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Korinna Korström-Magga
University of Lapland, Rovaniemi, Finland

Community-Based Art Education and Reindeer Herder Families

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In this chapter, I reflect on the potential of art education research for peripheral communities in Northern Finland. I have been collaborating with five reindeer herder families from Northern Lapland in Finland, in the area of Inari, through community-based art education (Hiltunen, 2009) and art-based action research (Jokela, 2019) since 2016. Our shared aim of the research is to explore how community-based art education can provide the reindeer herders with an innovative way to share their life experiences with others from their own perspective. How creative activities might be developed to support the aim was also an important part of the research.

Inadequate knowledge and expectations of reindeer herding and the Sámi culture affect other people's prejudgments of how the reindeer herders live and the kind of people they are (Valkonen, 2009). Also, Lehtola describes how rein-



Figure 1. Crossing freshly frozen waters may be dangerous. The herder needs to know nature well. Photograph: Magreeta Sara, 2016.

deer herding and the Sámi culture are often thought of in terms of romantic prejudices, false notions or ignorance. Reindeer herding is one of the Sámi people's main livelihoods, and it has a history of nomadic living. Today, reindeer herding is a mix of inherited knowledge about the wilderness and modern equipment and vehicles (Figure 1), where the reindeer still determine the activities of all the family members throughout the year (Lehtola, 2015).

I have lived in the North for over 25 years, and I am familiar with the work of the reindeer herders and the Sámi culture. I have assisted my husband with different tasks with the reindeer, and we have raised our children in the way of my husband's culture – the Sámi culture. During these years, I have observed how

the reindeer herders are categorised by people not acquainted with the livelihood for example the media or the authorities, the tourists and even the non-Sámi locals. The idea of describing the real daily life of the reindeer herders feels important to me and the five reindeer herder families that joined the project.

This project aims to produce information about the daily life of the reindeer herders, with emphasis on decolonisation. Our main activity was based on the method of *photovoice* (Wang & Burris, 1996). The participants took snapshots documenting their daily life for one year (2016–2017). The photography was initially meant to support the research interviews and inspire us to produce artworks that would reflect the families' thoughts about themselves. The snapshots, however, resulted in a touring pedagogical exhibition, sharing knowledge from a decolonisation perspective and renewing people's notion of this Northern livelihood.

Collaboration with indigenous people, to emphasise decolonisation, requires a sensitive and ethical approach for the research to be successful. In this article, I will focus on how to foster a sensitive, listening and reflective position for the role of the artist/educator/researcher. I will discuss how to create the dialogical platform of community-based art education.

The Concept of Reindeer Herding in Northern Lapland

Reindeer husbandry usually brings up the notion that the Sámi people are ancient and nomadic – living in the wilderness. The contemporary livelihood is, however, filled with modern lifestyle. Today, reindeer herding is practised in many places in the world, and each country has its laws and restrictions for the herders (Pennanen & Näkkäläjärvi, 2000).

Lehtola (2015) discussed reindeer husbandry in his research on the development of the Sámi representations and described the roots of the herders. The Northern inhabitants tamed the Finnish forest reindeer for decoy and transportation long before the actual monitoring of reindeer began. The monitoring of reindeer developed during the 15th century in the old Sámi *siida* system, which can be described as a large village area where several families lived for seasonal

hunting and fishing accommodations. The North was filled with these Sámi siidas, and, until the 18th century, the areas were approved by the Scandinavian government. The nomad form of herding developed beside the stationary siidas in the 16th century. The nomad families lived with a great herd and travelled with it from one pasture to another. They wandered long distances with the reindeer from the inner land siida in wintertime to the northern coast siida in summertime (Lehtola, 2015). Nomadic living with the herds came to an end when the reindeer herders were forbidden to cross the national borders with their herds. The border between Norway and Finland was blocked in 1852 and the border between Sweden and Finland in 1889. This had significant consequences for all Sámi siida communities and the Sámi culture. The people gradually adopted the dominant community structure. Due to the change in the way of living and new habitats, the people lost their traditions, language and cultural identity (Roto, Kulonen, Seurujärvi-Kari, & Pulkkinen, 2005; Sámidiggi, 2019).

After the borders were blocked, the siida system in the North was, over time, re-organised. Lapland is today divided into wide fenced areas called reindeer municipalities – where the reindeer are wandering freely but are collected by the herders for slaughter, parturition and calf marking. Each municipality has its systems of monitoring the herds, depending on the terrain and the pastures. In Sweden and Norway, the reindeer herds are still freely monitored in connection with the Sámi villages. In both countries the reindeer herds are also moved between summer and winter pastures and the old siida system has remained as a sort of cultural basis of livelihood. Lehtola (2015) stated that even though the nomadic herding represented only an intensive and short period of the reindeer herders' history, it has labelled the image of the livelihood and is associated with the narratives of the culture that several people expect to hear.

Revealing the fact that the reindeer families share the same modern reality as the rest of the world may be eye-opening. At the same time, the reindeer herders' family life is strongly connected to the wilderness where they use their extensive inherited knowledge about their working environment.

The contemporary form of reindeer herding has an important role in maintaining the Sámi culture and traditions. In Finland, reindeer herding is not

restricted only to the Sámi people as it is in Norway and Sweden. But in practice, almost all herders in the northern parts of Lapland are Sámis. The Sámis live in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Murmansk Oblast, Russia. The Northern Sámi language is the most common, but altogether, there are still nine different spoken Sámi languages. In Finland, you can find three of them; the Northern Sámi, the Inari Sámi and the Skolt Sámi languages. The languages divide the Sámis into different tribes with their own cultures, local history, stories and ways of living (Lehtola, 2015; Pennanen & Näkkäljärvi, 2000). The participants of my research speak Northern Sámi and Inari Sámi. All Sámis also speak the language of the respective country they live in.

Lehtola (2015) described the politics of assimilation in the North, starting with the forced conversion to Christianity at the beginning of the 16th century to the conscious prevention of using the Sámi languages outside the homes in the 19th and 20th century, which almost destroyed the Sámi cultural identity. During these periods, there was resistance from the Sámis side but only a few violent confrontations. The Sámi reindeer herders and their families living in the periphery have managed to maintain their traditions and culture better than families living in the village centres or outside of Lapland. The strong communality and bonds in the reindeer herder families help to retain the culture. Today the revitalisation of the Sámi culture-identity is active. Sámi school classes and language nests have been established in the northern municipalities to revitalise the languages. The work continues by seeking justice for the culture, to secure and preserve the *duodji* (the Sámi traditional handicraft), preventing the Sámi costumes to be worn improperly by ignorant non-Sámi people, saving the old stories and knowledge that would otherwise have disappeared when the elders pass away. These revitalisation actions have had a positive impact on Sámi culture. The decolonisation actions, led by Sámi people, has reborn the spirit and the hope in a minority community (Lehtola, 2015).

The decolonisation of indigenous people is a process that aims to reveal and dismantle different forms of colonial powers and change the power structure from the main society and replace them with the indigenous customs (Smith, 1999; Valkonen, 2009). One distinct colonial power in Western history has been

the research on the indigenous people of Sámi. The Sámis, like many other indigenous people, have been measured, documented, photographed and examined by western researchers and documentarians. Often when the word research is mentioned, the people in the North will step backwards and refuse to participate.

The decolonisation approach is crucial for my research project. The optimal collaboration with the community would result in ethical and reliable data and give confidence to both the research group and the researcher. This research path is difficult to find and each moment requires sensitive reflection. As Smith (1999) pointed out, the challenge is always one's position as a researcher; even if you are in some way an insider, as a researcher, you will always be seen as an outsider.

As a researcher I am in an insider's position. The benefit of knowing the research terrain has been most helpful. According to Smyth & Holian (2008) it is easier for an insider to operate with the people participating in the research because the flow of social interaction in the community is not disrupted. But the danger in being insider lies in the possibility of losing objectivity, falling for personal biases and exposing sensitive information due to being too familiar with the circumstances of the community.

In order to maintain objectivity and avoid bias, I shared all the research material with the participants before publishing. The participants also had the right to deny the use of their photos in public. My research topic which focused on art education and the creative processes, not exploring the participants' personal lives, gives me as a researcher an exceptional place in the community. The participants reported that they wanted me to be in charge when dealing with art issues such as organizing the exhibition.

Art as a Research Strategy

I have worked for a long time in the field of art education with several projects using a place-specific and culturally sensitive pedagogical approach. As an art educator, my emphasis has always been to create actions that enhance and support local identities and cultures and to produce art made by the community rather than interpret their situation by my art. Using the method of art-based action

research in my cooperation with the reindeer herders' families was a natural choice as my aim had been to improve community-art education as a research method. The feature of the research is a typical participatory action research (PAR) following Whyte (1991). In the PAR model, the subjects of the study participate with the researcher throughout the research process. The actions of community-art education specify the method to be art-based action research (ABAR).

Art(s)-based research (ABR) has many definitions. Art itself can be researched or the research can be conducted artistically or be presented by Art. Leavy (2015) described art-based research practices as a long list of tools used by researchers across different disciplines. The form of art practices varies from needlework to film where the research results can be expressed by the art of the artist or then the art practices can be used as a means to collect data. The different approaches have resulted in multiple terms under the umbrella of ABR, which "for a newcomer on the field may cause confusion" (Leavy, 2015, p. 5) The value of art-based research has been recognised long ago, especially in the field of social sciences. Art and art practices might express meanings that are ineffable in plain conversations and gives a broader spectrum of data. In its representational phases, it may also provide an important public service that otherwise would be unavailable (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

The creative way of making arts-based research has become rather popular in the recent years. At the same time there has been some discussion and criticism of using art as a research method in the social sciences. The postmodern understanding of what art is has no absolute definition, there are also countless ways of making objects that are called art. Siegesmund (2014) calls for artistic practices that meet criteria because through them it is possible to make judgments of quality. According to Siegesmund, art has enjoyed unquestioned position within academia for the last half century; anything that is done in the name of art is research yet there are artistic practices and aesthetic relationships that are undoubtedly not research. Jagodzinski & Wallin (2013) stress that art is neither research nor knowledge rather an event or an encounter.

Art education has used the art-based research strategy to develop more functional and practical working methods. The strategy progresses the research

in the cycles of action research and uses art as a catalyst for the development of work (Jokela, 2019; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). The ABR-term used for this method is art-based action research (ABAR). The Department of Art Education at the University of Lapland has been developing the ABAR method since 1995. The department has carried out multiple community and environmental art education projects in northern rural villages, offering their art education students work experience in addition to research topics for their degrees. Art education and community art have been used as methods for empowerment and well-being (Hiltunen, 2009; Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018).

The ABAR method has been used to convey multicultural understanding and empower cultural identity in small communities that are endangered. Contemporary art has been used for activism for progress or change. The northern cooperation partners of the University have usually been schools or tourist businesses (Hiltunen, 2009; Jokela, 2019; Jokela & Hiltunen, 2014; Jokela, Huhmarniemi, Haataja, & Issakainen, 2018). The organised art workshops have often culminated in a larger event or exhibition that has involved relatives and friends and brought a positive feeling of togetherness to the community. These research projects have aimed to develop operational art education methods to support stakeholders and local communities to become more sustainable (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018).

As a part of ABAR, I have used in this research, the *photovoice* method developed by Wang and Burris (1996). It is a participatory action research method in which the participants use cameras to document their own lives. According to Gubrium and Harper (2013), this method gives a social possibility of raising awareness of identity and culture in a community. The photos may facilitate communication with policymakers and authorities who are often inaccessible to the members of the group.

The photovoice methodology is also known as a decolonisation action and seeks to give the word and the power of decision to the participants (Kessi, 2018). The Sámi reindeer herder families examined their daily lives by taking snapshots. They had the right to choose the subjects of the shoot and the also which final photographs that are shown in public.

Art and Reindeer Herders

The research with the families and the photography started in June 2016. I presented the idea of photography, and asked the participants to capture moments of their daily life that might change or widen other people’s notion of how they live. We wanted to take photos for at least one year to capture the most possible encompassing view of the daily life of the families. I encouraged the families to take plenty of pictures and of all kind of situations. I advised them that moments during the breakfast and putting the children off to school were equally important as the harsh moments taking place at the reindeer separation fence. Photography was a practical way to collect the data as almost everyone had cell phones and there are several moments in the reindeer herder’s work where a picture may serve as a helpful and clearer explanation of an unknown situation. My preliminary plan was to use the snapshots as an inspiration for the second act, to create a pedagogical art exhibition together with the families. (Figure 2) I wanted to examine if the creative actions together with the exhibition would better generate the true nature of the reindeer herders’ way of life, and also scrutinize how art educa-

The plan of the first cycle of the art-based action research 2016-2017					
Snapshots ➔	Discussions ➔	Creative work ➔	Art Exhibition ➔	Workshops in Exhibitions ➔	Discussions ➔
The families are documenting their daily lives by photography	Open interviews and discussion with the families, getting ideas and inspiration for making art	Making artwork with the families. Also photos possible to use for the exhibition	First exhibition. Planning the show and building the exhibition together with the families	Plan the workshop with the families. Implementation by the art-educator / researcher or together with family-members	The outcome of the exhibition. Decide together about changes and modifications for the next exhibition

Figure 2. A linear table of the preliminary action plan.

tion can empower and help a community to share their own perspective on their story that is usually told by people outside the community.

The collaboration with the families and the dealing with different kind of agencies in addition to our daily matters took time and I had to make changes in my schedules and project plans. I was applying for our first show in the Sámi Siida museum, which is a national museum of the Sámi in Inari for spring 2018, but suddenly Siida offered us the early autumn in 2017. My plans for making art together with the families after the year of photo shooting changed as our schedule became narrow. An extra challenge for me was that I had to take into account the hectic work periods for the reindeer herders. I could not disturb them with scheduled timetables for art workshops because their priority is always their work with the reindeer and their time schedules and leisure are most unpredictable. Engaging the families to make art felt suddenly difficult and intruding. During the winter period, I made some attempts to arrange art workshops with a couple of the families. With one family. I built snow and ice sculptures that framed their photos in their yard (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The family enjoyed building ice sculptures despite the freezing temperature (-30°C). The sculptures served their tourism business, which is a common additional source of income for reindeer herders. Photographs: Korinna Korsström-Magga, 2016.



To another family, I showed how to transfer printed photos on textiles, bones and skin by rubbing. To a youngster, I taught how to photoshop their photos to combine layers of landscape and visions. The art activities were regarded by the families as interesting but it was, however, hard to find time for them. In their busy daily lives, it turned out to be an additional obligation. When I started to talk about the coming exhibition and the planning of our artworks they mostly smiled shyly and convinced me that they could help me to hang the exhibition as long as I prepared the artwork. One man told me frankly that he would take the photos, but would not attend any art workshops. Another family said that they were too busy to make art. They did not reckon themselves as artists and they were actually not very interested in making artwork. A couple of interested participants were cautious about presenting their ideas for the exhibition, as they thought their efforts were not professional enough. A common opinion was that exhibition hall and museums are only meant for fine arts of professional artists and it is a part of the urban world far in the South. On the other hand, I wanted to use my skills as an art teacher to entice the community to create tangible artworks that could address the audience to learn about the reindeer herders in a new and different way. Was my ambitious plan only an unrealistic dream? And what purpose would the artworks serve in the end?

I realised that my previous experiences of community art had been among school pupils and art enthusiasts that were easy to involve in art actions. Working with the families that had various interests was different. How could I find a way for art education to connect the reindeer herders with an audience? Kantonen (2005) reflected, in her research on Mexican and Sámi communities, on how challenging it is to find a balanced dialogue and relationship between the community, the researcher-artist-educator and the audience. Depending on the community and its needs, the community-art practices can resemble – for example, activism, social work, ethnography or education. Kantonen found an imbalance in seeking for participating and collaborative research practices with her research communities when she was concurrent the one who determined the project and led the practices. Even if her art workshops served as the centre for the research project and the communities knew her well, she saw a conflict

in that she and her colleague represented and served the institutional western art world. She claimed that finding the balance of collaboration with the stakeholders, the community, the researcher, the research institution and the audience, in community-art research is hard and the researcher needs to be constantly alert and ready to redefine the research process (Kantonen, 2005, pp. 38–40).

It is often taken for granted that people like doing art. The word art has different connotations for people. To understand the northern adult people's lukewarm and cautious feelings about art, which I refer to in this particular project as European art, we need to look back at the cultural background of the rural areas in northern Lapland. Lapland is still a sparsely inhabited area where people often live long distances from authorities, schools and basic services. The nearest cultural amusement, such as theatre, contemporary art museums and galleries are in Rovaniemi, at a distance of at least 350 kilometres. Exhibited art is not easy to reach, it does not belong to their daily life and is not an essential part of child fostering. The adults in Lapland are raised by their parents and grandparents that rebuilt the country after the war when most of Lapland was destroyed in 1945. Life was extremely harsh, poor and demanding and it was seen as a sin or at least unacceptable to use your time for anything but useful things. The lack of paper, pencils, literature and the late arrival of media to the homes delayed the entrance of the urban, European art that is today a usual sight in the environment in the urban cities. Fine art is still, in many ordinary northerners' opinion, something unfamiliar. Their years are filled with more important things waiting to be done, prepared or repaired. Nevertheless they enjoy beauty, as we all, and find great aesthetic pleasure in the nature, which could be recognized of the photos of the participants. In the rural areas in the North are the narratives, the music and the handicrafts recognized as art.

The *duodji* (Figure 4) is a very important part of the Sámi reindeer herder's cultural identity. The knowledge of making the dresses, tools and equipment are taught by the parents to the children and each family in different areas have their styles that can be recognised from their models and decorations. The artefacts show proof of a distinct sense of aesthetics and skill.



Figure 4. “Duodji” is a complex of skills embracing wood, leather, silver, bone and needlework, for example, and the material is often of reindeer. Photographs: Jouni Lukkari, 2016, Magreeta Sara, 2016 and Marjunga Sara, 2016.

The duodji is both maintaining old traditions of patterns and models as well as developing along with the modern time. Sámi artists, such as Outi Pieski (see emmamuseum.fi), Per Isak Juuso and Gunvor Guttorm (see samidaiddaguovddas.no), have also used duodji in their contemporary art. Duodji as contemporary artwork is though rare and belongs to the “Art”-world. In the daily Sámi culture has duodji its specific value and place.

Visual Working

The family’s task to photograph their daily lives seemed anyhow fun and fluent. The photographing was perhaps not recognised as making art. To take snapshots with cell phones is simply seen as a normal contemporary way of communication. To explore and discuss the multiple photos of the families took hours. Talking over the different tasks in a reindeer herders’ family’s daily life was easy

and we shared the interest in the findings in the pictures. We also admired the photos and found many of them aesthetically pleasing.



Figure 5. The snapshots performed in the Siida museum in 2017. The photos presented at items of the reindeer herders daily life formed one installation per family. Photographs: Korinna Korsström-Magga 2017.

In the end we did not make tangible artwork for the exhibition with the families in workshops as I had planned. The exhibition at the Siida museum turned out to be a collection of the snapshots that the families took during the year. The families provided hundreds of photos for the exhibition. I was most happy to notice how important they considered it to be to show moments of their private lives to an unknown audience. Almost every family selected the photos for the exhibition primarily themselves. I advised them not to leave out snapshots with poor quality as they often captured moments of haste or harsh conditions. The collection of snapshots shown in the exhibition is the rarest and delicate insider's view of a special livelihood and culture. The photos described the actual work and culture of the livelihood and also moments of leisure and casual living, pointing

out the ordinary life that we globally share. We called the exhibition *Boazoeallin* (Reindeer Life). I suggested to the families that we would build the exhibition environment of items from their surroundings to strengthen the ambiance of their world. I wanted to avoid the severe atmosphere of a traditional exhibition that also felt for me as a distant world combined with the vivid reality of the reindeer herders. The families thought it was a terrific idea that the photos would be presented in a 'cosier' and more familiar manner and it suited their cause better than the sombre traditional way of presenting pictures on a white wall (Figure 5). Each family presented an entity of their daily life in a world built of grey wooden fences, reindeer skins, sledges and a traditional Sámi hut. A lot of friends and relatives came to the opening and the atmosphere was warm and festive.

Potentials and Challenges in Community-Based Art Education

It is quite easy for a person working and communicating with art and visual means to forget that a lot of people are not familiar at all with different forms and tools of contemporary art. Simply mentioning art making may lock the door of interest to join a project. The families were enticed to join the project because they saw the purpose of showing the actual reality of the reindeer herder's work as important. The creative part of the project and how to reveal their documents, they preferred to hand over to me as I was the artist and also the organiser of the project. I realised that enticing adult people to join art making, asking them to give their time and throw themselves into unknown waters was much more challenging than supervising school children or art enthusiasts in workshops. I almost fell into a professional trap; instead of listening to the needs of the research group, I was more concerned about fulfilling my ambitions of producing tangible artwork with them. I had not thoroughly reflected on how the reindeer herder's community would benefit from creating tangible artwork in case they would not see it as useful, but as a waste of time. In the worst scenario, art education could turn out to be perceived as a colonial action.

Hiltunen described the challenges of collaboration in community-based art education and she pointed out the necessity of understanding each commu-

nity as an individual case. Reflexivity is the most important part of the projects, beginning from the moments of planning, brainstorming, engaging people until the end of the project when evaluation of the activities was done. It is always relevant to reflect on ‘what kind of and whose progress is being supported, and whom does it affect?’ (Hiltunen, 2009).

After the exhibition at the Siida museum, I was eager to analyse the first cycle of the action research. So far, I had realised that the most meaningful moments for the research were during the open interviews over the photos that resulted in an exhibition. The exhibition was a result of the creative work of the families under the direction of the researcher. The intention of the snapshots was not to make art, but during the open interviews I understood that the families enjoyed the task and their spontaneous photographing turned into a creative flow. The families’ installations did imply that the community had worked using visual and creative forms, to share their daily lives from their perspectives. I had provided the families with the means to convey a personal view of their reality and the photos were taken with the attitude that best described their lives visually. Taking photos let the families examine their lives from an external view, giving them the chance to understand their values in a changing, modern society.

According to Huhmarniemi (2015), community art is not bound to a specific art form, the term describes the attitude and the starting point for the creative activity, where the artist often stays in the background and the creative work or the artwork is done by the community. Also, Hiltunen (2009) described a visionary platform, where community-based art education can be seen as a performative dialogue, where each action, for example, meetings and discussions in all the collaboration with the community has a meaning for the research. Each decision, what you choose to do and what you leave out is a performance that involves the community in a mutual process aiming for a visual presentation.

The period of the photography was an intense time of collaboration with the families. After the exhibition in Siida, I presented the exhibition and the research project in different conferences of art education. Subsequently, the interaction and the meetings with the families became occasional. The exhibition, embraced by the western world, seemed to drift away from the families. I

felt concerned that the project was going to fade away without leaving traces in the lives of the families. I realized we had to plan the second cycle of the action research and bear in mind the aim of the reindeer herder families project; how to inform about their daily life.

According to Huhmarniemi (2015), community art occasionally has been criticised for being shallow. There have been short-time community-art projects that have mainly served the artist's intentions and left the community confused and neglected. This problem has been recognised by artists and researchers and today community art strives to put in place a cultural and ethical action that has a long-term benefit for the community.

The project with the reindeer herder families is still ongoing. I have realised the importance of the photos to the families and I see the photovoice action as an essential and part of community art in this research. We are now, along with the families, gathering the photos for a publication. The families will compose the topics of the chapters and select themselves their photos for the publication. When the photos are shared with explanations the information will open up for a wider audience. The book will stand as a specific result of the photography and of course, also serve the continuing touring exhibition. The discussions and the planning of the book have already begun.

Conclusion

Working as an art educator in the field with periphery northern communities and with indigenous people requires wide knowledge about the circumstances of the Arctic cultures. During the process, I learned the importance of being sensitive and responsive to the research group. The members of the families that participated in this project were individuals with different backgrounds and experiences about contemporary art expression. They do not represent a group of people with a special interest in art and their main aim in this project was plainly to inform and produce information about themselves to the rest of the world. Art and creative expression, as it is recognised by the western norms, is an unfamiliar form of developing knowledge for most of the participants in this project.

Over time, I realised that instead of applying my terms of expression on the members of the project I had to seek for the strengths and abilities in the research group itself. The process has helped me to recognise new and different values of my profession and reflect critically over my intentions and working methods. A well-planned workshop may turn out meaningless and soon be forgotten by the participants, but spontaneous creative actions, that rises from their own interests in the field is meaningful for the participants and may continue without direction of the art educator-researcher.

I have learned a sensitive, listening and reflective position of supervision, where the creative space has a larger meaning than the actual final product or artwork. In this research, collaborating with indigenous people and aiming for decolonisation it seems to be a better starting point for the research project.

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