

Hey readers! I'm Tanja, a community educator student from Mikkeli. I was a participant in Brain Gain – training course in Italy. I was a representative of Hyvärilä youth center alongside with Laura. Here's my story about why I wanted to attend Brain Gain, what I learned and experienced during this training course, and of course an explanation of what is even Brain Gain!



Brain Gain, which you can probably figure out already of the name, has everything to do with brains, to be even more precise – neuroscience. The main goal of Brain Gain is to give **tips and tools to engage youth and manage workshops** according to neuroscience approach. The training collected youth workers from all over Europe to come together to deepen our knowledge and competence in youth work, learn about ourselves, and of course, to create connections internationally.



Why did I join the training course? As someone who is passionate about internationality, I try to jump in to every possibility that I can, to gain more and more experiences and relations worldwide. I find international programmes really rewarding on so many levels, because we have the opportunity to meet new people, see new places, learn new cultures, learn new languages and widen our outlook of life. The topic of course was also a big reason why I wanted to join, because studying about neuroscience perspective in youth work is something I haven't explored and now this training course was an amazing opportunity to increase my knowledge.

Neuroscience as a subject is very important to understand our own behaviour and the behaviour of youth. A training course that had participants from so many backgrounds helps us **widen our learning process** even more about the topic. Our **cultural differences** gave the opportunity to share our different points of view, with the same goal in mind: neuroscience approach in youth work.

During our week long training course, we processed neuroscience from the following perspectives among others: learning and plasticity, metacognition, constructivism, emotional intelligence and Montessori method. **For example** we learned that all emotions are adaptive and emotional intelligence is not about answering the question "what we feel", but about "how much", "when" and "why" we feel.

What I found **most interesting** about the topic, was the Montessori method. Montessori sees each child as competent unique individuals, that think and learn differently than adults. To support children to fulfill their greatest potential, they need great environments and interactions with peers from different ages. We learned that there are **four different sensitive periods** of development: infancy (0-6), childhood (6-12), adolescence (12-18) and maturity (18-24). In these periods the brain needs a certain stimulation to develop properly.

Montessori has 7 principles in her method: play is work, independence, prepared environment, hands-on learning, respect, freedom within limits, observation. The method is very focused on learning by doing and experiencing, which I love. I'm also very glad we got to learn about Montessori method, since I'm writing my thesis about experiential pedagogy and this method was new to me and gave me a great aspect that I can exploit.



The week also included **visits to amazing places** alongside the theoretical parts and workshops. For example we visited Fly High school, where we got to see the Montessori method in action!

We got to see children **learning math through a game** that required fast reaction and fast calculation: they divided into two groups and the game leader shouted a number, for example "nine!". After that, the ninth person from each group ran to the game leader and the faster one got a multiplication problem they had to solve fast. If the other one fails, then the other team member could try. This was a great way to practice multiplication. It involved time outdoors, it involved social skills, it involved physical health without forgetting the main topic: math! **All the visits were very rewarding**, cause it's always so interesting to get to see the methods in action.

In conclusion: the whole week was full of beautiful landscapes, knowledge, culture, amazing people, laughter, bugs (:D) and lifelong memories from the glorious experiences we had the privilege to have together. I mean, where else can you really experience a night with Spanish Flamenco, Finnish karaoke, Italian pizza, Turkish coffee, Croatian juice and Estonian dried bread? And yes, that was only one night with a fraction of what the whole week contained.

Internationality rules!