

Teach Me Your Arctic: Place-Based Intercultural Approaches in Art Education

Elina Härkönen
University of Lapland, Finland

ABSTRACT

In this article, I will discuss what a place-based approach in art education means for cultural understanding and culturally sustainable work in the context of the Nordic Arctic. I will approach and reflect these themes through art-based action research of the place-based art course “Our Arctic” that I organized with my colleagues at the University of Lapland in Spring 2017. The aim of the course in which art education and art students participated was to use artistic methods to collect and map the local school pupils’ perceptions of their lives in the Arctic and share these as a collective narrative in the form of a video art installation in an international exhibition. The approaches used in the course aimed to create knowledge that is locally and collaboratively produced and, in the process, also to see one’s own stance and cultural interpretations related to the Arctic.

KEYWORDS: Cultural sustainability, place-based art education, interculturalism, participatory art

My work as an art educator at the University of Lapland (UoL)¹ is largely connected to the multilayered context of the Arctic. Its features, cultures, and circumstances blended with global perspectives lay the groundwork for the art practices we carry out with the international group of students studying in our art education department. The intercultural education settings require constant consideration and openness to different cultural contexts and their representations, similarities, and differences. The ideas of locality and how a sense of place is experienced by people with different cultural backgrounds are important aspects of sustainable intercultural education (Gruenewald, 2003).

The principles of cultural sustainability (Auclair & Fairclough, 2015), decolonization (Jokela, Hiltunen, & Härkönen, 2015b; Smith, 1999) and place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003) offer tools to develop culturally sensitive art education in the Arctic. These concepts contain culturally sustainable objectives that facilitate social communication and dialogue between different groups of people and show respect for the local knowledge related to place (see Dessein, Soini, Fairclough, & Horlings, 2015; Ellsworth, 1997). Place-specificity as cultural sustainability aims to develop sensitive approaches and acknowledges multiple histories, memory-based perspectives, and people’s complex relationships, experiences, and meaning-making with respect to the specific place (see Dessein et al., 2015; Massey, 2005). In participatory place-specific art activities, collaboration and engagement are the key elements, and the place determines the means of working and the materials (mental and physical) utilized in the art productions (Coumts & Jokela, 2016). In the context of the Arctic, merging place-specific art education and the operating modes of socially active contemporary art requires culturally sensitive approaches.

My research interest is in the relevance of place-based art education for promoting cultural sustainability in the Nordic Arctic.² In this article, I discuss this topic through my research case the “Our Arctic” art education course (organized in 2017). The university course was targeted toward international art and art education students studying at UoL and aimed to lay a foundation for these students to work together with local school pupils³ to create a collective narrative of life in the Arctic through art. During the course, the students organized art workshops for the local pupils to create a space for sharing and collecting these narratives and designed a joint video installation that was exhibited in the international Arctic Spirit Congress⁴ in Rovaniemi, Finland. My method for the study is art-based action research (Jokela, Hiltunen, & Härkönen, 2015a); hence, the focus is on the actions carried out during the course to create these narratives.

2 In this context, this includes the Nordic countries of Finland, Norway, and Iceland.

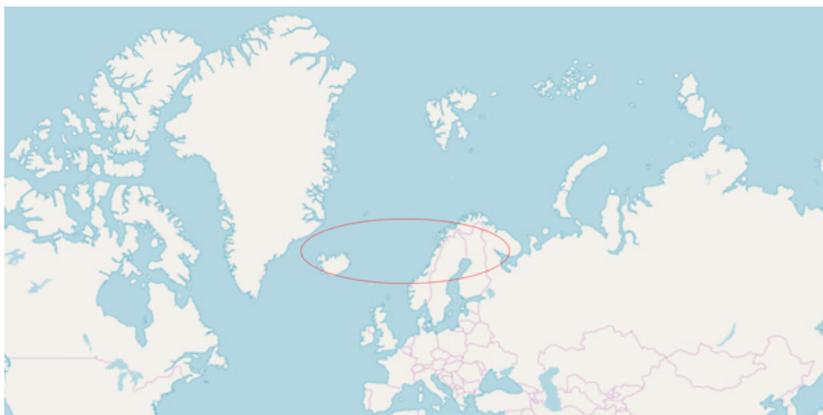
3 I have used the word *student* to refer to the university students and *pupil* to refer the school children participating in the students’ workshop.

4 The Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit conference was held in November 2017 in Rovaniemi, Finland. The conference aimed to bring the UN Sustainable Development Goals to Arctic science, policy and economy, and education.

1 Located within the Arctic Circle in Rovaniemi, Finland

A Place for Culturally Sustainable Art Education

A place is a layered location with human histories and memories (Lippard, 1997). Our perceptions of places are influenced by the people and culture connected to the place. We change along with the changing places, and places change both through people's actions and on their own (Hyry-Beihammer, Estola, & Hiltunen, 2014; Massey, 2005). Similarly, the narratives and cultures of the place change over time (Massey, 2005). They are strongly connected to politics and power, which brings up questions about agency and participation (Fairclough, 2009; Hiltunen, 2009; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2014).



Map 1. Nordic Arctic marked by the red circle by the author. Map: © OpenStreetMap contributors

When cultural sustainability is considered, the need to understand locality and place in the modes of working becomes greater. In the context of the Nordic Arctic (see Map 1), dimensions of the environmental and sociocultural settings can function as an arena for developing context-sensitive and practice-based methods of working. Climate change has caused dramatic environmental changes and has cumulative impacts on social and cultural dimensions of life; identities and systems of meaning may need to be reconsidered due to the changing environment (Alverson et al., 2009). Understanding place as an ecological, social, and cultural entity refers especially to the perspective of “socially produced space in geography as well as the view of place as personally experienced” (Hyvärinen, 2014, p. 10). According to Massey (2005), conceptions of place are constantly changing depending on the time and the experiencer. Hence, perceptions of place have no pre-given collective identity, but are

formed in continuous negotiations of the here-and-now.

Connecting sustainability to pedagogical perspectives, the model of place-based education (PBE) is a useful approach to look at learning. According to Gruenewald (2003), learning is thought to take place in different kinds of environments by utilizing their interdisciplinary nature to meet the challenges of a socially and ecologically sustainable future. The practices and purposes of PBE are closely connected to several other learning theories, and it is a process in which the local community and environment determine the starting points for teaching (Gruenewald, 2003). When critical pedagogy's agenda concerning cultural decolonization is synthesized with PBE, the potential for a more sustainable educational model is established. This model contains the ability to embrace the experience of being a human in connection with others and highlights nature and our responsibility towards it – in particular, how to conserve and restore our shared environments for future generations (Gruenewald, 2003). The foundation is social constructivism, in which knowledge and understanding of life is seen to be constructed through social interaction (Gruenewald, 2003). Social constructivism emphasizes knowledge as a form of communication, not as any ready truth. Places are also defined as social constructions filled with ideologies, and the experience of places shapes cultural identities (Anttila, 2006; Gruenewald, 2003; Hiltunen, 2009; Hyvärinen, 2014; Jokela et al., 2015a).

In the Arctic context, PBE could be utilized to address the challenge of the marginalized position of the local youth whose voices are rarely heard in regional decision-making. Recent studies on the perspectives of Arctic youth about the future show that they are motivated to participate in the development of their home region (Karlisdóttir, 2015). When the action of making art is added to the critical pedagogy of place, intentional and situational learning can occur. Instead of focusing on subjective experience, reflection is carried out using communal experience and cultural and aesthetic linkages between the community and environment (Jokela et al., 2015a). When considering the ways to create opportunities for children and youth to participate in the regional development, Hiltunen (2009) points out that community-based art practices can provide tools and create a platform for marginalized groups of people to have a chance to be heard. Art can also provide tools for expressing counter-narratives and generating new stories that encourage action and change (Bell, Desai, & Irani, 2013). Although Bell et al. (2013) are concentrating on the issues of racism in their study, their argument concerning the use

of artistic approaches to encourage young people's full and equal participation and the promotion of social justice can be applied into this context as well. Bell et al. (2013) speak about enabling the young people to be active in challenging and reproducing knowledge of their society by using art as a vital tool.

Whose Arctic? The Decolonization Aspects of Art Education

When working in the educational contexts in the Arctic, attention should be paid to the processes of decolonization. From an educational perspective, this means learning to recognize dominant assumptions and ideologies that injure and exploit other people and places. Decolonization has the aspect of "recovering and renewing traditional, non-commodified cultural patterns such as mentoring and intergenerational relationships" (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). Decolonization is also one of the principles of culturally sustainable development. Turunen (2017) emphasized that if the aim is to develop regionally relevant education, questions of continuity, respect, ownership, and dialogue must guide the work. Continuity is about safeguarding traditions and remaking them in children's lives today. These aspects exist between generations at home and in school. Respect means that the inherited local knowledge that children also bring with them is valued in the process of constructing knowledge. With ownership, questions arise regarding who "owns" knowledge, who uses it, and what kind of knowledge is valid (see Guttorm, 2015; Jokela et al., 2015b; Smith, 1999).

In this study, the groups of university students had international backgrounds and related to Arctic on different levels, with some having been born there and others visiting the region for the first time. During the "Our Arctic" course, they worked with local school pupils who had their own perceptions of the Arctic and whose voices the students aimed to capture in the art. Hence, understanding the principles of decolonization as part of culturally sustainable education allows for spaces in which creativity and cultural diversity are valued and interaction in and between cultures can be advanced (Räsänen, 2015). With this culturally diverse group, we saw the potential for creating multilayered and intercultural narratives of the Arctic. De Vita (2005), however, argues that intercultural interaction and learning does not develop by itself, but requires participation in social experiences, discovery, transcendence of difference through cross-cultural interaction during real tasks, and emotional as well as intellectual participation. For culturally sensitive approaches, when working with people and contexts we are not familiar with,

becoming aware of our own preconceptions is necessary. Our insider/outsider position as actors and researchers in relation to the collaborative community also needed to be considered and examined with respect to how it influences communication and results of the action (Fairclough, Dragičević-Šešić, Rogač-Mijatović, Auclair, & Soini, 2014; Smith, 1999). Both positions have positive and negative dimensions. Hofvander Trulsson and Burnard (2016) claim that insiders, who for example share a similar cultural background with the researched community, may be able understand the context and modes of behavior at a deeper level, but may at the same time be blind to power relations that are internalized. Outsiders, who often are accused of never truly understanding a culture or comprehending what is behind the discourse, may benefit from their distant position in conducting objective research analysis (Hofvander Trulsson & Burnard, 2016). As researchers and actors working with communities different from ours, practicing responsible reflexivity in our own subjectivities, representations, and ways of knowing supports the principles of culturally sustainable work (Hofvander Trulsson & Burnard, 2016; Smith, 1999).

Bringing these approaches together, I hypothesized that place-based and culturally-sensitive approaches would promote social inclusion. A place-based cultural activity of any kind should fundamentally embrace "dialogue, discourse, debate, argument, persuasion. It requires us to listen as well as to talk" (Fairclough et al., 2014, pp. 17–18).

Art-Based Action Research for Narratives of the Arctic

My focus in this study is on the processes of action that took place during the "Our Arctic" university art course. I co-taught the course with my colleague Annamari Manninen, and it was also a collaboration between three universities (Nord University of Norway, the Iceland Academy of the Arts, and the University of Alaska Anchorage) under the Arctic Sustainable Arts and Design (ASAD)⁵ network. Two schools from Rovaniemi, Finland and one from a small Norwegian coastal island took part in the collaboration.

I studied the university students' approaches to creating narratives with the local school pupils about their lives in the Arctic. These artistic narratives were to be exhibited and brought into discussions

⁵ ASAD is a thematic network of the University of the Arctic consisting of 26 art and design member institutions around the Circumpolar North. It is coordinated by the University of Lapland.

during the “Arctic Spirit” congress, with an international audience. Although the narratives motivate the action in this study, they are not the main focus of the research. I have used Art-Based Action Research (ABAR) as a method to follow the cycles of planning, executing, and re-evaluating the action (Anttila, 2006; Jokela et al., 2015a). The course was divided into three sections that also form the cycles of action in this study. In the first cycle of action, I take a closer look at the measures taken for the university students to become aware of their own and their peers’ perceptions of the Arctic. In the second cycle, the students work in their smaller groups to frame their workshops and their first encounters and actions with the school pupils. The third and final cycle of action contains the student-run art workshops.

The ABAR method enabled me to approach the researched action from three different roles: art educator, researcher, and learner (Jokela et al., 2015a). The aim with action research is to develop the researched action (Anttila, 2006), and one of the aims of this study is also to develop my own work as an art educator in a more culturally sustainable direction. Jokela et al. (2015a) emphasize that the central focus in ABAR is to develop interactions between the participating artists, researchers, and communities. The aims of ABAR target empowerment and increasing communality, societal change, and environmental responsibility (Jokela et al., 2015a). This approach is closely related to hermeneutics, in which the researcher is entitled to interpret the influences on the outcomes of the action through the situations in which the action takes place (Gadamer, 2003). These layers form a hermeneutic circle, such that understanding is constructed and developed through previous interpretations (Anttila, 2006; Gadamer, 2003).

I have collected data throughout the two-month course by teaching, observing and participating in the action. It is typical in action research to collect many kinds of data to help form a general view of the action (Anttila, 2006). My data include the actions taken place during the course that I have collected in the form of five recorded lectures and 14 student individual reports. The produced visual materials, videos, and my personal research diary have supported my observations and allow a return to the action as authentically as possible. I have analyzed my data in two phases, firstly after each cycle of action to help develop the next cycle of action, and secondly as an entity after all the cycles of action have been finished. I have combined content analysis and close reading to categorize the student reports and their visual “My Arctic” narratives and compared the findings with the recorded materials and my research diary.

Cycle One: Becoming Aware

The aim of intercultural learning in contemporary art education is to increase alertness in recognizing an ethics of approaching the differences in human cultures (Räsänen, 2015). Hence, the first cycle intended to build trust in working together, to open discussion on the topic, and to help the students become better aware of their own and their peers’ perceptions of the Arctic. De Vita (2005) argues that in order to reach cultural sensitivity, a space for open sharing should be organized to help students become more conscious of their own stereotypical beliefs and consequently become more eager to learn the actual differences between the participants. We discussed our insider/outsider roles based on the works Fairclough et al. (2014) and Smith (1999) for heightened awareness of our possible influence on the Arctic communities, in this case the local school groups. We recognized our mutual outsider role with respect to the school groups, but the aim of the first cycle of action was also to show how we all relate to the Arctic and the Arctic has some meaning to all of us, although multifaceted.

To diminish the biases inside our working teams, we aimed for communicative dialogue (Ellsworth, 1997) in order to realize that our shared worldviews help us to become impartial and have a neutral reading of each other’s words that needs no debate. Ellsworth (1997) refers to communicative dialogue as situations where common dispassionate understanding benefits open dialogue such that differences will not threaten the continuity of the discourse. Thus, the dialogue started from subjective experience, but aimed for a joint understanding of the perceptions in the very nature of PBE. We could not predict where our discourse and debates would lead and what types of narratives would emerge, and thus we felt excited to start the course.

To reach these aims, the pre-assignment for the students was to produce visual “My Arctic” cards from an object that represented “Arctic” to them. The objects varied from snow scoops to board games and from lichen to bracelets. These representations were shared with the whole group and were later used as visual tools for the planning phase of the workshops. What caught my attention in the sharing was that many of the students started to see new perspectives of their objects while listening to others sharing theirs.

Lichen
Lichen is a distinctive element of the Arctic vegetation. It's also reindeers favorite food. As the Arctic, it has a complex definition by being both plant and mushroom.

Iccubus
My first association when I hear the word 'arctic', is ice. My personal definition of arctic is 'the oceans and landareas around the top of the map'. I always have been fascinated by snow, ice and low temperatures. In the last dekades my opinions about arctic as just an idyllic place, has been challenged. Global climate changes infortunatly leads to an greater impact in the arctic, than in other part of the world. That concerns me. Even though gloomy prospect about the climate change, I keep on associating arctic with ice and snow.

Handicrafts
For me Arctic area is connected to people, handicrafts and nature. I have here a small weaved fish made out of small bush branches. I have noticed that further in the north, handicrafts, traditional livelihoods (fishing, hunting, berry picking, reindeer herding) have bigger value for people, comparing to more southern urban population.

Valuable details.
From a first view, arctic for me means the landscape and specifically the details like the lichen – what the tree branches carry and what reindeer eats. But in a metaphorical way, arctic is all about trust and honesty. Here details matter. What you say and what you do, who you are and with whom you relate to. Arctic is my little precious thing.



Image 1. Examples of the visual “My Arctic” cards.

To deepen the process and to tie the conversations to current studies on the Arctic, we had a few short lectures on the topics of place-based and participatory art, definitions and representations of the Arctic, and the significant problem of marine debris in Norway. The discussions during the lectures based on the shared materials led us to versatile narratives of the Arctic. I found four different narratives from the cards and the related discussions. The first theme was *the admiration for the skills and traditions* people have in the Arctic and how they somehow are related to the surrounding nature (materials, beliefs, symbols). The second was *the narrative of survival*, including themes of living and surviving the long, cold, and dark winter. The third, *the narrative of the uniqueness and remoteness of the Arctic*, was the most controversial. The debate surrounding the question as to what constitutes the real Arctic brought the contradictions of urbanism and sacred wilderness to the surface. To some, the Arctic was the vast and empty snowfields closer to the North Pole with no people. For others, city life and the nature nearby had personal meaning and history and were closely connected to the Arctic. These were translated to symbolize the different layers of complexity of the Arctic. The final theme, *the narrative of issues threatening the Arctic*, held a surprisingly minor role in the pre-assignment. The threats became the dominant narrative in the discussion during the first cycle of action and it was

obvious that our students were very conscious about the severe ecological situation in the Arctic. The consumption-based lifestyles of modern people were condemned as contributing to the extensive problems of marine litter and climate change that are damaging the ecosystems and also the social, cultural, and economic aspects of the Arctic. We anticipated that these narratives would take on a great role in the final narrative.

We met the aims of the first cycle of action and created a very rich and complex narrative of the Arctic. The students challenged each other to consider new points of view, which helped everyone to predict that the children’s narratives would not necessarily be a unified entity. On the basis of critical pedagogy (Gruenewald, 2003), the building of shared and sometimes contradictory narratives of the Arctic increased communicative dialogue and a collective awareness of what both the students and teachers brought with their contributions. The next phase, that of collecting narratives from the school pupils, started to take shape.

Cycle Two: Chaos, Uncertainty, Relief

In the second cycle of action, in which the students began their fieldwork, students formed smaller groups and planned workshops for schools in Rovaniemi and Norway. Hiltunen (2009) points out that in the communal processes of contemporary art, the offering of a space for interaction and participation is a central principle of collaboration. Working with different kinds of people and creating an open atmosphere are prerequisites to sharing (Hiltunen, 2009). Our role as the course teachers was to step back and let the students take a clearer role in the creation of action. We were part of the workshops, but mainly helped and observed during activities.

All the groups had some pre-knowledge from the schools that guided their choices of approach and materials. They spent some time brainstorming in their groups to choose the theme and medium of approach before going to the schools. They tested their ideas in practice, and we had one session together to develop these ideas.

Overall, this was a very hectic phase and most of the negative feelings were related to the starting of the workshops. Almost all the students reported being nervous before going to the school. The mentioned causes for hesitation were related to uncertainty about their own abilities and roles in the team and in the new art educational situation (some did not study education). This reflected an uncertainty as to what the children would like to do or whether their plans would

work in the school settings.

The negative feelings toward teamwork were related to a lack of agreement within the team and not knowing what everyone wanted or was able to do. This was partly due to meeting the new team members just before starting work, and because the roles in the team evolved along the way. At this point, the uncertainty concerning roles recalled De Vita's (2005) notion of the need for real intellectual tasks for true engagement. The communication issues caused only minor setbacks, since all the students were willing to reach the mutual goal and find ways to collaborate.

Some students also worried that either they or the school teachers would overly influence the children's perceptions and the outcome of the works would only reflect their own ambitions. At the same time, the students were very keen to hear what the children would share about their place. The students strived to work in the role of a facilitator, handing control to the pupils to arrive at their own solutions, and thus increase their sense of ownership of the art being made (Coutts & Jokela, 2009).

The workshops started with different kinds of warm up introductions. A pleasant surprise for all the groups was that the pupils started working enthusiastically and were motivated to have their own input in the art-making. The imagination of the pupils seemed to know no boundaries, and their technical skills and fast speed made the work enjoyable.

Different artistic approaches and tools were used for ideation. In the group with the youngest pupils, brainstorming centered around the objects children had brought with them; from there, they prepared a storyboard for their animation. The pupils took a fanciful approach to their narratives, in which shoes would meet other Arctic objects and somewhat supernatural incidents would take place.

The second group approached the theme by drawing and improvising "Arctic" sounds with different instruments in groups. The drawings were then grouped into three narratives to be painted on the snow the next day. The narratives were about the northern Finnish fell landscape that differs from the southern parts of the country. The other narrative celebrated Finland's success in ice hockey, and the third narrative told the story of dog sled running under the northern lights.



Image 2. Storyboard as a planning tool for animation. The pupils followed the plans very carefully when filming the animations. Image: Netta Tamminen



Image 3. In one of the schools, the pupils drew their Arctic elements as a starting point to collect the joint narrative of the place. A clip from the students' video.

In Norway, the pupils were very well educated on the environmental crises related to their living environment. The student group was also eager to hear the pupils' narratives of their everyday activities and what they considered positive aspects of life on the island. These narratives were processed into live-recorded sand animations.



Image 4. Left: A video clip from the sand animation. By manipulating several elements of the story during the recording, they discovered a new way of storytelling and narration. Right: Design workshop concentrated on upcycling through creating jewelry from the marine litter. Image: Elina Luiro

The individual narratives of the Arctic as outcomes of cycle two varied as greatly as in cycle one. The pupils approached the Arctic through their interest areas of everyday life in terms of hobbies mostly related to winter, natural elements and landscapes, and local traditions such as saunas and food. The first day with the pupils revealed the hectic reality of school life. One student described it as having the “processes forced by the circumstance,” not as initially planned. Hiltunen (2009) states that this is rather typical in participatory art. The potential lies in tolerating uncertainty, which often creates space for real interaction and participation. The frustration was also related to their artistic ambitions to produce high quality outcomes, which caused them to genuinely worry if they would have anything to present in the exhibition.

Cycle Three: Art as a Narrative

The second cycle of action had established a good ground for mutual trust despite its chaotic nature. The final cycle of action was to put the collected ideas into an artistic work. The students had chosen different techniques, from snow painting to animation and design using recycled materials. These were partly chosen to broaden the pupils' views on how to express themselves through art.

The youngest pupils produced their animations quickly. The students also interviewed them about their perceptions, and together, these resulted in a collective narrative called the *ICE of the kids*. It was about walking in the Arctic and having an individual experience. The shoes symbolized each individual.

The pupils were really proud of the animations and wanted to watch them twice in the end. They commented on each other's animations and the atmosphere was excited. (Student report)



Image 5. Shoes having a meeting with a woolly hat and mittens. Image: Netta Tamminen

The sound workshop continued on the frozen lake nearby where the groups would draw massive drawings based on their narratives. The students also educated the pupils on ecological perspectives of working in nature and chose to use only non-toxic paints so as not to harm the lake.

[T]he outdoor activities and painting on the snow was of the most interest for the children, and the majority later admitted that they enjoyed the most the recording of the sound and the snow coloring. (Student report)



Image 6. Finally, the massive Arctic snow drawings were examined with the whole group, with some dancing on the way. Images: Elina Härkönen

The workshop in Norway followed the theme of marine debris in the area, and participants worked together on the shore, collecting marine litter and creating a temporary sculpture called the *Sea Monster*.



Image 7. The monsters of the sea: Left: Tons of invisible microplastics and Right: visible plastic threatening the sea ecosystems. Clips from the students' video.

When reviewing the outcomes⁶ of all of the workshops, one feature rises above the rest: the joy of creating art together. Red cheeks, big smiles, and active participation highlighted the special experience.

[The activity] was not just a learning experience for the pupils, it was an experience for all of us. The whole work with the team and our different backgrounds and skillsets added up to the

⁶ Due to the limited permissions from the schools, the videos cannot be shown online. They can only be shown in exhibitions and lectures.

process and everyone could learn something from the others.
(Student report)

Similar comments could be found from several student reports. Such experiences refer to Räsänen's (2015) intercultural aspects of mutual learning and valuing cultural diversity. The negative feelings expressed in cycle two had changed to appreciation when students started to reflect on the final art processes. The change of experience can be viewed through De Vita's (2005) meaningful participation and real tasks in increasing true intercultural learning.

It was pleasant to witness at the end of the project that each person had made a valuable contribution to the working process, and I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in such a course. (Student report)

What, then, is "Our Arctic?" What all the groups realized was that speaking about the Arctic as a concept was too abstract when working with children. They started with "the Arctic" but later noticed they had fluently changed it to local points of view and ended up calling it the "local."

I was satisfied with the final work. In the installation, the audience could see the innocence and creativity of the children, but in the same time, they could see how our group felt about the "Arctic," which is intimate, personal and full of memories.
(Student report)

Conclusion

Regardless of their area of expertise, the scholars referred to in this article (Bell et al., 2013; Ellsworth, 1997; Fairclough, 2009; Gruenewald 2003; Massey, 2005; Smith, 1999) all emphasize the importance of communication in the processes of working. Place-based art education that is targeted toward intercultural groups of students does not reach its full potential as a culturally sustainable pedagogy if it is not striving for Ellsworth's (1997) communicative dialogue. Concentrating first on the similarities between the participants helps them to understand and agree (to disagree) with each other's different standing points. This forms the core for intercultural learning and has a constructive influence on the critical pedagogy of place. The most influential outcome of cycle one in the "Our Arctic" course was the process of learning as the multilayered narratives were produced. The local students were offered a chance to look at their home region

from an outsider's perspective, and the international students had a better opportunity to understand the hidden mentalities and personal histories influencing the way everyday life is led in the Arctic. The accepting atmosphere of these different perceptions also allowed everyone to feel connected to the place and possibly decreased the feelings of being an outsider in the Arctic.

Smith's (1999) decolonizing methods and Auclair and Fairclough's (2015) principles of cultural sustainability refer to the need to determine the researcher or actor's position with respect to the community he or she is working with. This became apparent during the course, as most of the students expressed a fear of influencing the narratives of the school pupils too much. In my work, I constantly encounter these fears, and at times they hinder the work through a lack of courage in approaching an unfamiliar cultural context. It is not usually about a lack of awareness of the student's or outsider researcher's stance regarding the collaborator, but instead it seems to be sensitivity taken to another extreme. This saddens me, as I see it doing a disservice to cultural sustainability. In the worst-case scenario, fear can lead to inaction, and inaction can stifle collaboration. The lack of collaboration can lead to the division and isolation of different cultural groups and make the negotiations between the groups more difficult. Place-based education needs to consider these aspects and operate so that it supports mutual respect and communication between groups that have different relationships and cultural standings toward the specific place of action. What the fears exposed in this study actually revealed was that the students possessed the needed mindset and respect for the children's ownership of their narratives of the Arctic. Such an understanding offered great opportunities to exercise culturally sustainable art practices in schools and beyond. It turned out that the children were very excited to receive international guests and participated in the art activities enthusiastically and without reservation. Their genuine admiration of the final video productions can be translated into feelings of empowerment and a new appreciation toward their home region.

Another empowering aspect in the findings of this study was the upcoming exhibition, as the potential of a real audience motivated both the students and pupils in their work. It also made the students work harder to deliver the voices of the children as authentically as possible. The publicity around the upcoming congress instilled a sense of respect towards the children's narratives and fulfilled to some extent Bell et al.'s (2013) points about enabling school pupils to actively challenge and reproduce the knowledge of their society.

The narratives continue to be shared as the video installation will be exhibited in several events around the Nordic Arctic region.

The process of creating artistic narratives with the school children and the university students was a rich and multifaceted journey. The cycles of action proved to be vital in increasing understanding of a place and its cultural aspects. Art as a dialogic activity proved its great ability to engage and bring people with different cultural backgrounds together. It also operated as a common language when the spoken languages ran out of words.

References

- Alverson, A., Combes, B., Crowley, J., Dogsé, P., Duvelle, C., Nakashima, D. & Rössler, M. (2009). Introduction. In P. Bates (Ed.), *Climate change and Arctic sustainable development: scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges* (pp. 1-5). Paris: UNESCO.
- Anttila, P. (2006). *Tutkioa toiminta ja ilmaisu, teos, tekeminen*. [Exploring the activity and the expression, the work, the making.] Hamina: AKATIIMI Oy.
- Auclair, E., & Fairclough, G. (2015). Living between past and future: An introduction to heritage and cultural sustainability. In E. Auclair & G. Fairclough (Eds.), *Theory and practice in heritage and sustainability. Between past and future* (pp. 1-21). Oxon & New York: Routledge.
- Bell, L. A., Desai, D., & Irani, K. (2013). Storytelling for social justice: Creating art-based counterstories to resist racism. In M. Stone Hanley, G. W. Noblit, G. L. Sheppard, & T. Barone (Eds.), *Culturally relevant arts education for social justice* (pp. 15-24). New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor and Francis.
- Coutts, G., & Jokela, T. (2016). Art, community, and context: Educational perspectives. In M. C. Manifold, S. Willis, & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Culturally sensitive art education in a global world* (pp. 137-146). Alexandria: NAEA.
- Dessein, J., Soini, K., Fairclough G., & Hurlings, L. (Eds.). (2015). *Culture in, for and as sustainable development: Conclusions from the COST Action IS1007 investigating cultural sustainability*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.
- De Vita, G. (2005). Fostering intercultural learning through multicultural group work. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all* (pp. 75-83). Oxon: Routledge.
- Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions: Difference, pedagogy and the power of address*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fairclough, G., Dragičević-Šešić, M., Rogač-Mijatović, L., Auclair, E., & Soini, K. (2014). The Faro convention, a new paradigm for socially—and culturally sustainable heritage action? *Култура/Kultura (Skopje)*, 8, 1-23. Retrieved from: <http://journals.cultcenter.net/index.php/culture/article/view/111/95>
- Fairclough, G. (2009). Place-making and place-shaping. In D. Théron (Ed.), *Heritage and beyond* (pp. 153-154). Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (2003). *Truth and method*. New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

- Guttorm, G. (2015). Contemporary Duodji—A personal experience in understanding traditions. In T. Jokela & G. Coutts (Eds.), *RELATE NORTH: Art, heritage and identity* (pp. 60-77). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Gruenewald, D. (2003). The best of both worlds: A critical pedagogy of place. *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), 3-12. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3700002>
- Hiltunen, M. (2009). *Community-based art education in northern sociocultural environments*. Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Hofvander Trulsson, Y., & Burnard, P. (2016). Insider, outsider or cultures in-between: Ethical and methodological considerations in intercultural arts research. In P. Burnard, E. Mackinlay, & K. Powell (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of intercultural arts research* (pp. 115-125). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hyry-Beihammer, E., Estola, E., & Hiltunen, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Paikka ja kasvatustutkimus* [Place and education] (pp. 4-8). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Hyvärinen, R. (2014). Paikan käsitykset paikkalähtöisen kasvatuksen tutkimuksessa [Perceptions of place in place-based education research]. In E. Hyry-Beihammer, E. Estola, & M. Hiltunen (Eds.), *Paikka ja kasvatustutkimus* [Place and education] (pp. 9-30). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Jokela, T., & Hiltunen, M. (2014). Pohjoisen kylät ja koulupihat taidekasvatuksen paikkoina [Northern villages and school yards as places for art education] In E. Hyry-Beihammer, E. Estola, & M. Hiltunen (Eds.), *Paikka ja kasvatustutkimus* [Place and education] (pp. 78-106). Rovaniemi: Lapland University Press.
- Jokela, T., Hiltunen, M., & Härkönen, E. (2015a). Art-based action research—Participatory art for the north. *International Journal of Education Through Art*, 11(3), 433-448.
- Jokela, T., Hiltunen, M., & Härkönen, E. (2015b). Contemporary art education meets the international, multicultural North. In M. Kallio-Tavin & J. Pullinen (Eds.), *Conversations on Finnish art education* (pp. 260-276). Helsinki: Aalto Arts Books.
- Karlsdóttir, A. (2015). Nordic youth and future visions (Nordregio Working Paper 2015:2). In A. Karlsdóttir & L. Jungsborg (Eds.), *Nordic Arctic youth future perspectives* (pp. 64-69). Stockholm: Nordregio.
- Lippard, L. (1997). *The lure of the local: Senses of place in a multicentered society*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Massey, D. (2005). *For space*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Räsänen, M. (2015). *Visuaalisen kulttuurin monilukukirja*. [Multi-literacy of visual culture]. Helsinki: Aalto Arts Books.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd.
- Turunen, T. (2017, 16 November). Culturally sustainable education. In L. Holmberg (Chair), "What is sustainable education in the Arctic?" Arctic Spirit Congress conducted at the meeting of University of the Arctic, Rovaniemi.