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Student Teachers Building a Sustainable Future Through Constructing Equality in Visual Arts Education

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Abstract

This article presents a discussion about primary school visual arts education from the point of view of social sustainability and in the context of teacher education in Finland. The study focuses on the student teachers' understanding and pedagogic thinking of the equality construction in visual arts. In this case study the research data comprises the learning portfolios of student teachers (N=25) from the visual arts teaching course at the University of Helsinki in which they designed and carried out pedagogical workshops of visual arts to promote equality. The data were examined with the methods of qualitative content analysis. In this context, the student teachers found engaging elements in the aims and practices of visual arts to be the way to enhance equality. Visual arts education was found to offer a functional space for enhancing the agency, social skills and values needed in a sustainable future.

Key words: teacher education, visual arts education, equality, sustainability, social engagement, dialogue

Introduction

We humans have driven our planet and ourselves into eco-social crisis. It is our responsibility to find solutions to the problems we have caused. Teachers need the means to educate socially engaged, responsible future cosmopolitans who understand the complexity of the global society and know and want to operate with others to create a better world. The aim of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is to educate people to live and act sustainably and understand environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2009). The concept of social sustainability encompasses topics such as equity, community, diversity, human rights, social justice and social responsibility. Equality can be seen as a base for all encounters and agency. Among the social sustainable development goals of Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015), promotion of equality is a crucial yet demanding task of contemporary education. Equality is a wide and diverse thematic educational entity included in the aims of multicultural, diversity, global, democracy, human rights and citizenship education (Dewey, 1916; Banks, 2004; Biesta, 2006; Räsänen R., 2009; Andreotti, 2010b; Dervin, Paavola, & Talib, 2013; Pudas, 2015).

The aims of equality are already well represented in the current core curriculum of Finland (FNCC, 2014). However, it is not enough to present beautiful aims and theories; it is the actual pedagogical means and acts that matter. Finnish teachers support the aims of social justice at a rhetorical level, but they feel they have not been prepared to deal with challenging inequalities (Talib, 2005; Mansikka & Holm, 2011b, 2013) (see also Stites et al., 2018). Global education has not yet found a fixed role or systematic way of action in Finnish basic education (Pudas, 2015). In addition, not everything that is done in the name of social justice promotes it. For example, studies have shown that multicultural education in Finland (Riitaola, 2013) and elsewhere (Gorski, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 2007) has often been nationalist and colonialist despite its good intentions. Otherness may be strengthened (Dervin, 2016; Gorski, 2008; Tuori, 2007), minorities may be essentialized and hegemony supported (Gorski, 2008; Sleeter & Grant, 2007) despite opposite objectives. Teacher education is central in promoting functional practices that support social justice aims. However, the aims of democracy and human rights education have not yet been sufficiently promoted in Finnish teacher education (Kasa, 2019). In addition, studies show, that despite its current interest, there has not been enough research on ESD (UNESCO, 2009) and that Finnish student teachers feel they are not prepared to teach about sustainability (Hofman-Berholm, 2018). More research and critical reflection are needed in all educational interventions in order to support pupils' development to become active agents for a sustainable future. Building a connection between a curriculum and the practice and development of teacher education are the key factors in that task.

Sustainability calls for the atmosphere of hope, the culture of caring and critical thinking, but besides all that, sustainability also calls for activity, commitment and communality. The arts and experiential artistic knowledge building are known to be functional tools for hope, empathy, dialogic encounters, challenging the status quo and handling issues like social exclusion, marginalization, diversity, identity, questioning and world relations (e.g. Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Boughton & Maison, 1999; Pääjoki, 2004; Räsänen, 2008; Känkänen, 2013; Foster, 2017; Knif, 2017; Pusa & Suominen, 2018; Kallio-Tavin et al., 2019). The arts have been used to shape environmental behavior, for example through communicating information, creating empathy towards the environment and embedding the arts in sustainable development (Curtis, Reid, & Reeve, 2014). There are artistic practices aimed at common goals with social sustainability. For example, Pablo Helguera (2011) uses the concept of socially engaged art, to describe such social process-centered artistic practice which is related to concepts of relational aesthetics, communality, collaborative, participatory, dialogic and public art that democratizes the construct. In socially engaged art, subjects can be discussed in a space of ambiguity. That makes the problem visible and brings new insights through a critically self-reflective dialogue with an engaged community. Social interaction, conversation and dialogic art are the center of sociality. Socio-cultural animation (Kurki, 2000; Smith, 2009), based on the critical educational philosophy of Paulo Freire (1970), is another example of an approach in which the arts can be the means for social engagement to become active and to find one's own voice in a society. According to Dewey (1929), humans come into existence through and as a result of communication. Biesta (2017) states that existing as a subject means being in a state of dialogue with what and who is other. Dialogue and active social agency are seen as common key factors of sustainability, social justice and engaged communal art practices.

Dialogue in the arts can be seen as group work and discussions, but also as a dialogue between humans and the world (Biesta, 2018) and as a co-operation of mind, body and senses in art-based researching and thinking. Contemporary art education can support sustainability through bodily world relations by challenging the dominance of rationalism and individualism (Foster 2012, 2017). By its nature, contemporary art is dialogic, engaging, process-centered, editorialized, societal, interactional, democratic, collective and diversional. It supports critical thinking and opens new points of view by combining issues to new connections and to experiences of individuals. There are no right or wrong answers, just different experiences (Sederholm, 2000, 2010). The lack of the right answer and the independent knowledge production in the arts promote equality by challenging the knowledge hierarchy. That changes the role of the pupil from object to an active and critical subject.

In this article we have focused on the specific pedagogical means of promoting equality in teaching practices in the context of primary school visual arts education and primary school teacher education. This article reports on a study of the issue from the point of view of primary school visual arts teacher education in the context of equality. In this case study, the research data comprise the learning portfolios of student teachers (N=25) from the visual arts teaching course at the University of Helsinki where they designed and carried out pedagogical visual arts workshops aimed at promoting equality. The construction of the understanding and pedagogical thinking of future teachers' route from values to practice has been studied. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis methods. We asked how student teachers form the aim of equality into classroom practice in visual arts education.

Equality in Finnish Visual Arts Education

There is a need for deep pedagogical understanding of the means of enhancing equality at schools. This is even more the case today, when Finland is becoming more and more culturally diverse through the growing number of migrants and refugees and that create new aspects of social exclusion and inequality. However, concepts of multiculturalism and cultural diversity are now more widely understood, and equality is not a question of ethnicity alone, but of all aspects of diversity such as age, sex, language, capability, socio-economic status and the intersections between them (e.g. Räsänen, 2015; Crenshaw, 2017). There has been a change in educational discourses from ideas of integration and intercultural interaction towards social justice (Nieto & Bode, 2012). Discourses have moved from tolerance education and a nationalistic point of view towards more pluralistic and global thinking (Zilliacus, Holm, & Sahlström, 2017). Earlier, central multicultural education concepts of culture and cultural identity were problematized in the current discourse (e.g. Dervin et al., 2013; Zilliacus, Paulsrud, & Holm, 2017; Zilliacus, Holm, & Sahlström, 2017). However, schools are still environments of racism and differentiation (Lappalainen, 2009; Rastas, 2009; Riitaoja, 2013; Souto, 2011; Alemanji, 2016; Juva, 2019).

In the current national core curriculum (FNCC, 2014), the content of visual arts education has also changed dramatically in its understanding of art and culture, from modernism to contemporary conceptions of art and from discipline-based art education to visual culture education, and even beyond (Kallio-Tavin, 2015). Visual multi-literacy is seen as being important. The aim of the visual arts is to support the development of

the pupils' critical thinking, to encourage them to be engaged with the environment and society, to create the foundation of pupils' local and global agency and to support a sense of communality by producing and interpreting images (FNCC, 2014).

The FNCC is a set of values and a framework for educational planning, but it does not define how teaching should be implemented. Finnish teachers need to be academically independent interpreters of the curriculum and theories of both education and the visual arts, and in this context, also of social justice, to be able to construct tangible learning experiences for pupils. Class teachers usually have the main responsibility for visual arts education in the Finnish comprehensive school. In the study conducted by Räsänen (2013), class teachers had a narrow conception of multicultural issues at the beginning of their studies, and they did not identify the connection of the arts to the subject.

Arts education aimed at equality and social justice has artistic, social, political and ethical objectives (Quinn, Ploof, & Hochtritt, 2012). There have been different pedagogical approaches in that field of visual arts education. Critical reflection is needed on the choices made in them. Efland, Freedman and Stuhr (1996) formulated the connection between multiculturalism and the arts in the modernism-postmodernism continuum. Efland et al. (1996) in arts education, and Sleeter and Grant (2007) in education, state that instead of perceiving diversity through culturally-essentialized differences, seeing differences as faults, teaching of the different other and aiming to adapt the others to the norms of the dominant culture, education should aim for critical thinking and questioning. If teaching is built on tolerance, on celebration of diversity and on a simplistic and stereotypical use of culture, it maintains the hegemonic power relations of 'us and them'. According to Efland et al. (1996), the core elements of post-modern socially reformative art education are the relationship between knowledge and power in the context of image and art, active social engagement and openness for conflict. Sleeter and Grant (2007) state that education should be critical and focus on power relations and structural inequalities and they see the process of othering as the problem, rather than the other (see also Dervin, 2016; Gorski, 2008, 2009). According to Stein and Andreotti (2016) education needs critical reflection on the content and the positions of those involved. Otherwise educational outcomes tend to reproduce unequal relationships between dominant and marginalized populations, simplistic rationalizations of inequality and instrumental imaginaries of interconnectedness, diversity and social responsibility. It is important to examine whose culture and whose contents are dominating education in order to enhance social sustainability. Functional ways of artistic practices aiming for social justice in school need to be studied, since being compulsory and regulated environments, schools can be challenging places for artistic projects aimed at empowerment (Sava & Bardy, 2002; Anttila, 2001; Krappala & Pääjoki, 2003; Känkänen, 2013; Kiilakoski & Tervahartiala, 2015).

Equality, Engagement and the Arts

The social aim of education is to raise active and responsible citizens engaged in a democratic society and its aims for a better future. Equality is the starting point of all activity. The engagement and the empowerment gained through it are seen as being crucial in equality-building. Engagement is also crucial in sustainability behavior, since it enhances the experience of having an influence in society and on the environment (e.g. Palmer, 1998; Cantell & Koskinen, 2004; Uitto, Boeve-de Pauw, & Saloranta, 2015).

A study conducted by Uitto et al. (2015) showed that in-school agency and pro-social experience can enhance pupils' pro-environmental values, personal norms and self-efficacy for general ecological behavior even more than ecological experiences. Social engagement can be seen as a builder of social responsibility and agency that are central elements of sustainability behavior.

Social engagement is a complex concept to define and to translate, since it has diverse meanings in different contexts and languages. It is often related to participation, involvement, commitment, relatedness, belongingness, togetherness, coherence, inclusion and representation (Isola et al., 2017). Social engagement can be seen as a two-sided concept that includes both participation and involvement and has a connection to a prevention of marginalization (Kiilakoski, 2007). The key elements of social engagement in the educational context can be seen as pupils' involvement in power issues such as decision-making, the nature of the participation practices, and the level of participation (Sinclair, 2004). Experiences of being important and belonging, being listened to and involved and the process of growing into being an active and committed member of the society are also regarded as engaging elements (e.g. Karlsson, 2012; Thomas, 2002). Engagement is also positively connected to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995) that refers to beliefs in own capabilities in the action required. Self-efficacy enhances motivation and effort and hence leads to more task involvement (Ouweneel et al., 2011). A sustainable future needs competent individuals, capable of assessing their own efficacy and to develop their own ability to act (Pröbstl & Schmidt-Hönig, 2019).

Art can be socially engaging (e.g. Helguera, 2015) but visual culture is also a part of the process of othering. Visual literacy increases critical consciousness in the creating understanding of visual order ways of creating social order through visual culture, media, images and art. The visual orders contain the established and shared cultural meanings operated by power relations and they crystallize into interaction between people (Hall, 2013; Seppänen, 2010). The concept of the other highlights how societies create a sense of belonging, identity and social status by constructing social categories. The representation of the groups within a society is controlled by groups that have more political power (e.g. Said, 1978). Visual representations of otherness hold special cultural authority (Hall, 2013). Othering builds on comparisons based on representational stereotypes and the meanings connected to them. Colonialism is still strongly visible in current visual culture. For example, in Finland, Finnishness and therefore normality, appears to be white (Gordon, 2001; Honkasalo, 2003; Lahelma, 2005; Lappalainen, 2006; Rastas, 2009; Juva & Holm, 2016; Knif, 2017). In this context, the process of othering is seen as an opposing force to equality and social sustainability since it undermines the social agency and the self-efficacy needed in sustainability.

The Context, Aims and Methods of the Study

All class teachers in Finland complete a master's degree in education. Class teachers work in primary K-12 education, teaching all subjects including the visual arts. This study focuses on the understanding of 25 student class teachers of visual arts education in the context of equality. The data comprise the documented and reflected learning processes of the course, which in this case are five group portfolios. The case is limited to a teaching course in the visual arts, carried out in March 2016 in the primary teacher education section of the Faculty of Education at the University of Helsinki. All the

second-year students studied the promotion of equality in the teaching of “Arts and Skills” subjects in this multi-disciplinary course, which began with brief introductory lectures that conceptualized and outlined the basic concepts of equality and social justice in the educational context as presented earlier in this article. However, students were not especially guided towards social engagement. The researchers were also lecturers at the visual arts course and present at the workshops as well. The students who chose visual arts formed the case in this study. They learned about contemporary arts (e.g. community art) and artists’ ways of handling social justice issues (e.g. Jani Leinonen). After the lectures, the students designed a project related to the theme from the point of view of the subject chosen. They carried out the workshops independently during a day at a primary school in Helsinki. They were encouraged to use contemporary arts and media in their workshops and were asked to document the workshops and discuss the learning processes in their portfolios. The students’ group portfolios were examined through the following research question related to constructing social sustainability in visual arts education: How do student teachers build the aim of equality into classroom practice in visual arts education?

The aim of this case study was to research a phenomenon within its context and thereby develop a comprehension of it (Yin, 2003). The portfolios were analyzed in multiple phases by using qualitative content analysis methods, adapting both data-based and theory-based extracts at different stages of the analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2013). First, all the material was read through as a whole, examining the students’ descriptions in order to map the content and the structures in the phenomenon (Krippendor, 2013). Second, the repeated pattern of equality building elements in visual arts education practices that would form a significant wholeness from the point of view of the case was searched for (Patton, 2014). From this data-based stage of preliminary observations (Alasuutari, 1993; Eskola & Suoranta, 2001; Krippendor, 2013), points of view of the more exact reading were made to search for the common denominators of the preliminary observations. In the report, the theory and the empiricism interacted and formed a new understanding of the subject (Alasuutari, 1993; Eskola & Suoranta, 2000). The cyclicity is typical for such an approach, where the study of the data and the developing of the categories are intertwined and the categories develop during the process (Derry ym., 2007; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendor, 2013). Students found the central themes of equality education through visual arts to be related to examinations of knowledge and power, including means in questioning and the criticalness, equality skills and acts of influencing with an image. The common denominator in these observations was the concept of social engagement that was present in the aims given and in pedagogics used in projects. In the final stage of the analysis, the focus was on these observations that were discussed in the context of socially engaging art practices (Helguera, 2011; Kurki, 2000; Smith, 2009) to be able to study the role of arts in the process of social engagement and agency more closely.

Next, the essence of each project is introduced briefly, followed by a presentation of the general observations that arose from the data. Finally, we open the focused stage of the theory-based content in which we proportion students’ insights to the elements supporting equality and to their connections to social engagement. To enable the evaluation, repeatability and reliability of the qualitative analyses, the research process was opened, and the conclusions verified by original quotations from the research material, translated from Finnish.

Promoting Equality in Workshops

Five groups, each of five students, designed and executed the following workshops aiming at the promotion of equality:

GROUP 1: *Power-figure*. Media images were examined, the hopes and wishes of the persons visible in the pictures were discussed and expressed, a power-figure was made from modelling clay to carry out the wishes, the figure was photographed in front of the picture discussed at the beginning. The central aim was to develop the pupils' empathy skills.

GROUP 2: *Body painting/community art*. A background was painted by the group and the pupils' own hands set over the background were also painted; the process and outputs were examined and discussed. The central aim was to learn about operating in a group and developing negotiation skills.

GROUP 3: *Class spirit*. The pupils in groups negotiated and implemented a figure representing team spirit. The central aim was to enhance co-operative skills and paying attention to the views of all members.

GROUP 4: *Portrait*. Images related to the self were collected from magazines and a collage portrait was made from them. The central aim was to self-define and determine the self.

GROUP 5: *Advertisement*. Social contemporary art was discussed, and the media images were studied. Advertisements were prepared to proclaim something that one found important, the works were presented, and the process was discussed. The central aim was to learn about influencing with art and the critical examination of an image.

At the beginning, the theme was seen as abstract and difficult to get a grip on. Thinking gradually in groups and utilizing the lectures and the literature provided, the students began to develop the theme towards something tangible. Step-by-step it began to come together as sufficient small acts and pedagogical choices. The equality thinking actualized into engaging acts, infiltrated into the structures, aims and working methods of the lessons to practice the skills which support equality. Attention was drawn to images and their place in knowledge and hierarchy-building. Emphasizing of the process was seen as being important. The students did not end up choosing educational elements that could be directly interpreted as othering. They based their workshops neither on the idea of enhancing or adapting the other, nor did they take the position of knowledge-owner. In all the projects, the focus was on practicing functions which produce equality impartially directed at all the pupils. No group used approaches that only tolerated someone different or facilitated recovering (Efland et al., 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 2007). These choices can all be seen as socially engaging, since they created the group relations and constructed participatory structures in a group. However, it was possible to perceive examples of emphasizing unity and shyness instead of facing conceptual conflicts. These elements of socially reformative art education (Efland et al., 1996) and socially engaged art (Helguera, 2011) were missing. Even though socially engaged art emphasizes the network for participation over the act of protest, it aims to make the problems visible.

The students themselves realized this when it would have been possible to challenge the white nationalistic discourse of Finnishness.

At first, we had considered showing an advertisement in which there was a black person in the usual Finn's role. Shyness hit us: would this seem like pointing at an immigrant child somehow? However, we came to that conclusion that we were wrong when we noticed the joy with which a girl of Somalian

background took a magazine (Kuukausiliite 4/2004) and found an article about young Somalian-background women with the heading “Basic Finns”. They wanted to show the paper to the Somalian girls on the other side of the class. We understood how empowering it can be to see women of their own ethnic background brought out as ordinary Finns. (5)

Perhaps we as future teachers could learn from the co-students’ thoughts and from (artist) Leinonen’s “disobedience school” that when pursuing something good we could accept the possibility of conflicts, challenging situations and our own incompleteness, we might be a step closer to an open interaction. If a teacher could just stop pursuing the ideal and would be present in the moment, s/he would have better chances to listen to the pupil...and to meet the pupil as not only a representative of one’s own culture. (5)

However, students began to recognize some elements of visual orders ways of creating social order (Hall, 2013; Seppänen, 2010) in the process of othering (Sleeter & Grant, 2007; Gorski, 2008, 2009). According to Adams et al. (2016), the new points of view open from the shaking of the existing hegemony. That and the need of the support following from it must be realized. Helguera (2011) reminds us about the necessity of time investment in receiving results. Students’ carefulness must therefore be seen in the context of the short time invested with unfamiliar groups. An atmosphere of trust is needed in the open critical interaction. In addition, teachers need to show trust to build it by involving the pupils and appreciating their inputs (Kukkasniemi, 2011).

Challenging Power Relations Through Process Centered Pedagogy

According to Andreotti (2011), to enhance equality, education should guide pupils to build knowledge in interaction, to open many points of view, to meet uncertainty and to operate ethically. The students focused on the relationship between knowledge and power in the structure and realization of the lesson. It led to learner-centered and process-centered pedagogical thinking which is a core element of socially engagement art practices (Helguera, 2011). Students found teachers’ equalitarian thinking and actions to be important, in both methods and in knowledge-construction. The pupils were encouraged to be equal knowledge constructors and co-researchers through artistic processes and discussions.

We wanted to go deep into the power structure of a lesson and bring equality into practice. In other words, we wanted to give voice to all kinds of opinions stated in the classroom, to avoid “one truth” in issues and give all the pupils the opportunity to be heard, seen and accepted. (3)

The project stimulated thoughts about the possibilities of process-oriented pedagogy. The appearance of the result does not necessary explain what was learned, the most important things happen in process, on the way. (2)

The themes in the discussion on the image come from the pupils, their earlier experiences and things they have learned guide the discussion. (1)

We wanted to construct a situation, like the artist Jani Leinonen in his work, in which the pupils had a chance to make a difference in the themes they found to be important. (5)

Practicing Equality Skills

Pupils need knowledge, skills, and commitment to change the world, since the future world needs reflective and active citizens with high moral values (Banks, 2004). Adams et al. (2016) emphasize the meaning of engaging pedagogy to gain full participation for all. Equality in students' workshops was enhanced by engaging pedagogical choices. The practicing of equality skills was regarded as being important. Dialogue was seen as the central skill. According to the students, equality in visual arts education was constructed through practicing skills in empathy, taking others into account, co-operation, patience, negotiation, listening, presenting differing opinions, being critical, taking a closer look at something presupposed, questioning and building knowledge through artistic process as active agents. In addition of being equality skills, these are central skills in sustainability behavior as well.

During this course we have discussed a lot that you don't necessarily need to give the adult words for those acts at primary level, e.g. "now we are supporting equality here", but it is enough to take this point into account in pedagogical choices made during the lessons and in exercises. (5)

Equality becomes understandable for children by doing things as members of a community. (3)

We were happy about our choice of small groups. Everyone's voice was heard, and all pupils were met personally. The pupils needed to take other group members into account, listen to and be listened at, accept others different points of views and interpretations of images. We practiced skills of empathy, taking another position and taking others into account. (1)

There is no single right answer. Rather, questioning can continue for a long time and there is room for everyone's opinion. What else do we see in the picture? – as a question, challenges everyone once more to look at the picture from a new point of view. (1)

Our project was such that pupils needed to co-operate. It was necessary to negotiate in a group and respect each other when painting the background. (2)

We left the assignment so open that the members of the group needed to negotiate about the plan and the implementation. (3)

The aim of our project was to give every pupil an opportunity to be seen as the person s/he wants to be seen as, not just as a member of certain subgroup in population. The pupils themselves define how to present their identities. (4)

Dialogue is the center of sociality and participation, since it builds relations (Freire, 1983, 1994a; Helguera, 2011; Kester, 2005; Kurki, 2000). According to Helguera (2011), opening a discursive space and accepting the inputs give everyone a chance to insert their context into a structure. Helguera (2011) and Sinclair (2004) emphasize the nature and the level of participation in the engaging approaches. Students aimed for educational dialogue that could be seen as emancipatory and creating agency instead of dependency. Pupils were more than passive viewers involved in nominal participation or their participation was not only doing a simple directed task. They participated creatively by providing

a content and at best participated collaboratively by sharing responsibility for the development of the work (Helguera, 2011).

Engaging Through Images and Art

According to the students, the choice of images is an engaging equality act since images mediate a worldview and the norms which promote inclusion or othering. Taking a picture was seen as an act of choice, as evaluation and as a part of the interaction. Examining and making images was considered to be self-reflection and as becoming visible. The pupils were encouraged to look at images in such a way that made it possible to practice dialogue, interaction and criticality through them.

Anyway, a teacher has a big role in supporting equality in ways which s/he may not even think of. S/he constructs equality by choosing exercises and images. Thus, every image used in teaching is a statement and a message to pupils. You have to consider carefully which images you want to show to your pupils. (1)

We all strengthen or weaken equality among people by choosing our own ways of acting. Life is full of choices and art also makes choices. Art is used as a means of communication. Art has strengthened Finnish national identity over the years, e.g. national-romantic landscapes, and this is still happening through advertisements. Racism can also be resisted by using diverse people in advertisements. (3)

We wanted our pupils to look at the images in a new way. An important part of visual literacy is to reflect on the kinds of images that are shown, what matters are represented in them and how. Images can construct new knowledge, or they can repeat old role models, stereotypes and values as well. (5)

Art forms that enable collaboration and cultural interaction, for example community art and art forms that deal with difficult issues, were seen essential in equality construction.

This marginalized form of art served as a possibility for us to support pupils' body images and give them a new experience which broke the usual rules and borderlines. This is what contemporary art is often about – questioning the familiar and creating the new. (2)

Discussion and Conclusion

The choice of a relatively small research group is justified from the point of view of the subject and character of the study, but questions can be raised about the scope of the findings. Even though the qualitative study does not attempt to be generalized beyond the study group, it supports the significance of teacher education in this case. The nature of portfolios as data and the position of the researchers as the teachers who participated in the case affect the results of the study. Students' understanding of equality in education was intentionally increased with the lectures and literature. It is highly probable that students' dialogic group process and collective knowledge building have affected the

output of the students' thinking to be more finished and correct. However, it is not self-evident that teaching produces learning, and that learning is transferred into functional practice. Paradigms change slowly, and pedagogical understanding takes its time shaping classroom practice.

The building of the practical pedagogic operation seemed to be the class teacher's strength in promoting equality. Since the engagement is seen as being crucial in sustainability behavior (Cantell & Koskinen, 2004; Palmer, 1998; Uitto, Boeve-de Pauw, & Saloranta, 2015), students managed to build a connection between equality and sustainability. Students noticed the social aim of education and wanted to raise active and responsible citizens engaged for a better future. Students regarded social interaction and socially engaging acts such as dialogue, participation and process-centered pedagogy to be key factors of equality construction in visual arts education. Equality was elaborated through engaging pedagogy in dialogic art practice by examining power relations in pedagogical settings and choices and by studying and making images in co-operation. The development of social and emotional skills in empathy, co-operation, dialogue and criticality is crucial in sustainability construction. In addition, these skills seem to connect well with the skills of the future global citizen declared by UNESCO (2014) and with the global competencies declared by the OECD (2018). When engagement is understood as children's involvement in power issues such as decision-making, experiences of being important, being listened to and being involved (Thomas, 2002; Sinclair, 2004; Karlsson, 2012), these agency-enhancing aims were met in the projects. Visual arts education can help pupils to become critical thinkers and active engaged citizens. It can also help to enhance empathy and build connections to others and their thoughts and feelings. The skills gained in the process help in turning the focus from the self and one's own instant desires to those of others and the world (e.g. Biesta, 2014; Värri, 2018).

According to Biesta (2018), one of the greatest tasks of contemporary education is to figure out how to put our own desires in dialogue with others and the reality that exists outside of ourselves. In that task the arts can be the dialogue of humans and the world. Student teachers managed to find ways to build equality through images and art and the skills needed in existing in and with the world were practiced. However, the aim of adapting the ways of working and knowing through art was not fully reached. Even though the workshops started with examples of contemporary art, the ways the projects were carried out could have been more versatile and more courageous in utilizing all the options the arts have to offer. Regarding the experiential dimensions of learning and knowledge-building, the essence in embodiment in world relations and the wider conception of dialogue might have been easier for the students to recognize. According to Helguera (2011), the role of the arts is a complex and common issue in engagement art projects. The core of the artwork is its pedagogical process. Art focuses on the social processes of exchange depending on the unique patterns of performativity, experience and ambiguity in the arts. But, if art is understood profoundly, the experience can be built to be more complex, thoughtful and enduring. If that is combined with engaging pedagogy and the learning environments that strengthen pupils' identities, agency and co-operative skills, it is possible to enhance the abilities of generating change. These findings should be studied further, since they can be useful in the development of teacher education in the context of visual arts and sustainability.

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