



ISSA Peer Learning Activities

# The Little Captain and the Great Calm Sea

*Lightning flashed, thunder cracked and rain poured from the sky. The boat rocked dangerously as huge storm waves splashed on the deck. The little captain took a deep belly breath to steady himself and calm the fast beating of his heart so that he could think clearly. He held the steering wheel firmly in his hands and guided the boat through the terrible thunderstorm to quieter waters. He loved being in charge of his ship, he enjoyed knowing exactly what to do. The dark clouds had dispersed and a few stars shone brightly in the sky. The waves were calm and gentle, and so was his breathing, now that the danger had passed. Looking out over the peaceful sea at night, with the light of the moon dancing across the ripples, he relaxed and smiled.*

## **What is it?**

ISSA members Sardes (the Netherlands) and the Neohumanist Education Association (AEN, Romania) developed this **Peer Learning Activity (PLA)** as a 2-day joint learning activity about the role of yoga and meditation techniques in stimulating young children's Executive Function and Self-Regulation. The starting point is *The Little Captain*, developed by Sardes as a professional development package that helps preschool teachers to stimulate children's Executive Function and Self-Regulation.

## **What is Executive Function?**

Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and switch between multiple tasks successfully. Children need this set of skills to

filter distractions, prioritize tasks, set and achieve goals, and control impulses.

In the last decade, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of Executive Function and Self-Regulation in the lives of young children. Being able to cope with changing situations, being able to maintain information in working memory, being able to control impulses and your emotions, are important assets in that facilitate children's development as well as early learning.

Research suggests that well developed EF/SR are even more crucial for learning and development than cognitive skills. They also enable positive behaviour and allow us to make healthy choices for ourselves and our families. EF/SR can be defined as the capacity to control impulses, to use working memory, and to be flexible, and these capacities are important (or even prerequisites) for further learning and development.

## **What is the role of yoga and meditation?**

Known factors that inhibit a sound development of EF/SR are different forms of stress. Yoga and meditation practices have been proven to reduce stress levels. Children are likely to display better EF/SR when they are not stressed. Moreover, teachers who are not stressed are better role models for the children and they are better geared to stimulate children's EF/SR.

Sardes and the Neohumanist Education Association will be working together to



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incorporate yoga and meditation exercises and games in the existing training of *The Little Captain*. For example, deep breathing and exercises adapted from yoga and meditation practices have been shown to enhance executive function, by activating the parasympathetic "relaxation response" and thus reducing stress levels.

### **For who is this PLA?**

The PLA is designed for those ISSA members who have experience in training and coaching professionals who work with young children (especially those at risk, such as young refugee children) who would like to expand their repertoire. Basic knowledge about EF and/or interest in yoga are a plus.

### **What will the workshop cover?**

- Exchange of practice and experience in working on EF/SR
- Development of expertise in stimulating EF/SR in young children
- Enriching the existing EF materials with yoga and meditation exercises
- Understanding the role of yoga and meditation exercises in stimulating EF/SR
- Preparing some of the training exercises in English
- Dissemination plan for the different participating countries

### **Spin-off**

As a spin-off of this PLA, we will consider the possibility to develop an international (English) version of the training, to be disseminated in the local language(s) among ISSA members.

### **Target audience and application procedure**

We invite **maximum 12 ISSA members** to join the PLA. We ask applicants to write a short Letter of Interest. Should there be more than 12 applicants, the trainers will choose the participants on the basis of this Letter of Interest.

Main target audience are teacher trainers, coaches. In order to assess a starting level, the applicants will receive a short survey to be filled before the start of workshop. The responses will give insight in what the applicants already know about Executive Function and Self-Regulation.

### **Logistics**

**When:** Monday-Tuesday, 20-21 November 2017

**Where:** Sardes, Lange Viestraat 371 Utrecht, the Netherlands

**Course size:** Maximum of 12 participants (max. 2 per ISSA member)

### **Financial conditions:**

#### **Accommodation:**

One night stay covered by ISSA/PLA program (bed + breakfast). If needed, the second night of accommodation has to be covered by the participants (price is approx. EUR 115/night per room).

#### **Travel:**

100 EUR per participant contribution to travel cost is provided by ISSA/PLA.

#### **Meals:**

On Monday 20 November lunch and dinner are provided. On Tuesday 21 November lunch is provided.



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## *The trainers/facilitators*

### **Lilian van der Bolt (Sardes)**

Lilian is a social psychologist graduated from the Communication Science department of the University of Amsterdam and a specialist in behaviour in educational contexts. She obtained her PhD at the University of Amsterdam (dissertation on affective reading experiences of pupils).

At Sardes she works as adviser and trainer has been involved in development and implementation of training courses and recently an app for mobile devices to support the tasks of ECEC staff. She is a consultant for municipalities and schools on various topics of preschool and school policy and practice, in particular processes on change and innovation in schools.

In her work she addresses topics such as Executive Function, Social Competence, Nature Education, and Play. She assists education professionals who have trouble coping with problematic behaviour of children in the classroom. She teaches them to consciously improve Executive Function and Self-Regulation in children. She developed *De Kleine Kapitein* (the Little Captain, see above for more information). She is author of training packages on Conflict Management and Social Competence in schools (C&SCO, Baas in Eigen Soap).

She has international experience in education projects in Turkey: Widespreading and

increasing the quality of preschool education in Turkey (2006-2007), and Strengthening the Turkish primary education system for handicapped children in line with European requirements for quality of education and equal opportunities (2005-2006).

### **Jeroen Aarsen (Sardes)**

Jeroen is working as ECEC adviser and trainer at Sardes in Utrecht, Netherlands (focus areas: language development, multilingualism, executive function/ self-regulation). With Lilian van der Bolt he developed *De Kleine Kapitein* (the Little Captain, see above for more information).

Jeroen is project leader of a large-scale, nationwide training program called TINK (Language and Interaction Skills in Child Care), and of a European project about multilingual approaches for young refugee children.

He has a PhD in Applied Linguistics (dissertation on bilingual language acquisition of Turkish children in The Netherlands, Tilburg University 1996). In 2017, Jeroen was elected as Board member of ISSA.

He was involved in a number of ECEC projects (mainly in Turkey), for example:

- As international expert in the project Child-Friendly Street in Ankara, financed by the Ankara Development Agency (2013-2014);
- As initiator, coordinator and trainer of the Early Childhood Development



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Diploma Course for Mid-Career Professionals in Turkey (2009-2011), financed by the Bernard van Leer Foundation;

- As project leader, trainer, adviser in the No child left behind (Hiçbir çocuk geride kalmamış) preschool project in Turkey (2008-2009);
- As project leader, trainer, adviser in the project Widespread and increasing the quality of preschool education in Turkey (2006-2007).

## Didi Deshaies (AEN)

Didi is the founder and president of the Association of Neohumanist Education in Romania. She is an international trainer in Neohumanist Early Childhood Education, having led trainings for NHE projects in Holland, Lebanon, Italy, Romania, USA and Australia. Neohumanist education places

emphasis on the personal development of children, with the aim to nurture the development of empathy, inclusive values, ecological awareness, service mindedness and love of learning.

She was one of the authors of the Neohumanist Education curriculum, submitted to the Romanian Ministry of Education for approval as a national alternative.

She has also been an initiator, trainer and author in the "We all Have a Story" project that promoted inclusive education with 125 Romanian ECE teachers (2014-2016).

In addition, Didi has 22 years of experience as a teacher of yoga and meditation and has incorporated insights gained from personal practice into her work with children and teachers.



## Contact and registration

For more **information**, please contact

Jeroen Aarssen at **Sardes**

E-mail [J.Aarssen@sardes.nl](mailto:J.Aarssen@sardes.nl)

Mobile phone +31 6 5328 1323

To **register** please fill the form on the next page, scan and send to the email above

**Sardes** and the **Association of Neohumanist Education** are both members of the International Step by Step Association.



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## Registration form

To **register** please fill the form below, scan and email to: [J.Aarssen@sardes.nl](mailto:J.Aarssen@sardes.nl) , before 15th October

Registration for *PLA The little Captain and the Great Calm Sea*, November 21-22, Utrecht, NL

First Name

Last Name

E-mail

Position in the organization:

Organisation name

Street

Postal/Zip code

City

Country

Motivation to join (approx 100 words)