszentmihályi and Bennett, 1971; Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels, 1971; Lieberman, 1977). For example, Jung (1923: 112) perceived the creative process as being intimately connected with the play instinct. He writes: “If play expires in itself without creating anything durable and vital, it is only play, but in the other case it is called creative work. Out of a playful movement of elements whose interrelations are not immediately apparent, patterns arise which an observant and critical intellect can only evaluate afterward. The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the object it loves”.

As such – and as the play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith (2001: 214) notes – play is difficult to understand, because it is ambiguous in its very nature. As Sutton-Smith (2001: 219) points out, play is like language: a system of communication and expression, not in itself either good or bad. One of the earliest and often-cited definitions of play was suggested by the historian Johan Huizinga (1949, 7), who summarized that play is, first and foremost, a voluntary activity – play is freedom. Furthermore, as defined by Csikszentmihályi and Bennett (1971: 45), play is action generating action – a unified experience flowing from one moment to the next, in contradiction to our otherwise disjoint “everyday” experiences. Alternatively, when approached from the perspective of picturebooks, Tan (2002b) suggests that visual literacy is perhaps all about the continuation of that “playful inquiry people begin in [their] childhood”, by using
their imagination to find significance and meaning in those ordinary, day-to-day experiences that might otherwise remain unnoticed. Similarly, Rogers (1961: 353-355) considers play as “the ability to toy with elements and concepts” and as one of the central conditions for creativity. Rogers (1961: 353-355) explains that from the spontaneous toying and exploration – from the ability to play spontaneously with ideas, color, shapes, and relationships – arises the hunch, the creative seeing of life in a new and significant way. This type of play is also associated with the openness and lack of rigidity, which Rogers lists as the second condition of the potentially constructive creative act – the openness to experience. This second condition of “extensionality” refers to a lack of rigidity, and possible permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses, as well as the ability to receive much conflicting information without forcing closure upon the situation. The third condition for creativity defined by Rogers is “an internal locus of evaluation”. This means that for the creative person the value of her product is established not by the praise or criticism of others, but by herself (Rogers, 1961: 353-355). The author Ray Bradbury (1990: 4) suggests that the internal evaluation, self-awareness, and excitement should be the central goals when working as a creative professional. “[If] you are writing without zest, without gusto, without love, without fun, you are only half a writer. It means you are so busy keeping your eye on the commercial market, or one ear peeled for the avant-garde coterie, that you are not being yourself. You don’t even know yourself. For the first thing a writer should be is – excited”, Bradbury writes. In fact, “fun” is considered by some to be central to playfulness (see, e.g., Huizinga, 1949; Lieberman, 1977; Ackerman, 2000). Internal locus of evaluation noted by Rogers could also be considered from the perspective of motivation. As noted by the creativity researcher Beth Hennessey (2010: 343), when a person perceives her task engagement as externally controlled, she is then likely to be motivated “extrinsically” rather than “intrinsically”. “Most contemporary theorists define extrinsic motivation as the motivation to do something for some external goal, a goal outside the task itself. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is seen as the motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake, for the sheer pleasure and enjoyment of the task”, Hennessey (2010: 343) writes. Intrinsic motivation is one of the main factors that helps the creative professional to not only focus on the process of creation, but also to experience the sense of play while moving towards her goals. Furthermore, a sense of curiosity usually drives a person who approaches an activity, question, or problem with an intrinsic motivational orientation. As a result of these factors, the creative professional feels a certain degree of competence, believes that her involvement is free of external control, and has a sense that she is “playing rather than working” (Hennessey, 2010: 343). Similarly, Jaatinen (2015: 237) argues that the sense of personal growth and meaning as eudaimonia depends largely on intrinsic human motivation. “Regarding overall visual art practice, this consideration is conceptualized as the meaningfulness of the practice” (Jaatinen, 2015: 237).

Sutton-Smith (2001: 198) argues that the opposite of play is not work but depression. When the creative professional lacks the sense of play and intrinsic motivation, then experiencing agony and frustration during the creative process increases exponentially. This, in turn, might leave the creative professional exhausted and even depressed for some time. However, such experiences still seem to be surprisingly easy to accept and overcome by those who manage to pursue a long and rewarding careers in creative
fields. Uusikylä (2020: 132) has noted that while creative artists can often be “neurotic”, they still tend to have a strong ego, which helps them to withstand mental health symptoms without “breaking down”. According to Uusikylä, a creative person with sufficient intelligence and self-control is able to turn her strange thoughts and manic fantasies into good ones. Surprisingly enough, if there are enough creative resources available to complete the creative process, the challenges and the struggle might in fact increase the enjoyment of the process. This is due to the fact that – contrary to what we usually believe – the best moments in our lives are often not the passive, receptive, relaxing times (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990: 3). According to Csíkszentmihályi, the best moments usually occur if a person is stretched physically or mentally to her limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. This corroborates with the findings of the studies about the Finnish picturebook illustrators presented in this thesis. The phases that were typically labelled as the most agonizing ones in the picturebook illustration process “because of the incompleteness” were often followed by moments when the illustrators felt extremely relieved and “genuinely happy”. Saltz (2020: x) agrees with Csíkszentmihályi in that the challenges and doubt the creative professional inevitably faces are not something that should be avoided in the creative practice. “Doubt is a sign of faith: it tests and humbles you, allows newness into your life”, Saltz writes. According to him, doubt banishes the stifling effect of certainty, which “kills curiosity and change”. The philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, on the other hand, discusses the aspect of seriousness – while echoing Dewey’s (1932) views on seriousness and playfulness – in relation to the end result, considering “true art” to be both serious and lighthearted: “Art vibrates between this seriousness and lightheartedness. It is this tension that constitutes art”.

Csíkszentmihályi (1975) proposes that flow occurs when people perceive a balance between their skills and the challenge of an activity. In a “model of the flow state”, formulated by Csíkszentmihályi, flow state is represented by the diagonal between anxiety and boredom. “When a person believes that his action opportunities are too demanding for his capabilities, the resulting stress is experienced as anxiety. ... When skills are greater than opportunities for using them, the state of boredom results” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1975: 49). Therefore, the level of difficulty should match the level of person’s abilities. The phase when anxiety, worry or boredom seems to become intolerable is usually when the creative professional loses the connection with the present moment and joy altogether, and instead, experiences a total absence of play, flow, and inspiration. This might lead the creative professional to a position where she starts questioning her profession.

The art critic Clement Greenberg has argued that inspiration is the only thing in art that cannot be copied (quoted by Dormer, 1994: 7). For the creative professional, losing the element of inspiration from the creative process might lead her to the arena of comparison and repetition, where the motivation to work in her profession starts disappearing completely – regardless of how extrinsic or intrinsic this motivation initially may be. Dewey (1934: 52) notes that if the artist does not perfect a new, inspired vision

---

74 In his essay *Is Art Lighthearted* (1992) Adorno discusses “true art” in relation to the concept of “kitsch”, suggesting that: “Though attempts to define kitsch usually fail, still not the worst definition would be one that made the criterion of kitsch whether an art product gives form to consciousness of contradiction – even if it does so by stressing its opposition to reality – or dissembles it” (Adorno, 1992: 249).

75 The model of the flow state is often also referred to as the “flow channel model”.

---

234
in her process of doing, she acts mechanically and repeats some old model “fixed like a blueprint in her mind”.

**Suppressed creativity**

After losing the connection with inspiration and joy, and after struggling with increased job demands and low job resources for a prolonged period of time, which have, in turn, allowed symptoms of burnout to manifest themselves, the creative professional might experience her creative resources starting to decrease. The less creative resources she has, the lower she moves in the creative cycle until she can no longer see a way back to enjoying her craft. All she now sees is the pain and anxiety that is growing bigger. Creative blocks, impostor syndrome, pessimism, comparison, and anxiety start to be the everyday companions in the creative process. Having reached this state, as mentioned earlier, some creative professionals choose to blame their creative practice for their pain and decide to change their profession altogether.

It is not uncommon that once highly passionate creative individuals end up working in professions that require fewer creative efforts from them, simply because they feel that their creativity has “dried out”. Nevertheless, as discussed previously, somewhere inside – under the numerous layers of pain and denial – the desire to create often still exists. The flame is still there, the creativity is still there – even when it is suppressed – and as a result, the creative professional might experience melancholic and depressive feelings, although she would now be unable to see the reason behind such feelings. Should not the pain be gone, now that the creative profession is in the past? Often, it is not, because the source for the pain is the creative mind, which has a desire to create freely but is unable to do so. “If I am not actively creating something, then chances are I am probably actively destroying something (myself, a relationship, or my own peace of mind)”, as the author Elizabeth Gilbert (2015: 171) points out. Similarly, the artist Yoko Ono has said, “Creativity is innate, and it manifests itself in so many forms. It needs to come out somehow, or it destroys you in some way” (quoted by Hundley, 2011). This dilemma and suffering caused by suppressed creativity are also recognized by Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 189): “Perhaps the most difficult thing for a creative individual to bear is the sense of loss and emptiness experienced when, for some reason or another, he or she cannot work. This is especially painful when a person feels one’s creativity drying out; then the whole self-concept is jeopardized”.

In this thesis, I have proposed that creativity in itself does not increase or decrease in a person. I have suggested that creativity is always there, willing to be used and explored. What increases or decreases, however, is the level of creative resources available to a person, which is affected by both internal and external factors. What makes acknowledging this issue challenging is that creative professionals who are struggling to enjoy their creative profession usually have no difficulty managing their everyday life *outside* their creative practice. In other words, a person who has started experiencing anxiety, melancholy, depression, or symptoms of burnout in her creative work, might still enjoy her family life fully or operate successfully in other types of work. A person suffering from, for example, creative depression or creative mania, might not be depressed or manic at all outside her creative practice.

As discussed in the previous section, Csíkszentmihályi (1996: 149-150) points out that
creative personalities show tendencies of thought and action that in most people are segregated. A creative individual is more likely to be both aggressive and passive, either at the same time or at different times, depending on the situation. These qualities are present in all of us, but usually we are trained to develop only one pole of the dialectic (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996: 149-150). The creative professional who does not acknowledge this complexity in herself or does not realize the tendency of her creative resources to function, flourish or languish in the process of creation – often separately from her everyday life, as mentioned above – might lead her to blame her creativity for her professional struggles. Instead of actively looking for ways to fill her creative pond and increase her creative resources, the creative professional can then become a passive recipient of some higher, mystical power called “creativity”. The results of the studies presented in this thesis have demonstrated that this is not how creativity plays out in the creative professional’s life. Creativity is something that wants and needs to be nurtured and used. This can be done by acknowledging and accepting a personal responsibility to actively move in the proposed creative cycle towards higher levels of creative resources by exploring how the different internal and external factors can impact these resources.

According to Uusikylä (2012: 203-204), the key to increasing creativity can be found in the creative communities. “The creative community is characterized by trust, freedom, playfulness, and tolerance for risk-taking. It seeks to find new ideas and gives them time to mature. There you can also take risks and make mistakes without unpleasant consequences. This is the essence of increasing creativity”, Uusikylä (2012: 203-204) notes. The studies presented in this thesis have shown that this community can, indeed, increase or decrease the creative resources during the creative process drastically. However, even if the external factors resulting from the “external community” are incredibly supportive, playful, and tolerant of risk-taking, the internal factors controlled by the creative professional may be completely the opposite. Relentless self-monitoring – thinking and worrying about oneself – can consume a tremendous amount of mental energy. Acknowledging and recognizing this “internal inquisition” that takes place in the mind of the creative professional during her process of creation is one of the ways for navigating in the Cycle of Creative Resources.

The creative professional needs to be able to tell if she is getting closer to her goal or not (Csíkszentmihályi, 1994). By acknowledging the negative self-talk and replacing it, for instance, with constructive feedback that the creative professional requests for her work, she can consciously learn to control her emotional state and increase the level of her creative resources. Although the external community or other external factors cannot solely determine the nature of the creative process, a study on leader behaviors and the work environment for creativity by Teresa Amabile, Elizabeth Schatzel, Giovanni Moneta and Steven Kramer (2004) shows that providing constructive, positive feedback on the work done is one of the main aspects of a leader’s behavior that can support her employees’ creativity (see also Heikkilä, 2010: 74). However, as Csíkszentmihályi (1994) notes, almost any type of feedback – for example, conversation with a friend – can increase enjoyment during the creative process if it is related to the goal of the process.
Taking control: six steps towards higher creative resources

“The wearing youth, restless manhood and insecure senescence” that Waltari (1935: 14) predicted for the aspiring artists does not have to be the inevitable condition for the creative professional. Instead, reaching and maintaining the higher states of creative resources – the creative stability and the creative flow – can be the goal of the professionals working in creative fields. These states are possible to be achieved if the creative professional:

1. focuses on identifying and accepting where she is in the creative cycle,
2. consciously explores and utilizes level-appropriate strategies to navigate to a higher state in the creative cycle,
3. focuses on the process of creation and the present, instead of the end result, and the past or the future,
4. sets attainable but challenging goals for her creative process,
5. aims at understanding and accepting the nature of her creative process, and
6. recognizes her negative self-talk and controls her emotional state consciously by, for instance, requesting feedback for her work from others.

If the creative professional is not willing to accept her current state in the creative cycle, and is not consciously focused on moving higher in the cycle by controlling her emotional state and exploring different strategies, then it is very likely that her state will be controlled by external factors such as the changing conditions, the work environment, the demands of the process, as well as other people, rather than by her own ability to increase her creative resources. As a result, she might end up being like a small cork in a raging sea, instead of being the captain of her boat. “Everyone must lay the foundation for their own creativity. The core is that the person takes control of her own inner life”, Uusikylä (2012: 221) writes. Similarly, the psychologists Abraham Maslow (1968: 137), Clark Moustakas (1956: 273), and Ralph Hallman (1964: 15) argue for a necessary connection between creativity and human existence. To be a human is to grow – to actualize one’s essential qualities, and this process of self-actualization equates with creativeness (Hallman, 1964: 15). Controlling the emotional state and consciously investing it in a specific goal, while focusing on the process of creation, seems to be the pathway towards higher creative resources. Moreover, since creativity lies within everyone, this pathway, too, is within reach for anyone willing to take the first step and accept the fact that creative talent is “like a wild animal that must be fed”, as suggested by Saltz (2020: ix).
6.5 Summary

Through the studies conducted as part of this thesis, I have illuminated various important aspects of the creative process of illustrating a picturebook from several angles. Based on the findings of these studies, I propose that a picturebook is the result of a creative process that requires not only an exceptional visual-verbal understanding, but also exceedingly high emotional stamina on the part of its illustrator. The Picturebook Illustration Model, presented in Section 6.2, shows the different stages of this process in a linear form. The Picturebook Illustration Model consists of four stages typical for the picturebook illustration process in terms of both the technical aspects of the process and the emotional landscape usually experienced by the illustrator during each stage. The four stages of the Picturebook Illustration Model are: 1. planning the picturebook, 2. creating the illustrations, 3. finalizing the picturebook and 4. post-process stage.

Formulating the Picturebook Illustration Model has led me to recognize and identify the role of “creative resources” in the creative process. The Cycle of Creative Resources, presented in Section 6.4.1, is a visual model that presents the different states of the creative professional, corresponding to varying levels of these resources. The Cycle of Creative Resources is a theoretical framework that depicts the varying creative resources available to the creative professional and shows how certain conditions in the creative well-being can lead to specific actions and interactions in the creative process. The Cycle of Creative Resources consists of six different states of creative resources identified in this thesis. These states are: 1. creative mania, 2. creative flow, 3. creative stability, 4. creative anxiety, 5. creative melancholy, and 6. creative depression.
How do I know all this, you might ask? Oh well, I just happened to be at the right place at the right time and to listen carefully to what the little girl had to say to me. And as I have come to understand, listening is the path to a place where people are not afraid to show to each other who they really are. To show to themselves who they really are. And by showing who they are, they allow others to understand themselves and the world around them as well. As written by the author Leena Krohn: “I have always been astonished by the fact that falling into the most personal, most private, most secret means ending up to the common waters without any shores” (Tuomikoski, 1987).

When the girl realized that the line, she had been following for her entire life was not her own line after all – that was when the girl knew that her path as an illustrator was not finished after all. It was just beginning.
What is the creative process of illustrating a picturebook?

The Picturebook Illustration Model presents the linear, iterative process that consists of the four typical stages of illustrating a picturebook. As described in Section 6.2.2, the first three stages of the model – planning the picturebook, creating the illustrations, and finalizing the picturebook – cover the actual process of creating a picturebook, from its initial planning to finalizing its illustrations and completing the book itself. The fourth stage of the process – post-process – deals with what happens after the book is published. It is worth noting that these stages may, to some extent, vary from project to project. Furthermore, individual illustrators would have slightly different ways of working and different emphases on how they like to create a picturebook.

In addition, other factors such as the story itself, project schedule, financial considerations, life situation, as well as collaboration with the other members of the picturebook team, can significantly impact the process.

Each stage of the picturebook illustration process also reveals a typical emotional landscape. As discussed before, during the first stage of the process, the illustrator is often faced with ambivalent feelings of fear, euphoria, self-doubt, and excitement. During the second stage, the illustrator is most likely to experience feelings of inspiration, enthusiasm, excitement, and flow. The third stage of the process – “the panic stage” – is typically more associated the feelings of frustration, agony, and exhaustion than any other stage of the process. During the fourth stage, the illustrator is often balancing the ambivalent feelings of disappointment, relief, and pride. While different stages of the Picturebook Illustration Model may vary, these four stages represent a generic model of the picturebook illustration process and form the basic structure that this process typically follows.

In every project, it is common for a picturebook illustrator to experience extremes of joy and agony during her illustration process. However, the level of how exciting, pleasant, enjoyable, wearing, distressing, or intense the picturebook illustration process is, in general, tends to vary from project to project.

The factors that impact the way the illustrator experiences the creative process can be related to a number of things, which can differ between illustrators enormously. These factors can be either internal, impacting the process from inside – more to do with, for example, self-esteem or resilience – or external, impacting the process from the outside – for example, the collaboration with the author or having financial concerns. The amount of creative resources – resources to conduct the project – that the illustrator has during the picturebook illustration process is defined and impacted by both internal and external factors.

What are the main elements of creative resources?

In this thesis, I have investigated the main elements that impact how the creative professional experiences the creative process. The aim has been to see whether this increased understanding of the creative process can be utilized in order to support
creative professionals to enjoy the process more, feel happier, and be more fulfilled and productive in their work. Based on the findings of the studies presented in this thesis, I have identified six different states of creative resources: 1. Creative mania, 2. Creative flow, 3. Creative stability, 4. Creative anxiety, 5. Creative melancholy, and 6. Creative depression.

In Section 6.4.1, I have presented a visual model of the Cycle of Creative Resources and discussed the resulting theoretical framework representing the six states of creative resources. Depending on where the creative professional is in the creative cycle impacts directly how fulfilling or draining she experiences not only the creative process, but also her creative profession. The closer the creative professional is to the state of creative depression, the lower the level of her creative resources is. The closer the creative professional is to the state of creative flow, the higher the level of her creative resources is. The creative mania is where these two ends meet. Typically, the creative mania is the state in which the level of creative resources is extremely high. However, in the state of creative mania, the creativity is already going on “overdrive”, and the resources are close to drying out completely. Although the state of creative mania can feel extremely rewarding at first, it can quickly turn out to be unhealthy, both physically and mentally. Because of this, it is not a recommended state in the creative cycle, despite the availability of extremely high level of creative resources. How well the creative professional learns to navigate in the Cycle of Creative Resources strongly affects how she experiences the creative process.

What are the main factors contributing to creative well-being?

This thesis proposes a new way to approach, achieve, and sustain creative well-being. At the core of creative well-being is the increased understanding of the complex nature of the creative process. By accepting and addressing where she is at the Cycle of Creative Resources, and by controlling her emotional state, the creative professional can learn how to navigate – or be supported to navigate – in the creative cycle, in order to use her creativity in a sustainable, effective and fulfilling way.

As proposed in Section 6.4.2, creative professionals should consciously aim to reach and maintain the states of creative stability and creative flow during their creative process. These states are possible and likely to be achieved if the creative professional: 1. focuses on identifying and accepting where she is in the creative cycle, 2. consciously explores and utilizes level-appropriate strategies to navigate to a higher state in the creative cycle, 3. focuses on the process of creation and the present, instead of the end result, and the past or the future, 4. sets attainable but challenging goals for her creative process, 5. aims at understanding and accepting the nature of her creative process, and 6. recognizes her negative self-talk and controls her emotional state consciously by, for instance, requesting feedback for her work from others.

As discussed in Section 6.4., creativity in itself does not increase or diminish in a person – creativity is always there, ready to and explored. What increases or decreases are the creative resources. The level of these resources has a direct impact on how much the creative professional is able to use her creativity. Therefore, rather than trying to
be *more creative*, the creative professional should focus on removing the obstacles that prevent her from utilizing her creative resources – her creative potential – to the fullest. Experiencing increased creativity is an automatic and immediate side-effect of increased creative resources. This, I propose, is at the core of creative well-being.

### 7.2 Reliability and validity

Jaatinen (2015: 238) has addressed an evident need for common understanding of how visual arts as a specific practice in relation to well-being could be researched, and proposes careful consideration of the following four aspects: 1. well-being should not be used as an all-encompassing concept, 2. the possible outcomes of the research concerning well-being should be hypothesized with rigor, and neutral or negative impacts should also be considered, 3. it is not enough to examine a question of visual arts by gathering only verbal and written data, and therefore 4. it is essential that the art activity, the artistic process and the artworks themselves are studied and analyzed in the context of art research and not only within the theoretical frameworks of social and health sciences (Jaatinen, 2015: 238). This thesis provides a new critical approach to the connection between creativity and well-being, and takes into consideration many of the aspects suggested by Jaatinen above. It also aims to correct some of the existing definitions of a “creative person”, which are misleading when viewed from the perspective of the creative professionals themselves. In particular, I was interested in exploring further Csíkszentmihályi’s (1996: 240) argument that “creative persons differ from one another in various ways, but in one respect, they are unanimous: they all love what they do”.

This thesis provides an insight into the creative process and creative well-being specifically from the viewpoint of a practitioner-researcher. It is unlikely that the highly personal and sensitive information that I received from the interviewees would have been possible to collect with any other approach, or by trying to remain more distant or neutral as an interviewer. Furthermore, the data that I gathered by observing my own illustration process, more fully revealed complex details of the creative process – such as the levels of creative agony that I personally experienced – which helped me formulate the Cycle of Creative Resources without embellishing the findings.

As mentioned before, the decision to focus on my peers in this thesis – other professional picturebook illustrators – was influenced by Hannula, Suoranta and Vadén (2014: 10-11), who point out that the most beneficial act for any research is not to try to reach out and “get something from somewhere else”, but to stay with and within the positions and frames of one’s own practices. “Reading, seeing, feeling and talking with and within one’s own peer group is ridiculously underrated and must be rescued and returned to the core of any research action and activity”, Hannula et al. (2014: 11) argue. Instead of relying too much on the existing studies and definitions of creative people, I approached the creative process from the “inside-out”. This peer-to-peer, colleague-to-colleague approach was a fundamental and indispensable help in really understanding the process from the perspective of creative professionals.

---

76 Art research here refers to both theoretical research in the field of arts, humanities and aesthetics, as well as practice-based art research (Jaatinen, 2015: 238).
Furthermore, as Hannula et al. (2014: 23) point out, in humanistic research, there might be materials and data – as well as their analyses – that are in a sense “objective” (such as historical records, texts and so on) and not produced by the researcher in any ways. However, the ways in which the humanist argues, writes and uses rhetoric, are, in fact, not external to the research but an integral part of it. Therefore, the situation is similar to a practice-led research, which can – like humanistic writing – offer “open-ended but argued-for views that gain their traction from how relevant the views are for the practice at hand and how well they are contextualized” (Hannula et al. 2014: 23). The findings of the studies presented in this thesis are filtered through my professional understanding as a picturebook illustrator. Subjective understanding has been valued here as an indispensable tool in building new knowledge. I have aimed at transforming this subjective knowledge into research knowledge that is accessible to others through an in-depth and transparent analysis of the creative picturebook illustration process.

At the core of this thesis lies criticality, openness, and self-reflectivity. As such, the chosen research approach invites discussion about possible biases, firstly, when it comes to analyzing postexperience interview data (memories and descriptions of experiences after the experience has actually happened), and secondly, when it comes to the inevitable possibility that my own experiences of the creative process have somehow influenced how I have perceived the data. Both of these aspects could have been addressed more carefully already before starting to analyze the research material, in order to increase the level of self-reflectivity in this thesis even more.

As mentioned, I propose that the new theory developed as the result of the studies presented in this thesis, depicting the evolving nature of the creative process, could be applicable to other creative processes besides illustration as well. As discussed before, selecting a very homogeneous group of creative people, such as a group of writers, musicians, fine artists or mathematician, has been perhaps the most common approach to study creativity and the various aspects related to creative well-being (Andreasen, 2008: 252)77. Therefore, the approach that was chosen for this thesis is in line with the research approach found in many existing creativity studies (see, e.g., Karlsson, 1970; Andreasen, 1987; Csíkszentmihályi and Getzels, 1971; Jamison, 1989; Ludwig, 1994; Ekvall and Ryhammar, 1999; Hennessey, 2010; Botella et al., 2013), which aim at understanding creativity as a larger phenomenon, by observing a narrowed-down group of people from a particular creative field.

The flexible and interdisciplinary research process grounded in data has allowed the research material to lead the way in the studies presented in this thesis. Brown (2012: 252) suggests that the grounded theory researcher has to let go of her own interests and preconceived ideas to “trust in emergence”. Instead of making any concrete initial hypotheses, and then looking for answers that would prove or reject those hypotheses, I have chosen to focus on observing and identifying the kind of themes and topics that started to arise from the data. Therefore, rather than deciding the direction of this thesis, I have, to some extent, allowed the data from each stage to provide direction for the next stage of my research. In fact, for a relatively long time, I thought that I was doing research on picturebooks – a study that would bring new knowledge about picturebook

---

77 As discussed in Section 3.1.2, the other common approaches to study creativity are: 1. studying a mixture of creative individuals from multiple disciplines, and 2. identifying a group of people for whom written histories are available, and to use this information as the basis for study (Andreasen, 2008: 252).
illustration as an art form. However, the further I proceeded with the analyses of the data from my studies, the stronger the data started suggesting themes around the emotional landscape of the creative process and creative well-being. According to Brown (2012: 252), a grounded theory researcher has to focus on developing the courage to let the research participants define the research problem. The conclusions drawn from my research – the proposed theoretical framework and the two visual models – have resulted from not resisting the direction that the data analyzed was persistent in taking.

7.3 Limitations

The limitations of the studies presented in this thesis are connected with the methodological choices that I have made. As mentioned, this thesis is built on the qualitative methodological approach that I have taken – namely, the grounded theory. In analyzing the studies conducted as part this thesis, I chose not to follow the strictest grounded theory guidelines suggested by, for example, Glaser and Strauss (1967), Charmaz (2014), and Birks and Mills (2015). This was because I aimed to maintain the flexibility of the direction of this thesis, rather than trying to provide a case for an exemplary model of the grounded theory approach. It is possible that following some of the data analysis guidelines more strictly may have provided more depth to the analyses of some of the details of studies presented in this thesis. However, as, for instance, Brown (2012: 252) points out, it is virtually impossible to understand grounded theory before using it. This was also my experience with the approach.

Furthermore, conducting the interviews of the professional illustrators initially by using the narrative interviewing method and strictly following Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s (2000) approach was not the most effective way of collecting the interview material. Also, there are some aspects of Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s model, about which I could have been more critical before starting the research. Choosing an interview method that was not developed for cases where an artist is interviewing another artist led me to devise and use a modified version of the chosen method. This revised method was based on my observations, hypotheses, and assumptions on a suitable way to continue the interviews after finding Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s model problematic – at least to some extent – for the aims of my study.

Although I appreciated the in-depth data that I gathered with the narrative interview method, this resulted in interviews that lasted for a long time. Some of the interviews took almost four hours, and while I was analyzing the interview material, I noticed that and the interviewees and myself got tired towards the end of these interviews. Another interviewing method could have given me a chance to interview a larger number of illustrators and collect more empirical evidence for some specific aspects of the illustration process. However, this would have required identifying what aspects of the process to study in more detail, which is not possible in the area of this thesis without much prior studies.

Finally, the fact that my interviews were conducted in Finland with Finnish picture-book illustrators has some impact on the findings of this thesis. However, after spending long periods in other countries while working on this thesis – United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, and France – I have come to realize that the creative process and
its related issues discussed in this thesis are relatively universal. According to my ex-
periences, the ways in which illustrators communicate through picturebooks and the
way they experience the picturebook illustration process seems to be homogeneous, at
least in the Western world.

7.4 Future research

7.4.1 Creative well-being and the Cycle of Creative Resources

The creative sector would greatly benefit from further studies that would offer new ap-
proaches to better understanding the mental health and well-being of those working in
creative fields. The challenging working environment conditions and the lack of appropri-
ate recognition of the value of creative work are conducive to stress and mental
health issues faced by many professionals working in the creative fields (Shorter et al.,
2018: 5). These aspects are worth studying further in order to improve the resilience
in the sector which others can be built upon. This study has illustrated a need to con-
sider and improve the well-being of the creative professionals.

As mentioned, this thesis proposes that the Cycle of Creative Resources could also be
observed from the perspective of other creative professionals, as well as professional
picturebook illustrators. This suggestion comes with an invitation for further studies
on the creative cycle, involving control groups not only from other creative fields, but
also appropriate comparison groups from among people who are not professional cre-
ators78 – equivalent in age, gender and educational level to the groups of creative pro-
fessionals. In order to generalize the findings presented in this thesis, and to eliminate
whatever bias might exist when a single field or profession were chosen (see, e.g., An-
dreasen, 2008: 253), further studies on the creative cycle should be conducted.

Furthermore, while presenting the six states in the creative cycle in the previous
chapters, I made some initial observations about how it is possible to navigate in the
proposed model. However, these suggestions are not based on any empirical studies,
but only on the findings of the studies presented in this thesis. Raami (2016: 117) notes
that: “Great theories or models of action have little weight if they don’t work. The most
destructive action for creativity is to try to squeeze the action into a pre-planned or
defined sequence of events”. Like Raami, I also believe that the best way to “train cre-
ativity” is to define methods that work in practice. A practical investigation of the Cycle
of Creative Resources – or a series of practical investigations – should take place to
formulate proven strategies grounded and tested in practice. Ideally, this would be im-
plemented in collaboration with other people working in the creative fields, possibly
through an interdisciplinary approach, by incorporating considerations for psycholog-
ical factors to the study. Creating tools that would help creative professionals to iden-
tify where they are at the different states of creative cycle, and explore and evaluate
different navigating strategies, would be a potential way to further develop the Cycle of
Creative Resources.

78 See the “Four C Model of Creativity” (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009, 2013), Section 1.4.1, Creativity and the creative
professional.
7.4.2 The impact of artistically ambitious picturebooks

The tendency to simplify picturebooks by the publishing houses – at least in Finland – in order to make them “more suitable for children” or “less artistic” limits and greatly diminishes the possibilities and the potential that picturebook illustrators have as visual artists. By doing so, the potential and possibilities of the picturebook as a powerful communication medium and a visual artifact are also limited and largely diminished. Therefore, I would suggest that issues related to these themes should be studied further.

The most plausible explanation for simplifying picturebooks is not in children’s needs, hopes, and expectations, or any realistic or actual suitability demands of children as a target audience. Rather, this kind of “aesthetic guidance” is most commonly used as a false justification for marketing factors. Like Salisbury (2006: 9) notes, the “rules” are set by “the notorious chain of people that come between book and child: the marketing people, accounts people, salespeople, bookshop managers, shop assistants and parents, all of whom have a say in what is ‘appropriate’ and what reaches the child’s bookshelf”. When picturebooks are no longer published primarily for children or with the aesthetic and artistic quality of the picturebook in mind, it is time to evaluate the dominant processes in this area critically. After all, like Evans (2015: 44) points out, “quite evidently – responding to challenging and controversial picturebooks is not something that children are afraid of. It is more likely to be adults – parents, teachers and carers – who are unwilling, indeed incapable of making relevant, mature responses”.

According to the marketing and leadership author Seth Godin (2018), what is going on right now is “the revolution of marketing”. The new way of marketing – finding the smallest viable audience with specialized products – has already taken place worldwide. This is radically different from the old marketing method, which was all about finding as big an audience as possible by generalizing the products (Godin, 2018). Should this also affect and change the way picturebooks are created, published, sold, and valued as visual artifacts?

In Norway, for instance, the Arts Council Norway provides state subsidy for the production of Norwegian picturebooks with high artistic value. Publishing houses may choose to publish some picturebooks with low commercial potential as long as their aesthetic quality is high (Ørjasæter, 2020). In addition to the state subsidy in Norway, every new book of fiction that has a sufficient level of literary quality is bought by the state and distributed to all the public and school libraries. Picturebooks are also included in this scheme – this results in 1550 copies of all books for children and young adults, categorized as new Norwegian literary fiction, that are distributed to libraries for free (Ørjasæter, 2020).

Norwegian picturebooks are highly experimental, non-patronizing, intelligent, versatile, challenging, and often enjoyable to both children and adults. Several Norwegian illustrators behind those “artistic” picturebooks – for example, Stian Hole, Per Dybvig, and Øyvind Torseter – have succeeded in building highly successful and international careers as picturebook illustrators. The level of their artistic ambition does not seem to correlate with the number of their books being sold – on the contrary. Similarly, for
instance, Marika Maijala\textsuperscript{79} has received wide recognition nationally and internationally for her inventive and experimental picturebooks, many of them published by a small and ambitious Finnish publishing house, Etana Editions. The underlying “fear” towards artistically ambitious picturebooks, which some larger publishing houses seem to hold on to persistently, is in fact outdated.

According to Kristin Ørjasæter (2012) – the director of the Norwegian Institute for Children’s Books – the Norwegian “state subsidy system” has affected the Norwegian book production considerably. Between 2000-2010 the increase in published new picturebooks was bigger than in any other book category, Ørjasæter notes. Also, during the same period, many difficult subjects that children encounter in their lives – for example, school bullying, cruelty towards children, or alcoholism – found their way into Norwegian picturebooks (Ørjasæter, 2012). The concern about the suitability of difficult subjects for younger age groups that is still widely held in some other cultures (see e. g., Salisbury, 2007; Salisbury and Styles, 2012: 113; Evans, 2015: 10-11), seems to have been replaced in Norway with the concern about children who are confronting conflicting feelings and situations.

Publishing a wider range of picturebooks with experimental approaches – both thematically and visually – does not mean that there would not be any room left for more commercial picturebooks. According to Ørjasæter (2020), these days Norwegian publishing houses publish not only just more artistic but also more commercial picturebooks. However, commercial picturebooks are usually considered as “financial accelerators”, which allows the publishing houses to also publish picturebooks with higher artistic quality (Ørjasæter, 2020). The “Norwegian model” is an interesting example of how well-formed structures and artistically-minded approaches can help the picturebook illustrators and publishers to take full advantage of the possibilities that the medium of a picturebook has to offer.

Nodelman (1988: 285) notes, that good picturebooks offer us what all good art offers us: greater consciousness, and through that, an opportunity to be more human – wiser, and “less innocent”. Furthermore, as Nodelman points out, “it also means both to feel more objectively and to think with more involvement. ... It is objective awareness based on deep understanding that allows us first to know the world and then to love the world we know”. Is it possible that the “Norwegian model” produces more visually discerning children, who not only become receptive to a broader visual language, but also more responsible towards, and aware of the visual world we live in? Could this kind of development occur if children can see artistically ambitious and experimental picturebooks in their childhood and youth, instead of merely consuming images that their parents find “suitable” for them, or those that the publishing houses consider commercial enough for their market?

The observations presented here have been made to demonstrate that the conversation about the artistic quality of published picturebooks should take place far beyond the circle of publishing houses and the ateliers of illustrators. Future research is needed to investigate the issues raised here, so that, for instance, the responsible organizations and institutions can devise and implement more effective strategies on how children’s culture is supported at national and international levels.

\textsuperscript{79} Maijala is one of the illustrators interviewed for the study presented in Chapter 5.
7.5 Final words

There is no key to happiness – the door is always open.

Mother Theresa

This thesis has been an extraordinary journey to me both as an artist, as well as a researcher. When I started making this thesis – several years and two babies ago – I had a clear image in my mind of what and who I was – I was a picturebook illustrator. Being a picturebook illustrator was my professional identity – that was what I had wanted to be since I was a little girl, and that was what I had become. However, I was struggling to receive joy from this fulfilled childhood dream of mine, and when I was not trying to hide from these feelings, I was blaming myself for my struggles – that I was having a hard time only because of my perfectionism or because I simply was not skilled enough as an artist. As I have discussed in this thesis, documenting my illustration process for this study brought me to a state of creative melancholy. Soon it developed into a creative depression – a paralyzed state of creativity. Despite the fact that I enjoyed every other area of my life and was fully functioning in my other roles as a mother, teacher, and researcher, my yearning to create was still there. However, every time I tried to draw, paint, or do any type of visual explorations, I ended up throwing the tools back into the drawer in frustration, with the waves of anxiety hitting me relentlessly.

Now, six years later, I consider myself as a “recovering creative”. Only recently, I declined another book illustration project that I was invited to undertake. I could not see myself illustrating a picturebook, without ending up in the same state of complete agony that I had experienced while illustrating *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*. I got that close to the same “fire” that Sendak (2011) mentioned himself experiencing while illustrating the picturebook *Outside over there* (1981): “It also brought a nervous breakdown. Of monumental force. It slapped me to the ground. I got that close to the fire – I got that close to the fire”. Eight years after my own breakdown, the “fire” is still very close. So close in fact that I am reluctant to accept any illustration assignments, and not just picturebooks. I am afraid of getting burned by the fire again. This is how overwhelming the state of creative depression can be for the creative professional.

After finishing *Iivari-tonttu karkuteillä*, I believed that maybe the struggle was in fact an inevitable part of the creative process, and that some individuals were just better and stronger at dealing with it. The list of tortured creatives in the history of arts is so long that I thought that maybe it was just a matter of one’s career choice – a profession that comes at a price. However, through this thesis, and through the persistent work to recover my own creativity, I have come to believe that the struggle does not need to be part of the creative process – although it might sometimes seem like it.

The very first step for recovering creatives is to admit that they are struggling. Often, admitting that the creative profession does not provide joy anymore comes with emotions like guilt and shame. This, I also noticed myself. For a long time, I repeated to
myself that I would be just fine if I could “get myself together”, stop procrastinating and being “lazy”. It is common for struggling creatives to feel that their agony is exaggerated or is nothing in comparison to some “real” problems in the world. As this thesis proves, this is never true, and the struggle should always be taken extremely seriously.

My willingness to become friends with my creativity again has taken me to the most peculiar places while doing this thesis. After several failed attempts to find joy in where I used to find it – at my drawing table – I started looking for a creative spark elsewhere. I started baking. I made cakes and croissants. I made Napoleon pastries and macarons. So much so that I ended up competing with other baking enthusiasts in the finals of a baking competition broadcasted on national television. I gave birth to two children. I moved to Copenhagen for two years, and then back to Helsinki. I completed t twelve-week-program by Julia Cameron – The Artist’s Way: The Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity – explicitly designed for artistic renewal and recovery. Inspired by David Lynch, I took a course about transcendental meditation and started meditating regularly twice a day. I began practicing improvisation theatre – first in Denmark, then in Finland. My relationship with drawing is still shaky and fragile, but with the help of croquis drawing – quick, effortless sketching week after week – I have been able to move one step closer to my own line again. Instead of being afraid of my line, I have become more and more curious about where it will lead me.

“The stringent requirement of a sustained creative life is the humility to start again, to begin anew”, Cameron (2016: 182) writes, or as Saltz (2020: x) puts it: “The artist is on a continually evolving path, accumulating experience but always starting over”. Even though the way back to my own creativity has been slow and has required humility and patience – after all, I am still on the road – it is the quest that I am willing to make. My creativity is worth saving. It is worth cherishing, protecting, defending, and loving. I only wish that I had recognized it before I did practically everything I could to push my creativity into a dark corner with no windows.

This thesis has given a profound insight into the creative process from the perspective of picturebook illustrators. Although the process of illustrating a picturebook has a particular visual-verbal nature, and although the profession of an illustrator is in many ways different from any other creative profession, I have proposed that the six states of the Cycle of Creative Resources could be observed from the perspective of other creative fields as well. I hope that this thesis will reach the people interested in creative well-being both within the academia, but also out there, in the studios, ateliers, offices, and workspaces of creative professionals, who find themselves wondering when the last time was that they had fun. “Creativity is our true nature. Blocks are an unnatural thwarting of a process at once as normal and as miraculous as the blossoming of a flower at the end of a slender green stem”, Cameron (2016: xvii) argues in her own poetic way.

It is possible to avoid the fate of Icarus, who was burned by, rather than being touched by fire. It is possible to survive the flight – even enjoy it – without losing one’s own self. The states of creative anxiety, melancholy, burnout, and depression can be prevented. Those states could have been prevented by me, and they can be prevented by anybody who decides to turn around before ending up into the dark corner with no windows. However, as I myself came to notice, even in that corner, there is a door. And that door, just like Mother Theresa said, is always open.
References

Literature:


References


References


References


**Broadcasts, podcasts and audio books:**


Appendices

Appendix 1: The Picturebook Illustration Model in Finnish

Figure 1. The Picturebook Illustration Model in Finnish: Kuvakirjan kuvitusprosessi.
Appendix 2: The Cycle of Creative Resources in Finnish

Figure 2. The Cycle of Creative Resources in Finnish: Luovien voimavarojen kehä.
Research studies acknowledge the complex nature of creative personalities and show empirical evidence for an association between creativity and mood disorders. Yet, there has been surprisingly little discussion of creative professionals who have lost their work motivation and creative spark. In the studies presented in this thesis, I focus on addressing this gap and attempt to provide a more in-depth understanding of the creative process. This thesis examines creative well-being and the complexity of the creative process from the perspective of picturebook illustrators. Initially, my aim with the thesis was to answer the question: what is the creative process of illustrating a picturebook? However, the more I examined my data, the clearer it became that it suggested a new kind of theory about the work-related well-being of creative professionals in general. Consequently, I ended up posing and answering two further questions: what are the main elements of creative resources, and what are the main factors contributing to creative well-being?