



IMAG

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Integrating Contemporary Art in the PYP IB Curriculum to Open Dialogues About Cultural Diversity in Norway

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Abstract

What does it mean to open dialogues about cultural diversity using art in an international school in Norway? In the context of a changing Europe, cultural prejudices, sense of otherness as well as cultural and language barriers represent a challenge for educators. That is why, placing a special focus on progressive education, literacy and the humanities are key to designing a student-centered International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum which is also inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Goals. What makes Norway's private schools unique in comparison to other private schools that implement the IB curriculum is that a state-approved private school is 85% publicly financed. Within this context, Fagerhaug International School (in the region of Trøndelag), has welcomed students coming from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds worldwide, and used art as a subject to integrate dissimilar cultures by opening dialogues about global issues, such as immigration. This means that many students in Norway can have access to quality public education within a multicultural environment whereby the community is enriched. The school can act as a cultural and political institution open to addressing local and global challenges to help shape a comprehensive model of the society. In this paper, three case studies are analyzed by using the theoretical approach of *Diversity Pedagogy* (Hernández Sheet, 2005) along with themes from theories related to democratic education (Freire, 2005). The article discusses the role of contemporary art in the teaching-learning process of art as a subject within Scandinavian socialism in the context of evolving Europe.

Keywords

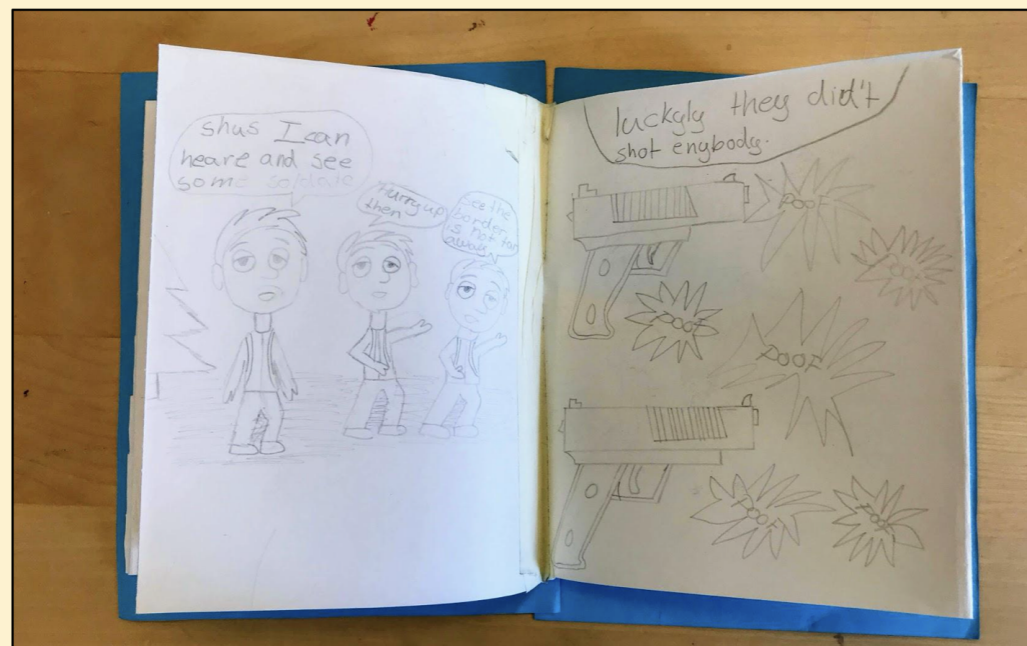
Socialism, education, art

After the department of education within Norway began to accept international school requests to implement the International Baccalaureate Curriculum (IB), many new IB schools flourished across the country. Schools teaching the IB program differ from other private schools in Norway which are typically publicly financed in 85%. The legal framework in the country protects students from being discriminated against when applying to a publicly funded private school because those schools are forbidden to ask questions about the prospective students' individual qualities or needs when assessing their applications. **Only after a student is enrolled at a particular school can the pedagogical team ask questions and design a plan based on their individual study needs.** Moreover, there are very few schools which cater specifically to students with special needs in Norway. Instead, each student with special education needs is individually assessed by the pedagogical team and appropriate funding is provided directly to the schools to meet those student's needs.

At the IB school where this research takes place special education teachers work in the classrooms and students with special needs are integrated into the classroom with minimal time spent in activities outside of the classroom. In addition, all parents in Norway are entitled to child support of approximately nine hundred kroner (equivalent of a hundred euros) per month until the child reaches the age of eighteen in order to assist with the costs of raising a child. **The department of education has set a limit on student fees which cannot exceed 15% of the child support allowance available to each student.** This prevents the publicly funded private schools from becoming 'elite' schools. Moreover, some private schools decide to charge less than that. For instance, at Fagerhaug International School the current cost of fees is approximately ninety euros. While this socialist context creates a welcoming environment which favors access to education, the schools face many challenges with addressing the students' special needs as well as the needs of students studying in a language which is not their first language.

In line with this, the three case studies explore the question of how contemporary art in the IB PYP can be used to create a sense of multicultural community, by incorporating the students' social and cultural backgrounds into instruction. The three case studies discussed below were designed, applied and assessed in order to open dialogues, foster creative processes and analyze the cultural relevance of the content in connection with experiences in a culturally changing Europe.

The themes used as examples in this paper embrace a multicultural perspective where identity, cultural diversity and social interaction are also used to define the lesson plans of the art classes. Each lesson was planned following global IB transdisciplinary themes, which place emphasis on local communities as well as using contemporary artists' examples to represent students' cultures and interests. The assessments embedded in the classes included: a self-reflective moment at the end of each lesson, a simple student rubric, a teacher rubric as well as museum walks used as a strategy to foster dialogue and respect among students.

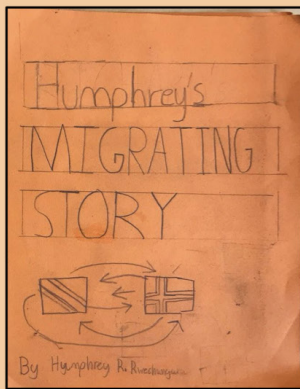


Methods

The methods we used to research the questions are the following: case studies, content analysis, and student interviews. It is important to mention that the art curriculum in our school focuses on the idea that research is not only a meeting point for students performing as artists, but also a tool to promote different roles, e.g. through politics and activism. In this study we have used the UNESCO's definition of the concept of 'research' which states that "research is linked to creative and systematic activities within the areas of culture and society in order to foster and access knowledge" (OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms, 2008). At the elementary level, research is a means of facilitating lesson plans that incorporate contemporary art and research skills in accordance with the transdisciplinary approach of the IB curriculum. In the context of art as a subject we have used the IB curriculum, the United Nations Sustainable Goals and contemporary art to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge across the school curriculum. In this article the focus was placed on the case studies analyzed from a democratic and diversity inclusive approach following Freire (2005) and the *Diversity Pedagogy Theory* (DPT) (Hernández Sheet, 2005). *Table 1* shows the cultures represented by students in the 4th to 6th grade art class to better understand the cultural diversity at our school.

Grade	Age	Cultural identities represented in the classroom	Number of students
5	10	Brazilian	1
4	10	Norwegian-Brazilian	1
4-6	10-11	United States-Brazilian-Norwegian	3
4	9	Norwegian-Congolese	1
5	11	Eritrean	1
6	11	United States-Norwegian	1
4-6	9-11	Ethiopian	2
4-6	10-11	Tanzanian	2
4-6	10-11	Palestinian	2
4-5-6	10-11	Norwegian	23
4-6	8-11	Somalian	2
4	8	Norwegian-Mexican	1
6	11	Norwegian-Swedish	1
Total of students			41

Table 1. Fourth and fifth grade class cultural and age composition at the school in the region of Trøndelag, Norway.



Case Study 1: “Where We Are in Place and Time: Migration Stories”

In this unit lasting six weeks, fifteen students in fourth and fifth grade were exposed to issues of migration and culture by making a comic book. The transdisciplinary theme in this specific case study was “Where We Are in Place and Time”. As part of the study the students inquired into their personal stories concerning homes and journeys while they made a comic book that narrated a migration story. The central idea tied to this transdisciplinary theme was: “People migrate altering the existing environment, culture and their own lives.” The lesson plan followed the central idea and focused on two lines of inquiry: causation and reflection. The questions used for discussions and creating art derived from the IB lines of inquiry were the following:

- Causation: Why is migration like it is?
- Reflection: What is culture/diversity/immigration?

To support the discussions, students analyzed artworks from artists such as Jacob Lawrence’s (1941) *Migration Series*, Marjane Satrapi’s (2004) *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and Bouchra Khalili’s (2008-2011) *The Mapping Journey Project*. Archive images from migration in Norway during WWII as well as images from online newspapers – such as *Al Jazeera* and *New York Times* – were used to facilitate dialogues about cultural diversity in different times and contexts, and to better understand how migration affects existing cultures. Since the aim of this lesson was to share different perspectives of cultures and to celebrate each of the represented cultural identities, students had freedom to choose the story and the protagonists of it. During the first discussion, the images were used to open the conversation by addressing the following questions: *What is migration? Why do people migrate?*

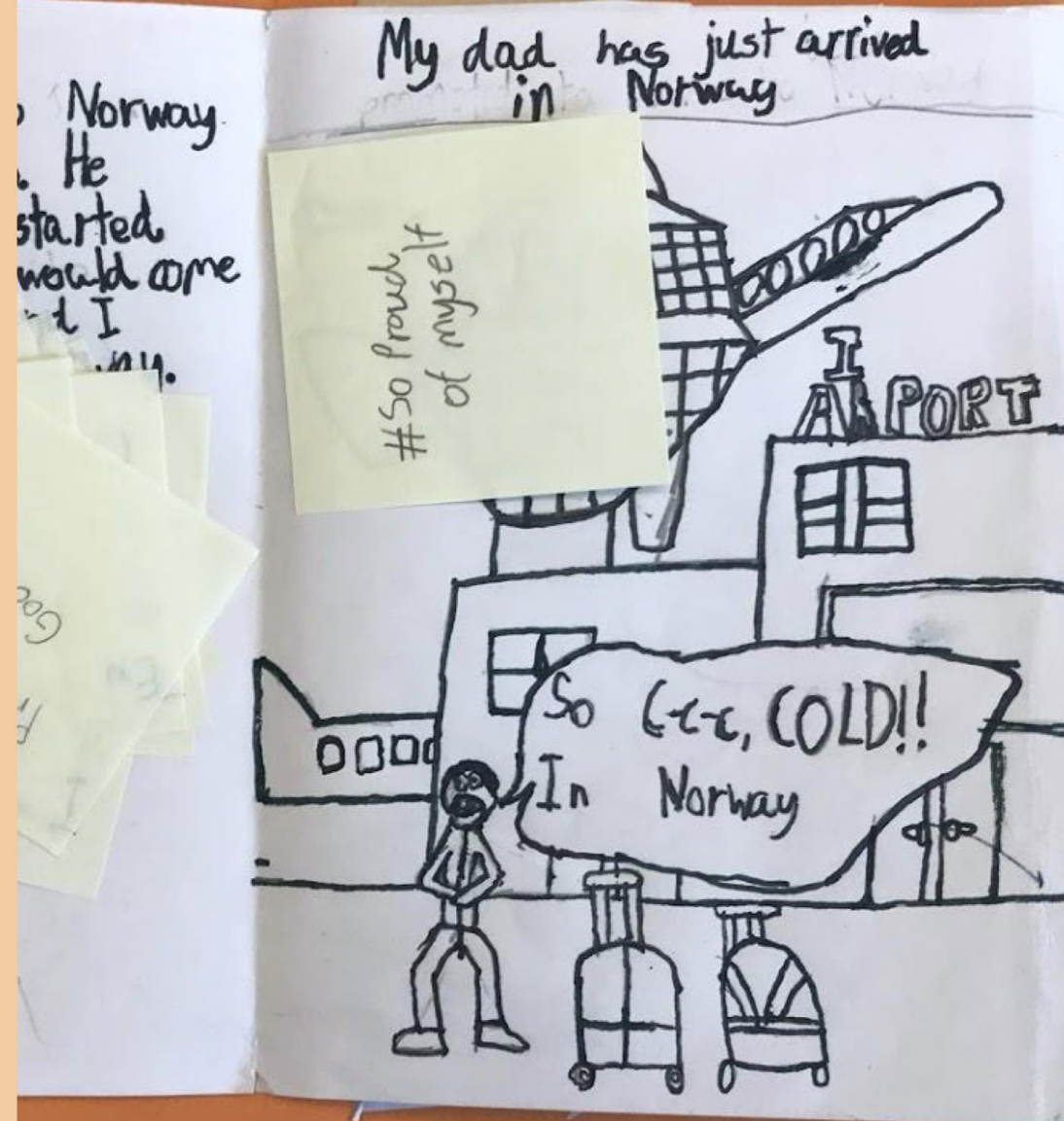


Figure 1. Student artwork migration story. This student utilized his own story when the family migrated from Tanzania to Norway and vice-versa.

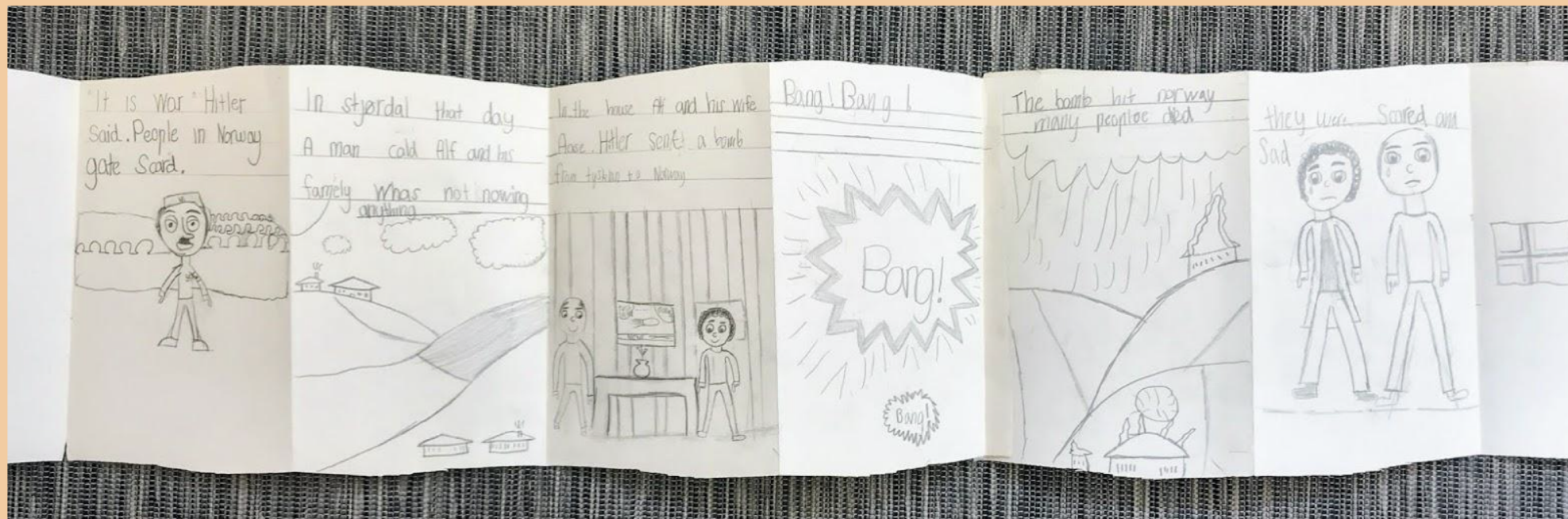


Figure 2. Student artwork migration story. This student used his grandfather's story who experienced the Nazi occupation in Norway and temporarily migrated to Sweden.

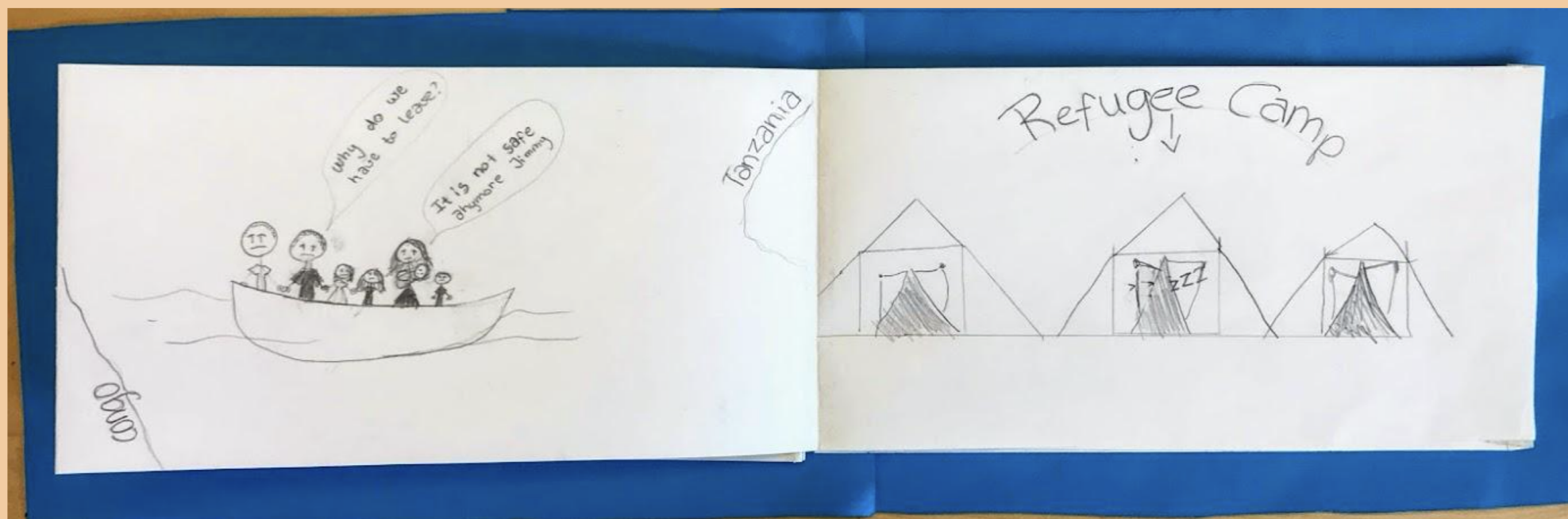
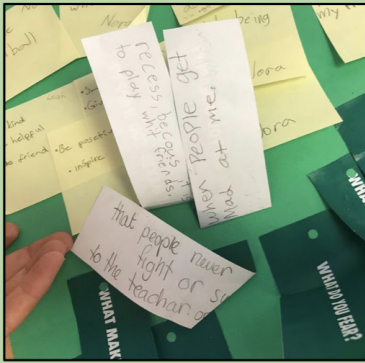


Figure 3. Student artwork immigration story. This student narrated the story of her father who came as a Congolese refugee to Norway.



Case Study 2: “Who We Are: Positive Attitude Campaign”

In this case study we analyzed how twelve students from sixth grade developed critical awareness of their own environment, the cultural diversity and the place of art within it, through the *Positive Attitude Campaign* lesson as shown in *Table 2*. After discussing with the students problems that they were facing in relation to bullying situations, we designed a new lesson plan to address this issue. The task consisted of designing a sign to support the importance of a positive, friendly learning environment. During the eleven one-hour sessions of the project duration the students created the protest signs shown in *Figure 4* and performed as role models and art activists for other students (see *Figures 5* and *6*). The aim was to manifest their concern and send positive messages to the whole school community. The research methods of collaborative brainstorming to collect information and find common threads used during the lessons were inspired by Kruger’s *Whose Values?* (2015) artwork. The IB lines of inquiry incorporated into this unit were the following:

- Perspective: How do positive/negative attitudes in the school context change us?
- Form: What is a positive/negative attitude towards other classmates?
- Change: How have you experienced negative/positive attitudes in the school context?



Figure 5. Students march in the school area.

At the beginning of the unit students discussed aspects of a healthy community to gain perspectives on how to deal with bullying and how to, potentially, neutralize it. The activities in this lesson were collaborative brainstorming, discussions about artworks in connection to the main theme, art, and design principles, as well as, a typography workshop. Finally, students were asked to anonymously answer four questions in writing. The questions were posed in order to share common experiences and have an anonymous place where their voices could be heard and the act of making art can be decoded by students as an experience to understand culture and community at the school (Freire, 2005). The questions were as follows:

- What do you fear?
- What do you wish for?
- What makes you happy?
- What makes you unhappy?

The students' provided the following answers:



Figure 6. Students as role models for the lower PYP grades.

What do you fear?	What do you wish for?	What makes you happy?	What makes you unhappy?
Not to get a sniper in Fortnite	I wish everyone would be nice and kind to one another	Playing with a friend	When someone is mad at me, I can't forget it, I still think about it.
If someone is going to scare me or push me	I wish to have a sister or brother	Recess because it means playing with friends	People that are not nice to me
Bugs	To have an iphone	To play on my iphone	When people get mad at me
Nothing	We are all friends	Recess	
I fear, fear	People never fight or swear at the teacher	When I get more pets	
	To have more kids in the classroom		

Table 2. Sixth-grade class answers to the research questions in this lesson.

Technically, the students applied the basic art principles of contrast and pattern. In terms of assessment, the students learned to design and write a claim and to develop critical awareness of their environment and the place of art within it. According to the IB organization, "providing provocation through new experiences and providing opportunities for reflection and consolidation, constructs meaning from the world that surrounds the student" (as cited online at the *IB Taught Curriculum* website section). We collected information from the students' own social worlds at school. The reason was to deal with bullying situations within a safe environment where dialogues about fairness and empathy can happen.



Figure 4. Positive attitude signs made by students.

When taking into consideration the different social and cultural backgrounds that students come from, the idea of empowering them through art is not necessarily easy to understand. Ayers (2010) stated that teaching is an act of hope and emphasizes the importance of building relations, advocating for a better moral environment and protecting students from real world obstacles, such as bullying (pp. 9-24). Similarly, author Gude (2012, p. 78) argues that the art made at schools is what students experience and that this art shows the knowledge elaborated through a set of "collaborative activities". On the one hand, the curriculum frames and restricts the art activity reducing the chances of an organic and quirky process. On the other hand, the collection of information derived from the students' emotions in order to create messages with their own voices allows the students to use the space of art to deal with problems of bullying that oftentimes occur outside of the teacher's view. While it is true that bullying situations cannot be solved with art, we have used art to create awareness and empower students' voices. The outcome has been positive according to students' post-intervention interviews.



Case Study 3: “How the World Works - Political Campaign?”

During this lesson twelve students from sixth grade inquired into the interconnectedness of human-made systems and communities; the structure and function of organizations; societal decision-making; economic activities as well as their impact on humankind and the environment (IB program of inquiry). During the art class students analyzed posters and flyers from different socio-political contexts and times, including propaganda from regimes, democratic and communist parties. Students then designed an ideal government in groups, see *Figure 7*. After that, in *Figures 8* and *9*, students designed their own political campaign poster applying the technique of poster design along with basic advertising strategies, such as creating a slogan, taking a photograph that communicates an attitude and selecting the right font to emphasize the slogan. Students also wrote a statement that was used as a speech on the election day. By doing this, the students developed confidence in seeing themselves not just as students in art class, but also as politicians, that is future leaders who understand how art can be used in different contexts and for a variety of purposes. The lines of inquiry incorporated into this lesson plan were as follows:

- Function: How do leaders use art to influence people’s opinions? Why?
- Responsibility: What is our responsibility as artists and politicians to use art?

The summative assessment consisted of a poster that included a slogan and a statement for a political campaign.

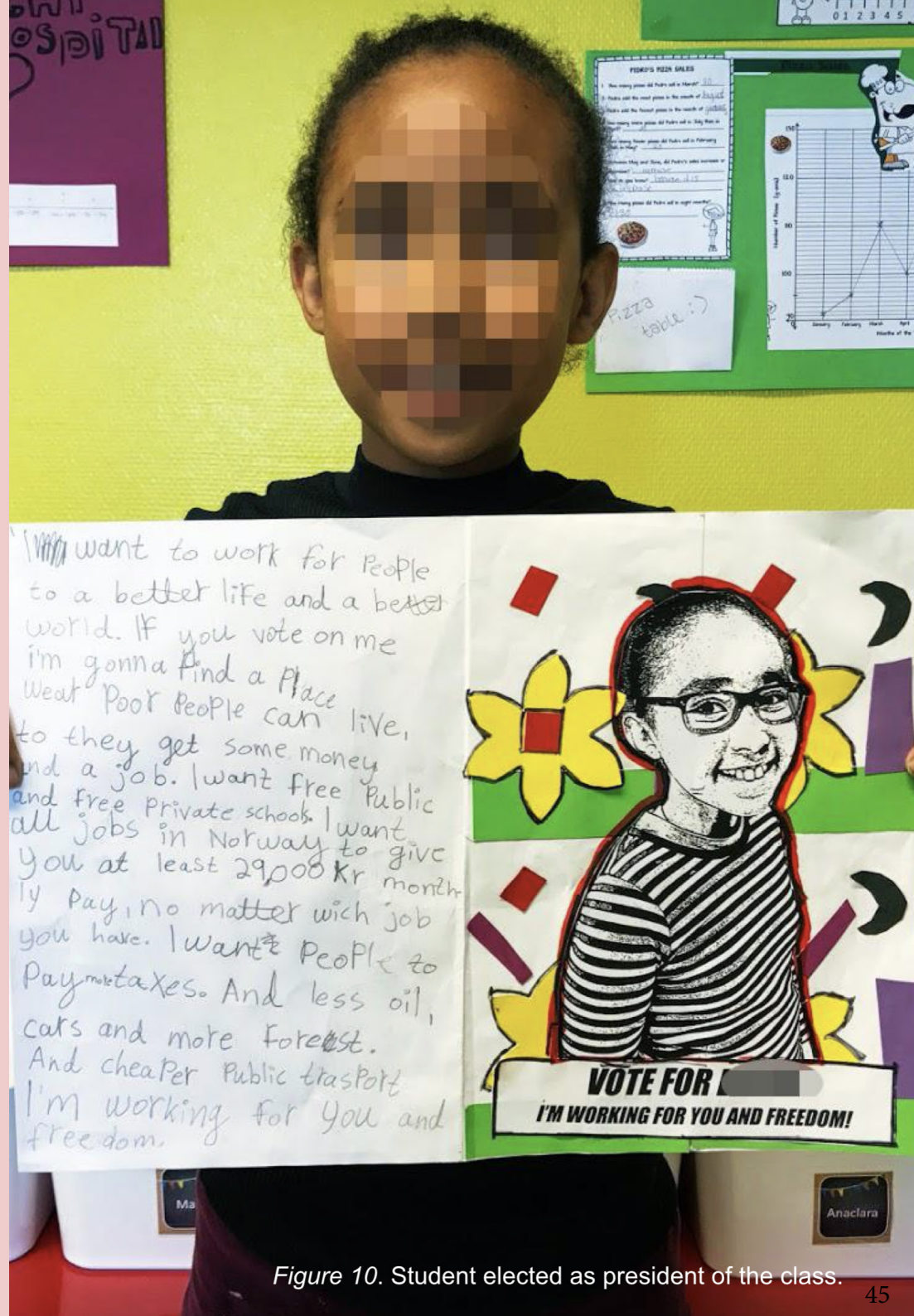


Figure 10. Student elected as president of the class.

The students' themes based on their own experiences and interests were used for speech as shown in *Table 3*.



Figure 7. Students collaborative brainstorming.

Themes	Number of Students with similar themes
Civil rights	3
Access to free public education	3
Environmental policies	4
Safety	3
Tax reduction	1
Tax increase	1
Democracy	1
Free health care	1

Table 3. Students themes used for the statements.



During the voting day, the students applied democratic principles by making a list of voters, having two students control who voted, using a dark room to vote and a committee of four students to count the votes. We witnessed the students' anxiety while waiting to calculate the election results and then the students were surprised about who won the election, see *Figure 10*, because it challenged the notion of being popular in a class compared to what it means to choose an ideal candidate created by an individual.

Figure 8. Students discussing potential candidates and their statements before the election day.

Findings

The three case studies focused on using the arts as a transversal tool to open dialogues about experiences in a culturally changing Europe within the IB curriculum.

The assessment methods followed the IB guidelines of not only using summative but also formative assessment. **We observed from the three case studies that out of a total of forty-one students, twenty-one have been able to move outside their comfort zone to question assumptions of migration, bullying and, in the case of the political campaign, relevant themes to host a better world for the represented cultural identities.**

Eleven students grasped the idea of the main lesson themes and made connections to their personal contexts and the local context in which the school is located. However, the students experienced difficulties with understanding the current global context because they did not have experiences outside their local community or the necessary geography skills to gain a wider perspective of the world.

Lastly, eight students demonstrated the transfer of knowledge by discussing and applying their own experiences on the concept of emigration, immigration and cultural diversity. **Students shared their own points of view about bullying situations and used their social and cultural background experiences to design a political campaign.** Between the three cases studies two to three students, many with special needs such as ADD and ADHD, have been able to create artwork and connect it to the theme within the physical and social context of the school.

They partially demonstrated connections to the world by understanding that bullying, migration and pollution not only happen in our region, but also in other parts of the world.

The majority of the students, thirty, in the three case studies, created, analyzed and applied their own ideas making use of their critical thinking skills. It could be observed that they moved from fixed ideas such as “migration is for poor people” or avoiding talking about bullying situations to opening dialogues of social justice.

An important fact to mention is that the majority of teachers and students at our school have experienced migration. As a result, the design of the lesson in *Case Study 1: “Where We Are in Place and Time: Migration Stories”* promoted an inquiry into the world in which students live to foster experiences that lead to self-discovered content within the specific theme of migration. In this case study, students were participants into the lives of others and used material that belonged to others to experience and process learning, while participating based on historical events (Blandy, 2012, pp. 29-34).

In contrast to *Case Study 1*, in *Case Study 2: “Who We Are: Positive Attitude Campaign”* it was not easy to start a discussion due to most students’ unwillingness to state personal opinions. **However, the majority felt empowered when designing their signs and performing as role models to the lower elementary students by explaining the importance of a positive environment at school.**

Discussion

The *Diversity Pedagogical Dimensions* (Hernández Sheet, 2005) illustrates a set of principles where we, as educators, attempt to understand the relationships amongst culture, cognition, teaching and learning. According to Hernández Sheet (2005), culture has implicit power to define behavior patterns that create a system from which students learn to view and socialize within the world. **The diversity of cultures is brought into the classroom and an understanding of each of the students' cultural backgrounds informs the praxis. Not only does it create an empathetic relationship among peers, but it also exposes many different cultural perspectives to encourage children to make use of their cultural knowledge during art class.**

In the same vein, Eisner explains how art visualizes the differences between all types of learners since it praises the participation of peers. Using imagination as a key factor, the creative process is boosted and used as a methodology for learning facilitating students to explore and to discover ideas from their unique perspectives (Cerveny, 2010). In the case studies presented, students analyzed their own contextual reality and created connections to world issues as well as raised their awareness about those issues. By doing that, they now have more tools to understand and fight injustice and discrimination (Freire, 2005, p. 132). Moreover, in Freire's (2005, p. 129) words "Educators are politicians".

In line with this we, as educators-politicians, perform our tasks conformingly to a socialist system where many of the teachers act as social mediators when values, beliefs and fears are challenged in the classroom by dissimilar cultures.

But, praxis and research also have to be addressed in terms of enforcing an ongoing dialogue between parents and the school to create awareness of what is an international education. What future strategies could our school design in order to ensure and strengthen connections with the school community in the context of a changing Europe?

Conclusion

We are not an elite school and we are rooted within the safe boundaries of a socialist state. We still must address the multicultural themes of race and culture in the context of changing Europe through a long-term process. Economic wealth does not keep our students and families from minority backgrounds from being discriminated against based on their cultural, religion or ethnicity. Some immigrant parents stated that they feel included within our school community, even if they do not feel the same way within their local communities. For our school, seeing each individual emphasizes the sense of being part of a multicultural family that continually enriches the community. Schools are the result of a set of cultural values and their organization is understood by the individuals through experiences in the learning environment. These values are specific ways of thinking; and in this case, even if the core responds to western values, the school promotes individual autonomy with a focus on multicultural sensitivity.

We aim to build a collective capacity to promote intercultural communication where common ethical values are represented in the community in order to build a positive learning environment in the context of a changing Europe (Walker, 2010).

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