



Implications of the Land Art Training for Kindergarten Teacher Trainees on Their Interdisciplinary Teaching Practices

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1. Introduction

The Contribution of Early Childhood Education to a Sustainable Society" [7] [18] explains how to educate young children with the aim of preventing further degradation of our planet and contributing to a sustainable society where values of human rights, peace and justice are upheld. The publication argues that as early childhood education is about laying a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation, it has an enormous potential in fostering values, attitudes and skills that support sustainable development. There is a great deal in the traditions of early childhood pedagogies that align with education for sustainability for example, interdisciplinary approach, use of the outdoors for learning and learning through real life projects.

From the other hand, art is, a vehicle to promote global communication and understanding and helps the educator to better explain all about cultural and environmental matters. [12] [13] It is a kind of art that not only cares about nature and environment but also cares about environmental awareness of the people. [14] [15] [16]. Environmental artworks are, special projects where artists, scientists, teachers and students work together. The results are environmental art pieces created by the spirit of "ecology and sustainable development". [2] [10] The most important thing in environmental art is, that these actions have, at the same time, at the same place, an artistic and ecologic meaning. So, environmental art belongs both in Art Education and Environmental Education (14).

The Greek education system has recently introduced a redesigned curriculum – *DEPPS* - which focuses on the "holistic" development of pupils through promoting learning in capacities such as confident individuals, successful learners, effective contributors and responsible citizens etc.. [19] One of the key ideas underpinning the *DEPPS* initiative is the idea of *interdisciplinarity* and the views of knowledge that differing disciplines bring to a particular issue, topic or learning context. But while theoretical arguments for interdisciplinary implementation are strong, such approaches are problematic for both schools and teacher education. Pedagogical Departments of Universities, showed limited attention towards ESD and many of them treat sustainable issues as academic subjects, [3] policy that can not lead to a holistic investigation of environmental issues [20]. So, the future teachers are not motivated and committed to act in the direction of new pedagogical approaches and very often we can see into the classrooms they use traditional practices to teaching about it.

Within this framework the purpose of this study was to describe the effects of teaching a specific Land Art model to teacher trainees in Department of Preschool Education of University of Crete in 2011-2012. Through this project we seek to promote a questioning and critical approach to art teaching, and environmental awareness within the context of early childhood education [4,5], developing a validated inventory of instructional procedures, techniques and assessments methods that may be used by the profession as a framework for curriculum development and for the assessment of program effectiveness.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Our study was attempted to incorporate 70 teacher trainees, enrolled in 4th years of their study in Preschool Department of Education, University of Crete, 17 kindergarten classes, 25 cooperating kindergarten classroom teachers, one kindergarten mentor teacher, an art education instructor-mentor, the university supervisor, and 805 children aged 4-6 years old in an participatory action research [11] project.

2.2 Teacher trainees' training model

The first phase of training constituted the introductory stage where the teacher trainees introduced by the supervisor to the inter-disciplinary approach and the project methodology. During this phase teacher trainees, the advisory teacher and the supervisor discussed the sequential development of the program. Teacher trainees were devised in 17 working team groups (un group for each class).

During the second phase, an art instructor introduced the teacher trainees in Land Artwork. The presentation included three categories of artworks that they praise the sublime of nature and landscape: a)The "Artificial Landscapes", huge sculptures in the countryside where they will be transformed according to the weather, the climate and the time passing by. b)The "Parks and Gardens", big areas designed for enjoy the people, and c)The "Made by Natural Materials", special art pieces made from leaves, stones, rocks, snow, sand etc. [6]

The third phase included the teaching intervention which is still ongoing. During this period the teacher trainees were encouraged to teach the follow topics: *Trees are our life*, *Talos into the cave of Melidoni*, *Prokni & Philomila (the birds of love)*, *Quiet!!! The nature awakens*, *Turtles' protection*, *On the road safely*. Before each teaching



teacher trainees participated in workshops, animated by the supervisor and the advisory teacher, which focused to link the teaching topic with the spirit of sustainability and the Land art.

A focus group interview was conducted with the teacher trainees to gather their views on the Land Art approach and possible contribution to enhancing this approach in their interdisciplinary teaching practices about sustainable education.

3. Results and discussion

Teacher trainees' reports indicated that they had not opportunities to study environmental issues before this program, and the art courses in University were not related to environment education. Teacher trainees, also, mentioned that the training program helped them to improve their knowledge for environmental issues and correctly conceptualize the systemic and holistic character of environmental issues [1]. The program activities helped teacher trainees to realise that environmental issues are not only those connected with the natural dimension of the environment, but also those that have social, political, and economic implications as well. Teacher trainees, also, clarified the holistic and systemic character of sustainable development. Some teacher trainees stated that the program of Land art offered the participants the opportunity to connect global issues to local reality [1] [20].

Through the program, teacher trainees seemed to have acquired an increased sense of personal responsibility, not only as humans but also as professionals. Several teacher trainees stated that their involvement in the program increased their sense of personal responsibility, and they felt ready not only to inform the wider community (parents, citizens) about the environmental degradation, but also to act at a personal level towards the preservation of the environment and the improvement of the quality of life in their communities [20].

Several teacher trainees described that the program of Land art empowered them as professionals to undertake action and work for sustainability. [9] The program helped teacher trainees realise the importance of their role as future teachers. Teacher trainees' reports also stated that the training program promoted their active involvement in designing and implementing appropriate teaching procedures. Several teacher trainees mentioned that the program offered them the opportunity to be actively involved in planning relevant activities, and their statements indicated that the program enhanced their teaching and pedagogical approaches for effectively handling sustainable issues as future teachers. [20]

It seems that the training program provided opportunities for improving teacher trainees' self-efficacy and competence to be involved in Land art activities. They mentioned in their reports that the program functioned as an experiential tool that guided them how to better organize their teaching, to set objectives and accomplish them using various outdoor activities and educational approaches. Teacher trainees' reports indicated that their participation in the program was an amazing experience that fostered their willingness and motivation to be involved in similar activities in the future.

Teacher trainees also stated that their participation in the program helped them to combine theory and practice, while they designed and implemented pedagogical methods that could easily be used in indoor learning activities. The quality of teacher education programmes can be improved only if the teacher educators help student help teacher trainees identify the gap between teaching and theory, and continually facilitate them in connecting their learnt theory and practice. [4] [8]

It was highlighted that the enhanced scope of Land Art Model promoted a "sense of adventure", "openness to new ways of learning," and "willingness to take risks" and helped them to design and apply innovative pedagogical activities targeting critical thinking, participation, outdoor learning, recreative, interactive, active and experiential learning [20].

All the steps of the training program were based on teamwork and encouraged the cooperation between university teacher trainees and their mentor, amongst university teacher trainees, and among university teacher trainees and young children. The results indicated that the net of collaborations that were developed amongst the participants was a crucial factor for improving teacher trainees' teaching abilities and strategies [9].

Land Art readily facilitated the understanding of subject content through interdisciplinary learning and helped teacher trainees to realise that every curriculum subject can contribute to a holistic inquiry of sustainable issues.

Multi-professional collaboration between all the participants in the community of learners we re able to create knowledge and experiences that helped them to change their educational realities by changing practice and their lived realities [17].

4. Conclusions- Recommendations

The results of this study showed that Land Art is an essential instructional tool in training teacher trainees to teach environment education and should be part of the daily instructional methods used in all teacher training programs. Universities play a crucial role by preparing future teachers to understanding that art can support sustainable development in theoretical, practical and instructional level, adapting effective practices in daily instruction [5]. So, it is important initial teachers' education program include courses that connect art and environment as has been the artistic movements of the twentieth century Land Art, Trash Art, Recycle Art, etc. Further research that examines Land Art education practices in Greek schools is recommended.



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