

# PRACTICING ACTIVE NON-ACTIVENESS IN THE FACILITATION OF ARTS-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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Based on his personal experience, the author aims to examine some of the key competencies that he considers essential for facilitators of group activities in arts-based environmental education (AEE). In this, participants are encouraged to enhance their sensibility to the environment through artistic approaches. A case in point is a workshop called “making a little me”. Its participants sculpt – while keeping their eyes closed – a clay version of their own seated body in miniature. When guiding such a workshop, it is of critical importance, according to the author, to encourage the participants to suspend their judgments on the art works of others. The facilitator should make every effort to provide a safe environment by practicing “holding space”.

KEYWORDS: arts-based environmental education, facilitator, teacher, holding space, open-ended.

## INTRODUCTION

In this article, I look at a developing educational field that seeks to combine art education and environmental education – two pedagogic spheres that hitherto have mostly remained separate from each other. This relatively novel approach, which has been called “arts-based environmental education”<sup>1</sup>, aims to lend an artistic grounding to our education about

the green and built environment. Rather than starting such an endeavor by accessing preconceived scientific knowledge, participants are encouraged to seek a direct connection to the world by actively using their senses and imagination. My focus here will be on a specific aspect of arts-based environmental education (hereafter abbreviated as AEE), namely, the role of its teacher and facilitator.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of my own experiences, I present my thoughts on the kind of competencies I

1 Meri-Helga Mantere, “Foreword”, in: *Image of the Earth: Writings on Art-Based Environmental Education*, Ed. Meri-Helga Mantere, M. Barron, trans., Helsinki: University of Art of Design, 1995, pp. 1–2.

2 Here I zoom in on a more restrained “persona” of the figure of teacher or educator, namely, him or her acting as facilitator of an educational process. In this, his or her key role is to act as a catalyst of meaning-making activities, which ideally primarily originate from the participants’ own engagement.

have come to consider indispensable for me as an artist educator<sup>3</sup> guiding such group processes. In discussing and sharing some of the key outcomes of my research on this theme,<sup>4</sup> I aim to make these findings available for use and further reflection to colleagues aiming to practice or develop similar activities themselves.

It was in the 1990s that Finnish art educator Meri-Helga Mantere first coined the concept of AEE.<sup>5</sup> Challenged by the growing awareness of the environmental imperatives of the day, Mantere found it more and more important to go back to the very basics of the process and skill of perception. This is how she articulated her approach at the time:

I try to support fresh perception, the nearby, personal enjoyment and pleasure of perceiving the world from the heart. To achieve that, it is necessary to stop, be quiet, have time and feel psychologically secure in order to perceive the unknown, the sometimes wild and unexpected. At times conscious training of the senses, decoding the stereotype, is needed. I aim at an openness to sensitivity, new and personal ways to articulate and share one's environmental experiences which might be beautiful, disgusting, peaceful or threatening. I support and facilitate the conversation with the environment.<sup>6</sup>

3 I thank Jeroen Lutters for introducing me to the concept of *artist educator*. By this, he refers to an artist and teacher whose thinking and practice – both in formal and in informal learning environments – is thoroughly informed by an art-specific, creative and artistic approach; (Lutters, 2017).

4 Cf. Jan van Boeckel, *At the Heart of Art and Earth: An Exploration of Practices in Arts-Based Environmental Education*, Helsinki: Aalto University, School of Arts, Design and Architecture, 2013.

5 A nuance is appropriate here. Mantere herself prefers to use the term “art-based environmental education”; I opt for the plural form “arts-based”, also in the remainder of this article.

6 Meri-Helga Mantere, “Art and the Environment: An Art-Based Approach to Environmental Education”, in: *Rapporten om utbildning*, 3, Ed. L. Rubinstein Reich, Malmö, Sweden: Lärarhögskolan, [online], 1998, pp. 30–35, [accessed 21-06-2017], <http://www.naturearteducation.org/Articles/Art%20and%20the%20environment.pdf>, p. 32.

According to Mantere, the burden of scientific information that is commonly part of environmental education may run the risk of stiffening the participants’ artistic and the facilitator’s pedagogical activity, as qualifiers such as “scientifically correct” and “scientifically incorrect” may come to stand in the way. For her, this is just one of the difficulties one may encounter when moving into the zone between science and art.<sup>7</sup>

At present, there is no established definition of AEE. Scholars Hilary Inwood and Ryan Taylor (2012) work with a slightly different concept, which they call “environmental art education” and define as “an interdisciplinary endeavor that draws elements from the more established fields of visual art education, science education and environmental education, amongst others”. They go on to say that “it fosters the kind of transdisciplinary learning argued for by environmental educators by integrating knowledge, pedagogy and narrative from the visual arts, sciences, outdoor education, and environmental education.”<sup>8</sup> Through that, educators try to develop the awareness of and engagement with environmental concepts such as interdependence, systems-thinking, biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability. Additionally, according to Inwood and Taylor, environmental art education can also offer opportunities for artistic forms of environmental activism for students of all ages by encouraging the development of creativity alongside cross-curricular learning in pursuit of the higher goal of sustainability.

The two descriptions partly overlap and partly complement each other. I would hold that AEE puts its emphasis on perceiving the circumambient environment through the senses. One of its aims thereby is to engage practitioners in new ways, through igniting or stimulating their curiosity in ways that conventional

7 Meri-Helga Mantere, “Foreword”, p. 89.

8 Hilary J. Inwood & Ryan W. Taylor, “Creative Approaches to Environmental Learning: Two Perspectives on Teaching Environmental Art Education”, in: *International Electronic Journal of Environmental Education*, 2 (1), 2012, p. 66.

approaches to environmental education may not be able to achieve. This intention, however, is not void of weaknesses. An artist educator's<sup>9</sup> enthusiasm to bring about such "openness to sensitivity" may cause him or her to leap over other arduous challenges like how to integrate such novel artistic ways of seeking understandings with more established and rigorously scientific approaches (e.g. to studying interdependence relations within a given ecosystem).

Another shortcoming may be that facilitated artistic practices with groups may appear to somewhat resemble, or even tilt towards, art therapy. Typically, in AEE activities, participants may at some point be encouraged to bespeak and work with certain aspects of their inner world. However, in general, most art educators – and the same holds for AEE facilitators – are neither trained nor qualified to act as professional therapists. Yet, their efforts may, even unwontedly, open up some real therapeutic dimensions and consequences. As I have come to experience, it is precisely in the field of tension between "inviting the unforeseen" on the one hand, and handling the sometimes profound impacts of such undertaking on the other, that I (and probably other AEE facilitators as well) often seem to operate. I will try to unpack this more fully further on in this article.

What begins to happen when we seek to connect to the world primarily through art, rather than pre-established scientific knowledge? A foundational presupposition here is that artmaking activity can contribute in unique ways to the sharpening and deepening of our perception and make us more receptive to the world. Through it, we are invited to leave our habitual ("autopilot") ways aside and to grope our way forward, as we deal with the immediate circumstances at hand. Artistic activities can thus provide us with an

opportunity to access more fully not only the sensory and perceptual, but also the emotional, symbolic and creative dimensions of human consciousness. Unlike other types of outdoor or environmental education which offer room for aesthetic experiences, AEE turns the tables in a fundamental way. Art is not an added quality, the icing on the cake; it is rather *the point of departure* in an effort to find ways in which people can connect to their environment.

#### TRACING THE BACKGROUND TO ARTS-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

In Finland, already around the early 1970s, the insight took root that the development of environmental consciousness can and should be an important area of art education. At the time, art educators wished to emphasize the manifoldness and diversity of our environmental problems. They were no longer understood as purely biological, economic and social, but also as aesthetic, and consequently, they were taken to be part and parcel of art education.<sup>10</sup> Towards the end of the 1980s, new trends emerged. Art educators began to develop activities that were strongly influenced by down-to-earth phenomena in environmental art and new developing ecological awareness. Pohjakallio lists the following sources of inspiration for the new activities: deep ecology, gestalt therapy, experimental learning theories, and environmental aesthetics. The ability and experience of Finnish art teachers to work in environmental education through artistic means began to draw the interest of environmental educators in general. What was appealing was the insight of these Finnish pedagogues that attitudes and values apparently do not seem to change through teaching that only emphasizes scientific facts. By consequence,

9 I use the term "artist educator" here almost as a synonym of art educator. With the former term, more emphasis is given to one's artistic bearings, in the sense that artists educators aim to devote considerable attention to both their own artistic practice and their pedagogical functioning with others.

10 Pirkko Pohjakallio, "Mapping Environmental Education Approaches in Finnish Art Education", [online], 2007, [accessed 21-06-2017], <http://www.naturearteducation.org/Articles/Pohjakallio.pdf>.

they more and more came to appreciate employing emotional, aesthetic and practical methods. In the newly emerging AEE, the life-world approach came to stand central. Emphasis was put on the idea that the environment is, first of all, inhabited by persons and not something remote or detached.

However, a composite approach such as AEE inevitably seems to always fall between two stools: it is neither environmental education proper (because it starts off from an arts- rather than science-based perspective), nor can it convincingly be classified as a subfield of art education (when understood in a narrow sense of “teaching art”), as it moves away from a conceptualization of artmaking as a primarily self-referential discipline (“l’art pour l’art”). In his article “From Environmental Art to Environmental Education”<sup>11</sup> Timo Jokela, a Finnish professor in art education, has listed different types of exercises that illustrate how environmental art can be a method of environmental education. On the one hand, these exercises are faithful to the practice of environmental art and, as such, they are a basic part of art education. On the other, they are also methods for increasing one’s sensitivity towards the environment and, in that sense, says Jokela, they are essentially environmental education.

In her practice of “creative nature connection”, or “artful ecological education”, Canadian art educator Lisa Lipsett wants practitioners to move beyond “thinking *about* nature, to learning *with* and *through* nature”.<sup>12</sup> Her approach to AEE alternates between moving “from the inside out” (creating connection with self) to letting “the outside in” (creating connection with nature). When we paint, says Lipsett, we not only can see changes in a moth or a tree, but we also

embody and feel these changes in ourselves. Artmaking thus becomes “a transformative way to know”<sup>13</sup>. In developing this approach, she is inspired by Australian environmentalist John Seed, who suggests that we can extend our identity into nature: “the nature within and the nature without are continuous”<sup>14</sup>. Lipsett’s concept of learning reminds us that any learning of an outside environment is inevitably grounded in our own body coming to awareness of itself, in a reciprocal relation with the more-than-human.

As a Dutch art educator, I became inspired by how Mantere and other Finnish art teachers had brought art education and environmental education together in this fairly unique way. From 2006 onwards, I carried out my doctoral studies at the University of Art and Design (now called Aalto University), an appropriate place to conduct my research. My primary interest was to explore some of the epistemologies that guide AEE. I learned about exercises that aim to focus the participants’ observations on the processes that are happening in the natural and urban environment and encourage them to perceive the world more sensitively. The foundational idea was that through artmaking, participants would be able to attend more carefully to phenomena like growth and decay, the flow of water, the turning of day and night, the changes of light, the wind, etc. As the time passed, I started to develop and deepen my own AEE practices as well, mostly with adult participants. After years of experience, I focused my attention on three particular group activities, which I had partly learned from others and had partly developed myself. I call these “wildpainting”, “the lines of the hand”, and “making a little me”. As a “reflective practitioner”<sup>15</sup>, I started to explore their meaning for and impact on participants, and this became a core part of my inquiry.

11 Timo Jokela, “From Environmental Art to Environmental Education”, in: *Image of the Earth: Writings on Art-Based Environmental Education*, Ed. Meri-Helga Mantere, Helsinki: University of Art and Design, 1995, pp. 18–28.

12 Lisa Lipsett, *Beauty Muse: Painting in Communion with Nature*, Salt Spring Island, BC, Canada: Creative by Nature Books, 2009, p. 283.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

14 Seed, cited in Lipsett, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

15 Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.

## “MAKING A LITTLE ME”

In the following, I will look specifically at one particular AEE activity, “the making of a little me”. It is a workshop that usually takes a little more than an hour. During this workshop, the participants work most of the time with their eyes closed. They are invited to make a miniature clay sculpture of their own seated body, “a little me”. This workshop and, more specifically, what it takes to facilitate such an artistic group process, will be the focus of the remainder of this article. The inspiration to regularly perform the “making of a little me” workshop with groups came from British sculptor Antony Gormley. It was he who facilitated a similar workshop in 2006 at Schumacher College in the United Kingdom, of which I was one of the participants. I understood and appreciated the activity as the deepening of the awareness of one’s corporeal existence while being present in a given environment, through participating in an artistic exploration involving clay modelling. For this reason, I regard it as a fitting expression of AEE in practice; its core idea is that the fostering of environmental sensibility builds upon an awareness of *being* a body – a body, moreover, that is fundamentally intertwined with the ecological context in which it finds itself. Rather than grounding activities that aim to develop environmental awareness about the “world out there”, the point of departure becomes, first and foremost, the nourishing of the participant’s focused attentiveness to his or her (ecological) self, which is (at least potentially) enhanced through artistic practice. This then becomes the basis for engaging with one’s lifeworld. Artist educator Gormley guided us to close our eyes, grab some clay, and, while moulding it, to focus our full attention on the different parts of our body, starting from our feet and moving slowly upwards to the head, in a sequential fashion. When he, for example, encouraged us to pay attention to what we perceived in our shoulders – if they, for example, felt heavy or light, tense or



1. Making a “little me” of clay with the eyes closed

„Mažojo aš“ lipdymas iš molio užmerktomis akimis

relaxed – he subsequently asked us to express what we felt in and through the piece of clay we were working on, and which would be added to the emerging “little me” figure. The artistic challenge thus became how one could give a 3D shape, outwardly, to what one perceived internally in one’s body through mindful concentration on its different constituent elements. Only when the whole sculpture was completed, could one open one’s eyes and have a chance to see the actual result. After the hands-on artmaking activity with clay, a reflective session followed, in which we stepped back and tried to address what kind of meaning-making had taken place throughout the entire experience.

Since having undergone this myself, I have taken it further by facilitating numerous workshops in the making of clay “little me’s” over the years, thereby taking the immersive experience with Gormley as my model. Time and again, I noticed that this exercise

tends to have a deep effect on those participating in it. Partly, I assume, this is because the participants, keeping their eyes closed, come to experience that they can work artistically without being hindered too much by a degree of anxiety that can be brought about by feeling themselves exposed to the “judging eye” of others who may (or may not) be monitoring what they are doing. And partly, this is because they have to “let go”, as the workshop unfolds in time. They cannot check if the “little me” that is growing in their hands is an anatomically correct depiction or if it is developing in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing. And exactly because such considerations are no longer of primary concern, this circumstance suddenly affords a certain freedom in how one works with clay as an expressive medium.

In the following, I will focus my attention specifically on what I have learned, through the years, about what it means to facilitate an artistic workshop such as “making a little me”. Appreciating it as a fitting example of performing AEE in practice, I will try to identify some of the key facilitator competencies that I have come to deem important. Most of what I will present here is based on the findings of my arts-based auto-ethnographic doctorate research.<sup>16</sup>

#### HANDLING OPEN-ENDEDNESS IN AN ARTMAKING PROCESS

As part of my research, I conducted interviews with participants in “making a little me” workshops. One of the things I found that stood out was that there often is a marked difference between, on the one hand, participants who would have preferred to get clear instructions about what the activity would entail and, on the other, those who – in contrast – *liked* the aspect that we “jumped right into it”, as it were, without them having much of a clue what was going to happen. One

of the participants with the name Hanna,<sup>17</sup> for example, expressed disappointment about the lack of prior information: “I liked it. But what I missed were the introductory things.... It might have helped me to orientate myself if I had a little backing and information. What is the point of these practices? The body, movement, how important are these when you define AEE?” Participant Bente added: “I felt a slight sense of frustration. How long is this going to take, five minutes or five hours? It doesn’t have to be so precise, but, with that, I can relax in the situation.”

Just as well, there are also those who enjoy the *not*-knowing. Participant Britta, for example, recalled her eagerness to get going at once: “It felt calm, full of expectation.... I like it when you do things and you know: *now* it is starting!” And Petra said, similarly: “It was exciting to start. Let’s go see what we do! Something new, unexpected.”

These different responses to the way the artmaking activity is initiated – on the one hand, people who like to have its purpose clearly spelled out beforehand, and, on the other, those who enjoy the excitement of not-knowing – form an important aspect of the first phase of “little me making”. It is important to acknowledge and underscore that there can indeed be very different ways in which people approach the activity that they are invited to join. Intentionally leaving an art activity open-ended is different from encouraging participants to work towards an outcome that is largely predetermined. Already in the first phase of an AEE activity as “making a little me”, participants get a sense of commencing something whose outcome cannot be foreseen: the purpose of the activity is not given away by me as facilitator, and they only receive some elementary information as to the “what, why and how” of what is bound to happen. In this type of AEE, I consider it important that – while remaining within a frame consisting of certain parameters and

16 Cf. Jan van Boeckel, *op. cit.*

17 This name, and all the following names of participants, have been anonymized by the author.

rules – it is the *process* itself that, as it were, “decides” what course to follow.

To me, part of the quality of retaining the dimension of open-endedness in the AEE activities that I facilitate has to do with the fact that the materials the participants use (in activities such as “little me making”) often tend to be rather basic. They can thus be applied in multiple ways: the raw materials “only” involve some lumps of clay, a piece of paper and pencil, or some paints, and that is all. What I implicitly hope to communicate through making this choice is that the quality and intensity of an experience of artistic engagement – or, for that matter, of *any* deep experience at all – is not necessarily the function of the exquisite-ness and complexity of the tools or working materials. It is a cliché, but I believe that the elementary nature of the ingredients that are made available can be seen as a genuine example of the maxim “less is more”.

As a facilitator, I have come to underscore a specific element that seems to contribute to and substantially augment the quality of the open-endedness process. And this aspect is vested in me having the inclination, at times, to determine only at the very last instance what the exact content and sequence of activities in the workshop will be. This allows me to be more “on the edge” and to dwell longer in keen excitement about what *may* happen. In that mode, one can take other factors into play such as subtle changes in the weather, or one’s intuitive perception of alterations in mood and concentration of the group members. It may also entail having an open eye for affordances,<sup>18</sup> i.e. those elements of the place or landscape that lend themselves to be used in the artmaking activity – at that very moment in time and locus in space.

In the course of facilitating several AEE activities over the years, I learned that for me, as a facilitator, an important value resides in approaching the upcoming artistic process enthusiastically and with anticipation.

I strive to retain a sense of freshness to what is going to happen, always looking for a point of departure that can be somewhat different, a new setting, or how I can introduce novel elements in the unfolding of the workshop. This improvisational aspect brings along a certain sense of anticipation, which, I believe, is mirrored by a coevolving curiosity among many of the participants: they observe this excitement of looking for something new, a thing not done before, and it seems to ignite their creative energies as well.

Not everyone appreciates “improvising-as-we-go-along” on the part of the facilitator. I have noticed that for some people such a mode of mentoring the process seems to provoke, first and foremost, the feelings of anxiety and frustration. Some people may take it to be an indication of a totally unstructured, sloppy, “anything-goes” artmaking group activity, and consequently interpret it as carelessness and disdain for the participants on the part of the facilitator. Yet, from my perspective, in truth it is rather the opposite that is the case: most often, the activity *is* structured in its seemingly loose character. The circumstance that there is hardly any prescription and explanation provided to the participants in advance does not stem from either neglect or disregard; the underlying intention, rather, is to not “usurp the space” beforehand but to allow for a full evocation of the creative potential the participants may carry themselves.

However, some degree of purposive steering of the artmaking session seems inevitable; certain “rules of play” are indispensable. Or, put otherwise, the *absence* of a frame or guiding context to a group artmaking activity does not necessarily enhance the manifestation and maturation of improvisational qualities. Rather, it paradoxically seems to suppress their expression, as at least some of the participants feel they are simply presented with too many options.<sup>19</sup>

Another aspect of allowing for open-endedness is

18 James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

19 Cf. Stephan Nachmanovitch, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*, New York: Tarcher/Putman, 1990.

that the facilitator, in the reflective part that follows the artmaking activity itself, may choose to refrain from asking leading questions which elicit only certain types of answers. By abstaining from staging the scene and by asking only open questions, the facilitator may gently “force” participants to dwell a little longer in the liminal space of being in uncertainty (and thus maybe also enhance their ability to handle this). This space may be rather different from the kind of educational and artmaking settings that they are accustomed to. At the same time, the facilitator neither wants the participants to acquire a sense of feeling helpless, of having been cast out into chaos with no clue whatsoever about what is happening. It requires effort to strike a proper balance here. In the following, I will look a bit more closely at what I believe it takes from a facilitator to be able to walk this tightrope successfully.

As I see it, there is – from the very outset – an interesting dialectical tension between two forces. On the one hand, there is an urge, when needed, to actively interfere in and influence what will happen in a session. On the other, there is a wish and need to occasionally “step back”, to allow sufficient space to what participants may experience and what may manifest itself in the process. I see my contribution, as facilitator, ideally as that of being a catalytic agent that helps to bring about the optimal conditions for the taking place of an immersive artistic experience, an event which allows the participants to engage as fully as possible. A metaphor that I sometimes use to illustrate what I mean with this is that I, in best cases, am able to assist them in “opening a window” in themselves of which they were not aware that they had kept it closed. When this happens, I can take some distance, thus allowing for the experience to be one that primarily stems from and provides meaning to each individual participant.

The attitude that is demanded perhaps comes closest to the kind of contemplative “non-acting action” that Simone Weil encouraged. For her, the attentive receptivity of *action nonagissante* constitutes an action

that is undertaken with no attachment to its results or consequences. Alexander Irwin recounts that Weil had transcribed the following verses of the Bhagavad Gita for herself: “He who can see inaction in action and action in inaction, he among all men is wise; he remains in balance even as he pursues action.” (Weil, cited in Irwin, 2002, pp. 179–180)<sup>20</sup>

This insight is reminiscent of the Taoist concept of *wu wei*, literally meaning “without action”, and involving “non-doing”, or the art of letting-be. Such an attitude does not imply the dulling of the mind – rather, it is a “creative quietude”, Ted Kardash explains (1998).<sup>21</sup> He adds that it refers to a behavior arising from a sense of being connected to others and to one’s environment: “It is action that is spontaneous and effortless. At the same time it is not to be considered inertia, laziness, or mere passivity. Rather, it is the experience of going with the grain or swimming with the current.” Kardash goes on to explain that our contemporary expression “going with the flow” is a direct expression of the *wu wei* principle. One of the aims is to act without effort and to attain the state of doing without doing. The opposite of this would be when a person exerts his or her will upon the world, thereby disrupting the existing harmony.

The state of *wei wu wei* is an interesting variation of *wu wei*, close to Weil’s notion of non-acting action. For here one paradoxically seeks “action without action”, or active non-action. One accomplishes what is needed, but one leaves no trace of having done it. Philosopher David Loy speaks of a natural, non-willful form of action which does not force but yields: “Rather than being a version of doing nothing, this might be called ‘the action of passivity.’”<sup>22</sup> Loy regards

20 Alexander C. Irwin, *Saints of the Impossible: Bataille, Weil, and the Politics of the Sacred*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

21 Ted Kardash, “Taoism: The Wu-Wei Principle, part 4”, [online], 1998, [accessed 21-06-2017], <http://www.jadedragon.com/archives/june98/tao.html>.

22 David Loy, *Wei-Wu-Wei: Nondual Action. Philosophy East and*

*wei wu wei* as nothing less than “the central paradox of Taoism”.

In an educational context, *wei wu wei* could mean that no course of action is dictated to students. They themselves may have the idea that they were not taught anything actively, while the whole point was that they would generate and integrate their own learning through lived experience.

#### WITHHOLDING JUDGMENT AND HOLDING THE SPACE

If a facilitator wants to foster an environment conducive to new learning, then it is important, it seems to me, that he or she should encourage the participants to embrace and foster a respectful attitude towards each other. According to art educator and therapist Peter London, it is essential that a facilitator, already at an early stage of his or her interactions with participants, should encourage them to suspend their judgments. Ideally, they should avoid praising or criticizing each other’s work, and instead direct their efforts to providing a welcoming space to whatever the other may want to share (and only if the latter has the inclination to do so):

I encourage participants to hold back judgments of good and bad. When we use old criteria, then only the old will be good. There is no opportunity to explore the features of the emerging new. I ask them to try to be indifferent to: ‘I like it – I don’t like it,’ because if they approach it that way, they will veil it with their opinion.<sup>23</sup>

In any facilitated group art activity it can happen that suddenly something painful or traumatic comes to the surface. In such cases, the facilitator is responsible, in London’s view, to “attend to the wound” before the person concerned leaves the artmaking session:

*West*, 35 (1), 1985, pp. 73–86.

23 Peter London, personal communication, September 25, 2006.

“To do otherwise would be unethical and unprofessional. If one invites for vulnerability, one stays with the person concerned long enough until that wound has sufficiently healed and the group or the person can go on independently of the facilitator.” For him, this entails the practice of “holding space”. It means that we attend to other persons in whatever journey they’re on without making them feel inadequate, trying to fix them, or trying to impact the outcome. Holding space for other people implies offering unconditional support, and letting go of judgement and control. As London elaborates this point further: “When someone has something important to say, just listen, don’t flee. Don’t help him or her out of it, just listen. Don’t judge. Be patient. For if one would push, a healthy person would choose to retreat.”<sup>24</sup>

According to Meri-Helga Mantere, one never knows what people bring with them when they come to participate in an artmaking session. All participants bring their own history and experience. She agrees with London that if a participant gets into emotions that are hard to handle, the facilitator then stays with the person concerned until he or she has recovered enough balance. The rule of the thumb that she practices in such situations is to never psychologize. Instead, one ought to stay with the artwork itself: “It means that you discuss about the artwork, not about the artmaker.”<sup>25</sup>

Occasionally I have experienced myself that, irrespective of what kind of artmaking session is going on, participants can at *any* moment (and at times quite unexpectedly) touch upon aspects of their inner being that take them by surprise. When it happens that a participant is confronted with something that stirs his or her emotions in unexpected, surprising ways, it is important, it seems to me, that a facilitator should respond as adequately as possible. At the same time, he or she should not transgress the boundary and *act* as a therapist, if formal training in art therapy is lacking.

24 Peter London, personal communication, September 25, 2006.

25 Meri-Helga Mantere, personal communication, March 16, 2012.



2. The author facilitating the reflective part after participants have finished making their “little me’s”

Autorius moderuoja aptarimą su dalyviais, jiems pabaigus lipdyti savo „mažuosius aš“

The art of practicing holding space does not imply that a facilitator remains disconnected or stays at a distance; the intention, rather, is that he or she interacts in a way that participants are able to undergo more deeply what they are experiencing. As Chris Corrigan suggests in his *The Tao of Holding Space*,<sup>26</sup> it is “the art of being completely present, and *totally invisible*” (p. 8, emphasis added). For him, holding the space is ultimately an act of courage and leadership, as it takes resolve to stand still and trust that the people with whom one is working know what to do. One of the great tasks

for teachers in our time, says Parker Palmer in his *The Courage to Teach*,<sup>27</sup> is to cultivate their ability to “hear people to speech”. In making space for the other, being fully aware of his or her presence, such teaching involves cultivating one’s dexterity to listen to a voice before it is spoken:

It means not rushing to fill our students’ silences with fearful speech of our own and not trying to coerce them into saying things that we want to hear. It means entering empathically into the student’s world so that he or she perceives you as someone

<sup>26</sup> Chris Corrigan, “The Tao of Holding Space: 81 Short Chapters on Facilitating Open Space”, [online], 2006, [accessed 21-06-2017], <http://www.chriscorrigan.com>.

<sup>27</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

who has the promise of being able to hear another person's truth.<sup>28</sup>

Part of the ability to hold space is the capacity to respond adequately to expressions of fear for the art-making process, especially by people who purport they are not talented or have never made art previously. In that respect it is remarkable that when participants work with clay in "making a little me" sessions, they, in some deeper sense, *cannot* do it wrong, because it is not about whether or not the sculpture in the end is beautiful or if it is an anatomically accurate rendering of a human being. Inner fears do not seem to play out to the same extent as they could when a person would be painting or drawing with the eyes wide open in the company of the whole group. In the "making of a little me", one inevitably exposes oneself – certainly at the moment when everyone has opened their eyes again. Sometimes people make the belly very big, and at other occasions people even make an open hole in their torso; they report feeling some kind of emptiness there. Because participants have their eyes closed during the process, they seem to allow themselves to be more open and vulnerable.

When studying the relationships between the participants and the facilitator in AEE activities and their impact on each other, it is important to bear in mind whose point of view and whose agency is brought to the fore. The participant, through her artmaking, is acting upon her environment. But she, at the same time, is being acted upon by that same environment and through the facilitation that the teacher provides. Part of her undergoes or is receptive to what is offered to her, and part of her makes her own decisions on what to take up and what to neglect. Put differently, she is invited by the facilitator to improvise on her own terms, but she is also being directed through the way the facilitator guides the process. In the encounter, surrendering to the process and actively intervening (taking action) alternate.

## DISCUSSION

In this paper I tried to explore some of the specific competencies of a facilitator of AEE that can be identified, particularly in the activity where participants sculpt a clay "little me" while keeping their eyes closed. Taking it at face value, it may seem that exactly the circumstance that much weight is lent to its open-ended character implies that in fact *anybody* would be able to facilitate such activities. I believe the contrary, for I think it is important to underline that non-interference should not be mistaken for neglect or turning one's back on whatever happens.

I found that it is required of a facilitator that he or she be able to hold space for whatever unfolds in the multifaceted encounter: between a participant and co-participants, between participants and their emerging artworks, and between participants and the circumambient, more-than-human world. The skill to both register – if even intuitively – what happens at these different levels, *and* to prepare the ground for what may manifest itself next, asks for a versatile position of concentrated non-interfering and *yet* being ready to act swiftly and through improvisation when the flow of the process or the wellbeing of the participants would require so.

It is no less important that the facilitator both demonstrates and fosters an attitude of withholding judgment, in consideration of the vulnerability that the participants' presentation of their artworks may entail. Thus, breaking away from more conventional views that the ultimate value of art resides in the contemplation of finished results, the focal point becomes the meaning-making that takes place in artmaking as a process. Part of this is a shift of attention from the roles of individual persons (participants *and* the facilitator) to their patterned mutual relationships.

Each and every session that one facilitates will be unique. However, compared to group activities in which the vulnerability of the participants' inner

28 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

selves is less at stake, I would argue that a facilitator of an AEE activity such as “making a little me” can expect that he or she will have to deal with amplified expressions of fear and need for safety and containment. Therefore, I regard the ability to hold space so that participants can decide themselves what they want to share (and *not* share) of their work as fundamental, with a parallel capacity to bear witness to whatever will be manifested.

Ultimately, I would argue that one has to build a practice in facilitation which resonates with one’s own identity and integrity, with what Palmer called “the teacher within”<sup>29</sup>. Here it would be instructive for an AEE facilitator, I would suggest, to regularly attend AEE activities oneself, but then as a *co*-participant among other participants. For such presence allows one to approach the process again and again “from the inside out”, and provides some safeguard against the risk of stiffening in habitual and routine forms of educational practice. A consideration here – which I believe holds true for any pedagogue, in the arts, environmental education or elsewhere – is that such immersion in the process as a participant, in best cases, refreshes and feeds one’s own indispensable excitement about learning.

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29 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

# AKTYVAUS NEAKTYVUMO PRAKTIKAVIMAS ĮGYVENDINANT MENAIS PAGRĮSTĄ APLINKOS EDUKACIJĄ

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SANTRAUKA

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: menais pagrįsta aplinkos edukacija, tarpininkas, mokytojas, erdvės valdymas, atvirumas.

Įprastai meno edukacija ir aplinkos edukacija išlieka visiškai atskiri laukai. Menais pagrįsta aplinkos edukacija (*arts-based environmental education*, AEE) yra bandymas šiuos laukus priartinti vienas prie kito. Šioje edukacijoje menas nėra pridėtinis bruožas ar vyšnia ant torto; tai jau greičiau yra išeities taškas bandant aptikti būdus, kaip žmonės gali rasti kontaktą su aplinka. Tai nėra taip paprasta, nes susitelkus į meninį aspektą galima nepastebėti kitų iššūkių, pavyzdžiui, kaip integruoti meninius metodus su labiau įsitvirtinusiiais ir griežtai moksliniais požiūriais. Straipsnyje autorius nagrinėja, iš kur kilusi AEE sąvoka, išvystyta Suomijoje paskutiniame XX a. dešimtmetyje, ir sutelkia dėmesį į vieną konkrečią AEE veiklą, kurią jis kelis kartus įgyvendino su grupėmis – „mažąją aš sukūrimą“. Naudodami šlapią molį, dalyviai lipdė savo sėdinčių kūnų mini versijas. Viso proceso metu jie buvo užsimerkę, o tarpininkas žingsnis po žingsnio vedė juos į priekį.

Remdamasis savo asmenine patirtimi, autorius pateikia savo mintis apie tai, kurios kompetencijos jam atrodo svarbiausios menininkui edukatoriui, vadovaujančiam tokiam meniniam grupiniam procesui. Jis atkreipia dėmesį į atvirumo aspektą jo vadovaujamuose AEE užsiėmimuose. Užsiėmimo tikslas ne iš karto atkleidžiamas dalyviams – būtent pats procesas, jei galima taip pasakyti, „nusprenžia“, kokią kryptį pasirinkti. Užsiėmimo vadovas jaučia dialektinę įtampą tarp noro, esant reikalui, aktyviai kištis ir poreikio kartkartėmis „atsitraukti“ kaip tarpininkui, šitaip suteikdamas pakankamai erdvės tam, ką gali jausti dalyviai ir kas gali išryškėti paties proceso metu. Idealiu atveju tarpininkas veikia kaip katalizatorius, padedantis sukurti optimaliausias sąlygas įvykti įtraukiančiai meninei patirčiai.

Autoriui svarbiausia atrodo, kad tarpininkai skatintų dalyvius susilaikyti nuo kitų dalyvių kūrinių vertinimo, vengiant ir pagyrų, ir kritikos, kad proceso metu jie jaustųsi saugiau. Tarpininkai yra skatinami išmokti „valdyti erdvę“ (menas būti ir labai įsitraukusiam ir tuo pat metu visiškai nematomam). Jiems yra reikalingas įgūdis fiksuoti, tegu ir intuityviai, tai, kas atsitinka įvairiais meno kūrimo proceso momentais, ir paruošti dirvą tam, kas gali atsiskleisti toliau. Tai reikalauja užimti lanksčią tikslingo nesikišimo poziciją ir tuo pat metu būti pasiruošusiam veikti greitai ir improvizuoti, kai to reikalauja proceso eiga ar gera dalyvių savijauta. Tokia *wei wu wei* būseną reiškia, kad paradoksaliai yra siekiama „veiksmo be veiksmo“. Tikslai yra pasiekiami, tačiau nelieka jokių šio veiksmo pėdsakų. Straipsnio pabaigoje autorius skatina tarpininkus patiems reguliariai lankytis AEE užsiėmimuose, tačiau kaip dalyviams tarp dalyvių. Toks dalyvavimas leidžia pažvelgti į procesą „iš vidaus“ ir suteikia galimybę šiek tiek apsidrausti nuo pavojaus laikytis įprastų ir rutininių edukacinių praktikos formų.