



# Stretching the Limits

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Mirja Hiltunen

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# Stretching the Limits

## Abstract

This visual essay illustrates the context of art education practice and its contemporary art dimensions developed within the Art Education programme at the University of Lapland. The connections between interdisciplinary field of art education, research and artistic activism is a dynamic new opening with educational potential. I will examine performativity and place specific art and their potential in community-based art education in the context of art teacher training.

**Keywords:** Art education, Art teacher training, Place-specific art education, Socially-engaged Art

Photo (in the previous page): Mirja Hiltunen

The aim of the essay is to unwrap the basis through which place specific art and community-based art education is made a central part of the Art Education Programme. Community-based art education research extensively examines art education as interaction between people where cultures and ecologically and socially sustainable art education is a particular focus area where science and art become integrated. I intend to find out how the process of constructing an art event can offer an open space for conversation and collaboration – and how performative art in different northern environments can open the space for dialogue. In the end, it is a question of a possibility for change.

In the project studies (a class in the masters programme) the art education students have possibility to learn new teaching methods and approaches in a real life during their studies where activist art is considered as a potential agent of fostering sustaining, developing and regenerating communities in remote northern areas. The emphasis on the projects is on cross-sector collaboration. The action research approach during the projects have examined the potential for local schools and art teacher education to act as catalysts for developing an activist approach to art in a wider community setting.



*Utsjoki is the northernmost municipality in Finland, located next to the Norwegian border line. Department of Art Education has cooperated with the local school and other actors in many different ways over the past fifteen years. In the year 2004 we started to study Northern Lights both through artistic and scientific approach. In 2005, the significance of the first sunrise after the polar night was in focus. 2006 the main theme was water and the art activities were focusing to the memories, myths and local knowledge of the rivers and fishing-culture. 2007 the theme was wind and the activities were designed totally by locals with the help of couple of art students. Later the villagers have organized smaller summer schools for the upper secondary school, workshops for the elderly and persons with special needs, and several art and science days for the school, where winter art and snow sculpting has always been one part. (See Hiltunen 2005; 2010).*



Photo (children sawing ice) by Minna Saastamoinen.  
All other photos by Mirja Hiltunen

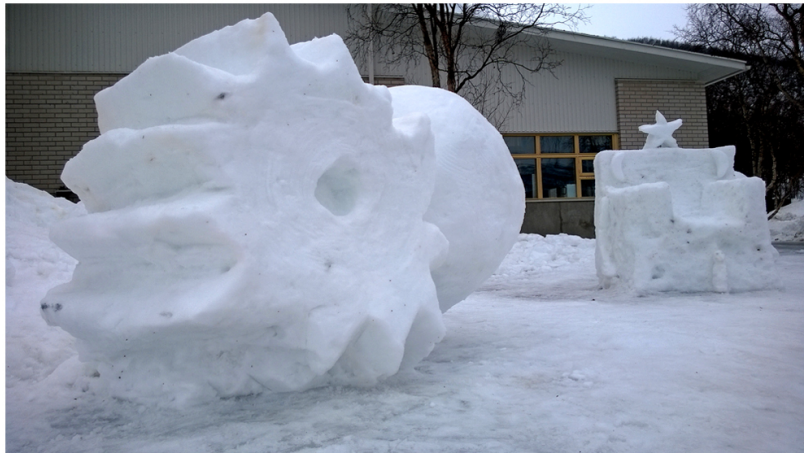




*Often the activity week has ended with a happening, where the villagers get together and celebrate in many ways the common achievements and experiences gathered during the activity week. At their best, the ending ceremonies of the project or activity week can be events in which speeches, performances, and artworks form an interdisciplinary artistic whole. The festive occasion it self can become an eventual work of art in its own right, which makes it possible for members of the community and different groups to present their skills and get together. The big snow sculpture was created in 2005 together with the local Sami high school students and international art students from the University of Lapland.*

*In March 2015 the theme of the science and art event organized by the villagers in Utsjoki was to celebrate the solar eclipse and ice fishing (see pictures p.36). The local astronomical association URSA and Village Association organized a joint science and art event to celebrate the solar eclipse which one experienced in Utsjoki 92% total. Two of my master students were leading a snow and fire sculpture workshop there under my supervision.*





*Solar eclipse and Ice fishing, Utsjoki 2015. Photo: Mirja Hiltunen*



The Faculty of Art and Design in general is involved in developmental research, which create new applications and innovations for business life, culture, education, the tourism sector and leisure and wellbeing services. A lively dialogue between science and art characterizes the research activities. Art education is involved in many ways in this development work by organizing multidisciplinary projects where students can do their project studies using art-based action research approach. (Jokela, Hiltunen & Härkönen 2015 a; b).

*ArctiChildren-project, a cross-border research and training program, is one example of the art department's long term projects where sustainable development has been the core element. The project aims for promoting schoolchildren's psychosocial well-being through school education in the Barents Region. In this project, the responsibility of art education was to develop environmental and community art activities using art-based action research as a method and students from the art education program were involved in many roles. (See Hiltunen 2008; Hiltunen & Manninen 2015; Arctichildren).*

Photo above: Timo Jokela





The aim of the art teacher education is the development of critical artistic and scientific thinking, where the challenge influencing change, in particular, is identified, as well as the questioning and discussion of alternatives. Since the 1990s, visual art education has been able to invite a number of cooperation partners and researchers to participate in projects, where it has sometimes been necessary to give up certainty, as well as familiar thinking and practice methods. Although art-based action research with its cycles and reflective frameworks appears to be goal-oriented and structured, art-based research also involves stepping into uncertainty, the unforeseeable future, as well as the imagination of even less existent worlds. Transition from the individualistic practices of art and sciences toward a sense of community, working together and creating together is challenging, but it also opens new horizons. When visiting the limits and stretching the limits, collisions should not be feared. (See Hiltunen 2010; Hiltunen & Rantala 2015).

In multidisciplinary projects, a rich and rewarding environment has opened up for joint consideration and active operations. The projects have taken a grip to support the well-being of young people and elderly people, as well as a variety of work places by means of art-based methods. At the same time, the scope of art education activities and cooperation with social sciences, particularly with social work, has been extended.

*The project IKÄEHYTT- supporting older adult's wellbeing and coping in Northern Finland, was held in 2011-2013 with 14 Northern Finnish municipalities in collaboration with 3rd sector actors. The aim of the project was to develop art-based models and methods that enhance older adults' wellbeing, quality of life and agency. The organizers used service design*

*and community-based art education approaches in order to promote social engagement and well-being.*

Photos: Rita Johanna Laitinen, except second photo: Elisa Ahonan







Saarenkylä 2011 photo Elisa Ahonen





*The starting point for the workshops called “At home” 2015 was multiprofessional geriatric care. Workshop was jointly organized by the Art Education and Social Work. The project focuses on interaction and respecting dignity of elderly through art based activities. In that case, it was not only a question about remembering the past but also dreaming and acting for the future. The art activities created opportunities for open interaction and working together joyfully and enjoying creating.*

Photos: Mirja Hiltunen





The 'ArtGear – Two-Way Integration of Young People 2016-2018' project addresses the challenges of increased immigration. This project is a collaboration between the faculties of Art and Design and Social Work in the University of Lapland; the Artists' Association of Lapland and the Cross-art Collective Piste. There is a perceived need for activities that integrate immigrants to Finnish culture and equally Finnish young people to a multicultural society. The aim of the project is to support interaction between young immigrants and native Finnish young people, thereby reducing racist attitudes. Art-based methods, such as community art, applied visual arts and performative art are used in close cooperation with social work to support the integration of young people in Finnish Lapland. The art workshops are designed to support immigrants who have arrived in Finland as asylum seekers and received residency permits. (ArtGear, Taidevaihdde-ArtGear). See <https://www.facebook.com/Taide-vaihde-Art-Gear-1173182562726526/>

The society changes, and the art changes as part of it, art teacher training should be included in this change sensitively but effectively. In art education, it is always a question of human growth through relevant experience. In this growth, knowledge based on perception of art and skills, physicality and experience, is considered valuable. Investigative and phenomenon-oriented working, which is characteristic of art, represents a holistic conception of knowledge, where the individual and communal nature of art learning are combined. The action is long-term and goal-oriented, it encourages

experimentation, interdisciplinary art, as well as large-scale cooperation projects. The present phenomena can be approached by applying practices that are characteristic of contemporary art. In their profession, an art teacher and educator must continue to develop their ability to imagine opportunities, which do not exist, research unclear issues, as well as develop their ability to notice new perspectives. The challenge of art teacher training and art education research is to understand and anticipate the needs for change in the field in relation to the changing world, but also believe in and defend stability, unique experience opening in art, and hence a new kind of understanding of the world, one's self, education phenomena, as well as art itself.



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