

BEYOND THE PICTURE-PERFECT OUTCOME: TURNING THE FOCUS TO THE ARTISTIC PROCESS IN ART EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Learning art is a complex activity, where different skills, emotions and competencies are intertwined. Learning in the visual arts entails in addition to the technical skills also the courage to take on explorative routes in the learning process, analyse the process and overcome possible setbacks and mistakes. Art teachers in Estonia are encouraged to embrace the possibility of bringing together the technical, emotional, cognitive and cultural aspect of learning visual art. Article discusses different approaches to creating a deeper and holistic learning process in art and the common challenges faced in this process. In the article, we give an overview of the theoretical foundations, methods and most important results of two studies (Arov, Vahter, Löfström, 2019; Niinep, 2018). Presenting them together provides an opportunity to show the possibilities of supporting the development of a self-directed learner in art education.

Keywords: contemporary art education, basic and upper-secondary school, key competences, holistic art learning process, choice-based art education.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, researchers in art education have highlighted the post-modern approach to learning in visual art (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Hardy, 2006; Hickman, 2008; Räsänen, 2008), which prioritizes the multitude of perspectives in interpretation, inclusion and co-work. In the postmodern paradigm, art is seen as sociocultural and contextual. There-

fore, art educators are encouraged to highlight the diversity of visual culture and contexts (Efland et al., 1996). The prevalent theories on teaching and learning tend to feature constructivist ideas, especially the ideas of social constructivism. Learning is seen as more effective in the social context, where the learner builds new knowledge on previous experiences. What is more, the necessity to analyse and take the lead in one's own learning is emphasized. According to these principles (Tynjälä, Heikkinen, & Huttunen, 2005; Wenger, 2009) the key focus is on the learning process, where the learner should have the possibility to make meaning collectively as well as individually. Over the course of almost a century, since Dewey's pioneering works in 1934, it has been well established that the experiences of the learning process are an essential part of learning. As emphasized by Elkjaer (2009), Dewey's learning concept remains to influence contemporary learning theory by means of underscoring the social experience, creativity and innovation in learning.

Yet, society has changed in many ways since the coining of social-constructivist ideas of learning. Some of these changes, such as the increased use of control mechanisms in education referred to as neo-liberalism, (e.g. Peers, 2011) have created conflicts with views on artistic endeavor and learning as social construction. Artistic endeavor is characterized by open-endedness and fluidity. In art education, a certain rigidity can manifest, for example, as an unwillingness to let go of the orientation to technical mastery and as measuring concrete art historical knowledge rather than encouraging individual analysis and meaning-making (Foley, 2016). Tavin (2010) takes a critical standpoint regarding the prevalent movement towards cognitive art education and encourages us to see the value in the subconscious knowledge-gaining and learning that happens through deferred action. In this article, we strive towards bridging the gap between the skills and competencies that can be supported through art education and the dynamic qualities of artistic endeavor.

Vahter (2012a) has described art education as a process (Figure 1) where the student is in the center, surrounded by two interdependent actions, namely responding and creating). Two equal dimensions of the learning process support the student's overall development. By engaging with art, students will have the opportunity to respond to their own and other artists' work and work processes, develop critical analysis

skills and the ability to interpret, evaluate, reflect, and communicate. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concept, methods and elements of art and visual culture. However, creating gives students the opportunity to develop their technical skills, and also allows students to explore their personal interests, beliefs, and values (Art Scope & Sequence, 2009). The selection of activities in the model (Vahter, 2012a) emphasise not only practical skills but also above all the importance of developing the student's thinking skills.

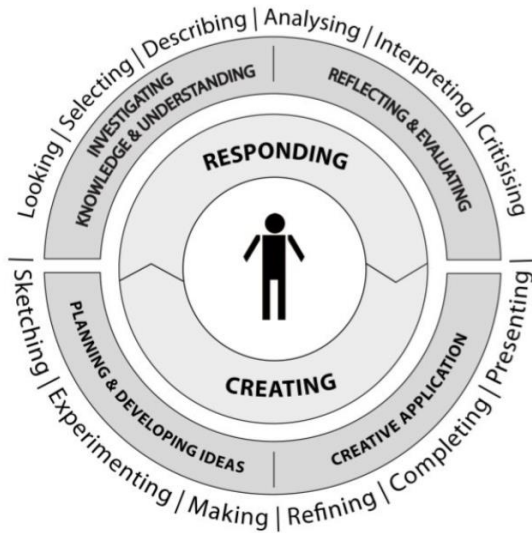


Figure 1. Model for visual art education (replication from Vahter, 2012a).

By applying this model, emphasis can be placed on the pupil's initiative and intrinsic motivation. Various learning activities give the pupil greater opportunity to find meaning in his or her creation. The model helps the teacher to design a learning process and better monitor the dynamics between different skills. At the same time, planning in this way increases the duration of a single unit of study or topic. Vahter (2012b) suggests that an average of six lessons per creative cycle is the most appropriate amount. In addition, longer units of study mean that

there is more time to solve and discuss each learning task. It is important to pay attention to each student's success and development needs when reflecting on the learning process (Green & Mitchell, 1997, p. 43).

Earlier studies in Estonia (Arov & Jõgi, 2017; Vahter, 2014) and abroad (Ishikawa, 2008; Smilan, 2016; Winner et al, 2006) have shown that teachers express insecurity about describing and explaining the skills in art activities and the competencies that are supported. Even more, studies involving Estonian teachers show that teachers expect guidelines and more support in various aspects of teaching art, such as contemporary art, formative assessment, encouraging creativity and creating a study process that supports learning (Arov, 2014; Kalmel, 2015; Kell, 2014; Kuresaar, 2017; Vahter, 2014). At the same time, the Art Syllabus within the Estonian National Curriculum (Kunstiained, 2011) encourages teachers to take the initiative in creating a holistic learning process, where practical activities alternate with responding to art and analysing one's own learning process. Setting learning targets for the art learning process and verbalising and purposefully acting upon learning outcomes is necessary to identify the change that creative activities have brought about in the knowledge, skills and values of students.

In the article, we provide an overview of the theoretical foundations, methods and most important results of two studies (Arov, Vahter, Lõfström, 2019; Niinep, 2018) – presenting them together provides an opportunity to explore two different strategies that aim to focus on student's self-directedness in visual art education. Both of the teaching strategies emphasize the aspects of artistic behavior rather than artistic production. In this article we spotlight the underpinnings, similarities and the differences of both approaches.

ACTION RESEARCH AS THE APPROACH

The two studies (Arov, Vahter, Lõfström, 2019; Niinep, 2018) discussed in this article have been conducted as action research based on practical tasks, where the researcher-teacher has the objective of solving a practical challenge in an authentic environment (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Stringer, 2004; Heikkinen, Rovio & Syrjälä, 2008; McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). Action research as a form of inquiry is based on

practice (Phillips & Carr, 2006, 10), which is very much the case in the studying the application of choice-based art education (see Study 1). Typically, action research studies a challenge (Pine, 2009), e.g. implementation of a new way of thinking about teaching art. The nature of the implementation and investigation process is cyclical (Dana, 2016). Consequently, action research is the study of change, where the teacher uses measures to bring forward changes in a given situation in order to improve both teaching and student learning (Pine, 2009, p. 30).

Both of the studies (Arov, Vahter, Löfström, 2019; Niinep, 2018) used the research diary as one method for gathering data, since it helps the writers to identify and express their viewpoints and thoughts on teaching and learning. In addition to that, the students' written and practical creative works were analysed and audio recordings of lessons were also used as a method of documentation. Teacher-researchers (first and second author) were inspired by the principles of (social) constructivism and the ideas of postmodern democratic education, which lack the pronounced hierarchy between the learner and teacher. In their studies, Arov et al (.2018) and Niinep (2018) bring out aspects and methods derived from these principles, which support a meaningful art learning process and creative activities.

STUDY 1: CHOICE-BASED ART EDUCATION

One way to bring the focus onto the learning process in art education is to change the subject-centred teaching strategy to a learner-centred one. Niinep (2018) studied the principles of choice-based art education and how a starting teacher could apply them. At the heart of choice-based art education lies supporting the ability to take responsibility for one's decisions, which means that students can choose both the materials and the technique to create meaningful work for themselves (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009). While the curriculum provides a framework for what is taught, students are encouraged to explore their own ideas. It is accepted that these may not coincide with the interests of the teacher (Sands, 2017). The role of the teacher is to develop self-discovery in children (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, p. 14) and to introduce them to new techniques and skills in artistic development (Bedrick, 2014).

Douglas and Jaquith (2009, pp. 9-16) highlight four aspects of choice-based art education: the student, method of teaching, the classroom, and assessment. The student is seen as an artist from early on. Pupils are encouraged to take a stronger authorship of their work because they have made their own decisions about their work. The artwork they make is therefore more personal and meaningful to them. There is much in the lives of students that they are passionate about, and these are the original themes for creating art (Sands, 2017). The teaching and learning roles are thus different from the normative art lesson – instead of guiding students step-by-step through a specific theme, they are supported on an individual basis, such as helping with new material, seeking inspiration, or giving examples. During art creation, the learner's central aim is to carry out their own idea (Papanicolaou, 2017). Learners seek inspiration around themselves, from peers, different materials, and also teacher demonstrations (Bedrick, 2014). The teaching credo is that there is no drawing, painting, or artwork that children should copy precisely (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, pp. 134, 180).

Teacher presence should reflect the value of art. Teachers are encouraged to study students' works closely, and share their interest in students' work (Davis, 2008, p. 38). The teacher is both a mentor and a friendly supporter in finding ideas. As a mentor, the teacher inspires and influences students to develop their strengths, but as an encourager, shares time, joy, and thoughts with them (Durham, 2006, p. 7). The teacher's task is to spark self-discovery in children and stimulate the depth of expression (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, pp. 144, 156).

The classroom is a studio for choice-based art education, divided into activity centres. Students need to have access to instructional materials and tools for independent discovery and creation (Epstein & Trimis, 2002, p. 70). The classroom should be a place where students dare to express themselves freely (Bates, 2000, p. 102; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, p. 144). The learning environment is seen as a place of communication, so the classroom should be adjusted to allow students to discuss and exchange ideas. The classroom should also offer children the opportunity to make arrangements by themselves and organize their own workplace without much help, so that they will also experience the more mundane artistic tasks (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987, p. 154).

The basis of assessment in choice-based art education is in monitoring students' development, observing and discussing their work. In the creative process, the students' own explanations are important, as this introduces the work in more detail and provides the viewer with information. Writing also helps students to reflect on their activities (Papanicolaou, 2017). Introducing and presenting works is time-consuming, but extremely important. The work could be presented in a larger group as this creates the possibility to look at their own work, as well as the works of their peers (Douglas, 2013). Exhibitions are encouraged to be assembled also with the help of students as this gives them the experience of seeing the works as a collection (Hetland et al., 2013, p. 30).

With these parameters of choice-based art education in mind, the following research questions were posed: What kind of didactical affordances and obstacles materialise in the implementation of choice-based art education in the second grade? How does pupils' learning manifest itself in their artworks in choice-based art education?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To implement the principles of choice-based art education and to support the teacher's own practice, Niinep (2018) conducted an action research in one 2nd grade with 23 students. The researcher, a master's student with little working experience as a class teacher, had had no previous contact with the students in the sample class. The class teacher of the sample class participated in the study as a research assistant. The class was chosen based on the principle of convenience. To conduct a study in this class, the researcher informed the students and asked the parents for their consent. In the Estonian context, an ethical review is not required. As preliminary work, an interview was conducted with the class teacher to get acquainted with last year's teaching programme and to get a more detailed overview of previous activities in art lessons. The purpose of the action research was to implement choice-based art teaching at primary school and to study the process of introducing a new way of conceptualising art teaching. In addition to reaching the learning outcomes set in the Art Syllabus (2011), each lesson was designed to meet the goals of choice-based art teaching and to monitor its implementation.

The duration of the action research was 14 weeks. Firstly, there was the preliminary cycle, which lasted six weeks and was divided into six smaller units. This was followed by the research cycle of eight weeks, which in turn was divided into eight smaller units. Each unit consisted of two 45-minute lessons, designed using Vahter's (2014, p. 34) learning unit model.

Data were collected by recording the lessons and keeping a reflection diary. Students' creative works also constituted data. The purpose of the audio recordings was to analyse the teacher's actions. Recordings provide a detailed documentation of what is said and how it is said (Baumfield, Hall, & Wall, 2012, p. 105). The audio recordings were transcribed after each cycle. This provided the researcher the possibility to identify the how the teacher used language to convey the pedagogical ideas.

Continuous analysis of the children's work provided information on the students' ideas and thoughts and on the clarity of teacher guidance. The students wrote down their ideas before creating the work. They planned the work progress and made a draft for the piece. After finishing the artwork, the students gave it a title and a short description of the work. For feedback, the students answered a short questionnaire.

In qualitative research, it is common for a researcher to document his or her observations and experiences during the research process by keeping a diary. It helps the researcher to identify, express and structure his or her position and thoughts on teaching and learning. Keeping a research journal helps to reflect on the development of thinking along with the setbacks and surprises experienced (Laherand, 2008, p. 276). In keeping the research diary, the teacher-researcher focused on four basic questions - what went well, what did not, how to improve and what to do next (cf. Evans & Savage, 2018). Keeping a diary helps to record, after the lesson, the immediate emotions, notions, and the changes that were made intentionally or unintentionally. These remarks were valuable later in the analysis process.

Qualitative content analysis on teachers' research diary, audio recordings, and student work, suggests that a change towards a more choice-oriented teaching style emerged gradually. In the last lessons, a change in the students' level of confidence with the choices could also be

identified. The biggest disadvantage was researcher-teacher uncertainty, which led to insecurity in conducting student-centred learning. When the first difficulty arose, the researcher as a novice teacher was tempted to return to the subject-oriented doctrine. While teaching methods that fit one teacher may not be suitable for another (Barnes 2002, pp. 2–4), the teacher did not give despite the difficulties but persisted in an effort to explore the potential of the new approach for her own teaching.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF ACTION RESEARCH

The most important result of the analysis is that choice-based art education gives students the opportunity to bring the focus onto their experiences in the classroom. It became clear that changing the familiar learning process takes time. This requires open-mindedness on behalf of the teacher and the ability to trust the pupils to master what is expected of them (Tuulmets, 2010, p. 387), because the purpose of the art lesson is not to reach a solution in the same way (Eisner, 2002, p. 196). The biggest difficulty was the teacher-researcher's lack of previous experience, which led to insecurity in managing discussions and time as well as supervision. The researcher-teacher tried to compensate for this with a positive attitude and continuous interest in students' work. Preparatory work for the lessons also required substantial effort to gather versatile materials for in class presentations.

Analysis of the lessons revealed that the explanation part of the lessons was lacking in diversity. Some students needed exposure to examples because this helped them to relate to less familiar subjects, and identify gaps in their understanding based on lack of prior exposure. (see also Eisner, 2002, p. 113). In order to explore ideas, it is beneficial to provide students with a wider range of materials that need to be constantly updated to be novel. The materials and tools formed the basis for the creation of activity centres for choice-based art education. Since all pupils had personal tools in the desk drawers in the classroom, there was no need to completely upgrade the classroom. Based on the layout and size of the classroom, activity centres were created in the front part of the classroom. All the instructional materials and tools needed for the task were available to the students so that the student could find a suitable tool and put it back in place (Hetland et al., 2013, pp. 15-16).

The pupils were eager to use the tools offered, but often did not use their own materials. The activity centres allowed the students to act on their own, and by the end of the period, students were bolder in their efforts, reducing the need for specific guidance and seeking advice on their own.

In conclusion, the application of the principles of choice-based art education supports the goals of the Art Syllabus for Estonian National Curriculum (2011) and is feasible if the teacher is fully prepared to apply this method. Applying the principles of choice-based art education requires time and acceptance of error, continuous analysis, and an explorative attitude. The teacher should give him/herself the same patience and encouragement that is given to an inquisitive child.

STUDY 2: KEY COMPETENCE APPROACH IN ARTS EDUCATION

Another way to bring the focus of art education onto the process is to look at the learning process through the key competencies' perspective. In this way, the role of the teacher changes from being a subject specialist to a specialist who primarily supports the development of students' cognitive, social, emotional, and technological competencies necessary in a rapidly changing society (De-Juanas Oliva, Martín del Pozo, & Pesquero Franco, 2016). Kikas and Toomela (2015) also emphasize this challenging task for teachers, as it requires awareness of the processes that evolve during learning. It is therefore necessary to have an in-depth understanding of the particularities of the child's psychological processes, the influence of environmental factors, and the ways in which change occurs. Also, teachers have expressed the view that in order to keep up with technological and other developments, they themselves need to acquire new competencies and skills that they have previously considered outside their field of expertise. (Smilan, 2016) In this chapter, we will open up ways to interpret the process of art education through the framework of key competencies. The objective of the action research was to support the selected key competencies through targeted planning based on the results of the pre-questionnaire. The article reflects on the first two cycles of action research, which were conducted in fifth-grade art education lessons over two academic years.

Le Boterf (2001, cited from De-Juanas Oliva et al., 2016) explains the concept of competence as the ability to adapt to change and to solve problems and tasks in a given situation and in situations different from those in which they were acquired. However, Kikas and Toomela (2015) emphasise the need to support key competencies in all subjects in order to better embed knowledge, skills and values. The Estonian National Curriculum (2018) identifies eight competencies as key competencies: cultural and value competence; social and civic competence; self-management competence; learning competence; communication competence; competence in mathematics, science and technology; entrepreneurship and digital competence. In addition to the large number of competencies listed as key competencies, the framework is even more complex as each competence is composed of sub-competencies and competencies are in many ways intertwined.

The goal of supporting key competencies within a single subject requires an understanding of how key competencies develop and how they manifest in the learning process. Teachers also need to have a keen mind to recognise critical and valuable moments in the learning process. Based on the results of a preliminary survey showing that teachers need more support in connecting the concepts of subject matter and key competencies (Arov, Vahter, & Löfström, 2019), action research was initiated focusing on the planning of supporting key competencies in art classes and its effects on the learning process. To address the issue, an action research was conducted to find support strategies for all eight key competencies in art education, with each action cycle focusing on two or three of them. The following elaborates on the five key competencies addressed in the action research and the literature-based supporting strategies created for the art lessons.

The first key competence, social competence, is a combination of knowledge and skills that allow people to communicate and think together with other people (Salavera, Usán & Jarie, 2017). The description of the social and civic competencies in the National Curriculum for Basic Education (2018) also emphasises the ability to reach personal fulfilment and act as an aware and responsible citizen. The first cycle of action research focused on cooperation and accepting differences between people. Earlier studies have shown that supporting students' need for autonomy and in-class discussions develop students' social

competence. They also help to prevent behavioral problems and facilitate adaptation to school life (Wang, 2009). Social competence was supported in art education by providing different choices and decision-making opportunities throughout the learning process. In addition, greater attention was paid to stimulating classroom discussion, and the planned tasks also reflected issues of interpersonal differences.

Secondly, the Recommendations of the European Commission (2018) address the entrepreneurship competence and describe it as the ability of an individual to realise their ideas and coordinate projects. Such activities also include innovation, creativity, initiative and risk-taking. The National Curriculum for Basic Education (2018) further stresses the ability to set goals and plan when describing entrepreneurial competencies. These skills are teachable and should be supported in all school subjects. The teacher and the facilitator should support the students' individual initiative and collaborative skills in their learning activities. There is also a need to consciously address the issues of risk taking and adaptation to unexpected events (Juřová, Čech, & Duda, 2017). In order to support the entrepreneurial competence, a longer unit of study was planned in the course, where the pupil set their own goals, planned the course of action and implemented it. Planning and time management techniques were also combined with the art activities.

Both entrepreneurial competence and self-management competence include aspects of self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. The third key competence, self-management, often involves the use of goal-setting and planning skills and the ability to positively adjust oneself (Mooney et al., 2005). In addition to self-reflection, peer feedback is valuable for developing one's self-esteem (Jones & Davenport, 1996). In order to support self-management, it was decided a process diary as a valuable supporter of self-regulation be used (Ibid.) and to provide opportunities for artistic analysis and discussions with classmates. A process diary is a personal notebook that reflects the whole process of learning art (Robinson, 1995; Gee, 2000). It allows students to take responsibility for their own learning and improves expression skills. A process diary can contain visual ideas, descriptions of the thinking process, spontaneous scribbles or sources of inspiration, ideas and techniques that need to be further developed. Using a process diary helps to create a holistic learning process for the pupil.

Learning skills include cognitive skills and processes that enhance learning and performance (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). Paul Pintrich (2004) identifies four areas of learning skills: environmental regulation (context assessment and relation to the environment); regulating one's activities (effort and asking for help); motivation and emotion (deciding on success or failure); and cognitive learning (receiving, processing, and memorizing information). Without the necessary learning skills, intended learning outcomes may not be fully reached (Kikas, 2005). To support the learning competence, students were introduced to various methods of collecting and processing information during the study and were encouraged to assess their learning situations and self-esteem, also to take risks and to ask for help. The course also offered students more responsibility and choices.

The fifth competence includes cultural awareness, reasoning, and appreciation of cultural heritage, which should be supported through artistic competence (cf. Art Syllabus for the National Curriculum, 2018). However, in previous studies in Estonia and elsewhere (Vahter, 2011; Sova & Kemperl, 2012; Arov, 2014), it has been observed that art subjects' study activities focus on making art and art discussions, leaving the cultural connection aspects in the background. The courses created within the framework of action research aimed to equally support students' creative self-expression through artistic creation, as well as their individual cultural awareness and reasoning.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The 5th grade students were suitable for the study as this is the period when students find that they belong to their peer-group and as a group, they can do more than alone (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). However, greater autonomy and decision-making opportunities are expected, and the child creates a self-image of themselves. Also, a rising self-awareness is often accompanied by a critical attitude towards oneself and others (*ibid*). The sample of this study, too, is a convenience sample. The researcher (Arov) has also had the most experience with students in this age group and thus the opportunity to conduct a more in-depth research at this school level.

The action research consisted of two cycles in which the first one was conducted in the academic year of 2017/2018 and the second in the academic year of 2018/2019. The first cycle focused on the social, entrepreneurship and self-management competence. These results have been published before (Arov, Vahter, & Löffström, 2019), whereas the second cycle, reported here, focused on the cultural awareness and learning competence. In order for the reader to get a view of the iterative nature of the research, we also describe pertinent aspects of the first cycle. The first cycle consisted of a course of 35 academic teaching hours, the second of 30 hours. In the first phase of the study, two 5th grade groups of 48 students participated in the study. The second phase involved one group of 5th grade students with a total of 25 pupils. The first course focused on social and civic competence, entrepreneurial competence, and self-determination. The second course focused on supporting cultural and value competencies and learning competencies.

Written informed consent was sought from both the headteacher and the students' guardians to carry out the study. Students were informed of teacher-researcher role and intention. Permission to photograph students work was obtained in every situation. Permission to publish students' artwork, essays, and photos of their teaching as research findings was also sought from the guardians. The study did not require an ethics review in Estonia. The research data consisted of research journal entries, study process recordings, student artwork, and process diary entries.

The teacher-researcher kept a research diary that collected the insights, questions, remarkable phrases, ideas and decisions made within the research process. Data were analysed during and after study cycles. The observations made during the action research cycles allowed for improvements in coaching during the same course. After the completion of the course, the data were coded and the topics formed. Cross-thematic links were also sought. Students' artworks and writing were grouped according to their assignments and expressed competencies, namely cultural and value competence; social competence; self-management competence; learning competence and entrepreneurship competence. The teacher-researcher assigned codes to units of text that expressed implications of competence from lesson plans, research diary entries and student process journal entries. Relevant didactical aspects and recurrent notions

were included in the analysis. Thereafter constant comparison was used to identify similar tendencies for grouping into the same conceptual categories.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Several of the methods used in the two courses were novel to the 5th grade students (for example collecting information prior to art making, multi-step planning and recording the work process in a process journal). It was also novel for them to set a long-term goal in art and to follow the path towards it. In the second cycle different methods for gathering and organising information were explicitly supported and students were asked to reflect on their learning throughout the course. During both courses, the students became more independent. At the beginning of the course, questions were often heard asking for teacher approval, such as "Is that right?" Or "Can I make grass purple?", but when students heard that they, as the authors of the work, had the right to decide, this opportunity was boldly used. At the end of the courses, the students conveyed a more confident author position that was expressed by assured and thorough presentations and the amount of sketches done in process journals in their free time. In addition, the self-analysis ability among the students grew.

In supporting students' cultural awareness and learning competence the second action research cycle focused on zooming in on different art history periods, deriving different working methods from them and supporting students in collect and structure new information in their process journals. The changing role of art and artist became the connecting thread for this cycle. Students were encouraged to compare different art history periods and reflect what impressed them, what did not and how to build their own artistic approach. Collecting information through different media (books, websites, videos and small lectures) was first seen as unusual in art classes for the students as they were more accustomed to start creating instantly after receiving a topic. The challenge for the teacher in this cycle was to create balance the activities of facilitation of discussions, exploration and creation.

It appeared within both cycles that the process diary became meaningful for the students. The process diary was used in the classroom hours

and by several students also in their free time to write down and draw on their ideas. The second course ended with a glimpse into the future and a discussion of the role art plays in each student's life in about 30 years. The learners expressed in their process journals the view that they would still be involved in art later in life, be it artistically, as a consumer or from the point of a knowledgeable viewer. Some of the answers reflected even deeper personal connection with art. These answers reflect art as a way to bring hope for oneself and to help make meaning of the world.

A deliberate focus on supporting key competencies led the researcher-teacher to take a deeper look at the value of artistic activity and the regular planning process became more multi-layered. Value was given and seen in those parts of the learning process that usually remain in the background. For example, the explicit goal setting and process planning is rarely seen in the final artworks. The key competence approach provided a solid and comprehensive foundation for the whole course. It sparked courage to create longer and more flexible study units, and to highlight the links between art and society. In this way, a focus on key competencies is also directed towards giving students more choices and letting the learning process be guided by students' ideas. Further cycles of action research aim to empower students to take the lead and more creative risks.

In conclusion, a complex framework of key competencies and its sub-competencies would require more clarification among teachers. Art teachers should also come together to explore and discuss the manifestations of key competencies in art classes and the connections with subject-specific skills and activities, therefore bringing forward the daily contributions of art teachers and the abundance of opportunities the art learning process gives to the teacher and the student.

DISCUSSION

Both choice-based art education and explicit key competence support in art education value well-balanced artistic process that includes creating and responding to art (Vahter, 2012a). The two teaching approaches scan artistic behavior for knowledge, skills, attitudes and

strategies and strive to support this behaviour in an educational setting. However, the two approaches differ in the teacher-student relationship and the classroom setting.

In choice-based art education students can behave and feel as if they are artists and they get the chance to think, act and perform as artists during the art learning process. The essence of choice-based art education is the students' possibility to make their own decisions about their work – to choose the material and technique in order to create a piece meaningful to themselves (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009). Primarily, artistic self-directedness is sought, and the main focus in the learning process is on student-led learning. In choice-based art education the teacher acts as a supporter and creator of structure in the learning setting.

In the approach of explicitly supporting students' key competences, both student-led and teacher-led learning methods are used. The teacher creates the premises for the artistic process and plans the focal points for supporting different competences, but also supports students' individual needs, and leaves room for explorations. As in choice-based art education, artistic behavior also holds the main essence of value in this approach. However, the main focus is the interconnections of artistic processes and knowledge, skills, attitudes and strategies that form the key competences. Therefore, seeking to support students' agency and their appreciation of art are vital goals. Setting a goal to support students key competences provides a firm and holistic foundation for the entire learning process, the courage to create longer learning units and highlight broader connections between art and society (Arov, Vahter, & Löfström, 2019).

The main struggle with both approaches is how to deal with the unexpected and dynamic qualities of artistic endeavor. Choice-based art education may leave more room for learning from deferred action (Tavin 2010). It also demands much effort from the teacher to support each individual process within a group context as well as encouraging students to face new challenges. As Niinep (2018) concluded, meaningful choice-based art education insists a longer period to get accustomed to and to integrate as a natural process in art learning. One of the most critical aspect in creating a successful art process is the time dedicated to the study unit and the recognition that a certain amount of time is needed to utilize novel methods with learners. The optimum time to increase meaningfulness is a learning unit of at least six academic hours

(Vahter 2014). This way, students have the chance to adapt to new instructions, develop their ideas, struggle with that idea and find their way out of it. A longer learning unit allows the teacher to pay more attention to the learner's development; it leaves room for discussions and choices. In order to give meaning to a study process, it is important to have conversations about each success and shortcoming (Green & Mitchell, 1997, p. 43).

Finally, the teacher-researchers observed that by implementing the principles of choice-based art education and explicit key competence support, students could get the chance to think, act and perform as artists during the art learning process. The common tool use in both teaching approaches were students' process journals that support idea development and meaning-making of one's artistic process. The journal functions as a positive confirmation of self-development. It can include visual ideas, thinking processes, spontaneous scribbles or inspiration sources, ideas and techniques that need to be developed further (Robinson, 1995; Gee, 2000; Arts Scope, 2009). A process journal allows the learner to better govern the creative process and to express a more venturesome author's position. The balance between responding and creating can also be promoted by conversations about art, where a collective discussion in class develops social, cultural and self-determination competencies.

CONCLUSION

The most important and forward-looking principle in 21st century art education is the understanding that art education is a multi-layered, social integration that enables cooperation, self-direction, and development of different competencies, or in other words, art is a natural way of giving meaning to one's experiences and expressions. Meaningful creative activities do not need only technical skills and the courage to explore, but also the ability to organise prior knowledge, analyse one's activities and cope with unsuccess (Feldman, 2003; Rostan 2010; Winner et al, 2006). The teacher should not be the only decision-maker in the classroom, the students' knowledge and understandings, their day-to-day life and experiences should also be considered. Each teacher should find meaningful questions to base the artistic process upon, questions that are relevant for his or her students specifically.

The limitations for both of the studies is that the studies lack of collaborative practices with other co-practitioners. Including more co-practitioners to implement and analyze the processes would strengthen the studies. The second study relied on the teacher-researcher's observational data without video or audio recordings. Including audio recording, that may not feel as imposing as a camera in classroom, may facilitate a more in-depth analysis of the discussions and questions that students voiced in the process. In addition, possibilities to diversify the data collection method were sought. In the following action research cycles the teacher-researchers strives to provide even more possibilities for students to make choices and encourage students to explore a larger variety of art media and techniques.

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