

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, the sense of the otherness, cultural and language barriers represent a challenge for educators. That is why, placing a special focus on progressive education, literacy and the humanities is 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 Trondelag), has welcomed students coming from a wide variety of cultural and social backgrounds worldwide, and uses art as a subject to integrate dissimilar cultures by opening dialogues about global issues such as immigration. This means 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 society. In this paper, three case studies are analyzed from the theoretical approach of *Diversity Pedagogy* (Hernández Sheet, 2005), democratic education (Freire, 2005) and the role of contemporary art in the teaching-learning process of art as a subject within Scandinavian socialism and a changing 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. Compared to other private schools in Europe the context is quite different because private schools which are approved by the department of education are eighty-five percent publicly financed. The legal framework also protects students from being discriminated against when applying to a publicly funded private school because the educational institutions are forbidden to ask questions about the students' individual qualities or needs before an application has been accepted by the school. Only after a student is enrolled at the school can the pedagogical team ask questions and design a plan based on the individual needs. Another point of interest is that there are very few schools who cater specifically to students with special needs in Norway. It is by working with a pedagogical team within each county that each student who has special education needs is assessed and funding is provided directly to the schools to meet those needs. At the IB school where this research takes place the special education teachers work in the classrooms and students with special needs are integrated into the classroom context with very minimal time spent outside of the classroom. Third, all parents

of children in Norway are entitled to approximately nine hundred kroner (the equivalent of a hundred euros) per month until the age of eighteen to assist with the costs of raising a child. The department of education has set a limit as to student fees that can not exceed fifteen percent of the funding allowance per student which hinders the publicly funded private schools from becoming 'elite' schools. This is the limit and some private schools charge less which is the case at Fagerhaug International School (the current cost is approximately 90 euros which is under half of the current limit). While the socialist context may set policies to provide access to education, there are many challenges (addressing special needs and second language learners) that need to be addressed in the classroom. For this reason, the three case studies explore the question of how contemporary art in the IB PYP is used to create a sense of multicultural community using the students social and cultural backgrounds for instruction. The three case studies explained below have been designed, applied and assessed in order to open dialogues, foster creative processes and analyze the cultural relevance of the content in connection to 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 art classes lesson plans. To inform the instruction, each lesson was planned following global IB transdisciplinary and global themes, within a framework being placed in the local community and using contemporary artists' examples to represent students' cultures and interests. The assessments consisted of: a self-reflective moment at the end of each lesson, a simple student rubric, a teacher rubric and museum walks as a strategy to foster dialogue and respect among the students.

Methods

The methods we used to research the questions are: case studies, content analysis, and student interviews. It is important to mention that the focus of art in our school is based on the idea

that research is a meeting point not just for students performing as artists; but, also, to promote different roles –such as politicians or activists just to name a few. From a pedagogical approach, we have used the UNESCO’s research definition stating 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, this is a means to facilitate lesson plans that incorporate contemporary art and research skills in accordance with the transdisciplinary approach of the IB curriculum. Specifically in 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. Here focus is 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 in the 4th to 6th grade art class to better understand the cultural diversity at our school.

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

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

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 addressed issues of migration and culture by making a comic book. The IB curriculum guidelines establish the product performance and purpose of each unit of inquiry. In this unit of inquiry: the transdisciplinary theme was “Where We Are in Place and Time”, the students inquired into personal stories concerning homes and journeys while they made a comic book that narrates a migration story. The central idea tied to this transdisciplinary theme was: “People migrate altering the existing environment, culture and their own lives.” In art, the lesson plan followed the central idea and focused on the two lines of inquiry: causation and reflection. The IB lines of inquiry questions used for discussions and creating art 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, 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 as a theme and to celebrate each of the represented cultural identities, students had freedom to choose the story and protagonists of it. During the first discussion, the images were used to open the discussion addressing the following questions of: What is migration? Why do people migrate? We are a small school in a small community and respectful dialogues about migration as a topic took place when trying to break down what stereotypes are brought to class. For example, as stated by Sokolower (2009, p. 170), we ob-

served that one student stated during a class discussion, that migration is a synonym to diversity but also of being poor. In the same vein, when the activity of making their own comics about migration was introduced, five Norwegian students from fourth grade and two from fifth grade, whose families are composed only of Norwegian members, asked what they should do as they did not know anyone who had migrated. Another student asked if it would be possible to use a great-great-grandparent who escaped Norway during the Nazi occupation. As a result, students researched and collected data from their own contexts about migration and culture using interviews as a method. In addition, a drawing workshop was designed for students to learn how to structure a figure and create scenery elements. The comic format was done as an accordion book so students could add pages as needed and understand the story as a timeline. Examples provided in Figure 1, Figure 2, expose cross-cultural identity examples. In Figure 2 and 3 details of political persecution can be observed.



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

The research took place not only at school but also at home as parents, relatives and friends shared their migration stories with students fostering a space for dialogue while restoring the importance of home learning using families as resources (Sokolower, 2009, p. 184).

Sokolower (2009, p. 182) also explains how students use storytelling to open up about their emotions and deepen their understanding of globalization through migrations stories. Similarly, Freire (2005) and Sheet (2005) argue that cultural identity experiences by students are highly valuable as content to understand different aspects of privilege and unprivileged backgrounds. From a technical perspective, drawing played a major role in this lesson because it worked particularly well for ELL students. The experiences of sharing different socio-cultural perspectives in the classroom successfully assisted students in making meaning and acquiring knowledge about migration and diversity while bringing community and respect towards each other. The assessment of the lesson consisted of a simple student rubric and museum walk. While all students participated in this lesson, out of fifteen students there were nine who completed their projects while six students finished three out of nine pages due to special needs relating to challenges of staying on task.

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 problems with the students 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 project duration of eleven one-hour sessions the students created the protest signs shown in Figure 4 and performed as role models and art activists for other students (see Figure 5 and 6). The aim was to manifest their concern and

send positive messages to the whole school community. The product performance, purpose and design research methods of collaborative brainstorming to collect information and find common threads were inspired by artist Kruger's *Whose Values?* (2015) artwork. The IB lines of inquiry incorporated into this unit were:

- 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?

At the beginning of the unit, students discussed aspects of a healthy community to gain perspectives on how to deal with bullying and, 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 sense 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' answers were the following:

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

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		

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” (IB Taught Curriculum). 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. 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 but can be hard work. 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 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 coming from the students emotions in order to create messages with their own voices allowing the students to use the space of art to deal with the problems of bullying that often times 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 action interviews.



Figure 4: Positive attitude signs made by students



Figure 5: Students march in the school area



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

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

During this lesson, twelve students from sixth grade, inquire into the interconnectedness of human-made systems and communities; the structure and function of organizations; societal decision-making; economic activities and their impact on humankind and the environment (IB program of inquiry). During 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 Figure 8 and 9, students designed their own political campaign poster applying the technique of poster design, basic advertising strategies, such as, creating a slogan, taking a photograph that communicates an attitude, and selecting a font to emphasize their slogan. Students also wrote a statement that was used as a speech on election day. By doing this, the students developed confidence in seeing themselves not just as students in art class, but also, as politicians. In other



Figure 7: Students collaborative brainstorming



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



Figure 9: Students' posters and statements selection

words, 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:

- 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.

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

Table 3: Students themes used for the statements

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

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 to what it means to choose an ideal created by an individual.

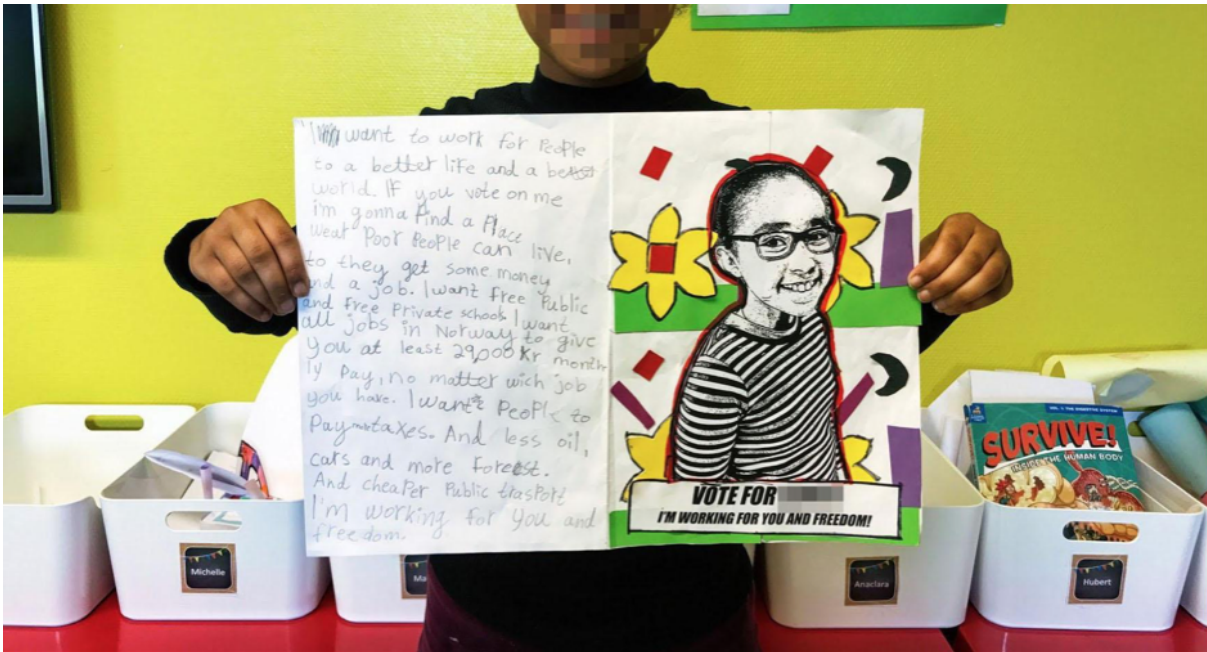


Figure 10: Student elected as president of the class

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 through the three case studies, that out of a total of forty-one students, twenty-one have been able to make meaning of knowledge moving outside of 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 experience difficulties to understand the current global context because they did not have experiences outside their local community and further geography skills are needed to gain a wider perspective of the world. Last, eight

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. In the three cases 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 evaluating 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 cases, 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

Within the cultural framework of our school and the findings within the three case studies, we are addressing our local and global challenges in the context of a changing Europe. The *Diversity Pedagogical Dimensions* (Hernández Sheet, 2005) illustrates a set of principles where we as educators attempt to understand the relationships among culture, cognition, teaching, and learning. Accordingly 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 cases presented, students analyzed their own contextual reality and created connections to world issues, as well as, raised awareness about it. 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" and we believe that because we 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?

In the context of an inclusive political system and in terms of the importance of multicultural education, our practice is reflective of that in the art class, but we have not conducted any study as of yet about the impact of the knowledge the students bring to their homes.

Conclusion

We are not an elite school and we are rooted within the safe boundaries of a socialist policy based state. We still must address the multicultural themes of race and culture in the context of a 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 for a positive learning environment in the context of a changing Europe (Walker, 2010).

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