

Arts education can support students' growth towards global citizenship

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Painting an artwork inspired by a newspaper article. Credit: *The Pennsylvania State University Libraries* (2022). DOI: 10.26209/ijea23n13

Arts education offers powerful ways to explore ethical responsibility,

values, and attitudes of global citizenship by means of interdisciplinary, intersubjective and embodied participation and experience, according to the Finnish researchers in the University of the Arts Helsinki.

Arts [education](#) enables us to step outside our immediate situation and examine it from alternative viewpoints.

Thus, it has the potential to support students' growth towards global citizenship including awareness, care, and understanding of—as well as active and responsible engagement in—current global challenges and [social issues](#), argue Professors Marja-Leena Juntunen and Heidi Partti from Sibelius-Academy, the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland.

According to the Professors, artistic activities and arts education make it possible to address and explore the questions of ethical responsibility, values, and attitudes in ways that surpass knowledge and rational thinking; that is, primarily by means of embodied participation, play and imagination rather than through merely learning facts about economic, political, or [ecological systems](#).

Practitioner research study about an arts pedagogy course

The professors Juntunen and Partti conducted a study utilizing research material generated during an interdisciplinary arts pedagogy course. The course is offered in subject teacher education at the University of the Arts Helsinki and Aalto University in Finland, and has been developed and taught for several years by Juntunen along with Riku Saastamoinen and Taneli Tuovinen.

The study focused particularly on the role of arts education to inform living together in ethical and sustainable ways through taking an active

role in advancing social and ecological justice.

During the course, students created teaching sessions in peer groups in which they explored pedagogical methods to enhance global citizenship through interdisciplinary arts education participation.

"The teaching experiment provided both the teacher educators and [student](#)-teachers an understanding of the pedagogical possibilities of interdisciplinary arts education practices to address global issues," says Juntunen.

According to the students, working with a global theme increased their motivation to study and to delve deeper into the significance of relationships that humans have with one other, with other beings, and the planet.

"The course offered possibilities for students to face difference and position themselves in an empathic relationship with the life situation of another. This in turn allowed students to encounter and reflect on their own attitudes and values in an experiential and embodied manner," continues Partti.

Artistic activities enabled students to explore questions through non-verbal and holistic interaction. A student stated that through such embodied interaction and dialogue, "one can experience the humanity that unites us in its ultimate form."

Artistic activities as tools to express and reflect on distress

According to a survey conducted in Finland by Sitra in 2019, approximately a quarter of Finns—and as many as 38% of the

respondents under the age of 30—estimate that the word "anxiety" describes very or fairly well their feelings about climate change.

Many [global issues](#), especially those related to ecological crises and human oppression, can arouse strong negative emotions, including fear, frustration, anxiety, and a sense of powerlessness.

The artistic activities used by the students in the course offered practical and flexible tools to express and reflect on distress in a concrete and non-verbal way.

According to Juntunen, embodied interaction and play may offer an important way to face and address the emotions and concerns without a requirement for verbal analyses or fear of being exposed.

"Through role-playing games, the students could explore, test, and critically reflect on their own emotions, prejudices, bias, attitudes, values, privileges, and ethical responsibility."

Interdisciplinary arts practices as a powerful tool

In [educational institutions](#), the arts are commonly taught separately, a practice reflecting the tradition of rigid borderlines between artistic disciplines.

"Although this division can be well justified from a variety of perspectives, this study suggests that interdisciplinary arts practices can be particularly powerful in providing opportunities to perceive and engage with the world," Juntunen says.

The researchers emphasize that on the brink of the collapse of global ecosystems and the subsequent societal turbulence this would engender, it is ever more crucial that arts education programs at the university level

support students' growth towards global citizenship and offer them tools to build sustainable futures.

"Global citizenship is not only a set of knowledge and skills that can be achieved and applied in different contexts. Rather, awakening and committing oneself to the activities of ensuring sustainable life conditions for [future generations](#) requires an ongoing state of dialogue with the world and a critical interrogation of the consequences of one's own desires on the planetary community," Partti concludes.

Arts education, as research and practice, can contribute to the shaping and supporting of the processes of transformative global citizenship by engaging students with multiple different and competing perspectives, values, and identities.

"It is a necessity for arts education to systematically open opportunities for students to critically question the social status quo and participate in collaborative efforts to advance ethical responsibility."

The work is being presented at the ELIA Biennial conference at Uniarts Helsinki's Sörnäinen campus, on Thursday 24 November. It was published by *The Pennsylvania State University Libraries*.

More information: Conference: [elia-artschools.org/page/ELIAB ...
ARIESOFARTSEEDUCATION](https://elia-artschools.org/page/ELIAB...ARIESOFARTSEEDUCATION)

Marja Leena Juntunen et al, Towards Transformative Global Citizenship through Interdisciplinary Arts Education, *The Pennsylvania State University Libraries* (2022). [DOI: 10.26209/ijea23n13](https://doi.org/10.26209/ijea23n13)

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