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## **Introduction**

In this chapter, I discuss results from the art-based action research in Creative Connections - project (2012–2014) with literature and theory about the integration of arts and other school subjects. My aim is to present the contributions of contemporary visual art in basic education both through the theoretical background of art education and reflection on the experiences in the action research project using art to discuss European citizenship. The research results I draw from four articles, which are part of my article-based dissertation. They examine the pedagogical use of artwork examples (Manninen, 2015) and group blogs in the project (Manninen, 2018). Next I examine the orientations to home place (Manninen, 2017) and to Europe in pupils' artworks (Manninen, 2019). The main theoretical base is on the writings of Arthur D. Efland (1996, 2002) and Finnish art educator and researcher Marjo Räsänen (2008, 2012), who both present arguments for education through arts. Efland justifies arts as a unique way of knowing and thinking that can contribute to learning and cognitive skills in general and in approaching issues affecting individuals and society (Efland, 2002, p. 6.). Räsänen continues the arguments for the use of art in education by emphasizing the aspects of arts in providing experiences and personal encounters that initiate learning (Räsänen, 2008). In the following chapters, I'm going through three aspects of the Creative Connections -project (looking at the artwork examples, making own artworks and sharing the images in the group blogs) and how they contributed to learning about European citizenship. As a result, I'm summarizing the possibilities of contemporary art and online communication to approach actual topics in society and create international dialogue for understanding and sharing pupil's voices and diverse views in the level of elementary and secondary education.

## **The *Creative Connections* Project: Methods and data**

The context of my study is an art education action research project called Creative Connections (CC), that was funded by the European Union to explore the possibilities of contemporary art and art education in European citizenship education. The project connected researchers of art education, English language education and citizenship education from the UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Finland and the Czech Republic. The aim of the project was to connect citizenship education with art education by using contemporary art examples and practices to explore and express the multifaceted phenomenon of European citizen identity.

To accomplish this the teams constructed an online gallery of contemporary artworks from participating countries and organized training for teachers. Altogether 25 schools were joining the project and connected in six group blogs, four to five classes in each, for the spring semester 2013. The participating pupils were from seven to 18-year-olds, while the majority were 9- to 15 -year-olds (80%). The action research project was running from 2012 to 2014 and was following a previous project called Images and identities (2008-2011, see Mason & Buschkühle, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. What was developed from the first round of action research, was the categorization of the artwork examples through the roles of art and offering the place and possibility for the pupils' interaction in the group blogs.

Using an action research strategy, interventions took place as part of the schools' normal routines and activities. Then, the experiences and outcomes were documented and reflected to develop the practices. Action research is defined by the involvement of the researchers to the practice that they are exploring (for example Stringer, 2007). I'm defining on my behalf the research as art-based action research. The artwork examples, art activities and artworks made by the pupils were all in the core of the CC- project and the research. In art-based action research, the practices are developed through artistic productions. The Art productions and the observations, documentation, experiences and reflections of making the artworks form the research data. (Jokela, Huhmarniemi & Hiltunen, 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). All the researchers participating from the different universities had their own specific research questions in the project. In this chapter, I am focusing on the meanings and effects that artwork examples and art activities had in the project according to my research.

For the research articles, I examined the project through various parts of data and several qualitative analysis methods. As a project and action research, my data consisted of numerous and versatile documents from video recorded interviews to teachers' lesson plans. I was part of the Finnish team and visited the schools and collaborated with the teachers in my country, so that affected my data and perspective of the project by emphasizing my understanding on the context and process. Still the main pieces of data that I have used: the

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<sup>1</sup> Images and Identities (I&I), was a Comenius (EU) funded action research project including six countries and shared contemporary art examples for educating citizenship through visual arts. Creative Connections followed this project with same coordination and four of the six participant country teams were the same.

case study reports from each school and the visual posts and comments in the blogs, covered all the countries and participants. To cover the pupils' feedback besides the interviews I made, I had transcribed extracts from interviews and questionnaires conducted by other countries' researchers. The close collaboration with the other researchers also gave a lot of background information about the situations in different schools in other participating countries.

For this chapter, I gathered theoretical arguments for arts integration in basic education. Then I examined the four articles covering the analyses of case reports, pupils' interviews and group blogs in the project and looked for the connections and disparities with the arguments. The conclusions are my synthesis of the outcomes. Concerning the research ethics, action research is rarely fully objective, since the researcher is involved in the action to change and develop practices. The results are thus a synthesis of my analysis of the project data. The experiences analyzed are not only my own, but through the data, those of all the teachers, researchers and pupils, who participated. Through the research process, I have tried to acknowledge my position as an art educator and Finnish and European citizen. The *Creative Connections* - project was funded by the EU and thus the aspect of increasing awareness of the European community and interaction between its' young citizens were beneficial goals. The actions in the project were more addressed to open discussion about European identity than giving any right answers or forcing any certain agenda. All the different kinds of orientations to Europe were allowed and expressed. In the school context it has to be taken into account that the pupils might have anticipated the teachers' expectations and what are the accepted and expected opinions from them. This might have led pupils to express views on the EU that were generally expressed in the community and in local or national media.

### **Art in teaching and learning**

*curricula in reading and maths limit understanding.* (Donahue & Stuart, 2010, p.1)

Contemporary art has plenty to offer for children with proper context and guidance. Julia Marshall and David Donahue point out firstly, that one of the benefits of contemporary art approaches is that it shows children professional ways to make art that they can follow, that doesn't require years of technical practice (like collage, assemblage, photography,

community and environment art). Secondly, the contemporary artworks often discourse the issues present today and offer actual topics easy to relate to. (Marshall & Donahue, 2014, p.4). When exploring a topic of European citizenship, we touched the questions of identity that are often addressed in contemporary art. The aim was also to use artworks and visual products to build a dialogue and communicate in the group blogs.

Efland is aiming to bring arts to the core of education as arts entail the narrative and metaphorical ways of thinking and knowledge, that are needed as much as logical and scientific information and thinking. Logical, pragmatic thinking is structured around principles and used in mathematics and languages. While in turn the narrative, metaphorical and case-based thinking is used in arts and humanities. (Efland, 2002, pp. 7–11). Both modes of reasoning are important to acquire. European citizenship is seen as the most difficult, supranational, level of citizenship education to engage and address (Kerr et al, 2009). In CC we offered the narrative approach with visual arts to European citizenship instead of facts and numbers.

*Art is used to approach questions that don't have final answers. The knowledge in art depends on its interactive and interpretative character of making art and looking at art.*

(Räsänen, 2008, p. 77, see also Efland, 2002, pp. 120-121)

Räsänen sees visual arts as cultural education that emphasizes context and identity. Both making art and reflecting are essential for learning about yourself and cultural phenomena. (Räsänen, 2008). Efland also sees the making of art and understanding artworks as the two parts of art education (Efland, 2002). In the next chapters I reflect more closely the learning in analyzing the artworks, in making their own art projects and in blogging. These three different activities were part of most of the pupils' participation in the project. In analyzing the pupil interviews, the comments linked to learning occurred connected to these three aspects (Manninen, 2018).

The use of contemporary art and blogging were based on socio-constructivist theory, where learning happens in the construction of knowledge in interaction with others (see for example Harasim, 2012). This was supported by art as an instrument to explore different cultural

realities: to express, understand and change, which brings the social aspects to the center of art education (Räsänen, 2008, p.89). Both, postmodern idea of individual stories instead of common facts (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996), and constructivist view on learning starting from pupils' previous knowledge and background, support also the learner-centered approach (Räsänen, 2008, p.90). Most of the classes in CC started working from personal and local identities taking the perspective then towards the national and European scale (Manninen, 2015).

In reality, the project involved a large group of researchers, teachers and pupils in different contexts. Especially the teachers had different concepts of art and learning, due to their various backgrounds and education. Participating primary teachers and civic education teachers had an understandably different view on contemporary art than art teachers. Also, the teachers' teaching approaches varied from imitating a model work to progressive inquiry according to pupils' age and group sizes (Manninen, 2015).

### **Art as a pedagogical tool**

*Individuals become aware of their cultural condition through their encounters with artwork as cultural landmarks.* (Efland, 2002, p.170)

In CC the art was used multiple ways in different phases of the project. In the beginning contemporary artwork examples from online gallery, making own representations of Europe in multiple techniques and following art projects, making introductions to others in group blogs with photos, drawings and videos, posting images of the art-making process and ready pieces. Thus, art was used as a way of knowing, a way of communication and a way to motivate and connect to personal life, when exploring one and others' European identities.

Most of the pupils in CC started by looking, discussing and analyzing the given contemporary artwork examples. The CC project teams had defined and gathered an online gallery of contemporary artwork examples to approach the themes of identity, citizenship and Europe. The "Connected Gallery" (figure 1) in the CC website presented 74 artworks including artworks by artists from all six participating countries. In the previous Images and Identities -

project, teachers favoured using artwork examples from their own country's artist (Mason & Buschkühle, 2013). So, this time, the online gallery needed to be organized other than by the artists' nationalities. Another aim was to give a comprehensive showcase to different types of contemporary art. To reach these goals systematically, teams used an especially designed matrix categorizing contemporary art. The five categories in the matrix were based on Suzanne Lacy's (1995) roles of art and defined by Mirja Hiltunen, national coordinator of the Finnish team in CC, according to her doctoral research (2009). The categories were Art as A. cultural self-expression, B. cultural interpretation, C. cultural reporter, D. cultural guide and E. activism (Manninen, 2015, p. 145). In the website the categories got into even simpler form (see figure 1).

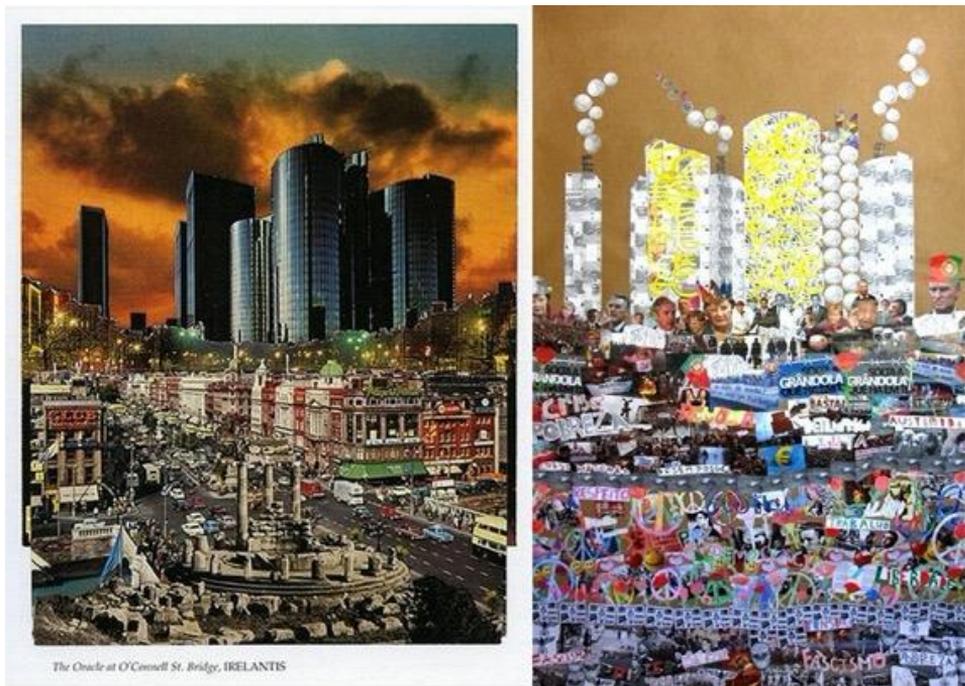


**Figure 1.** *The Connected Gallery in one view - categories and artworks. (Collage by Manninen, 2014.)*

Due to this online gallery of artwork examples, art served as an introduction and conversation starter to the theme of European citizenship. Categories A and B helped to map the different sides of personal and national identities and the other three categories led to approach art as reporting, guiding or activism. According to case study reports in CC, the artwork examples were mostly used to generate discussion (Manninen, 2015, p.147). The artwork examples served also in making pastiches or as an inspiration for a technique, form or subject, an example of a concept, or demonstrated how art functions as a political tool. These

connections to artwork examples could be seen also in the pupils' works visually (see for example figure 2). (Manninen, 2015, pp. 150–152).

One example of this was the process of Portuguese pupils who analyzed a collage by Sean Hillen and then used the structure found in the artwork to express their view of the past, present and future of their country and society (figure 2). The collage made in collaboration by the whole class pictures the past at the bottom of the paper as the peace signs and future in the skyscrapers made out of money. The analysis of the artwork thus gave a basis to discuss and express their ideas of the current situation in their country and construct their shared view as a metaphorical image.



**Figure 2.** *The Oracle at O’Connell St. Bridge, Irelantis (1996), by Sean Hillen and Past, Present and Future, 2013, by Portuguese pupils, age 10–15. (Creative Connections, 2013)*

In the beginning, the use of contemporary art as part of the project was met with distrust by some of the teachers. But during the project, pupils’ open and unreserved response to contemporary art surprised teachers. For many class teachers, showing and discussing images

was a new pedagogical tool and the experience in the project encouraged them to use it more. According to case study reports, the teachers and researchers found that the artwork examples changed the pupils' understanding of art, developed their visual literacy and awareness of art as a tool to express opinions. Still the meaningful use of the artwork gallery required expertise in art education, which was found either from the teacher her/himself or in collaboration with an art educator who visited the school as a researcher in the project. (Manninen, 2015, p.153).

### The roles of art in bringing out information

*Behind of all art teaching, is the vision of art as a special way of knowing, that offers a unique way to understand oneself and the world, which differ from other ways to acquire and present knowledge. (Räsänen, 2008, p.8).*

The exploration of own home place and introducing own living environments to others in the blog were popular tasks. At the same time, it served in representing the personal and local identities. My analysis in these representations of home places in pupils' works showed a correlation to art role categories to the perspective taken and information represented (figure 3).

Place	1) Experienced, personal	2) Represented, collective	3) Documented	4) Cultural	5) Issues
<b>Techniques</b>	Drawing, photo	Collage	Video	Painting, drawing	Socially-engaged Art
<b>Urban</b>	 <i>Larkin, IR</i>	 <i>Larkin, IR</i>	 <i>Larkin, IR</i>	 <i>OSYK, FI</i>	 <i>Zs Palachova, CZ</i>
<b>Rural</b>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>	 <i>Aver-o-Mar, PT</i>	 <i>Utsjoki, FI</i>
<b>The role of Art</b>	<b>Self-expression</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Reporter</b>	<b>Guide</b>	<b>Activist</b>

**Figure 3.** *Matrix - the connection of pupils' artworks to the online gallery categories of the roles of art.*  
(Manninen, 2017.)

The environments were showed as personal memories and meanings through drawings and paintings, reported in video and photo, guided with collages, and the issues in neighborhood and community addressed with activistic community and environmental art projects. (Manninen & Hiltunen, 2017, pp. 44–51). The artworks showed subjective, or larger shared perspectives on the places which indicate that the categories could be used as a tool to explore certain views to a topic or produce representations of certain information in visual form. Thus, the categories of the roles of art worked in producing different types of information. Pupils' works showed not measured facts but narrative information in the form of subjective and collective stories, that were important for the people and part of their lives and their home places for them.

*Understanding is not possible without relating the phenomenon to your own personal history.*  
(Räsänen, 2008, p.107.)

The possibilities of contemporary art and presenting different roles of art in the online gallery were seen especially in the case of one Spanish class. The teacher struggled first to find a suitable way to work on the topic of European citizenship and was then impressed by the activist artwork examples. Taking the activist approach to art led to creating community and environmental artworks to the school area helped the teacher and pupils to deal with the local issues (see figure 4). The economic crisis had brought a halt to the building of their new school building leaving them to attend school in temporary barracks next to the construction site. That was their reality of being European.



**Figure 4.** “Money to the sewer”. Spanish pupils, age 11–12, one part of the art project showing their opinion with environmental artwork on the politicians’ way of using money to wrong targets. (Creative Connections, 2013).

### Engaging through making art

*Learner engagement surfaces and grows through opportunities to connect students’ work to their unique lives.* (Douglas & Jaquith, 2009, p.7).

In CC, pupils were visualizing their relation to Europe in making their own artworks. The meaning of making images themselves, was to give a voice to each pupil to express their views and ponder or build a personal connection to the topic. The arts-integrated experiences often bring affective connections and the emotional impact optimizes the learning (Thorndike Greenspan & Greenspan, 2016). Even the research in neuroscience and -psychology indicate positive connections to motivation and attention when integrating arts in general teaching (Stixrud & Marlowe, 2016) while the visual art activates many areas in the brain leaving an imprint in deep memory (Kandel, 2012). In addition, Patricia Leavy argues that art-based approaches increase empathy and awareness (Leavy, 2015, p. 10). For me as a researcher, the images produced by the pupils gave a whole different view to their ideas about Europe and revealed more tones and details than interviews and written comments (Manninen, 2019).



**Figure 5.** *My idea of Europe.* Pupil, age 15–16, IR. (Creative Connections, 2013).

According to the feedback, most of the pupils enjoyed making their own artworks and pointed out that as the best part of the project. They also connected the learning in the project most clearly to their own art projects. (Manninen, 2018, pp.210–211). This was affected by the teachers’ different emphasis on the project parts. In the Finnish schools the blogging was seen as an important part of the project, while in other countries the art-making was given more time. This was reflected in the pupils’ experiences.

*I always thought that Europe wasn’t anything to do with me, but this has made me think we are European.* (Pupil, Asian heritage, age 9–10, UK)

The creation of images made pupils reflect their connections to Europe (see figures 5 and 6). The outcomes varied from listing the European products they know, languages they speak and places they’ve visited to family history and metaphorical images of the current situation in Europe or their place in Europe. Often the mapping started from one’s own family and broadened from the city and the home country towards Europe. Several pupils and teachers reported that they got to know each other better through this process.



**Figure 6.** Two times 'My Europe' in collage and drawing. Pupils' works from UK (age 14–15) and Finland (age 17). (Creative Connections, 2013)

The listing of brands, facts and existing visual symbols is still logical information, but creating visualizations of your relation to Europe requires more elaboration and creation of symbols and metaphors. Numerous pupils used common symbols like maps, EU stars, flags and Euro-currency signs to indicate Europe (Manninen, 2019). The large number of European landmarks (Eiffel-tower as the most popular) occurring in the pupils' drawings and collages was surprising but following the same trend that was appearing also in the Europe-images of previous I&I-project (see Mason, Richardson & Collins, 2012). Only a few pupils produced more original and personal visualizations of their place in Europe or view on Europe (see the right one in figure 6). The economic crisis appearing especially in the Portuguese (figure 2) and Spanish pupils' artworks (figure 4), but also in the comments of Irish and British children was one big topic colouring the perspective to Europe. The economic tensions in Europe were present in 2013, when the school projects were made (Manninen, 2019).

### Art as visual communication

*In a way the artwork builds a bridge between the cultures of the author and the interpreter.*  
(Räsänen, 2008, s. 90)

The participating classes used the group blogs more or less in the project depending on the availability of computers, internet connections and time planned for the blogging. Also, there were differences on how much the teachers controlled or encouraged their pupils to blog (Manninen, 2018). In general, some of the teachers emphasized the art-making activities, others the analysis of the artwork examples and others saw the blogging as a more important part of the project than others. As a result, the actual dialogue and commenting in the group blogs didn't come to the measures that were intended. However, the pupils' interviews revealed that the artworks made by other pupils were looked at and analyzed more than the blog activities showed.

*Initially, I thought it would be boring but some of the artwork was cool and represented their countries. (Pupil, age 9–10, UK)*

Efland emphasizes generally the pupils' lifeworld as an important part to take into account in teaching (Efland, 2002, p.167). The blogging impacted in two ways in the project. First the making of the pupils' own artworks was different from normal art lessons since the images made were meant to be shared online. The artworks were thus made to communicate to an international audience, not only to pupil him/herself or only presented to their own class or school. Secondly, the other pupils' artworks seen in the group blogs seemed to have a major effect on learning about Europe in the project (Manninen, 2018). The images showed the life and surroundings of other European peers and encouraged them to make remarks of differences and commonalities (figure 7).



**Figure 7.** Still images from introduction videos of the pupils, the school and surroundings from Dublin and Utsjoki (North-Finland). (Creative Connections, 2013).

*But like in that one, that image from the top of the fell... That may be for the Irish and others, and that they filmed their city's streets, and how a bus or metro arrived... That sort of what I noticed, I don't know if that was the idea, to compare the living environments.*

(Pupil, age 17–18, FI)

The group blogs might be today already old fashioned and there are more convenient applications and online environments to share and discuss images. Still the meaning of sharing images is not tied to a medium or application, but it simply changes the way the images are created and perceived, enhancing the awareness of cultural representations, the interpretations of artworks and information they can carry.

*It helped us to create connections to other people from other countries and we got to know more about Europe and staff, because they put photos in the blog, and we commented them, and they commented back.* (Pupil, age 11–12, Spain.)

Learning from artworks made by other children other than their classmates is not that used in formal school lessons. At the same time, sharing and commenting on self-made artworks in the social media and using online tutorials are part of their everyday lives. The latest Finnish national curriculum for visual arts (2015) has introduced pupils' own art and lifeworld images to be explored as part of visual culture besides the professional art and visual environment (Opetushallitus 2015). So, this tendency of the visual culture consisting of the peer images/works is considered at the curriculum level but its meaning and the methods to approach it are still in progress. My research indicates that seeing artworks by peers, and making artworks for the peers, have educational potential from motivating and teaching critical literacy skills to understanding the different functions, meanings and backgrounds of artworks and images.

## Conclusions

*Art makes us see ourselves and our relation to the world we live in. Art education helps to observe differences in human cultures and promotes an ethical attitude towards the unfamiliar. In order to understand other individuals and cultures, we need skills to interpret the art they make.*

(Räsänen, 2012, p.1)

The CC project showed another way to approach the complex variety of European identities with the integration of art and civic education. Contemporary art was used to tackle the multifaceted topic: to start discussion or artwork, to build connections, to express own views and to compare and discuss them with others. Because of this setting, the concept of integration could be replaced by phenomenon-based approach. Marshall and Donahue (2014) use the term “art-centered integrated learning” for using contemporary art in education and they define it as “applying the thinking strategies of art to knowledge in other disciplines” (p.11). In the integration the art was not just an instrument brought to a lesson of civic education but had contents and goals of art education in the core. The pupils were seeing and learning the contemporary art ways to express and take action, which were used as tools to explore the European citizenship.

The experiences and reflections in Creative Connections -project confirmed the remarks of Efland and Räsänen of the potential of contemporary artworks and making of art as a way to approach actual multifaceted, complicated topics in education connected to identity, culture and society. The new aspect is the interaction with images - the impact of seeing artworks by other children and youth (Manninen, 2018). Seeing the others’ artworks in the blogs made the link between culture, identity and artworks perceptible. Through the art projects, the pupils were expressing their culture, heritage, community and identity but also speaking out their opinions of the current political situation for the others.

*Work of art becomes meaningful when it is seen in the context of the culture, and the culture becomes understandable as read through its arts. (Efland, 2002, p.164.)*

The quest to convince the world beyond the art educators and artists of the importance of teaching art and even more all that it could offer for education continues. What was achieved

with art in CC -project? In the successful cases: the sense of connection to Europe. Personal connections made visible. Sense of other people on the other corners of Europe. Numbers and facts are faceless, but drawings and paintings have a human handprint. The sense of connectedness, the images of friendly faces in other countries can take a long way and have an enormous impact. Building a personal connection to Europe, might even be more important in maintaining the European Union, than imagined in 2013. While the teachers' conception of contemporary art changed, the pupils changed their views on Europe.

*Creative Connections was fun, making friends through their art: you're in yours and they're in theirs.* Pupil, age 9–10, UK

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### **Endnotes**