

Arts-integrated EFL teaching in Finland – from the teachers' point of view

Bachelor's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman aiheena on taideintegroitu englannin kielen opetus. Tarkemmin, tutkielma tarkastelee kuinka erilaiset taiteen tuottamisen muodot kuten piirtäminen, maalaaminen, muotoilu ja muut kädentaidot ovat osana englannin kielen opetusta Suomessa. Tutkimusten mukaan taideintegroitu opetus vahvistaa muun muassa oppijoiden aloitekykyä, motivaatiota, luovuutta ja ajattelukykyä ja on yhteydessä parempiin oppimistuloksiin, joita voi yhdistää luokkahuoneen ulkopuolisiin, oikean maailman ilmiöihin luontevasti. Opettajilla taideintegroitu opetus on myöskin yhteydessä motivaation kohenemiseen, luovuuteen ja työskentelyn iloon. Tämän tutkielman tavoitteena onkin toimia keskustelun avauksena samalla saaden selville minkälaisia kokemuksia, ajatuksia ja mielipiteitä englantia opettavilla opettajilla on kuvaamataiteen integroinnista englannin kielen opetuksessa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu viiden opettajan teemahaastatteluista, joissa etukäteen mietityt teemat toimivat haastattelun pohjana antaen samalla tilaa haastateltavien omille havainnoille. Teemoja olivat 1) opettajien henkilökohtaiset uskomukset ja mielipiteet taideintegroidusta englannin kielen opetuksesta kuin myös oppiainerajat ylittävästä opetuksesta yleisesti, 2) taideaineiden käyttö opettajien omissa luokkahuoneissa, ja 3) hyödyt ja haasteet taiteen integroinnista englannin kielen opetuksessa. Teemahaastattelu valittiin tutkimusmenetelmäksi, jotta taideaineiden integroinnista ilmiönä saataisiin syvällisempää ja henkilökohtaisempaa tietoa, varsinkin kun ilmiönä se on vähemmän tunnettu ja tutkittu.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että taideaineiden integrointi osaksi englannin kielen opetusta oli tutkittaville vieras ilmiö, vaikkakin yleisemmällä tasolla heillä oli varsin positiivisia tuntemuksia aiheesta. Kuitenkin taideaineiden varsinainen integrointi heidän omissa luokkahuoneissaan tuntui tutkittaville monin tavoin haasteelliselta – esteitä olivat muun muassa ajan ja resurssien vähyys, muiden opettajien mielipiteet ja tavat opettaa, oppilaiden haasteelliset suhtautumiset taideintegroituun opettamiseen, perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelma, työskentely pienellä koululla ja tutkittavien oma suhde taideaineisiin. Erityisesti muiden opettajien kanssa tehtävä yhteistyö oli tutkittaville olennaista onnistuneessa taideintegroidussa englannin kielen opetuksessa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen pienen otoksen vuoksi tutkielma toimii erityisesti keskustelunavauksena taideaineiden ja luovuuden tärkeyden määrittelylle ja onnistuneen taideintegroidun kielenopetuksen toteutumiselle sekä yksittäisissä luokkahuoneissa että laajemmin oppiainerajat ylittävässä kielenopetuksessa Suomessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of the present study is arts-integrated teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). In other words, the present study explores how visual arts like drawing, painting, sculpture, and various other crafts are present in English language classrooms in Finland – from the teachers' point of view. Visual arts are often used when teaching children or beginner foreign language learners solely even though there are multiple positive aspects of combining creativity in a more advanced language learning and teaching. For example, studies made on the subject (see e.g. Agathopoulou, Mattheoudakis & Psaltou-Joycey 2014; LaGarry & Richard 2018; Demoss 2011; Fautley & Savage 2011; Krawiec 2014) have shown that arts-integrated teaching improves e.g. the students' autonomy, motivation, creativity and complex thought processes, resulting in better learning results that can be connected to real life contexts unlike in any non-arts integrated classrooms. Studies (ibid.) have also shown that once teachers attempt arts-integrated teaching they become motivated and invested in trying it again after seeing the impact that creative learning has on the students.

Even though arts-integrated teaching and learning has various positive aspects to education, it is challenging to implement in schools. Not only is arts-integrated language teaching and teaching materials rather difficult and time consuming to design and put into effect by individual teachers following strict timetables and learning aims, but it also consumes various resources from the schools' budgets (e.g. Breazeale 2015: 26; Nikula & Kääntä 2013; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala 2016: 43-54). Thus, the present study aims to find out Finland' EFL teachers' experiences and opinions about crossing school-subject boundaries in their own classrooms. Namely, how they define and describe the integration of English with visual arts, whether they have executed such cross-curricular activities in their own classrooms and how they manage and feel about cross-curricular education in their own EFL teaching.

2 BACKGROUND

Compiling recent studies about the subject in more detail, the background section of the present study will first define cross-curricular education and review the main points of using art as an integrated component from a more general, curricular wide view to specific environments in EFL teaching and learning. This entails the effects cross-curricular education has both on students and on teachers. Next, the background segment of the present study will address the status art has in education and how that affects the integration of arts into other school-subject domains. That also affects the teachers; thus, the present paper lastly discusses the experiences and beliefs teachers have about cross-curricular studies along with the benefits and challenges arts-integrated education induces in language instructors. The research cited will mostly consist of studies about art-integration in general instead of in language learning because not many specific studies have been made on the latter topic; nevertheless, some studies do exist and act as a layout for analysing and comparing.

2.1 Crossing school-subject boundaries

Traditionally, different school-subjects (such as languages, mathematics, history, art, etc.) have been kept apart from each other and taught in isolation from vistas of real-life contexts. Furthermore, teaching has been believed to be telling and learning to be remembering. For instance, foreign language learning has traditionally consisted mostly of memorizing rules and patterns without attaching them to actual language usage environments. Because of this, creativity can be intentionally disconnected from language teaching and learning as well as from other subject domains (Fautley & Savage 2011: 27; Freeman 2012: 10; Orban 2012: 12; Robinson 2012: 125.) Therefore, the concept of crossing school-subject boundaries in teaching and learning (also known as cross-curricular education or interdisciplinary studies in the field of education) is about discovering common aspects between different subject domains to build “an enriched pedagogy” that combines intelligence and skills from separate school-subject domains. It not only boosts individuals’ autonomy, motivation and innovative abilities but also results in more holistic lessons and improves the curriculum as a whole by providing fresh perspectives to teaching and relevant challenges to learning (Agathopoulou, Mattheoudakis, & Psaltou-Joycey 2014: 2; Savage 2011: 8-9, as quoted by Fautley & Savage 2011: 1.) Cross-curricular education is quite a recent way of approaching teaching and

learning which can be seen even today in many schools: school-subjects are often kept separated and the boundaries between them can be evident.

All subject domains play an equally important role in education, however not every school-subject is flawlessly suitable for combining with others while others are almost as made for each other. One such example is an activity from a study by Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2016: 43-54), which combined mathematics with imaginative storytelling, theatre and physical movement. For the young children to fathom numbers, the children were asked to choose and then personify their favourite number, after which they enacted upon the stories they invented. According to Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (ibid.), the activity was received with satisfaction from both the teachers and the students.

Furthermore, some school-subjects have more connections to different subject domains than others. For instance, language can be regarded as a medium of communication, as a tool to connect all school-subjects, as stated by Krawiec (2014: 247-250). According to him, language enables the combining of all curriculum domains into activities that prepare the students for e.g. adapting to different contexts, real life communication, understanding, and suitable functioning in society. Art is also seen by Krawiec (ibid.) as a tool, yet with different abilities: art has the potential to e.g. develop students' critical and collaborative skills, encourage creativity, support individual personalization and enforce to observe the world from different perspectives. In short, while language can be a tool of communication, art can be a tool of expression. In education this indicates that both language and art could be efficiently combined with not only other school subject domains but also with each other.

One evidence of the promising marriage between languages and arts is known as *Chicago Arts Partners Education* (more commonly known as CAPE), which is an extensive research project that has worked on integrating arts into 37 schools' curriculums since 1992. After the program, in 1999, 19 schools continued into a veteran partnership. Among those schools, a few teachers in every school continued planning their teaching using arts-integrated methods while many schools adopted "*a teacher-as-artist*" model, which consisted of the teachers employing the partnerships' teachings in their lessons and improving themselves in various

art forms. Every school also had teachers who did not take part in the project, as expected in such a broad sampling (Demoss 2011: 2-3.) Nevertheless, this research project showed how using art as an integrated component has the remarkable potential of motivating teachers. Demoss (2011: 1) has further studied the veteran partnership portion of the CAPE, in this case how arts-integrated teaching differs from “non-arts” teaching. He found out that the art-integrated classrooms had improvements for students which were not seen in non-arts classrooms:

“Arts-integrated instruction: 1) created more independent and intrinsically motivated investments in learning, 2) fostered learning for understanding as opposed to recall of facts for tests, 3) transformed students’ characterizations of “learning barriers” into “challenges” to be solved, and 4) inspired students to pursue further learning opportunities outside of class” (Demoss 2011: 1).

2.2 Art beside informational content material

There is no exact way to integrate art into other school domains but there are differences in the type of tool art serves as; this is because the topic of cross-curricular education contains various kinds of values from diverse beliefs about instructors’ roles to opinions about school-subjects’ importance, whereupon authoritative individuals in different learning environments act as decision-makers in establishing the fundamentals of the arts-integrated teaching and learning (Fautley & Savage 2011: 29). There is not a lot of studies or reports of how this de facto happens in schools among individual teachers, not even in Finland even though the subject of deepening learning with phenomenon-based teaching by crossing school-subject boundaries is an important part of the Finnish educational system (Nikla & Kääntä 2013).

Nevertheless, Demoss (2011: 7) reports that in art-integrated classrooms the academic and art content have different kinds of power dynamics –as a result, art serves different functions. According to him, if either one of the domains are prioritized (e.g. art and EFL), the other one tends to act as an “educational enhancement” instead of as an integrated part of the lesson. For example, if the focus is on the academic portion of the lesson, the arts segment serves only as a way to summarize content; if the focus is on arts, the academic content tends to be neglected. Furthermore, Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2016: 43-54) argue that visual arts are generally used as a method to teach academic school subjects rather than being used as an

equal part of the teaching and learning. According to her, the difference in power dynamics increases the more advanced the learners are and the more academic the subjects are.

2.3 A creative English language teacher

For English language teachers, art has the potential of maintaining equilibrium in teaching between information-orientation and creativity (Rychter 2014: 161). Namely, art offers the traditional, passive language learning to become something more creative and active via expressive activity. The combination of arts and languages is not just randomly connected; according to Breazeale (2015: 19), visual arts and languages already have “an existing relationship” that allows the teachers to create specific language arts materials by finding those connections. This age-old relationship originates from the habit of describing and analysing art, which is central to the art processes. Language learning itself is also creative because using languages requires altering already learned language materials into actual language use in real life contexts; in a way, English can be seen an “arts-based subject”, especially in interdisciplinary education. Furthermore, self-direction and learner autonomy are central concepts in EFL, leading to the teachers’ task which is to foster those by offering a safe environment in which students can practise it through, for example, creative tasks. Creativity can be vastly personal and thus learning environments need to be safe and secure from the learners’ point of view (Fautley & Savage 2011: 2; Freeman 2012: 11; Robinson 2012: 126; Ruffolo 2009: 58, cited in Scott-Monkhouse 2012: 111; Stevens 2011: 3, 100, as cited in Fautley & Savage 2011: 84, 107.)

In addition, both students and teachers could find joy and enjoyment in various kinds of integrated art forms. For example, LaGarry and Richard (2018: 146-157) state that the teachers in their study reported positive feeling towards their own, arts-integrated work, while Irvin (2008: 10-11) comments that her two-year program of EFL teaching via art for Korean students was a positive experience for both herself as a teacher and for her students; she integrated “hand on art activities” to her language teaching and observed that the students “seemed to really absorb the language activities while engaging—”. Moreover, Krawiec (2014: 260) describes that his students regarded a cross-curricular English lesson as “a very attractive and stimulating form of teaching”, while Demoss (2011: 22-23), on the other hand, argues that even though the students truly enjoyed the arts-integrated lesson, their enjoyment

was more than simple” fun”; it was challenging, demanding and active work which resulted in creative ways to process content and in the use of “more complex cognitive processes”.

“– pupils’ expressive language, both verbal and artistic, can be developed through cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning within the arts which, whilst remaining faithful to their individual subject cultures, allows for natural playfulness on the part of the pupils (and, we hope, teachers) in forging cross-curricular links” (Fautley & Savage 2011: 106).

2.4 Scepticism towards creativity

There is scepticism towards cross-curricular education and visual arts as an integrated component in learning and teaching even though creative, arts-integrated learning and teaching has proven to have numerous benefits to it. Some teachers view cross-curricular teaching materials as extravagant and some see art as just bringing amusement to the classroom without any real impact on learning. Arranging holistically well-thought cross-curricular classroom practices can also be plainly thought as troublesome, additional work as it can rapidly devour the teachers’ time and vigor. Moreover, in addition to teachers’ preferences, there are external forces which complicate the task of designing learning materials and classroom scheduling; those forces include e.g. the national curriculum regulations and subject-specific norms. For this reason, it is important that teachers don’t feel “obliged to do all the work and then present it to learners as ‘entertainment’ for ‘approval’” (Bolt 2014: 225; Fautley & Savage 2011: 8, 56, 76; Nikula & Käätä 2013.)

However, there exists an arts integration framework for rural schools called *The Perpich Arts Integration Project* (LaGarry & Richard 2018: 146-157). The project lasted three years, during which LaGarry and Richard (ibid.) found out that the teachers in rural schools struggled with creativity and imagination when planning arts-integrated education. These derived from e.g. time constraints, multiple roles and a larger workload put on a single teacher, a shortage of proper equipment and a disconnection from professional networks. *The Perpich Arts Integration Project* included forming teams of teachers among the participants, exploring arts integration via workshops, planning backward when designing arts-integrated curriculum, teaching the students, reflecting informally and formally on work, and sharing learning with other participating teachers. According to LaGarry and Richard (ibid.), the results of the project were vastly positive, as most of the teachers stated that their professional

lives developed constructively and positively; without the limitations these rural teachers were accustomed to, they were able to awaken their creativity and improve their abilities in designing, implementing, and evaluating arts-integrated education in order to enhance learning.

As could be seen from the previous study, traditionally school lessons are content-oriented, which means that especially from middle-school and onwards there is not much room for any kinds of aesthetic creativity when the schedules are strict and the amount of information that needs to be taught and learned is vast. However, Breazeale (2015: 26) argues that the limited status that art has in schools is because its benefits are often not easily noticed, especially when compared to some more straightforward school-subjects like mathematics and history where the gains are usually effortlessly identified e.g. via tests or exams. Other counterarguments against art-integrated classrooms seize the fact that not enough research has been made on the cognitive growth of the learners (Demoss 2011: 21). Consequently, beliefs and insufficient research results influence the decision-makers in education, resulting in cuts in budgets and a decline in already limited status of visual arts in schools (Breazeale 2015: 26).

2.5 Creativity as a skill

However, not every teacher is willing to try out art-integrated teaching methods and not every learner feels comfortable with using arts to learn content. For example, LaGarry and Richard (2018: 146-157) reports that some students in their arts integration program expressed demotivation, frustration, and exhaustion in the arts-enhanced classrooms. While art integrated classroom might not be preferable for all types of learners and instructors, De Bono (2007: 2, quoted in Robinson 2012: 126) argues that “creativity is a skill that can be learned, developed and applied”. Cervini (2012: 299) agrees by stating that creativity is a natural part of human beings and thus should be learned and taught in all school-domains – through arts, for instance.

What’s more, Demoss (2011: 8, 19) points out that in his study the students who felt like the art element itself was “hard” didn’t see it as an obstacle but as a challenge. In addition, he

observed that “even shy and limited English proficient students participated fully in front of their classmates” and students with self-control complications “redirected energies in more acceptable ways”. Hence, art should not be assumed as something that is suitable only to particular types of individuals, but rather as an opportunity to teachers and students to try out creative, cross-curricular classroom practises.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 The aim of the study

The present study aims to find out about Finland’s middle schools’ English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers’ experiences and opinions about integrating visual arts into the teaching and learning of EFL in their own classrooms.

The research questions of the present study are the following:

1. What kind of beliefs and attitudes the EFL teachers have about arts-integrated classroom practices?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of arts-integrated EFL teaching according to the teachers?
3. What kind of functions visual arts serve in the EFL teachers’ own classrooms?

The present study is particularly interested in the experiences and reasonings of EFL teachers teaching grades 7-9 specifically because studies and research about arts-integrated language classrooms in those educational levels are scarce while creative, arts-integrated teaching and learning in primary school is well documented. Presently there are no commonly accepted, generalized precept of how to combine visual arts and English in EFL teaching, hence one aim of the present study is to discover whether the participants have de facto implemented such cross-curricular activities in their own teaching – and how. How teachers implement visual arts in their own classrooms and talk about the subject can entail attitudes and beliefs

they have towards the subject. Moreover, the findings of the present study may bring forth discussion on further improving language classroom practices and teaching methods through visual arts.

3.2 Data and Methods of Analysis

A semi-structured interview was chosen as the method for gathering information in the present study because it is a hybrid method which allows for variety in the interview structure to obtain both specific information about the research questions as well as additional information brought up by the participants (Galletta 2012). Hence, the interview questions in the present study were set up in a way to acquire qualitative data specifically about art-integrated EFL teaching while accommodating the participants with enough space to bring up instinctual issues around the subject. In the present study the semi-structured interview follows themes selected beforehand in pursuance of enough structure in the actual interview process. A pilot study was conducted to ensure that these themes and the structure of the interview managed to answer the research questions. However, in semi-structured interviews researcher-participant reciprocity and researcher reflexivity occurring during and within the interviews affects the outcomes of the interviews (Galletta 2012). Therefore, the inexperience of the researcher as an interviewer in the present study ought to be acknowledged.

The analysis methods used in the present study are both deductive and inductive content analysis; the deductive content analysis tests a hypothesis via investigation, while inductive content analysis commences with observations that are proposed into hypotheses (Dudovskiy: n.d.). In other words, the deductive approach offers certain themes to follow during the interview while inductive approach allows the interviewees to candidly convey their thinking on the subject. Furthermore, in inductive content analysis resulting theories or themes cannot be determined in advance, which means that all the previous information, observations and theories should not affect the analysis process though it should be noted that perfectly objective observations are almost impossible to implement (Thomas 2006: 237-238, 246; Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2018.) Arts-integrated English language teaching and learning in middle school is a topic without inclusive fundamentals, which makes it suitable for using deductive and inductive content analysis both in order to obtain comprehensive data on the subject.

The research questions of the present study narrow the structure of the data gathering thus guide the semi-structured interview process with certain themes. The themes in the present study are 1) the teachers' personal beliefs and attitudes about visual arts and arts-integrated EFL teaching as well as cross-curricular education in general, 2) the way of using visual arts in the EFL teachers' own teaching, and 3) the benefits and obstacles of integrating visual arts into EFL teaching. Moreover, within those themes are subthemes like experiences, descriptions, opportunities, and feelings. These themes were composed from the prior research, where the question of the teachers' own thoughts and beliefs on the subject especially was seen as important (see e.g. Demoss 2011; LaGarry & Richard 2018; Sotiropolou-Zormpala 2016).

3.3 The participants

The participants of the present study are Finnish EFL teachers working in three different smaller schools in Central Finland's basic comprehensive schools' grades 7-9, a.k.a. middle school, and upper secondary school. The vital part of choosing them was the work experience in teaching EFL at comprehensive schools but also the willingness to participate; for the present study, over sixty teachers were contacted yet only the following five answered. Thus, the participating teachers are all females and renamed teacher A, B, C, D and E in random order for protecting their anonymity. Their work experience varies from 6 to 29 years and the languages they teach can be seen below.

Name	Language(s) taught	Work experience in years
Teacher A	English	7
Teacher B	English, French, German	29
Teacher C	English, Swedish	11
Teacher D	English, Swedish	26
Teacher E	English, German	6

Table 1: Participants in the present study

The participants were approached via email, after which the interviews were concluded in March 2019. All the participants are Finnish with Finnish as their first language, wherefore the interviews were implemented in Finnish to prevent the language from impeding communication and to keep the interviews as relaxed as possible. The interviews were approximately fifteen minutes long, and they were recorded and transcribed. Then relevant categories were created in the pursuance of the research questions of the present study, after which compatible and repetitive key words appearing in the interviews could be discovered and their frequency counted (Denscombe 2014). To support these categories and key words, the significant portions of the interviews were translated into English and then presented among the results.

4 THE RESULTS

The findings of the present study will be presented and discussed in more detail according to the themes both prepared for the interview and discovered from the data. Those themes are 1) the teachers' personal beliefs and attitudes about visual arts and arts-integrated EFL teaching, 2) The way of using visual arts in the EFL teachers' own teaching, 3) the obstacles of integrating visual arts into EFL teaching, and 4) The students' attitudes towards arts-integrated EFL teaching. Inside those themes are occurring key words e.g. other teachers, time, the national curriculum, rural schools and teaching materials.

4.1 The teachers' personal beliefs and attitudes about visual arts and arts-integrated EFL teaching

All of the participating teachers in the present study had positive attitudes towards cross-curricular teaching and learning in general, while considering arts-integrated EFL teaching to be quite a positive idea. However, the concept of arts-integration was new to the participants, which was seen as lingering pondering and consideration when they thought about the subject. For example, teacher E thought that phenomena in the real world do not appear as single school subjects which is why cross-curricular teaching would be logical. In addition, she considered English as a natural language of science that could be effortlessly applied to

every subject, including visual arts. Teacher D noted that searching for and processing data merged into cultural knowledge would work especially well in arts-integrated EFL teaching, while teacher E mentioned how visual arts could develop the students' confidence in expressing themselves with mediums not used in EFL teaching. The participating teachers in the study had a correct intuition about the confirmed, positive sides of cross-curricular education as well as arts-integrated EFL teaching (see e.g. Agathopoulou, Mattheoudakis & Psaltou-Joycey 2014; LaGarry & Richard 2018; Demoss 2011; Fautley & Savage 2011; Krawiec 2014).

All of the participants had quite positive thoughts about the suitability of visual arts and English regardless of their own interests in visual arts; out of the five participating teachers, only two reported casually doing something related to visual arts during their leisure time. However, this was seen as both as a disincentive and as something that should not hinder the teaching of EFL:

Example 1 Teacher D: "Ei oman harrastuneisuuden este tarvitse olla (taideintegroidussa Englannin kielen opetuksessa), eihän oppilaatkaan mitään taiteilijoita ole nekään! Jotenkin niinku turhia raja-aitoja"

"One's own hobbyism does not need to be an obstacle (in arts-integrated English teaching), the students aren't artists themselves either! Those are somewhat pointless limitations."

Example 2 Teacher A: "Kyllä sinne (englannin kielen opetus) pystyisi ujuttamaan vaikka mitä (taiteen integroimista) mutta koska se ei ole mun forte etten oo mitenkään erityisen suuntautunut muutaku ihan vaan piirustelen joskus kotona enkä valokuvaa tai mitään. Ni mä en teetä tahallani semmosia tehtäviä että nyt teidän pitää ottaa valokuvia ja kertoa niistä tarinoita tai mitään muutakaan."

"Yeah you could plant there (English language teaching) this and that (integrating art) but because it's not my forte like I'm not particularly oriented I just draw sometimes at home but I don't photograph or anything. So I don't intentionally make them do assignments like now you have to take photos and tell stories based on them, or anything else."

As suggested by Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2016), there is a correlation between the educators' aesthetic role and the role of visual arts in the context of implementing arts-integrated teaching. All the teachers in the present study declared themselves as "non-artistic persons" which also affected their teaching. However, the teachers in the present study would have liked to sensibly try applying arts-integrated materials further into their own classrooms,

regardless of their own interests in visual arts. Every participant mentioned this during the interviews at least two times, accompanied with reasons on why it could be plausible and/or impossible at the moment for them.

4.2 The way of using visual arts in the EFL teachers' own teaching

Despite the positive attitudes the participating teachers had towards cross-curricular education, they had little to none experience of it in their own classrooms – and even less experience with merging visual arts specifically into EFL. Out of five participants, two had tried arts-integration indirectly once in their own teaching. For example, teacher A had a portfolio course where the students could freely choose the method and style of how to conduct the portfolio. As stated by teacher A, that course offered more freedom of expression to the students and enabled alternative ways of passing the course. Furthermore, teacher B had had implemented an exhibition style assignment, where the students gathered their culture-related works into one place and wandered through the space like they were in an art exhibition. On the other hand, teacher C stated that she had heard of the term cross-curricular education when she was still a student herself, yet she had never seen it materialize in working life.

The lack of artistic imagination was mentioned five times during the interviews and the difficulty in designing arts-integrated education tasks was mentioned four times. Similarly, Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2016: 43-54) states that over one third of the teachers in their study reported difficulties in implementing arts-integrated activities, since they require a more aesthetic approach and responsiveness than the teachers were trained and equipped for. According to her, the teacher education and its training period is not sufficient enough for preparing the future teachers for the challenges an aesthetic, innovative and unpredictable arts-integrated classroom might contain. For example, teacher B in the present study explained that she does not have the appropriate education and training to further implement arts-integrated EFL teaching.

However, even those participating teachers in the present study who reported lacking on imagination were quick to come up with example assignments when asked. For instance,

teacher E suggested a task where the students could familiarize themselves with culture and language by searching and learning about a specific art movement and then painting a simple portrait using the style in question. Moreover, teacher C suggested orally describing a landscape to the students to which they need to reimagine and paint, while teacher D came up with combining essay writing with pictures. In conclusion, participating teachers have the imagination required to integrate visual arts and EFL even though four out of five of them claimed otherwise during the interviews. This complies with the arguments of De Bono (2007: 2, quoted in Robinson 2012: 126) and Cervini (2012: 299), who profess the view that creativity is a natural part of being a human and able to be “learned, developed and applied”.

4.3 The obstacles of integrating visual arts into EFL teaching

The practicalities of applying visual arts into teaching prevented the participating teachers from doing so. The teachers saw multiple reasons why it would be unpractical to de facto implement arts-integrated education in their teaching: there was a lack of time and resources with the national core curriculum affecting the contents of their teaching; the cooperation with other teachers was complicated; and working in a small school had its challenges. The present paper will cover these themes in more detail, starting with the time-related issues.

All of the participating teachers mentioned the lack of time as the most significant factor in cross-curricular education as combining visual-arts with English requires time. Time as a concept was mentioned 19 times among the interviews. According to all of the teachers, every exception from normal teaching routines demands more time from the individuals planning it, whom do not have any extra time to spent on auxiliary tasks anyway as they grind through their own work. This kind of immoderate amount of work in working in education was mentioned five times during the interviews. For example, teacher E also noted that it is unreasonable to oblige anyone to do extra work for an arts-integrated assignment especially:

Example 3 Teacher E: ”Ei esimerkiksi neljän pienen lapsen äitiä voi velvoittaa tekemään ihan hirveästi ylimääräistä työtä sun ”jee tehdään romantiikanajan maalauksia” projektin eteen.”

”For example, you can’t demand a mother of four children to do a lot of extra work for your ”yay let’s make Romanticism paintings” project.”

This resonates with the previous study results, where designing and implementing cross-curricular education tasks was received with negative feelings concerning the teachers' time, workload and overall well-being (Bolt 2014: 225; Fautley & Savage 2011: 8, 56, 76). Four of the five participating teachers mentioned once the lack of materials as an obstacle to cross-curricular teaching of English with visual arts; overall, education materials were mentioned six times. Teacher A commented how the invention and development of suitable teaching materials with rational pedagogy behind them would be too laborious and time-consuming, whilst teacher D expressed a need for an "idea bank" online with diverse materials and example assignments for trying out in the field. In addition, teacher D noted how there is the danger of detachment between subjects when designing cross-curricular materials. Yet on contrary to all these previous aspects, teacher B saw that there are countless of suitable materials available for putting into effect – based on her, anyone could implement any kinds of arts-integrated EFL lessons.

On the subject of lack of time and teaching materials, the effect the national core curriculum for basic education has on planning the language lessons and materials was mentioned six times. For instance, teachers A and D mentioned how the national curriculum not only guides but also restricts the content covered in class; there are given amounts of resources and time for achieving certain goals. Consequently, there are no time for contemplating the suitable evaluation methods of the art-integrated language assignments. Previous research suggests that these are quite common obstacles to cross-curricular classroom practices (Bolt 2014: 225; Fautley & Savage 2011: 8, 56, 76). However, in contrast to this teacher E said that the national core curriculum does not bind the teachers nor the students to anything. According to her, it is the "hidden national curriculum" that mostly guides the teaching, like resources and budgets – which were overall mentioned six times during the present study. These observations agree with the arguments made by LaGarry and Richard (2018: 146-157), who argue that proper funding can be the answer to such difficulties.

The chemistry between teachers was important to the participating teachers and one of the reasons that could hinder integrating visual arts into EFL teaching because cooperation with other subject teachers was seen as an essential part of cross-curricular teaching. Other teachers were frequently repeated during the interviews, overall it was mentioned 16 times –

the second most mentioned key word in the present study. Prior research has suggested that emphasis on cooperation is indeed crucial when further defining arts integration in education (LaGarry & Richard 2018: 146-157). Moreover, in the present study working with other teachers was seen as time-consuming and finding a time that suits all the teachers taking part in designing cross-curricular teaching was seen as difficult – if not at times impossible. For example, teacher C mentioned how the cooperation with other teachers depended on the individuals rather than on the school subjects taught and teacher E explained how the chemistry and the differences in philosophy of education clashes with other teachers. For instance, teacher C declared that she would not participate in cross-curricular teaching with specific art teachers in their school and teacher D reported on trying to discuss the subject of cross-curricular education with her colleagues:

Example 4 Teacher D: “Mä joskus puhuin opettajahuoneessa että eiks nyt voisi jotain (oppiainerajat ylittävää kielenopetusta) kehittää mutta ei ne oikein ottanut -- musta tuntuu että se on ehkä siinä vastaanottavassa osapuolessakin että ei oikein lähetä siihen.”

“At one point at the teachers’ lounge I asked that can’t we come up with something (cross-curricular language teaching) but they didn’t really took it – I feel like maybe it’s about the receiving party that they don’t really go for it.”

Furthermore, because all of the participants were teaching at small schools, they did not have options at choosing with whom to work with. According to teacher A, at small school’s teachers have their own visions and rights at carrying out their lessons as they please, which complicates the potential cooperation between teachers and subjects. Fautley and Savage (2011: 29) agree on the subject; they argue that cross-curricular education is quite strongly connected to the teachers’ personal opinions and beliefs on the importance of various subjects taught and how they should be taught, which also affects the de facto teaching and learning occurring in schools.

The impact of small, rural schools was mentioned six times during the interviews. For example, in small areas the visual arts teachers tend to be too busy for cross-curricular teaching as they are usually working in multiple schools as the sole art teachers. Moreover, usually in areas like this the school transport is sparse which means that the students will be late for their drive to home if the art-integrated lessons protract even a little, as noted by

teacher E. However, teacher B saw working in a small school as an opportunity: the class sizes are smaller and the school budget is negotiable, resulting in more freedom to further implement creative teaching. On the subject of rural schools, LaGarry and Richard (2018: 146-157) confirm that rural teachers are accustomed to difficulties not occurring in urban schools e.g. time constraints, multiple roles and a larger workload put on a single teacher and a shortage of proper equipment, which hinder their imagination and creativity of the teachers planning arts-integrated education.

4.4 The students' attitudes towards arts-integrated EFL teaching

All of the participants in the present study mentioned how the receptiveness of the students affects their teaching methods. Even though in every group there are some students who would enjoy arts-integrated tasks, those rather unwilling to do such assignments seemed to constitute the majority – or at least the most vocal part – of the group. Furthermore, every teacher in the study had had challenging groups of students where even a slight divergence from normal routines resulted in a disinclined atmosphere in the classroom; teacher C even mentioned having groups where it was impossible to try anything outside of the textbook. Unwilling and insecure students were mentioned ten times. According to LaGarry and Richard (2018: 146-157), some students can indeed express demotivation, frustration, and exhaustion in the arts-enhanced classrooms.

Example 5 Teacher A: “Jos tehtävän rajaisi silleen että sen pitää nyt olla jollakin tavalla vaikka kuvaamataitton liittyvää tai jotakin taidetta, niin osa (luokasta) on sit silleen blaaH”.

”If an assignment was limited to having something to do with art or to be some kind of art, then part (of the group) would be like blaaH”.

However, teacher E stated that students usually enjoy arts-integrated tasks like crafting even though their first impressions usually include insecurity and unenthusiasm concerning their individual art skills. Yet, in the end students seem to feel triumphant and pleased with themselves for surviving an assignment that is different from their normal routines. Moreover, according to Teacher B the students seem to become more interested in learning when they can detach themselves from the textbook for a while. Conforming to this way of thinking, teacher D mentioned that the freedom to choose in accordance with suitable boundaries can inspire and motivate the students. Teacher A also emphasized the importance of learning

motivation and how it can be enhanced by linking the teaching to the personal lives of the students. Likewise, Demoss (2011: 22-23) has reported that in the end arts-integrated lessons are demanding and active work which surpass the concept of “fun” and result in “more complex cognitive processes” and the learning of new ways to handle the learning task. In the present study artistic students or students otherwise likely interested in arts-integrated education were mentioned six times.

Example 6 Teacher E: ”Kaikissa jutuissa mitkä jotka jotenkin rikkoo rajoja, oli se taidetta tai mitä, on hyvä että ne voi olla tosi voimaannuttavia kokemuksia silleen että tehdään juttuja opiskelijoiden mukavuusrajojen ulkopuolelta mutta tietysti ei kannata mennä tasolle et se on oikeasti ahdistavaa ja hirveää eikä pysty olemaan – se pitää huomioida”.

”In everything that somehow breaks boundaries, whether it was visual arts or what, the good thing is that they can be very empowering experiences when dealing with things outside of the students’ comfort zone but of course it’s not recommended to go to a level that is seriously distressing and terrible and impossible to cope with – that needs to be taken into consideration”

5 CONCLUSIONS

The present study attempted to examine how EFL teachers in Finland perceived and experienced the concept of integrating visual arts into EFL both in general and in their own classrooms. In summary, the idea was quite foreign to the participants, yet they had positive feelings about the subject in general. However, they reported multiple possible difficulties in integrating it in their own classrooms: for example, the lack of time and resources; the other teachers and their opinions and habits; the students’ reception to arts-integrated teaching; the national curriculum; working in rural schools; and their own relationships to visual arts. In order to successfully integrate visual arts into EFL teaching, the previous obstacles should be considered in the funding of education and in the teacher training – as well as in further defining the concept and duties of an EFL teacher.

Furthermore, in the present study the cooperation with other subject teachers was essential for the participants and a necessary part of integrating visual arts into EFL teaching and learning.

Previous research has argued that cooperation with other professionals in the field of cross-curricular education is critical and possibly extremely fruitful (LaGarry & Richard 2018; Sotiropoulou-Zormpala 2016), which was also perceived in the beliefs and opinions of the teachers in the present study – even though it was not one of the elements originally measured in the study in question. Consequently, in the future this aspect should not be neglected even when researching the integration of various school subjects in individual subject teachers' own classrooms, seeing how vital cooperation is in education.

Moreover, in the present study visual arts was seen as a way to enhance the teaching of English instead of as an integrated, equal part of the lesson. According to Demoss (2011), this tends to happen when either one of the subjects taught are prioritized over the other. This could be explained by the fact that the teachers interviewed for the present study are all subject teachers of English, who might see the academic portion (i.e. English) as the main focus of the lessons while regarding the possibility of visual arts as an “educational enhancement” to their teaching. Further research on the power dynamics of different subject domains and their functions in teaching as well as the differences in beliefs and opinions between various subject teachers and their subjects taught could be valuable to further improve the field of cross-curricular education as well as the cooperation between teachers.

In conclusion, cross-curricular studies need to take into consideration the aims and objectives of the lesson, the nature of different school-subjects and their power dynamics, the various kinds teachers and learners, the resources required, the context and the content of the lesson and the ways to assess and evaluate learning. In addition, visual arts integration requires skills that allow the instructor to manage with unpredictability that comes with the creative, innovative and aesthetic nature of the lesson. Due to this, Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2016: 43-54) argues that one of the reasons why arts-integration is seen as difficult is that the teacher education and its training period is not enough for preparing the future teachers for arts-integrated teaching. The subject of arts-integrated cross-curricular education could benefit from examining the state of the teacher education in Finland as well as discussing the status visual arts has in education. Visual arts have the potential of being an equally important element of education among the already established subject domains, if only the significance

of artistry and creativity would be broadly authenticated in discussions about teaching and learning.

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