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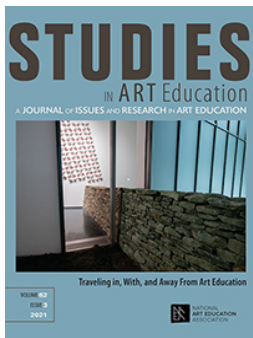
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“Art-based  
action research  
is especially  
rooted in  
process-oriented  
dialogical and  
place-specific art  
forms.”

## Toward Place-Specific and Situational Arctic Visual Culture Learning in Finnish Art Teacher Education

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In this article, we tackle critical and socially engaged issues on Arctic visual culture (AVC) education in Finland, which are, in this article, considered culturally sensitive topics in Finnish art education. The article emerges from research interests in (1) place-specific issues in art teacher education, as they relate to the critical study of AVC, and (2) Arctic art and Sámi art and craft, the current development and discussion in Finnish contexts, and their importance to art teacher education. Our approach is drawn from the field of Finnish art education and previous knowledge of culturally sensitive, socially engaged art education approaches practiced in two Finnish universities. Through this collaboration, we further develop research and practices related to the topic. The context of the collaboration is a 3-year multidisciplinary and nationwide project, *Arctic Reformative and Exploratory Teaching Profession*, funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

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## Introduction

**In this article, we discuss the nature and role of critically and socially engaged art education approaches to Arctic visual culture (AVC) education that includes Sámi art and craft.**

The concept of AVC is approached as a case-specific and relational phenomenon and addressed through culturally sensitive and current approaches in Finnish art education programs. We approach these topics through ethical responsibility and place-specific questions set by AVC for preservice art teacher education in Finland at the University of Lapland (UoL) and Aalto University (AALTO); these two programs educate all art teachers in Finland. Furthermore, the article acknowledges the important relationship between Finnish art education, the current conversation on Sámi rights, and the development of Sámi peoples' sociopolitical and cultural history and awareness of the contemporary situation. Their importance is recognized as they relate to art teacher education in Rovaniemi, located in northern Finland near the Arctic Circle, as well as in the south, in Finland's capital, Helsinki.

The topics of the article are contextualized within a 3-year collaboration and research project, *Arctic Reformative and Exploratory Teaching Profession* (ArkTOP; ArkTOP Project, n.d.),<sup>1</sup> led by faculty in the Faculty of Education of UoL and funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. As part of

this large research project, our research interest in art education arises from the need for greater recognition of AVC in Finnish art teacher education. Our research project aimed to understand AVC needs for the further development of teacher education programs in their local place-specific dimensions in northern and southern Finland and to initiate a collaboration between the two universities on this topic.

One of the first phases of this collaboration was to identify the lack of perspectives on Sámi culture in art education curricula in Finland. Hence, learning from contemporary Sámi art became important early in the project (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2017). Sámi peoples live everywhere in Finland; they are part of the Finnish geographical domain and legislation, along with the Sámi parliament, and many of the decisions are made in the Finnish parliament in Helsinki. Sámi are the only Indigenous peoples within the area of the European Union. The estimated population of Sámi varies from 75,000 to 100,000, of which approximately 9,500 live in Finland (Sámediggi, 2020). Sápmi, the Sámi native region, is located across the northernmost parts of four countries—Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Finland. There are nine different cultural and linguistic areas in Sápmi, and in Finland, the three different Sámi language groups are North Sámi (*davvisámegiella*, c. 2,000 speakers), Inari Sámi (*aanaar kielâ*, c. 350 speakers), and Skolt Sámi (*nuõrttsää' mkiõll*, c. 300 speakers), which form the official language in the self-governing Sápmi area (Sámediggi, 2020). Although Sámi is not a uniform culture—it is one formed from several modern, living cultures—this sociopolitical context is here connected with global discussions on Indigenous peoples, as well as being dealt with in this article through the role

of social justice and decolonial thinking in the context of the Arctic region in Finland (Sámediggi, 2020).

Since Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, the history around the birth of the nation-state and Indigenous peoples has been similar to that of many other countries. The young nation reorganized itself with new legislation and wanted to see the Sámi people as part of the dominant culture. It is worth mentioning that Finns were placed on the lower level of the hierarchy, together with Sámi, Tatars, and Russians, with Sámi being inferiorized especially for their “primitiveness and nomadic way of life” (Keskinen, 2019, p. 172). Therefore, “the Finns themselves engaged in knowledge production and politics that built hierarchical distinctions between themselves and the Sámi and the Russian people” (Keskinen, 2019, p. 174). Finnish legislation began to govern the administration of northern municipalities as well as deer-herding laws and other concerns. The systematized national traffic network did not appreciate reindeer herding, and systematized schooling did not consider local needs and traditions. The school laws from 1947 forced all children in Finland to attend school in Finnish and isolated Sámi children from their families, homes, languages, and cultures. The school law restricted even voluntary Sámi language teaching in schools up until the 1970s. Children learned neither traditional crafts nor reindeer herding.

More importantly, the Sámi people’s attitude toward their own culture changed dramatically and became more negative than before, creating a culture of shame. Some families even wanted to hide their Sámi background. This kind of *colonization of mind* rooted racist behavior in the nation, and it had a long-term effect on future generations. This era of colonialism in Finnish history is often silenced. Particularly, contemporary artists have claimed Sámi rights and have openly discussed oppression, discrimination, marginalization, and current and future societal threats, such as the

mining industry, tourism, logging, military bombing ranges, and climate change (Keskitalo et al., 2012; Kuokkanen, 2007).

In the Arctic, culture is bound to nature, and issues such as climate change have an immediate influence on society. The Arctic peripheries are impacted by the centralization of national policy making, globalization, and immigration to and from Lapland that leads to notable changes in communities. Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures affect each other, and they are bound to nature in the same locations, to the extent that it may be difficult to determine the degree to which local Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge of nature differ from each other (Valkonen, 2013). The concept of northern knowledge enables reflection and action; non-Indigenous cultures also have traditions tied to nature and know-how that are worthy of maintenance and revitalization, and which are not ethnically inherited but can be learned, researched, and developed. Revitalization processes have also been implemented in multiethnic communities and non-Indigenous communities in the North (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020b). Issues about Sámi rights and even definitions of the term “Sámi” itself are complex and beyond the reach of this article. While the Sámi Parliament often contradicts governmental decisions, defining Sámi rights is an equally complex matter inside and outside the multicultural Sámi communities, and inside and outside the Sápmi.

One of the goals of our research project was to identify the relevant approaches and issues in discussing AVC with students in southern and other parts of Finland, as students at UoL and AALTO come from all parts of the country. Because UoL and AALTO educate art teachers in curriculum-based art education, the lack of perspectives on Sámi and other Arctic culture in art education curricula (at all levels of schooling) needs to be addressed from the perspective of both programs. Finnish art education professionals outside of the area of Finnish Lapland and the Sápmi need to have critical and sensitive

approaches to AVC. Furthermore, within the area of Finnish Lapland and the Sápmi, there is a need to promote northern knowledge of contextualized, situational (Kitchens, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991), and place-specific approaches and materials as they relate to northern communities, environments, and cultures. By *place-specific approaches*, in this research, we mean the ways of looking at places that emphasize temporal, local, and social ties, which are approaches that engage inhabitants and make places more meaningful to those who live there (Gruenewald, 2003; Lippard, 1997).

Through our research, we aim to find ways to develop AVC education in the Finnish art teacher education context. Our research questions in this article are as follows:

- (1) What are the relevant place-specific perspectives that should be considered in Finnish art teacher education when teaching is based on AVC and includes social justice issues?
- (2) How can collaboration on the critical study of AVC, including Sámi art and craft, in the context of preservice art teaching in the northern and southern regions of Finland be developed?

The research project was conducted in cycles, a structure that is often found relevant for action research and in art-based action research (ABAR; Jokela, 2019; Jokela, Huhmarniemi, & Hiltunen, 2019). In ABAR, objectives address community empowerment, social change, and an increase in environmental responsibility and sense of community. The activities and different phases of the project that took place during 2016–2020 were organized into three main cycles. Although the research project started earlier, the main part of the research was connected to the ArkTOP project (2017–2020).

### **Toward a Northern Knowledge Systems Concept**

Indigenous perspectives in art education have been considered epistemologically as important sources of knowledge in many

countries, such as in the United States (Ballengee-Morris, 2010; Ballengee-Morris et al., 2010; Bequette, 2014; Eldridge, 2018; Pauly, 2016), Canada (Ruiz, 2017), Australia (Edwards-Vandenhoeck, 2018; Wexler, 2009), New Zealand (J. Smith, 2010), Korea (Yoon, 2018), and many African countries (Ross, 2004). Indigenous epistemologies have, perhaps, been more frequently recognized as part of art education in these countries than they generally have been in Nordic countries (Kallio-Tavin, 2019). This becomes particularly clear when reviewing the national art education curricula, which are the fundamental frameworks for teaching in schools in Nordic countries. Although the curricula emphasize cultural diversity, they typically have not included learning from the Sámi peoples. Additionally, it is notable that in Finland, 60% of Sámi and 70% of Sámi children under 10 years old live outside of Sápmi, in other parts of Finland. This is particularly significant from the place-specific and situated knowledge perspective, as Finnish law does not require education in Sámi languages for children who live outside of Sápmi (Keskitalo et al., 2012).

Art education has a long tradition with social justice engagement (McFee, 1966), aligning with other art education movements, particularly multiculturalism (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Hicks, 1991; Stuhr, 1995). As Kraehe (2017) wrote, “Art teachers are presented with daily opportunities in which to seek justice in art education” (p. 275). Desai (2020) shared the importance and popularity of social justice approaches in the field, but acknowledged the criticism and refusal of some Indigenous scholars to use the term social justice, arguing that it perpetuates settler colonialism. This criticism has also been made by Rauna Kuokkanen (2020) in connection to Sámi.

Coloniality and the historical development of art education through modernism have focused on teaching certain skills and techniques, emphasizing self-expression (Desai, 2020). The Indigenous pedagogical approach in arts

learning has traditionally been more connected to everyday lives and aesthetics, as well as handicrafts. Discussions about the colonization of the Circumpolar North and disassembling its effects have challenged art education to consider the colonial characteristics of traditional Western concepts of knowledge and learning (e.g., L. T. Smith, 1999).

Indigenous epistemologies in the Circumpolar North offer a central view of northern knowledge systems from social justice and political perspectives. The northern knowledge systems concept, derived from the Indigenous knowledge system, consists of shared traditions, a historical understanding of nature, and the use of natural materials.

In the lives of the people of the Circumpolar North, the ecological, social, and cultural connection is close. Knowledge arising from a connection can be addressed from the perspectives of traditional knowledge, traditional ecological knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, tacit knowledge, or local knowledge. The northern way of knowing combines cultural heritage related to nature and ecosystems, tacit material knowledge with the making and the use of art and visual symbols of cultures (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020b; Valkonen & Valkonen, 2019). The northern knowledge system concept has been one of the key principles of the development of Arctic art and design in the UoL and ABAR projects with the various actors of the Arctic Sustainable Art and Design (ASAD) thematic network (ASAD, 2020; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020b).

The Sámi researcher and artist Gunvor Guttorm (2015) has considered the importance of reforming *duodji* Sámi art and crafts with the help of her own art-based operations. Guttorm (2012b) stated that traditional knowledge includes both skills and knowledge, and it is important to make use of the wisdom of the honorary artisans and elder craftspeople in teaching. By taking a minority and Indigenous approach, and by using cultural artistic expression within a specific culture, education itself

creates the space for a diversity of ideas and opinions (Guttorm, 2012a).

Pigga Keskitalo (2019) emphasized the importance of working outdoors in decolonial Sámi pedagogy and school culture that organizes teaching with a focus on a holistic approach. School schedules and the conception of place-specific ideas of learning should become more similar to the typical manner of the surrounding environment, and local people and nature should be consulted in teaching remarkably more than they are today. A similar transformation is referred to in educational research in terms of sustainability by describing the significance of empathy, a sense of community, resilience, and hope (Salonen, 2019; Värri, 2018).

The more recent national core curriculum for basic education in Finland (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2014) focuses on school culture and integrative approaches much more than did earlier versions. The aim is to develop schools that function as learning communities that promote true participation, democracy, equity, and equality, and that take responsibility for the environment by focusing on a sustainable future. For the first time, it is compulsory for schools to organize multidisciplinary learning modules at least once every school year. The core curriculum obliges schools to plan and implement these modules with cooperation between different subjects, involving pupils in their planning. The municipalities and schools plan their local and place-specific modules according to local needs. Moreover, more learning takes place outside of the school than it had before (Finnish National Board for Education, 2016). Situational, place-specific learning is encouraged, offering opportunities for individual and shared learning for all its members.

However, Keskitalo et al. (2012) and Kuokkanen (2007) have claimed there is a significant conflict between the Finnish schooling system, the ideologies of the welfare state, and Sámi pedagogy. Here, the aforementioned power relations and the Sámi lack of self-

determination limit the possibilities for implementing Sámi pedagogy (Keskitalo et al., 2012).

During the ArkTOP, researchers at AALTO conducted a literature review of AVC based on earlier discussions of art education and visual culture studies regarding the Arctic and northern aspects. Although Indigenous studies and decolonial perspectives have been influential, a limited number of articles in the context of art education were found to focus on Indigenous studies and social justice from the Arctic or northern perspectives (Eldridge, 2016; Guttorm, 2012b). In the literature review, the earlier Arctic and northern research approaches of the UoL held a central role through the *Relate North* publication (ASAD, 2020). At AALTO, the subject has been particularly topical in doctoral theses (Valkeapää, 2011). Within Finnish art education, the UoL focuses closely on Arctic and northern issues; for example, the Arctic Arts Summit's special issue in the *Research in Arts and Education* journal (Jokela, Huhmarniemi, & Hautala-Hirvioja, 2019) clarified and introduced the concept of Arctic art.

Contextual, situational, and place-specific contemporary art has become a model for the way art education at the UoL meets with the northern environment and cultures in practice (Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a; Jokela, Huhmarniemi, & Hautala-Hirvioja, 2019). The aims of culturally sensitive education and questions of the local coloniality of the area have required a pedagogic renewal of art teacher education, yielding new dialogue and critical discussions, and articulating how changing societal conditions need to be accounted for.

### **Reformative and Exploratory Teaching in the Arctic**

The multidisciplinary ArkTOP project (2017–2020) concerned reformative and exploratory teaching in the Arctic. The comprehensive project progressed in cycles and was divided into

smaller work packages. ArkTOP had extensive and versatile aims, and one of them focused on visual arts education. The primary focus was working with the concept of AVC and Sámi art and culture within art teacher education, including developing and building an e-learning environment for teaching visual arts. The work package, planned in collaboration with the UoL and AALTO, aimed to include these themes in art teacher education and art teaching at comprehensive and upper secondary schools in Finland.

The key collaborators of ArkTOP were five upper secondary school classes from the Utsjoki, Salla, Sodankylä, Ranua, and Vihti municipalities. The Utsjoki Sámi secondary school, located in Sápmi, is the northernmost upper secondary school in all of the European Union. It was also the only collaborator where Sámi and Finnish are offered equally as languages used by teachers to instruct. Salla is located on the eastern border of Finland, near the Russian border, where Russian is the first language for some of the students. Sodankylä is located in central Lapland and Ranua in southern Lapland. Vihti was the only collaborating school located in southern Finland, and it is situated near the capital area. As far as the researchers know, the background of the students in all schools is multicultural; students are not identified as being either Sámi or non-Sámi.

In the background of the visual arts education work package, there was a multiyear research-based development collaboration on visual arts education between the UoL and AALTO. While the UoL has the Arctic expertise in research regarding socially engaged art education and AVC and has circumpolar and local connections (ASAD, 2020; Huhmarniemi & Jokela, 2020a, 2020b; Jokela, Huhmarniemi, & Hiltunen, 2019; Manninen, 2019), AALTO contributed from the perspectives of critical and societal art education, bringing its expertise in international research (Kallio-Tavin & Pullinen,



2015; Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, 2018; Kallio-Tavin et al., 2019). Because these two universities educate art teachers for the entire country, the Arctic issues are equally important to their teacher education programs.

ABAR is developed in the UoL's Department of Art Education, viewing the environment and community from the perspective of participatory activities and agency (Jokela, 2019). The research process involves collaboration with stakeholders and community members, as well as art interventions. In these research approaches, practical and theoretical research are conducted simultaneously, and research topics are often situated in the middle ground between art and other fields of research, such as the social sciences and educational studies.

ABAR is especially rooted in process-oriented dialogical and place-specific art forms, such as environmental and community art and community-based art education. Such an approach has been implemented extensively in the field of community-based art education and in

multicultural communities in Finnish Lapland (Härkönen, 2018; Hiltunen, 2005, 2010; Hiltunen et al., 2020; Huhmarniemi, 2012; Jokela, 2018).

In the ArkTOP project, we used the ABAR approach as a cyclical process of research and development focused on AVC. In our case, it included the definition of objectives and research tasks, planning, theoretical background work, art education students' artistic work, courses at the universities, pilots in schools, participatory and reflective observation, conceptualization, and the specification of objectives for the next cycle (Figure 1). The research process and results were documented, and this documentation is used as research material. Each cycle of ABAR in the ArkTOP started with planning, setting goals, and investigating sociocultural situations in the community or place, which were the collaborating municipalities and schools.

Professor Hiltunen was the principal investigator of the whole ArkTOP project's visual

## ArkTOP research cycles 2017-2020

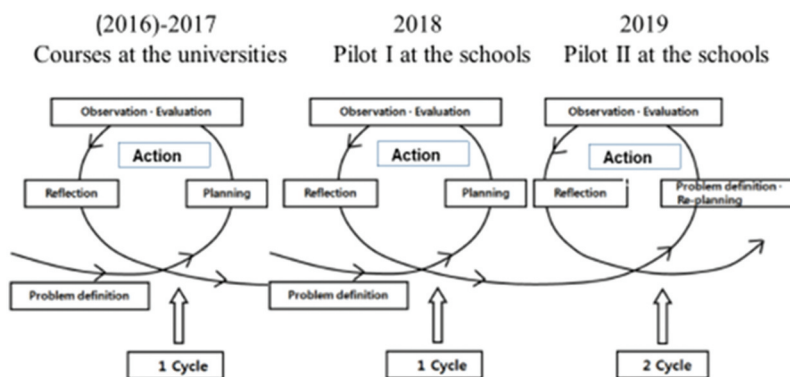


Figure 1. ArkTOP research cycles. Image by Mirja Hiltunen, 2020.

arts education work package. AALTO's role was particularly present in Cycles 1 and 3. Courses in which AVC was addressed were taught by Professor Kallio-Tavin, and they served as a starting point for the collaboration between the two universities. Two graduate students from AALTO, Annika Sohlman and Joonas Hakaste, were involved with research activities that took place in Lapland during Phases 2 and 3, and they organized AVC teaching in Vihti's upper secondary school.

University lecturer Annamari Manninen (UoL) was responsible for the visual arts education department's media expression course (Cycle 1) and operated as the postdoc researcher for the development of the versatile blended learning environment (Figure 1, Cycle 3). University lecturer Elina Härkönen (UoL) was responsible for the preservice teacher students' implementation of remote and versatile (multimodal) visual arts education pilots at schools for two fall terms in 2018 and 2019 (Figure 1, Cycles 2 and 3).

Mirja Hiltunen, Annika Sohlman, and the wider work/research group presented above have connections to Lapland through long-lasting family ties and their own living and working experiences. However, all of them identify as White and non-Indigenous.

### First Cycle: Courses at the Universities

Collaboration between the universities began with introducing AVC perspectives to students majoring in art education at AALTO. This introduction was a relatively small part of a mandatory course for all 2nd-year undergraduate and master's-level art education students in a course titled Multiliteracy of Visual Culture. The two course iterations included 44 students in 2016 and 30 students in 2017. Many of the students reported during course discussions and in their writings that AVC and particularly Sámi cultures had been addressed in a limited manner if at all during their earlier schooling, and that it was surprising to realize that they had not previously problematized their lack of knowledge regarding these topics. For many, their

experiences in these classes were their first exposure to Sámi and other Arctic histories and visual cultures. In the course feedback, one student described her lack of prior knowledge as follows: "I was surprised by how little I knew about Sámi cultures and how little it has been touched upon during my previous studies and schooling" (Tenhunen, personal communication, February, 8, 2017). It is worth mentioning that during both class iterations, there were one or two students who mentioned that they or their family members, such as grandparents, identify as Sámi. Even though the aims of the course were strongly connected to diversity, multicultural, and intercultural perspectives, the students (as they typically are in teacher education programs) expressed, similarly as in other courses in the program, "that they belong to the majority culture from well-educated white middle class families" (Kallio-Tavin, 2015, p. 25). Students from minority and Indigenous cultures are rare, regardless of efforts to try to change the program to be more culturally diversified.

The classes included introductory lectures on learning from AVC, as well as Sámi contemporary artists' work. The students explored short videos made by Sámi youth, discussed them in workshops, and wrote short response papers about them. Most importantly, the course included an online discussion with Liisa Holmberg, who was the rector of the Sámi *Oahpahusguovddáš* [Sámi Education Institute] at the time. Holmberg's involvement and the Sámi youth videos were crucial in terms of learning from contemporary Sámi cultures.

The students' final essays served as tentative research data for the collaborative part of the research project, provided information regarding students' previous experiences with AVC, and helped the researchers identify future needs. As a summary of the analysis of these essays, many of the students who included Sámi perspectives in their essays focused on the complex questions of cultural appropriation. Students were especially interested in

learning how to teach about Sámi cultures that are part of the nation in which they live. They were curious about learning how to include oppressed cultures in the curriculum while ensuring they avoided cultural appropriation and remained sensitive to the delicate, complex, and often political issues. Many students discussed conflicting messages in popular culture and art produced by representatives of the dominant culture.

One of the results of the AALTO course iterations was the students' growing interest in AVC issues. One example of this interest is Liisa Hannula's master's thesis (Hannula, 2019), in which she explored the reasons for the lack of recognition and representation of Sámi in Finnish education and visual culture. Her results echoed earlier art education research on visual culture and Indigenous cultures and prompted the question of how to interrupt the grand narrative (Slivka, 2015).

During the first cycle, the UoL course focused on AVC and contemporary Sámi art in the context of media expression. The course included 33 first-year master's-level art education students in 2017. Similarly, as at AALTO, the classes included introductions to Sámi contemporary art, and the course included an online discussion with a Sámi educator, Holmberg. One of the approaches to learning from Sámi cultures took place through watching Sámi youth videos and reading articles on contemporary Sámi art and Indigenous film production. How Lapland and Sápmi are described and represented in art and visual culture were explored by making media art, games, animations, and interactive media pieces. The art education students explored different approaches to AVC and reflected on and identified the possibilities, problems, and tensions when dealing with questions related to Indigenous art in the art education context. They were aware of how politicized and sensitive the issue is in Finland, and some of them were very anxious to problematize it in their

own art practices. The majority of the students at the Faculty of Art and Design came from the southern capital and other areas of Finland, only a few were from Finnish Lapland, and only one or two per year identified themselves as Indigenous.

In their media expression coursework, students addressed various themes, including what types of representations gain visibility (e.g., in media), and who produces them (Kumashiro, 2002). Initiatives such as land use, forestry, mining, and mass tourism were also explored using interactive media plays and animations. Some approaches to critical and socially engaged art education have emphasized delving into the prevailing visual culture and, for example, the critical review of art history and the ideology of representations (e.g., Tavin, 2016). The students learned that representation is always one perspective of a matter to be presented, in which case their analysis can provide a good opportunity for observing the incompleteness of information and the relationship between information and authority.

In both universities, students paid attention to cultural appropriation and how imperceptibly and without intention it sometimes happens. The lack of knowledge and need for pedagogical strategies, along with feelings of anxiety related to processing sensitive cultural issues, questions around how to teach students about AVC, and how to introduce students to contemporary Sámi art and craft, were also identified.

The practical work in Cycle 1 indicated that most students realized how representation is never innocent and it always involves an ideological underpinning. They also reflected on how representation carries content as well as avoids or refuses to represent while forming privileged and marginalized positions (Duncum, 2010). Therefore, it became important to address how including critical art content as a core area of education also requires the review of educational practices and how they need to be formed

in a way that serves the objectives of critical art education that resists oppression. We set out to develop these educational practices in Cycles 2 and 3.

### Second Cycle: First Round of Pilots in the Schools

During Cycle 2 (2018), ABAR was based on close collaboration with visual arts teachers and the development of a blended learning environment in UoL. One of the research tasks of Cycle 2 was to develop an online learning environment suitable for visual arts education. We wanted to review and develop AVC, particularly in the context of Sámi contemporary art, by inviting four art teachers and their students working in Salla, Ranua, Sodankylä, and Utsjoki to take part in joint knowledge production on the theme. Three master's-level preservice art teacher students in UoL worked together with

upper secondary art teachers and students to prepare course materials that reviewed AVC and Sámi contemporary art.

The starting point for the course materials and assignments for the art class was the hands-on practices and experiments in the UoL media expression course (Cycle 1). Before the 2-month preservice teaching period began, the art teachers from the four pilot schools took part in a hands-on workshop to explore ACV from their own local, place-specific perspective and plan the pilots, which would take place during the schools' following fall term.

In one of the workshops, the teachers were invited to explore artworks by Suohpanterror, an activist artist group (Figure 2), whose work often takes the form of activist posters. The teachers then produced posters based on their knowledge of their regions regarding important



Figure 2. The researchers, visual arts teachers, and preservice arts teacher students exploring the works of the Sámi activist group Suohpanterror. Image by Laura Ranta, 2018.

personal and sometimes challenging issues, such as logging, mining, fishing rights, mass tourism, and infrastructure plans; the same initiatives and specific issues that Kuokkanen (2020) pointed out when discussing Indigenous rights being weakened by actively advancing development. These art practice sessions were followed by deep discussions that explored the realm of the schools' and art teachers' realities.

The art teachers' local and diverse perspectives on AVC were important contributions to the whole project. The teachers' expertise and deep knowledge of northern circumstances and cultures widened the perspectives not only on AVC but also on living in northern Finland and its multicultural sociocultural environment. From the perspective of the theory concerning community-based art education (Hiltunen, 2010), we initially did not want to explore AVC through possible problems or oppressive practices in art and culture. The approach is more resource-oriented, as we seek meanings that local residents personally give to their own visual culture.

Thus, it would be central in educational practices to perceive and make visible the subjectivity and incompleteness of personal knowledge, which serves the aim of perceiving the limited nature of wider information and incompleteness as a method of education that resists oppression.

Art-based approaches aim to open the space for critical voices, too, and about issues like those, Kuokkanen (2020) questioned, "How can the state genuinely engage in reconciliation while pushing for aggressive and extensive land use and development plans considered detrimental to the interests of the Sámi, particularly to traditional livelihoods?" (p. 294). Heated political questions like this are also explored in artworks by the Suohpanterror (2020).

The collaboration was continued in the fall of 2018 with a 2-month period of practical student teaching at the same four schools as part of the UoL master's-level preservice art

teacher studies. During this period, the visual arts course focusing on AVC was implemented, and the online learning environment was tested. High school students were able to create, make visible, and reflect on their own visual culture in one of the assignments focusing on their own living environment and what the term "Arctic" means to them (Figure 3).

Two master's theses in art education were completed on this practice at UoL.

Mikko Luhtasela's (2019) thesis was a development research project that involved building and developing an online learning environment for advanced teacher education in cooperation with ArkTOP project collaborators. With the help of the developed online learning environment, the interaction increased between the different operators within the ArkTOP project.

Laura Ranta's (2019) master's thesis was an ABAR study focused on joint knowledge production with the art teachers. This focus is also important for the whole ArkTOP project from the ethics point of view. Ranta's thesis indicates that a remote connection can promote teachers' communication with colleagues and other experts in the field. Based on her thesis, high-quality visual arts education can be offered on a blended learning basis. According to the feedback she collected from art teachers, the collaboration between upper secondary schools and the UoL's visual arts education teacher education program was considered fruitful. The study also confirmed the general idea of the importance of user inclusion in the design of teaching practices.

The first pilots in schools indicated that a remote connection can promote teachers' communication with colleagues and other experts in the field. However, during Cycle 2, the need to increase interaction between schools, and especially between upper secondary students, was clearly raised. Upper secondary school courses, formed during Cycle 2, were further developed during 2019 (Cycle 3).





Figure 3. One student from Sámi upper secondary school explored what the Arctic means to them: reindeer, salmon, tourism, and social problems, 2018.

### Third Cycle: Second Round of Pilots in the Schools

The primary focus of the third cycle in 2019 was in the UoL preservice art teachers' 2-month period of practical student teaching in the Lapland region's municipalities and in Sápmi. A fifth upper secondary school from southern Finland, Vihti Upper Secondary School, was also invited to participate and promote a greater understanding of the needs of AVC in teacher education in Finland. Furthermore, during the third cycle, the collaborative effort initiated between the two universities, UoL and AALTO, before the official start of the ArkTOP project, was continued. At AALTO, the researchers conducted a literature review of art education and related fields to scope the earlier research on AVC. At UoL, the research process focused on reinforcing the

connections created in earlier cycles and further developing the remote teaching methods piloted during Cycle 2.

A joint assignment titled *My Arctic* was designed in collaboration with students from the UoL and AALTO. The assignment was coordinated as part of Annamari Manninen's (in process) postdoctoral research and designed based on analyses of the work done at the UoL in Cycles 1 and 2. Students at all five upper secondary schools implemented the same exercise.

The main questions of the assignment were as follows: How can the North, the Arctic, and Lapland be visually depicted, and what significance might they bear? These questions and the subject of AVC was approached from the personal perspectives and everyday experiences of the students. The blended learning lessons followed

similar principles in terms of facilitating discussions with students, observing the same art examples from northern Finnish and Sámi contemporary artists (Figure 4), and presenting a social justice and social change perspective that aims to disentangle representations of the Arctic and Indigenous cultures.<sup>2</sup> The assignment produced 105 finalized student works, which the students posted to an online image-sharing platform as part of the assignment. This allowed students from the other participating upper secondary schools to comment and ask questions about each other's works. The developed online learning environment offers a way to share students' own visual culture in a diverse way and comment on and learn from each other's artworks in multiple ways; the students were specialists in the matter themselves. The techniques of the artwork varied from photographs to paintings, digital images, and videos. The theme most often depicted was landscape, which often

included personal significance to the students from the northern schools (Figure 5). The student's artworks were not the main research data of the ArkTOP project, with the exception that the Vihti students' visualizations of the Arctic were thoroughly analyzed in Pekka Hakaste's (2020) master's thesis.

In Vihti, the same AVC assignment was modified to meet the place-specific context of a southern Finnish upper secondary school. The teaching period was remarkably shorter, and even though central knowledge about Sámi people and the Sápmi was shared, this information was introduced with a teacher-led presentation, and it was not processed with students at length. The assignment needed different contextualization in Vihti because the students were mainly new to the topics of the Arctic, Sámi culture, and northern Finland, as well as to the locations of the other collaborating schools.



Figure 4. In all of the participating schools, students viewed the same art examples. The most prominent one was Sámi artist Marja Helander's dance movie *Eatnanvuloš Lottit [Birds in the Earth]*, 2018, which examines questions behind land ownership in Sápmi. The performers are two young Sámi ballet students. Photo courtesy of the Center for Finnish Media Art/Marja Helander.



Figure 5. Two student works depicting AVC themes from everyday life. Photo courtesy of the authors.

Although the premises were different in the school in Vihti and in the other collaborating schools, these differences reflect the variety of situations faced by in-service art teachers when planning to take on subjects with sensitive, critical, and specific questions connected to AVC. The feedback students received and gave to each other through the online platform indicated the students' interest in how

their different place-specific perspectives affected the interpretations of the same assessment. Hakaste (2020) noted that the Arctic is perceived as alienated, stereotypical, odd, and exotic by many students in the southern part of the country. Although all students in Finland are considered, by definition, to live in an Arctic country, students in Vihti did not consider Arctic, Nordic, or Indigenous issues as



their own. The research finding reinforces what was identified during Cycle 1: More knowledge and understanding of AVC would benefit students across the country.

Collaboration between AALTO, the UoL, and participating schools culminated when the ArkTOP team visited the four collaborating upper secondary schools in the Finnish Lapland region (2019). Observations made in these four different learning and teaching environments affirmed the diversity of the place-specific and situational aspects of Arctic visual culture.

### Discussion

When discussing which relevant place-specific issues should be considered in teaching AVC within a social justice context in Finnish art teacher education, collaborative methods of knowledge production were emphasized. During the research project, it became more evident than before that the processes of renewal and strengthening different cultures, with respect to their diversified nature and concurrent existence, need to be shared in local areas. Learning from each other's personal experiences and viewpoints and from history, especially when the themes are connected to Sámi art and craft, was important. Becoming interested in previously unfamiliar narrations, images, handicrafts, art practices, and lifestyles was identified as essential in the research project. Through northern knowledge production, the previously known heated issues became more concrete through working with students, art and craft, theories, and local stakeholders. When considering place-specific perspectives, the education needs to be built on local issues, sensitively considering tensions as well as rich details of ways of lives. This sensibility, taught in teacher education, is a way of approaching the questions of AVC and other complex phenomena related to art education. In the ArkTOP project, teachers and preservice teachers were learning together with secondary school students by creating, renewing, and generating AVC.

The place-specific knowledge is oftentimes local and not easily accessible on a national level. However, this might be quite important, when, for example, approaching the plurality of AVC, instead of focusing on dualistic or opposing positions. Based on these thoughts, we are convinced that learning about AVC and its place-specific approach would benefit all students living in Finland. Based on our research findings, we recommend considerations for the National Core Curriculum for basic education and secondary schooling to include learning about AVC for all levels of students. The complex place-specific context presented in the theoretical framework of this article discusses social justice approaches and the need to raise awareness of Finland's colonial history.

In this study, we have developed collaboration on the critical study of AVC and Sámi art in the context of preservice art teaching in the northern and southern regions of Finland by using ABAR. Following the guidelines of the ABAR method, the collaboration between UoL and AALTO involved a variety of different stakeholders and communities, whose perspectives formed the foundation for understanding AVC during the project. In the first cycle, collaboration and sharing occurred primarily between the universities and art education students involved, while the practices in Cycles 2 and 3 took steps toward more in-depth conversation between all the participants, inviting the local schools and students to cocreate. Interaction and sharing of meanings were also achieved among upper secondary students. University researchers, as well as their students, high school students, and the high school students' teachers, were able to see which representations of AVC are gaining prominence in art and media imagery and who is producing them. High school students were able to create, make visible, and share their own visual culture in a diverse way and comment on and learn from each other's artworks in multiple ways. From the perspective of the participating schools, the project highlighted

the potential of blended teaching to transcend the sometimes difficult conditions of the Arctic and the challenges posed by long distances (e.g., Hiltunen & Manninen, 2015; Manninen, 2019).

Accordingly, it is evident that the experiential and professional knowledge of stakeholders forms the essential place-specific, sensitive, and critical awareness of AVC in art education teaching and preservice teacher education. The remote and blended methods for e-learning piloted during the project could make the further sharing of knowledge related to AVC easier. The same methods have great potential for becoming helpful to all schools when online teaching is topical, as it was in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Sharing the tradition of knowledge and professionalism in the northern areas of Finland and Sápmi, as well as on a national level, is essential when regarding social justice and the country's colonial history. More importantly, blended learning enabled agency for participants to create AVC. By developing blended learning and remote connections, art education can also engage in resisting colonization. It became clear that the Arctic is multifaceted, and each variation and place-specific presentation and representation of a participant's own Arctic experience is as important, meaningful, and valuable as anyone else's (Eldridge, 2016; Yoon, 2018). When pondering how to collaborate on the critical study of AVC and, especially, Sámi art and craft in the context of preservice art teaching in Finland, the research project's aim was to reach beyond confronting heated political questions and find sustainable yet critical ways of doing so. One of the methods was to include coteaching through remote connections as a relevant aspect for consideration when discussing art education teaching that deals with sensitive, critical, and relational issues. Art education teaching at the preservice level or within art education classes that takes into consideration the sociopolitical and cultural history of the place, including awareness of the Sámi peoples' contemporary situation

and ethics, cannot take place without the involvement of experts' viewpoints regarding Sámi culture and northern knowledge.

Arctic multicultural communities share many common features, issues, and challenges that can be addressed through art and whose solutions require cooperation, negotiation, and sensitive understanding. The expertise on northern knowledge systems, local voices, situational and place-specific learning, as well as theory on social justice art education offered future art teachers research-based tools to develop their own professionalism and navigate the changing world.

## Conclusions

Artistic operations focusing on such social practices challenge us to reassess familiar interpretations and links concerning visual culture. Although familiarizing and participating in critical art practices in AVC is not a guarantee of fairer operations, it makes way for the critical review of social structures as well as alternative ideologies and operational opportunities.

This research project arose from the need to shift Finnish art teacher education toward more social justice approaches to AVC education. On a national level, AVC perspectives have not been given much attention in the curriculum, and hence, they have been a focus neither in upper secondary schools' art classrooms nor in art teacher education. Based on our research, we propose that AVC education should be included in art education teaching in the form of situational and place-specific, as well as multimodal and sensitive, approaches. For example, getting to know and learn from contemporary Sámi artists' ways of creating visual culture is one way to open up the Finnish art education discussion for multiple narratives. In addition, reflecting the participants' own relations to the "your own Arctic" assignment gave AVC the opportunity to widen the perspective and promote

equity and equality. Here, place-specific and situational learning should take forms based on the recognition of different sensitive, arts-based methods of knowledge creation, respecting the diverse ways of seeing and

knowing and different ways of sharing. Developing remote methods for learning enables AVC and social justice education to become a valuable enterprise for all learners.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The ArkTOP project was led by the UoL, and its partners included 18 municipalities from Finnish Lapland, the Regional State Administrative Agency of Lapland, the University of Helsinki, and AALTO. The Ministry of Education and Culture funded the 4-year project with 400,000 euros. From the UoL, participants in the project included the Faculty of Education's music education and teacher education school as well as the Faculty of Art and Design's visual arts education school. From the University of Helsinki, participants included music education faculty and students, and from AALTO, visual arts education faculty and students.
- <sup>2</sup> Northern Finnish artists such as Kalervo Palsa, Helena Junttila, Reidar Särestöniemi, and Sámi artists such as Marja Helander, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, and Suohpanterror were presented to the students. Through group discussions, students considered how artworks, media images, and other visual culture phenomena create cultural meanings and impact identities in the context of AVC.