

# IGNITING CHANGE



## AGENDA's Growing Global Reach

In its first two years (2016–2018), the AGENDA resource has reached international audiences, most notably with the American launch of an expanded and interactive AGENDA toolkit in partnership with the New York-based **SPARK Movement**, to **Valentine Card arts-activisms in Finland**. There, over 120 children and young people (aged 11–12) posted 210 Valentine's Cards to every member of the Finnish Parliament, letting politicians know that the #MeToo movement deeply affected children and young people their age.

## From sparks to flames: AGENDA in Finland

Since 2017, researchers, artists, and practitioners in Finland have continued to adapt and expand AGENDA's methods across multiple schools, working with more than 400 children and young people aged 10–13. Supported by a range of university and academy-funded research and engagement projects, this growing movement has coalesced into a powerful new force: the **FIRE COLLECTIVE**—a network of scholars and creative professionals, led by senior researcher Tuija Huuki and co-led by Dr. Suvi Pihkala. The collective is committed to transforming how we engage with gender and power in the peer cultures of children and young people.

This case study introduces the FIRE COLLECTIVE and the many creative projects they've ignited across Finland. Some have been developed in collaboration with Professor EJ Renold, such as the **Kisstory Project**, and others have drawn on their support in an advisory capacity: Gender-based violence in pre-teen relationship cultures: *How history, place, affect and arts interventions matter 2016-21*; *Arts and research-activism for addressing sexual harassment in pre-teen peer cultures 2019-23*.

Over the next few pages, we showcase a suite of projects – a culmination of AGENDA's evolving **methods and ethos**. These projects gather together many of the creative strategies developed by the FIRE COLLECTIVE, offering new ways of attuning to what matters in children and young people's peer, friendship and relationships cultures. Here, children and young people explore, express, and sometimes transform the gendered and sexual power dynamics that shape their everyday lives and imagined futures, and always fuelled by an ethics of care.



AGENDA has served as a kindling force for the FIRE COLLECTIVE since its earliest days. The creative activities within AGENDA – as well as the principles and research behind them – have been a source of inspiration for our FIRE-works: research-based tools developed by the collective to explore and engage with children and young people's peer cultures in safe ways.

AGENDA has sparked FIRE COLLECTIVE's members to think differently – not just about what we do, but how and why we do it. It has opened up space in our work for affective attunement, creative disruption, and collective reimagining. Through it, praxis is no longer just repetition, but a chance to reshape and reconfigure – flaring toward ethically sustainable change in children and young people's lives.

# SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN FINLAND

a brief overview for grades 1–6 (aged 6–13)

## A long-standing commitment

Finland, a Nordic country with a progressive approach to education, has a long-standing commitment to sexuality education. Elements of sexuality education appeared in the national curriculum as early as the 1950s, becoming officially integrated in 1970. The aim is to support the growth and development of the whole person including the physical, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality.

The current curriculum was updated in 2014 and the **2022–2025 Action Plan for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse** calls for strengthening the **national reach and quality** of sexuality education. Teacher training institutions are encouraged to include **age-appropriate sexuality education content** and schools and municipalities are supported to provide **professional development opportunities** in partnership with **external providers**. **See here for further details.**

## Primary school provision

Sexuality education, or Seksuaalikasvatus, is mandatory from primary school onwards. In grades 1–6, it is integrated into environmental studies. The term "sexuality" is first introduced in **Grade 3**.

## Curriculum content and education standards

According to **Finland's Board of Education**, sexuality education includes areas such as:

- 🔥 "emotions and their expression the diversity of sexuality"
- 🔥 "gender and human relationships"
- 🔥 "sexual health, the human body and its development:
- 🔥 "safety skills (such as recognizing and respecting one's own and others' boundaries and rights) and sexual rights"

It follows the WHO's "**Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe** and the World Health Organization (WHO) definition for the concepts of gender, sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights"

# ABOUT THE FIRE RESEARCH COLLECTIVE

The **FIRE Research Collective** works to promote **safe, respectful friendships and peer relationships** among children and young people. Central, is identifying how **gender and power** shape peer dynamics and recognising signs of uneven power relations early, before these escalate into bullying.

In collaboration with children and young people, schools, and other partners, we carry out research and develop a wide range of **creative activities**, including workshops, activist events, and campaigns, focused on **child wellbeing** and **peer relationships**.

Our work raises awareness of **power imbalances and harassment** in children and young people's peer cultures. We use **arts-based and research-activist methods** to support children and young people in safely expressing and addressing these experiences, while building more equitable and caring peer relationships. We also explore how children and young people's voices can be shared with other children and young people, adults, educators, and decision makers to foster **sustainable change**.

The collective brings together researchers from the **Faculties of Education and Psychology, and Humanities at the University of Oulu**, as well as media producers, artists, educators, and international experts working at the intersection of **gender, power, and childhood**.

*"We believe that new research knowledge, creative methods, awareness raising and support for children's peer-relationships can help children to form equal and respectful relationships."*

Learn  
more about  
our team here

Follow  
our publications  
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# METHODS ON THE MOVE

## Where AGENDA's Sparks Catch and Carry

The examples over the page invite you to step into the many creative worlds sparked by the FIRE COLLECTIVE's Friendship Workshops. Adapted and expanded from the AGENDA resource, the Friendship Workshops reimagine its creative, participatory ethos as a two-day, multi-room journey through immersive spaces, tactile making, and digital activism.

While AGENDA offers tools to spark dialogue and action on gender equality and respectful relationships, here those methods are extended into carefully crafted environments: part exhibition, part studio, part dreamscape, where children and young people can explore friendship, confront harm, and imagine futures of care and justice.

# FRIENDSHIP WORKSHOPS

Friendship Workshops are two-day creative encounters with schoolchildren and young people in grades 5–6 (age 10–13), focusing on gender-related harassment and the cultivation of safe friendships. [www.fire-collective.com/en/showroom](http://www.fire-collective.com/en/showroom)

## A care-ful process

Developed within the Research Council of Finland-funded project *Mapping, making and mattering: arts and research-activism for addressing sexual harassment in pre-teen peer cultures* (2019–2023), these workshops invite a slow, attentive unfolding of **making 'voice' matter differently**, shaped through speculative acts and an ethics of care.

## The Space: rooms that remember

Workshops are organised with schools and take place during the school day, with participation entirely voluntary and supported by ongoing consent from children and young people, and parents/guardians. They inhabit a dedicated multi-room facility (once a maternity clinic) now transformed into a constellation of rooms that hold stories, gestures, and materials from past projects.

## The process: making and moving what matters

Children and young people begin in the **Orange Room**, sharing feelings on a “net of feelings” and drawing lines on wood in the quiet open circle, spend time in the **Forest Room**, a calm space for reflection and embedding what matters with the wider environment, body what matters in the **Glitch Room** to create digital activist animations, take turns in the **Hot Seats**, responding physically to statements about friendship, difference, and respect, make **Relationship Knots**, crafting sculptural forms of connection and conflict and step into the future where they imagine and build **Friendship Dreamlands**, model worlds of trust, inclusion, and joy.

## A living archive for over 400 children and young people

All of what is made to matter then travels beyond the workshop, see how in **Statements on Wood** and the film **Moments of Truth**. Here, hundreds of children and young people's artworks live alongside new acts of making, so that past, present, and future speak to each other in colour, texture, and form.



## Warm beginnings: the Orange Room

Children and young people begin the day by entering the Orange Room, its walls, ceilings, and windows draped in orange-dyed canvases, cushions and carpets in warm tones. They are invited into an open circle on the floor, a slow settling into the space, and orienting activities like making an emotion card and pegging it to a “net of feelings” or tracing a line across a large oval plywood board while microphones pick up the sound of the pen.

View **On the Surface – Under the Surface** from one of FIRE-collective’s earlier workshops (2017) for how children and young people have been “fishing into the unknown” and how moving pens draw out the lines of emotion, from joy to discomfort.



## The Forest Room

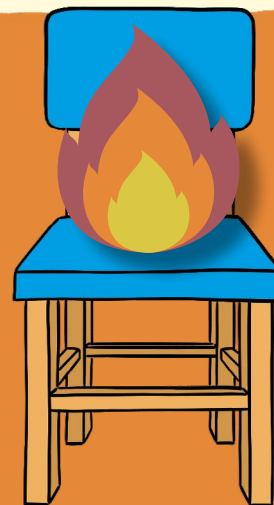
Children and young people can step into the Forest Room, a softly lit land where artificial spruce trees rise beneath canvas clouds and the gentle sound of a water stream mingles with birdsong. In one corner, a wishing well made from an old car tyre invites quiet hopes and birch trunk blocks serve as tables or perches. The air is calm here, offering a soothing space for thinking, making, and simply relaxing.

View the opening of the film, “**Friendship Workshop**” for a glimpse into this space.

## The Glitch Room

The Glitch Room, painted black, hums differently. In the spirit of Agenda's **glitching** projects: **Under Pressure?** and **i-motion**, this space turns digital media into a tool for creative resistance. With a media producer, children and young people create digital activist animations, embodying statements through movement, cardboard props, and glowing type. Messages such as *"Stop inequality!"* and *"Hey boys! Let the girls be themselves"* are projected large and edited into visual calls for change.

View children and young people's kinetic visions [here](#).



## Hot Seats

In Hot Seats, children and young people sit in a circle while researchers read statements gathered from other children and young people's workshops: "I have noticed that someone sometimes comes too close in an unpleasant way", "No one should be teased for being different", "You can like whomever you want to like." Agreement is shown by changing seats; disagreement or withholding by staying put. The scrape of chairs sometimes leads to conversation; at other times, the movement alone speaks.

View the section "Communicating Experiences" in the film, **Friendship Workshops**, to see the chairing of emotions in action.



## Relationship Knots

Many of the craftivisms first developed in AGENDA, including the use of **Jars, Pipe cleaners, Felt Clay Sculptures**, woven **Relationship Webs** and **Lego** to express and feel with what matters are adapted here in expanded form. Relationship Knots grow from anonymous “experience jars” filled with strips of paper carrying other children and young people’s thoughts and feelings.

These fragments seed the making of sculptural relationships from pipe cleaners, jute yarn, wire, wooden sticks, cardboard, bells, furry balls, glitter glue, patterned tapes, playdough, and Lego. Some works loop brightly, showing bonds of care; others knot tight or twist messy, holding the shape of conflict, confusion, or loss.

See the section “Communicating Experiences” in the film, **Friendship Workshops**, to view how these knotty matters are surfaced and shared.



## Friendship Dreamlands

Towards the close of the two-day workshops, the focus shifts from resisting harm to imagining what might be. Children and young people move from voicing refusals to crafting transformative visions of friendship. Similar to AGENDA's **Mood Boards**, each Friendship Dreamland is a three-dimensional collage shaped from colours, textures, symbols, and materials that have come to matter over the two days.

In these miniature worlds appear “friendship huts of trust”, safe spaces to calm down, classrooms for learning relationship skills, and open, inclusive landscapes where “liking” is freed from the **narrow lines of gender and sexual norms**. There are places for hobbies with friends, spaces to rest, and environments that feel held or to use a Welsh word, to ‘cwch’.

View the film **Friendship Dreamlands** to see how children and young people are making holding space for imagined relationship cultures that can be reached for, shaped, and shared.



## Carrying what matters beyond the workshops

A hallmark of the Friendship Workshops, and of **AGENDA's ethos**, is that the **creative work** doesn't end when creative sessions come to a close: it travels. The hundreds of paper strips written in workshops, holding children and young people's anonymous thoughts and experiences, form a 'what matters' archive. These slips are handled, read, collaged, bottled, poured out, and re-read over time, each one carrying the textures of children and young people's peer and friendship cultures into future encounters with wider publics.

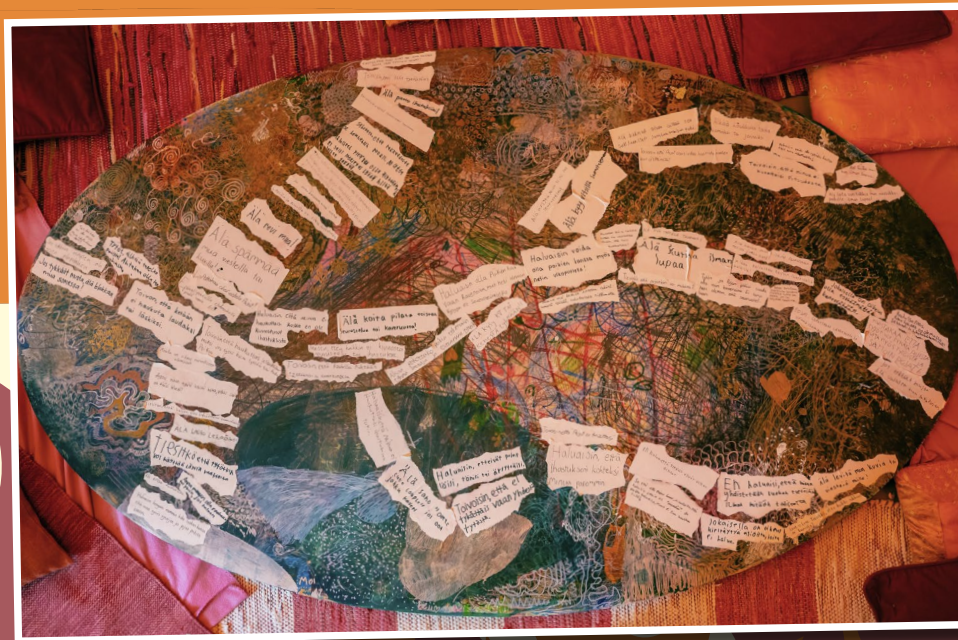
## Statements on wood

In a spin-off workshop, children and young people revisit the paper strips and press them onto the same 2-metre-wide oval birch plywood board used for the Line Drawing activity, the wood already charged with the energy of past participants. This becomes, **Statements on Wood** and echoing the AGENDA activity **Re-assembling the Rules**, with each strip bearing children and young people's experiences, dreams, and visions for safer peer and relationship cultures.

Like the **rule-elfies**, these voices in the grain speak through more than 80 statements, carried from workshop spaces into public life. Built across multiple sessions, the piece merges research, art, and activism. First exhibited in Rännigalleria in Oulu (April 7 – May 5, 2022), it moves as a powerful call for change, inviting decision-makers, educators, and peers to listen.

Read more about here about **Statements on Wood**.

Other creative matters have also moved outward: **Moments of Truth**, a YouTube film by a group of 10–11-year-old girls reflecting on their relationships with boys; and **#Metoo Postscriptum** Valentine's Day cards sent to policymakers to influence educational decision-making. In each case, children and young people's voices are amplified in ways that are both impactful and ethically careful, ensuring that what was made together continues to matter in the wider world.



This case study was shaped in conversation and co-writing with Tuija Huuki and Suvi Pihkala, and made possible with funding from Cardiff University.