

Abstract

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ARTISTIC METHODS AS OPENERS OF ONE'S "OWN SPACE" IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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The project Spaces for Children, <http://www.jyu.fi/hum/laitokset/taiku/tutkimus/tilaalapselle/>

Finnish pupils have succeeded very well in international comparisons of learning results (Pisa). It has been thought that one reason for this is our well-organised special education, which raises the average of results in the whole age-group. We should be proud of this, but there are other relevant perspectives on school life. The number of pupils transferred to special education has doubled in Finland in a short period of time. In addition to problems in concentration and attentiveness also mental problems have increased. The growing need of special education has been justified with social reasons, such as the decrease in the time families spend together, etc.

Can reasons also be found within the school system itself? Are the aims for an average pupil too high? From the point of view of school motivation and satisfaction it is useful to deliberate whether the superfluous hurry, over-individualisation and emphasis on information in school life create obstacles to having experiences of community or involvement. As an alternative to main-stream methods of special education, I have experimented with the use of artistic practices as a central ingredient of teaching and learning. In this approach, stories (based on drama, literature, films, photos etc.) produced in various ways have a central role to play. Further, the process is more important than the result – the teacher is not only teaching but doing and experiencing things together with the child.

My main research question is: how might art-based methods create a space for personal encounters at school? Preliminary results indicate that artistic practices open possibilities that lie in the growing child: those of expression, recognition and thinking. It does not aim at achieving something that has already been thought out. Focusing on the pupil's strengths creates positive learning experiences, experiences of success, and increases self-confidence. Finding answers to the questions "Who am I?" and "Am I good enough?" is necessary to the successful involvement in the community.

I would like to arouse discussion about teaching methods at school. Using artistic methods may challenge the teacher, since they demand a new way of thinking of the learning process, including:

- The development of the learning process cannot be known in advance
- Uncertainty, making mistakes and chaos are part of learning
- Creating something new requires time, also for reflection
- There are no ready answers to all questions, especially not "correct" ones
- The teacher does not only teach but is by the pupil's side as a learner
- All learning results cannot be tested

About myself:

I have been working as a teacher of special education in primary school since 1988, working with children who have difficulties in learning (reading, writing) or some other problems with schoolwork. Besides this, I have participated in developing aesthetic education in primary school, my special interest being art projects for the whole school. The guiding principle in these projects has been emphasizing the activity of the pupil and connecting the object of learning to the pupil's life. In my doctoral thesis I study the suitability of artistic or art-based methods in teaching children who have special problems with learning and schoolwork.

I wish to use powerpoint in my presentation.