

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

0113

V10 | Cardiff

Chaired by Heli Kauppila

Fri 13 Dec 2019

12:00 - 12:30

Art as the heart of sustainable development in higher education

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Research Domain: Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract:

This poster introduces artistic-pedagogical research done by teachers participating in higher education course at the University of the Arts Helsinki. The methodological starting point is action research, with emphasis on co-creation and co-reflection using various artistic methods. The research question is, how does art as an approach and the substance of learning, inform the university level teaching development? The data consists of written reflections collected during the two years of the teachers attending the program.

The aim of this research project is to illuminate the tacit processes of art and art teaching, to articulate the experience and expertise that guide the teachers' choices in their teaching, and to acknowledge the differences and similarities among various art fields within the university. Openness, the elements of surprise, and the undefinable nature are the guiding principles of artistic processes and hence the basis for developing the arts-based higher education practices.

Paper:

Art as the heart of sustainable development in higher education

What can we learn from the arts and the processes of making art while striving for universities with innovative cultures and collegial communities? How can the arts be taken as a guide for developing socially, politically, economically and ecologically sustainable higher education practices?

This paper illuminates the process of developing the approaches to teaching and learning at the University of the Arts Helsinki through a higher education programme offered for the teachers of the institution. The core purpose of the course is to strengthen the networking of the teachers, and at the same time, to articulate the tacit ways of approaching the teaching matters in various disciplines taught at the university.

The development work has been going on for two years, so this paper aims at presenting the phase of the research loop we are at the moment. The progression is constructed by the Uniarts Helsinki teachers who participate in the program altogether for three years. The author's responsibility is to act as both the program leader and the head of this practice-led inquiry. The methodological starting point is action research (see Cochran-Smith & Lythe 2009; Jarvis 1999; Reason & Bradbury 2013), with emphasis on co-creation and co-reflection using various artistic methods. The teachers are investigating their own work and their growth as artists-teachers-researchers with the support of collegial platform for information sharing and analyzes of the experiences. The research question is, how can the arts as an approach and the substance of learning, inform the university level teaching development at more general level?

The group of teachers representing all the different disciplines taught at the Uniarts Helsinki including dance, theatre, music, and fine arts consists of altogether 16 university lecturers and professors. During the programme the teachers meet once a month, and share their teaching experiences, questions, findings and challenges in various ways. The meetings are structured so that each session includes theoretical insights into current issues in higher education research, conducted both nationally and internationally. Parallel to the theoretical frames, the sessions provide a forum for practical teaching initiatives and practical parts, the so-called "labs", where the participants share their work and thinking in multisensory ways. After each meeting day the teachers reflect their experiences in various ways (for ex. writing, drawing, video diary), taking advantage of a shared digital learning platform.

The data of this inquiry consists of these reflections by the participants. After each semester the group reviews the material on the platform and directs the next season's activities accordingly. The research and development work are organized under the notion of local and shared pedagogies. The local meaning the subject specific teaching and learning matters (for ex. Violin pedagogy, Dance pedagogy etc.) and the shared referring to the notion of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, especially with emphasis on the Arts. By coming together, the teachers can reflect their own particular practices, and are introduced to different theoretical perspectives. Concurrently the group is in the process of searching and collectively defining the shared higher education policies within their university.

From the data analysis so far, the acknowledgement of the larger connections exceeding the everyday teaching objectives has been clear.

A diverse society challenges the education and the artistic work of artists based upon the national identity ethos. Multiculturalism, the blending of expressions, the blurring of boundaries between different art forms, the interaction between high and popular culture, the mediation of art, and new technologies in art challenge the arts education and the artist education in new, unprecedented ways. Diversity and pluralism affect both students and teachers. Understanding students' meaning horizons in an increasingly complex world challenges a university teacher to question her own views and engage in dialogue with a changing (and multi-meaning) world and meaning relationships. (Dialogical Feedback Writing 2019)

At present, we are facing the "post-truth" era, with growing global and interconnected concerns over the cultural and ecological worlds, and we need to be careful not to diminish the strive for deepening the understanding and knowledge only for immediate or instrumental purposes. As we have so far noted in our research loops, the space where the notion of knowledge is not fixed, or the direction of the learning processes straight forward, can be created by modeling the art making processes. When the artist starts to work, she quite often has the urge to search the new way forward, towards something that is not decided beforehand, and while in the process, she needs to keep on going

towards the uncertainty.

In today's world there are only few places where open debate and reasoned action is flourishing. The university level debate is much needed, and the interest of our project is to emphasize the value of an arts university to participate in these forums and perhaps generate versatile approaches to engage with the public spheres at large.

The starting point for the inquiry was the tacit processes of the arts and arts teaching. The task we as a group set for ourselves was to articulate the experience and expertise that guide the teachers' choices in their teaching, and to acknowledge the differences and similarities among various art fields within the university. Openness, the elements of surprise, and the undefinable nature are the guiding principles of artistic processes and hence the basis for developing the arts-based higher education practices.

We have outlined that within a university with different art forms, the foundation for the institutional development work ought to be based on the lived experience of the teachers encountering the different disciplines. The epistemological and structuralist conceptions of the disciplines provide well-defined, strong and relatively stable canonical renditions of disciplines (Fanghanel 2012, 72.). In practice, and especially, when working in multidisciplinary projects, the disciplinary boundaries and the individual's apprehensions of them become softer and malleable, and the conventional labeling becomes a bit more difficult. Even further, the circumstances and the group work begin to contribute in shaping the conceptions. The guiding principal for our investigation has been the aim to pursue teaching and learning insights without diminishing the individuals' artistic or pedagogical identities into one "sameness". The emphasis is on the plurality of voices, and indeed, in the recognition that the disagreements and even conflicts can nurture a fertile environment to dialogically attend to the complexities of our shared institutional contexts. From this point of view, the notion from the data shows that the defined and lived sense of "we" is the key factor in the staff development in a contemporary university.

So far, we have arrived to the notion that the development of the shared policies and strategies for the university level education, requires the recognition of the particular and the singular lived experience. In the processes of art making, the artist searches for her own relationship to the world and life, and makes her stance sharable in her choice of media /discipline. The similar way, at the university, the local pedagogies have the value of showing the diversity and multiplicity of the today's world. The picture might be messy, and full of clashes and conflicts. Here the analyses of multiculturalism by Kenan Malik (2014) has provided a suitable reference point for our inquiry. Multidisciplinary approach that is not leaning to the policy of taming the differences into one-ness in order to set them into manageable boxes has risen from reflections as one of the corner stones of the inquiry. Also, the notion that this way of approaching the different disciplines make's the individual teacher's stance substantial. By defining her unique standpoint, she evades to become the representative of one particular, named category. As a practice, this might strengthen the sense of participation and engagement.

By developing artistic thinking is one alternative way to answer the future university's challenges in an era of supercomplexity (see Barnett 2004; 2018). By the guidance of the artistic way of how to approach the educational processes, we might be able to practice the search and articulation of our own stance in the ever-changing situations, and to grasp something about a dialogical approach and tolerance towards the unknown.

References

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Reflections collected from the group at the end of the spring term 2019 (20.5.). "Dialogical Feedback Writing 2019".