

**THEMATIC ISSUE  
ON INCLUSION AND  
EQUALITY THROUGH  
ARTS AND ART  
EDUCATION**

**ART EDUCATION FOR  
SOCIAL INCLUSION  
AND DIVERSE  
COMMUNITIES**

**EDITORIAL**

MARIA HUHMARNIEMI

University of Lapland  
[maria.huhmarniemi@ulapland.fi](mailto:maria.huhmarniemi@ulapland.fi)

MIRJA HILTUNEN

University of Lapland  
[mirja.hiltunen@ulapland.fi](mailto:mirja.hiltunen@ulapland.fi)

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Since the 1990s, the exploration of dialogic and educational approaches within the realm of international contemporary art has spurred art educators and scholars to devise strategies that extend beyond the confines of the classroom, and formal education. This direction of art and art education emphasizes a keen awareness of the strengths inherent in communities and localities, encompassing their unique cultures, histories, and meaningful encounters between community members, generations, and diverse cultural minorities (Hiltunen, 2009; Huhmarniemi et al., 2021). Socially engaged art and community-based art education align with dialogic aesthetics, a framework in which art unfolds through an internal dialogue within a community.

The underpinning principles of contemporary art, characterized by its dialogic, contextual, and situational methods, provide the backdrop for the recent development of art educational theories and practices. In this context, the artists and art educator's primary objectives are not merely creating a conventional work of art but rather integrating art into the fabric of people's everyday lives (Jokela, 2013).

Contemporary art and art education have shifted into societal dialogues, socio-political interventions, and collaborations with local communities and entrepreneurs. Within this expanding field of art, where artists work in various organizations and across different sectors, artists require diverse skills, which research and artistic education aim to address

(Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2020), which is also present in this thematic number.

Like contemporary art, the field of art education is broad and continually expanding. Art education includes elements such as exhibition and art museum pedagogy, children's cultural centers, adult education, and engagement in visual arts. Both contemporary art and art education extend into socially engaged art projects and art-based services, such as artistic activities in healthcare facilities and assisted living residences. Contemporary art and art education manifest through project-based interventions, evaluated and reflected through research, and communicated in research publications such as this collection of research presentations.

This thematic number includes practice-based research that describes how arts educators, arts and cultural practitioners, and art teachers contribute to social justice, emancipation, and inclusion. For this thematic number, we called for research on the methods and impacts of art education, socially engaging arts, and arts-based approaches to enhance connectedness and foster social inclusion and integration. Our interest included the role of online participation, questions around access, and policies that guide the schools, educational institutions, and agencies in arts and culture. This collection of articles, visual essays, and commentaries is focused on higher education, but it also serves the broader field of research in art education.

Kai Lehtikoinen and Eeva Siljamäki discuss the vital skills and capabilities of artists whose practice is socially engaged. They claim that the growing field of socially engaged arts has created new competence needs for artists. Lehtikoinen and Siljamäki aim to enhance socially engaged art as a field of study in higher arts education. Their article analyzes curricula, literature, and interviews and identified eight competence areas beneficial for practitioners. These inter-related competence areas are artistic and complemented by competence areas in social, ethical, pedagogical, contextual, research, development, and entrepreneurship. Artists need these competencies constantly, but their needs vary depending on co-practitioners and collaborators such as producers and art mediators. Authors emphasize the value that emerges from multidisciplinary and trans-professional collaborations, often forming the foundation of socially engaged arts. The article by Lehtikoinen and Siljamäki is relevant for professors and teachers training future artists and developing continued studies for artists.

Katri Kauppala emphasizes the value of feminist and critical pedagogy in promoting inclusive exploration of sexuality, power, autonomy, and societal roles within the context of art education. These pedagogical approaches align with the notions of care, empathy, security, and independence, which makes them particularly suitable for art education. The artistic perspective cultivated in educational settings that embrace freedom, disobedience, and anarchy plays a significant role in the approach which she has developed through

arts-based action research in the context of art teaching in higher education. The article is part of Kauppala's ongoing doctoral research that will be beneficial for artists tackling diverse forms of sexuality in their art and teachers using art for sex education. Theoretical underpinning also serves the development of theories and practices of art education.

Michelle Searle, Katrina Carbone, Sumaiya Chowdhury, Amanda Cooper, Tiina Kukkonen, and Antara Roy Chowdhury's essay describes an art-informed inquiry to develop inclusive spaces and advance critical thinking about identity where artist-researcher-educator/researcher collaborations are catalysts for expanded thinking about assessment identity. They make space to embrace diversity and multiple ways of knowing with a commitment to inclusion that interweaves imagination and dialogue. The essay is part of long-term research that will continue seeking innovative ways to promote plurality in higher education and provide opportunities for positive social change.

Raisa Kilpeläinen's article gives insights into artistic work that involves observations of everyday environments. Photographs by Kilpeläinen are like found stages, and they guide readers to consider various aspects of contemporary stage design. Kilpeläinen aims to promote sustainability as a professional practice and through experience facilitated by the stage design. The article suggests seeing the stage as a fluid possibility. She also invites readers to imagine new creative forms, cross-pollinations, thinking differently, and

being inventive. While most of the research presentations in this thematic number are focused on visual arts, the article by Kilpeläinen grounds readers to professional stage design that is firmly based on visual expression, which shares similar theoretical underpinnings of sustainability and new materialism as research in contemporary art and art education.

Fiona Quill considers student-centered assessment in art and design education as a catalyst for expanded communities of practice and lifelong learning. This approach is based on a need to engage students as partners in training. Today, assessments in art and education are partly based on subjective values when objectivity is difficult to ascertain; thus, Quill asks how educational interventions could address these challenges. She concludes that a student developing their autonomy throughout their education can impact their confidence, communities, and cultural shifts if educators let go of some of the control and create new methods for the flow of communication.

Ya-Wen Hung and Ching-Chiu Lin study how to foster social inclusion and connectedness through digital artmaking. The visual essay describes how they have used arts-based research to examine seniors' experience during the COVID-19 pandemic. They also consider ways of fostering social inclusion and integration through an arts-based approach. They present how visual storytelling combines a narrative with digital content and how it captures seniors' complex lived experiences and serves as public-friendly and

accessible research communication. They conclude that the development of various ways of communication is essential for the wider impact of research in art education.

Mike Fox's commentary paper concerns the necessary process of adaptation and integration of students entering educational institutions and their cultures. Art education in higher education, particularly when connected to contemporary art, has evolved. It used to be tied to traditional values, but today, it is to a higher extent free from defined aesthetic, moral, or loyalty restrictions. This freedom allows ongoing discussions about what we consider as valuable cultural knowledge. It enables recognizing and crediting an individual's cultural richness gained from society, shifting from a negative and marginalized view to seeing diverse learners as an asset. The paper has a noteworthy value for cultural policies and educational strategies.

Heidi Schaaf has contributed with a commentary paper promoting the acknowledgment of user experience research principles in the cultural field. She bases the writing on her prior dissertation, "The Meaning of Participation: Detecting the Space for Inclusive Strategies in the Finnish and German Museum Context." Schaaf explores the significance of user experience research, why it should be used, and how it can be beneficial, and it thus proposes integrating user experience research into the development work of the cultural sector. As part of this thematic number, the paper gives a potential tool for fostering inclusive communities through art education.

Artists and art educators can specialize not only in a specific art form, such as video or performance art, but also in interdisciplinary and socially engaged areas. The expanding field of art and art education demands experts, education, and research to gain the full societal, educational, and transformative potential. Thus, we want to thank all authors of this thematic number for contributing to art educational research. The social, cultural, economic, ecological, and political significance of art and art education is here growing with the aid of critical reflections, discussion, and research evidence.

In 2023, the time of this thematic issue, we live in a world of wars, conflicts, and crises, in polarized societies and communities where the aim for inclusion is not self-evident. In this age, the needs for arts, art education and education in general are crucial. Socially engaged art and community-based art education provide tools for emphatic and critical thinking and means for a creative leap towards inclusive communities, possibilities, and worlds that are yet to exist. Art can enhance active citizenship, sustainability, dialogues, and community development to reduce social isolation and cultural supersession. Designing, implementing, and researching educational activities hold value for aesthetic, ethical, ecological, and political issues that we currently face in local and global communities.

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