

ART EDUCATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A HOPEFUL FUTURE AS EXPERIENCED BY ART EDUCATION AND TEACHER STUDENTS

Katri-Helena Rautiainen, & Merja Kauppinen

Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

Abstract

The study explores how art and art education could support building a hopeful future as experienced by art education and teacher students. The research context is a study module built on art-based learning (5 ECTS), which was carried out in multidisciplinary collaboration. The research material was individual (N=12), and group (N=9) produced during the studies. Data-driven content analysis was used to search for meanings that express the perspective of hope. According to the results, students see with art an opportunity for broad societal influence in building a world tinged with hope. The hope of the social and collective nature of art is integrated into communities and institutions through environmental art and public art. The importance of personality, art accessibility and perception, and skills of interpretation and understanding are also recognized. The reflections of the students provide elements for the implementation of the pedagogy of hope. A hopeful future believes in the transformative power of the intrinsic value of art and the preservation of the thinking of hope in educational work.

Keywords: *Art education, pedagogy of hope, agency, future orientation, resilience.*

1. Introduction

At times we have heard how hope has given strength to overcome difficulties, while losing it has led to despair, fear, and cynicism. Today's global threats and crises such as protracted conflicts and wars, climate, energy and economic crises, pandemics, the oppression of human rights, poverty and refugee flows, and even the confrontations between artificial intelligence and humanity can add to the climate of hopelessness. Such an atmosphere involves a negative emotional charge and evokes value reflection, which the educator must look at both independently and together with children and young people.

The current education system can also add to the cycle of hopelessness. Pulkki (2021) argues that education emphasizes individual performance and competition. These are symptoms of a broader social mindset and ideology. It emphasizes instrumental thinking and the competition for continuous growth (Pulkki, 2021). However, a breeder's central task is to create prospects for our living reality, even though our reality is marked by many unpredictable, seemingly uncontrollable events and developments (Foster et al., 2019) and to support sustainability in maintaining hope (Conklin, 2005).

In this context of global insecurity, new approaches and means are needed to add hope-building, rooting and pedagogical ways of dealing with hopelessness and creating faith in the future. For example, there is a need for experiential participation, emotional experiences and thinking skills guidance, where learners actively shape and influence their living world. These skills and approaches are used in art education. Its goal is to support the learner's agency and to emphasize the importance of the senses, emotions and reality in building meanings (Griffith, 2021). In addition, art can be used to train in valuing diversity, critical thinking and questioning oppressive structures that support building a sustainable and peaceful future (Forster & Sutela, 2024). The key task of education is to encourage the search for diversity of problems and to find constructive solutions for the future of hope (Bourn, 2021). From these starting points, the research task of our research took shape - art education as a builder of a hopeful future.

2. Perspectives on hope and the pedagogy of hope

In definitions of hope, several researchers refer to the ideas of hope expressed by Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire (Hannula, 2019; Suoranta, 2019). Freire (1994; 2016/1970) refers with hope to educational activities that are forward-looking and conducive to the future. In a school context,

this could mean that achieving hope requires learners to practice thought patterns that support hope, in which teaching is seen as a kind of tool in building hope (Freire, 1994; 2016/1970). In this context, there is also talk of a future orientation or belief in the future, in which learners are guided to set forward-looking goals and to act towards them (Snyder, 2000; 2002). The future-oriented model of thinking ultimately leads to a force for change in which, for example, social justice, freedom and equality are realized (Freire, 1994; 2016/ 1970; see also Moisio et al., 2016; Tomperi, 2001). But at the same time as future-oriented questions are asked, the guidance of the learner is also directed to the influence of phenomena and problems in time and to responsibility (Freire, 1994; 2016/1970). This can be experienced as empowering.

In education, the practice of hope takes place between the teacher and the learners in a dialogical interaction (see also hooks, 2003), which gives room for different voices and considers diverse perspectives (Freire, 1994; 2016/ 1970). Being heard and building common meanings strengthens inclusion and the experience of appreciation (hooks, 2003). When learners create an image of their own space and society, they could influence and experience hope. A critical awareness and desire to influence one's own life, vitality and the world around them is born (Freire, 1994; 2016/1970). Thus, hope is also associated with the ability to will and agency thinking (Hämäläinen, 2022). Strong agency thinking motivates action (Vanhalakka-Ruoho et al., 2015; Snyder, 2000) and, despite disappointments, supports the belief in better (Cheavens, 2000). To maintain hope, one needs so-called resilience, i.e., the ability to cope with adversity, such as learning from failure (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2000; 2002). Therefore, experiences of perseverance, patience, trust, and ability to maintain hope are considered to help individuals maintain an expectation of hope for something good and meaningful (Pihkala, 2017). In addition, other activities that sustain hope are imagination, dreams, and creative thinking (Freire, 1994; 2016/1970).

According to Hämäläinen (2022), education can only be used to awaken the prospect of hope, but each must build it himself. Essentially, it is about self-education, where building awareness of one's own ability to influence change in oneself and those around them increases hope (Hämäläinen, 2022). It is considered that factors based on personally meaningful experiences give educational strength to look at one's own life in a new way (also Suoranta, 2019). Hope also includes recognizing and acknowledging the limitations of life and being human without losing hope. These attributes are called pedagogy of hope. (Hämäläinen, 2022.) Hämäläinen (2022) also examines the pedagogy of hope as a pedagogy of will education. According to him, one must recognize the power of reason and will. This is based on the fact, that building awareness of one's own possibility through one's choices to make changes in oneself and in one's surroundings increases hope. In accordance with the principles of hope pedagogy, the task of education is to emphasize the sense of optimism and the possibility of change (Bourn, 2021).

3. Research question, data and methods

In our research, we examine a hopeful future in the context of art and art education, the significance of which has been less studied among students pursuing their university studies. The research question was: 1) how art and art education could support building a hopeful future as experienced by art education and teacher students. Based on the results obtained in the results review, we abstract a theoretical model: themes tinged with the hope of art and art education.

In our research, we examine a hopeful future in the context of art and art education, a perspective that has been less studied among university students. As a research data, we chose a multidisciplinary course of study in Art Education (5 ECTS) during which (four months) students reflect on their observations and experiences. The course also included art project interventions carried out by students at schools. The research material consisted of individual blog entries (Chapter 4.1) (N=12) and group outputs (4.2: Thesis of Art Education; 4.3: Final Reflections on the Electric Wall) (N=9). In art-oriented learning, visual arts, crafts, drama and music were integrated, as well as creative writing and narration.

The scientific philosophy of our research is based on phenomenology, which aims at the openness of the researcher and emphasizes the experiences of individuals. We use data-driven content analysis to analyze the materials so that we look for meanings that express the perspective of hope in the texts. In our analysis, we proceeded inductively from extracting statements of material through grouping to abstracting meanings (Guest et al., 2012). Blog entries and art education theses created in small groups are analyzed in three stages: 1) reading texts and picking statements about hope, 2) grouping statements, and 3) abstracting (Delve & Limpacher, 2023). The final reflection of the course was prepared on an electronic wall in small groups, and we analysed this material in the same way as the previous ones by classifying and theming statements. At this stage, students reflected on their experiences throughout the course and thus also took advantage of the findings from art projects. In the discussion of the results, we formed the key themes of hope. To increase the reliability of the analyses, classifications were revised by another researcher and unclear classifications were solved together (Guest et al., 2012).

This study was conducted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Prior to the collection of the material, consent was obtained from the students to participate in the study, which was not related to the completion of the course. In addition, students had the opportunity to interrupt their participation at any stage. To ensure anonymity and rights, the data of all parties was anonymized.

4. Results

4.1. Themes of hope in individual blogs

Students emphasized (1) the importance of growing as a person and the value of individual development: “Everyone grows at their own time, at their own pace, into a person.” This refers to the metaphorical expression of the artist, in which growth as a person was combined with the artist's mural of wood. Through the work, the tree symbolizes how different we are and how, despite this, we can grow together. This work communicates that diversity is acceptable and emphasizes the diversity of our community.

Students saw that “art also shapes (2) the society around us, is a big part of culture --- and is about humanity in general.” Art offers an opportunity to influence values, sustainable development and the creation of a positive atmosphere: “---the artist sought to influence society, or at least to take a stand and provoke discussion, by means of art (wars, environmental crises).” --- “Art and artistic activity have a lot of positive effects.” Places of influence include art galleries, which instil individuals and communities in art.

Students emphasized in their writings that (3) “art belongs to everyone” and art must be accessible. These include, for example, environmental art and murals. Public art offers the opportunity to encounter art in different everyday situations. This is called sustainable development. Independent works of art are often left on the walls of galleries or “painting on the wall, not physically recorded. When the exhibition is being built, the next piece will be in its place. (The artist's) art is displayed in places where there are people. Hospitals, maternity clinics, --- shopping centre.” These works will live on. Through environmental art, individuals learn to appreciate art, and it becomes part of their world of life.

The sociability and collectivity of art (4) appeared to students as meaningful dimensions of learning and experience. Art brings the environment and the world closer together. For example, art's “everyday themes, subjects, and approachable way of making art delight, possibly also create positive feelings that are not often experienced when visiting a hospital, for example.”

In the blog posts, students reflect (5) on the importance of growing up in art: “Is it enough just to notice art? Hardly! First, in the national core curriculum for basic education, art appears not only as something to be observed but also as a set of interpretive skills.” In guiding art education (6), the student has the freedom to learn in his or her own way. Students also found in the artist's mundane paintings that “perhaps the viewer can be more confused by the fact that such a mundane thing (a fruit basket) has been painted in great detail. For the artist himself, painting can be much more important and reflects emotions that are attached to the artist's process or everyday life. For this reason, students would do well to make (7) art for themselves.” “By describing the bodily, emotional, and social process a student has experienced, it helps them to get along better with their own creativity. This would prove to the student that the art he makes doesn't have to be part of some institution to be meaningful to himself.”

The connection between making art (8) to institutions and media “are vital for artists who want to employ themselves”. For an artist, this requires a balance of values.

4.2. Themes of hope in the theses of art education

The first thesis, tinged with hope, emphasizes that “there is no right or wrong in the emotions that art evokes.” This liberating perspective gives room to think creatively and experiment with different approaches, encouraging students to cross boundaries. The second thesis focuses on the balance of individuality and collectivity in art education: “Accepting the individuality and collectivity of making and experiencing art - to whom and from whom.” The third thesis highlights diversity, wide-rangingness and cross-border activities and expression: “Diversity: activities across disciplines and different art disciplines. Art education is so much more than just visual arts and/or music.” The fourth thesis, which expresses hope, focuses on the expression of emotions through art education: “The path of art to the expression of emotions -- how self-expression and communication can be implemented in an artistic way; how art can be used to feel, experience, tell.” The fifth thesis emphasizes giving “a sufficiently open frame - giving room for the student's creativity, but within the framework of instruction, the red thread must be included.” In the sixth theses, “the importance of interpreting and rehearsing the works it is understood that there is meaning and thought behind art and one learns to see them from one's own works as well.” The seventh thesis emphasizes the connection between art and “space --- how art can be represented in space, how a place or space is defined.”

4.3. Themes of Hope in the Final Reflections of Small Groups

In small group discussions, students emphasize the importance of building their own identity. Another meaning in making art is related to self-expression, creativity, developing emotional skills and deepening one's self-awareness. The third aspect emphasizes finding new facets. This includes expanding consciousness, breaking boundaries, creative perception, and the use of alternative forms of expression. In addition, the appropriate level of challenges and applications fuel creativity. The fourth observation focuses on identifying abstract concepts and supporting the understanding of reality. The fifth theme emphasizes the importance of collaboration and interaction skills. All the above factors contribute to a sense of community and synergy in the learning process.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The task of our research was to find out how art and art education could support building a hopeful future. The results abstracted meanings expressing the perspective of the hope of art and art education, from which were built up the four main themes of hope in the four-leaf clover (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Four-Leaf Clover of Hope: Themes of Hope in Art and Art Education.



According to our research, 1) the starting point for the idea of 'art belongs to everyone' is the accessibility and inclusion of art. Social influence and a sense of inclusion hold hope for thinking about a better tomorrow, where justice and equality are realized (Freire, 1994; 2016/1970; Moisio et al., 2016; Tomperi, 2001). According to the students, 2) the significance of cross-border activities in art is reflected in society and back again. The significance of community art is brought close to everyday life, which creates presence and takes a stand and creates prospects for future orientation (Freire, 1994; 2016/1970). Thus, community artworks placed in everyday environments can create collective bonds and dialogues between individuals and communities that uphold the resilience of hope. According to our research results, this can further build, for example, change flexibility, future thinking ability, and problem-solving skills (Southwick et al., 2014).

In this study, students placed the focus 3) on self-importance and relevance. Making art for oneself opens the gate to introspection, to examining one's own growth and thinking. It is necessary to find a personal connection to the creation of meaning, so that the rays of hope open and support the agency (Vanhalakka-Ruoho et al., 2015; Snyder, 2000) to experience inclusion and to maintain and preserve it in the long term even in difficult moments.

It takes 4) educational realization of hope pedagogy to discover the meaning of hope and develop it (Hämäläinen, 2022). In the pedagogy of hope, the teacher directs individuals to perceive and make different interpretations of art. Students emphasized that the teacher must create a path of hope for the learner to practice skills, strengthen commitment, and create a positive atmosphere for working (Snyder et al., 1991; Snyder, 2000; 2002). Collaborative learning enabled students to engage in the comparison of diverse interpretations. Students were also realised that it is the teacher's job to use pedagogical and dialogical means to encourage learners to question their own thinking and to build an atmosphere where it is permitted and safe. (Freire, 2016/ 1970).

This study focused on the activities of one group of students, so a comparison of the other groups could have broadened the perspective. The analysis and cross-checking of the data by two experienced researchers minimized the impact of the individual researcher's personal observations. Despite these limitations, our research deepened students' understanding of the importance of art education and its pedagogical means of building bridges towards a hopeful future.

References

- Bourn, D. (2021). Pedagogy of hope: global learning and the future of education. *International of Development Education and Global Learning*, 13(2), 65-78. <https://doi.org/10.14324/IJDEGL.13.2.01>
- Cheavens, J. (2000). Hope and Depression. Light through the Shadows. In C. R. Snyder (Ed.), *Handbook of hope: theory, measures & applications* (pp. 321-340). San Diego, Kalifornia: Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012654050-5/50019-1>
- Delve, Ho, L., & Limpaecher, A. (2023, March 24). *The Practical Guide to Qualitative Content Analysis*. Delve. Retrieved from <https://delvetool.com/blog/guide-qualitative-content-analysis>
- Freire, P. (1994). *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Freire, P. (2016) [1970]. *Sorrettujen pedagogiikka* (J. Kuortti, T. Tomperi & J. Suoranta, Trans.) Tampere: Vastapaino. (Original work published 1970: Pedagogia do oprimido).
- Foster, R., Salonen, A. O., & Keto, S. (2019). Kestävyystietoinen elämänorientaatio pedagogisena päämääränä. [Sustainability-Conscious Life Orientation as a Pedagogical Aim]. In T. Autio, L. Hankala & T. Kujala (Eds.), *Siirtymiä ja ajan merkkejä koulutuksessa. Opetussuunnitelmatutkimuksen näkökulmia* (pp. 121-143). Tampere: Tampere University Press. Retrieved from <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:tuni-201912166899>
- Foster, R.- & Sutela, K. (2024). Art education in the age of crises: Opportunities for hope and transformation. *Research in Arts & Education*, 2024(3), 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.54916/rae.148508>
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, Kalifornia: Sage Publications.
- Griffith, A. (2021). Embodied creativity in the fine and performing arts. *Journal of Creativity*, 2021(31). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.yjoc.2021.100007>
- hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York: Routledge.
- Hämäläinen, J. (2022). Toivon pedagogiikkaa. [Pedagogy of Hope]. *Sosiaalipedagoginen aikakauskirja*, 23(1), 121-128. <https://doi.org/10.30675/sa.121429>
- Moisio, O.-P., Raiker, A., & Rautiainen, M. (2016). Fighting Against the Flow in Theorizing Education. In A. Raiker & M. Rautiainen (Eds.), *Educating for Democracy in England and Finland: Principles and culture* (pp. 140-153). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Pihkala, P. (2017). Kuinka käsitellä maailman ongelmia? Traagisuus ja Toivo ympäristökasvatuksessa. [Tragedy and Hope in Environmental Education]. *Ainedidaktiikka* 1(1), 2-15. <https://journal.fi/ainedidaktiikka/article/view/65801/26624>
- Pulkki, J. M. (2021). Ajatuksia ekoindividuaation kasvatustilasta. *Sosiaalipedagoginen Aikakauskirja*, vol. 22, 43–62. <https://doi.org/10.30675/sa.90594>
- Snyder, C. R., Harris, C., Anderson, J. R., Holleran, S. A., Irving, L. M., Sigmon, S. T., Yoshinobu, L., Gibb, J., Langelle, C., & Harney, P. (1991). The Will and the Ways: Development and Validation of an Individual-Differences Measure of Hope. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(4), 570-585. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.4.570>
- Snyder, C. R. (2000). *Handbook of Hope: Theory, Measures, and Applications*. San Diego, Kalifornia: Academic Press.
- Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249-275. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1304_01
- Southwick, S. M., Bonanno, G. A., Masten, A. S., Panter-Brick, C., & Yehuda, R. (2014). Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v5.25338>
- Suoranta, J. (2019). *Paulo Freire - Sorrettujen pedagogiikka*. Helsinki: Into Kustannus Oy.
- Tomperi, T. (2001). Paulo Freire ja kriittinen pedagogiikka. [Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy]. *Niin & näin*, 2001(2), 62. Retrieved from <https://netn.fi/sites/www.netn.fi/files/netn012-17.pdf>
- Vanhalakka-Ruoho, M., Silvonen, J., & Kauppila, P. A. (2015). Toimijuus näkökulmana ohjaukseen. [Agency as a Perspective on Guidance]. In P. A. Kauppila, J. Silvonen & M. Vanhalakka-Ruoho (Eds.), *Toimijuus, ohjaus ja elämäntulkinta* (pp. v–vii). Publications of the University of Eastern Finland. Reports and Studies in Education, Humanities, and Theology. https://erepo.uef.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/15099/urn_isbn_978-952-61-1747-8.pdf