

# Colourful Cultures as the Theme in Visual Art Education



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## Art Schools for Children and Young People

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# Colourful Cultures as the Theme in Visual Art Education

## Abstract

In the school year 2015 - 2016 the pupils of Sara Hildén –academy / The Art School for Children and Young People in Tampere studied different cultures and cultural differences through various art practices.

The main objectives were:

- To study similarities and differences between cultures or subcultures.
- To look behind the most popular preconceptions and generalizations.
- To foster understanding and tolerance.

The concept of culture can be understood as a cultural region, as an historical period, as a subculture and so on. Multiculturalism is everyday

life of the children and youngsters because of their social background and history as well as their current surroundings. They also live in a global modern visual reality using the Internet and the social media.

The teachers could choose the way of approaching the theme depending on the age and interests of their pupils and the objectives of the curriculum. Sometimes it was easy to combine these in a work of art. Sometimes it was more demanding and the process of working, including discussions, was more important than the visual result.

When planning the theme we did not know what would happen in the world. Impacts of the crisis and war in Middle East came also to Northern Europe during late summer and autumn 2016. Tampere City received hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers from the Middle East in autumn 2016. This had an unexpected impact on our process with the theme colourful cultures.

**Keywords:** culture, multicultural, intercultural, otherness







## **Diane, lion and a turtle from Cameroon**

The smallest pupils, aged 7-9 years, started working with stories and tales from different countries. It was a special, peaceful and respectful meeting when Diane, originally from Cameroon, now living in Tampere, visited the school. Diane told an old story about a lion king and a turtle. Children made portraits of Diane and the tale was described by drawings, paintings and animation. This meeting led to a series of discussions of the appearances of human beings and the concept of beauty in different cultures.

A group of pupils started to make a visual “ethnographical” study about the social subculture of 13 year old Finnish youngsters. The work is on-going, only the self-portraits made in the style of mindfulness colouring books for adults (currently very popular in Finland) are ready.

## **A deity of my own**

An unfamiliar religion was the starting point for mixed-media works. The teacher, keen on India, told the pupils about the Indian deities. In Hinduism there are a lot of deities with different tasks and different things to protect. The pupils’ task was to think about from what they needed protection or which quality they needed more. They made Protectors for weather, love, peace, equality, falling asleep and courage. One of the

parents phoned the teacher, wanting to emphasize that they believe in Christian god and they do not want any other religious opinions to be delivered in the art school. The teacher explained that it was no meaning to insult anybody, just to make pupils understand that there are different cultures, religions and beliefs in the world.

## **If I were forced to leave my country**

In the autumn 2015 problems in the Middle East exploded - the asylum - seekers invasion surprised and challenged European countries, and also Finland. Tampere City received some hundred refugees. This politically difficult and humanly tragic situation was discussed and processed in some groups, either seriously or with a little humorous or tragicomic way.

One group of pupils studying ceramics, aged 13 – 14 years, was especially multicultural. Pupils used Finnish, English, Estonian, Turkish, Chinese and Persian while talking during the lesson because of their different backgrounds: one student was a refugee, some were from a multicultural family, some were living temporarily in Finland because of parents work, some were adopted. The group started to think what they would take with them if they were forced to leave, what would be the important things of their lives or Finnish culture. The results were the important thing or the idea of it surrounded by frames made of ceramic.







Pupils aged 9-10 years imagined that the sea -level is rising so high that Finland is sinking. They had to design a ship for their family and the most necessary things and travel abroad. These plans were drawings. Pupils also built models of the ships and made self-portraits describing the profession they would like to have in the new country. The portraits were 2 -layer prints.



## A Minimum State

One group of nine year olds started to study the concept of a state. The art lessons started to be like a long-term play. The group founded a state, decided to make it a democracy, instead

of a kingdom ruled by a teacher-queen. The teacher guided and made suggestions, but the pupils made a lot of democratic voting during the process. Even the name of the state was voted letter by letter. First the pupils worked together as a team and decided, planned and built the geographical map of the state: natural environments, borders and roads. Then everybody got their own area in which to work, make buildings, design money and so on. The process continues and there will be tasks for deciding laws and rules, making institutes necessary for a state: police, hospital, shops and so on. Artistic working included drawing, painting, three-dimensional work, design and graphics.

Indian-style bicycle was one of the short exercises during the minimum state -project. Studies of the structure of a bicycle and ideas of using it by Indian style as a home and as a means of earning one's living were inspired by the Ghoda cycle project by Sameer Kulavoor. The process included discussions of the traffic in cities, the amount of cars and pollution.

## What is Odd in Finland - What is Odd in Other Countries?

The 10 years old pupils studied odd traditions or habits in other countries or cultures and tried to imagine what would be odd for foreigners in Finland. They commemorated but also searched facts from the Internet.



Some odd traditions or habits from other cultures according to the pupils were:

- It is not allowed to ride a camel on holy days
- Giving a clock as a present means death
- Giving a yellow flower means the end of friendship
- Belching means that the food is good
- Nodding the head means “no”
- Muslim women using scarves

Habits or traditions that foreigners feel odd in Finnish culture in the pupils’ opinions were:

- Men are not allowed to have moustache in Finnish army
- The taste of Finnish Karelian pasty and Finnish fish pasty
- Going to sauna, rolling in the snow and swimming in ice holes

Pupils made acrylic paintings describing two odd things in one painting.

The school-year is continuing as this essay is written and working-processes are going on. But in May there will be a little exhibition and a multicultural vernissage for the pupils and their families. We think our theme is so important and interesting that we will continue it next school-year. For instance we could not organize meetings between pupils and

representatives of other cultures as widely as we thought. The political and cultural situation in the world will surely continue to be complicated so we need understanding of our own identity and understanding of otherness.

## Facts

Sara Hilden Academy/ The art school for children and young people in Tampere, Finland, was established in 1982 and today it gives basic education in visual arts based on the advanced syllabus. The number of students is about 400 and their ages are 7-17. The syllabus is divided into basic studies (540 hours) and advanced studies (760).

Basic education in the arts in Finland differs from compulsory basic education. Participation is voluntary and the education providers may charge moderate fees. Basic education in the arts is goal oriented, gradually progressing education in different art forms given mainly to children and young people. It provides them with the skills needed in expressing themselves and in applying for vocational and higher educational institutions. Basic education in the arts is regulated by act and degree and the national core curriculum, which may include syllabi of different extent: basic syllabi or advanced syllabi. The Finnish National Board of Education decides the objectives and core contents for nine different art forms.





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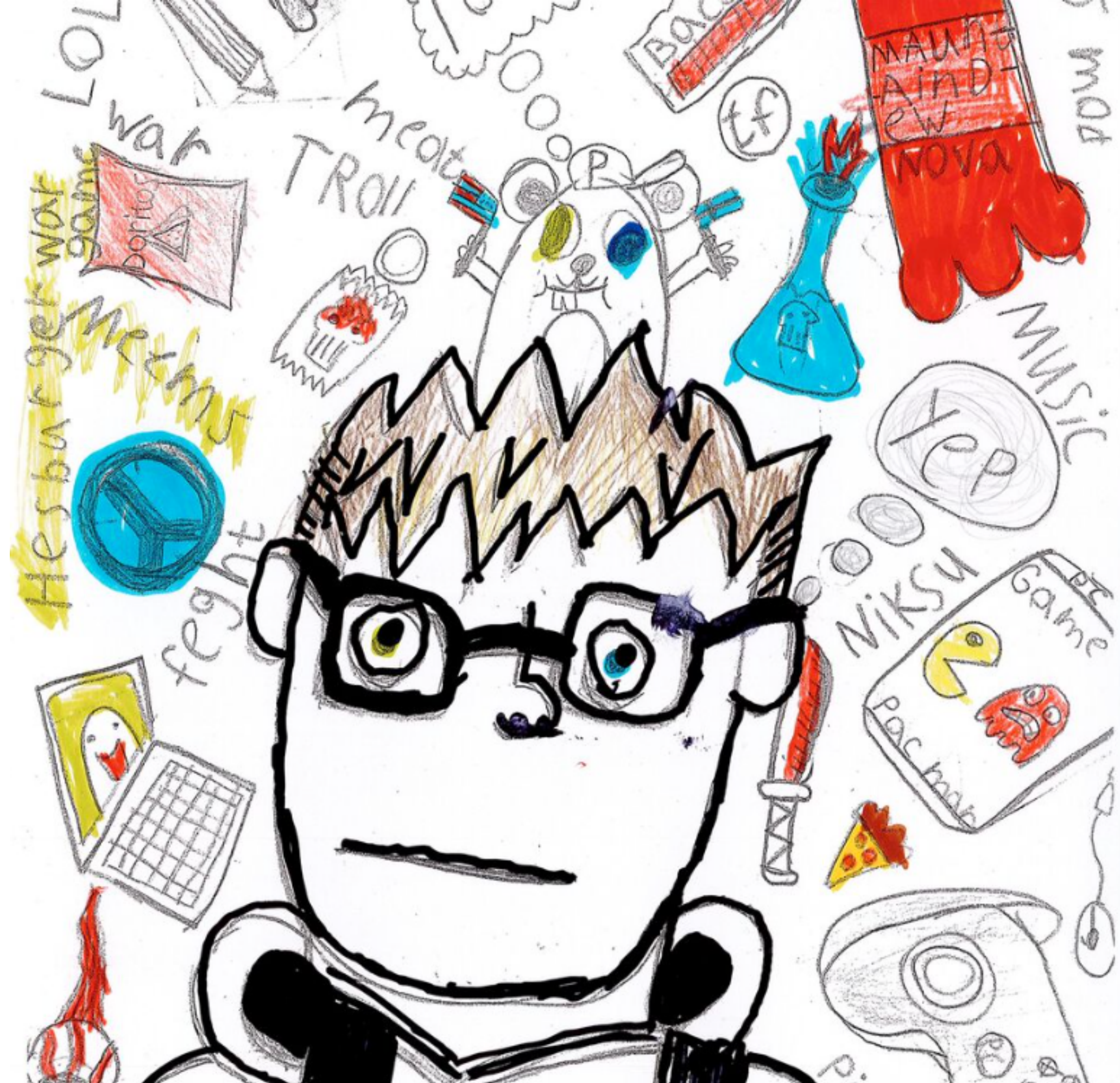
























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