

A Friend to Milli Mörriäinen

The Storification Method Supporting Pupils' Crafting Processes

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Arts-based and creative learning processes should be utilised more in craft education. With the NaCra approach, craft processes are connected to other creative content, mainly narratives. This NaCra study explored pupils' holistic craft processes that incorporated storified elements and the aim was to clarify the key elements of individual craft processes supported by storification. The study involved 12 pupils from the second grade (7–8 years old) in Finnish primary education. Despite the novelty of the holistic approach, all pupils successfully planned, created and evaluated their soft toys. The storification method permeated every stage of the holistic craft process, aiding not only the ideation and design phases but also motivation and increased concentration in the making and evaluation phases. The findings suggest that pupils' holistic craft processes incorporating storified elements work well together as a means for pupils to express their thoughts and imagination into assignments. Furthermore, storified elements make pupils' experiences come to life in the creative crafting process. Pupils should have more opportunities with holistic craft processes where the outcome is uncertain at the beginning of the process.

Keywords: pupil, holistic craft process, crafting, storification, storified elements, soft toy

Introduction

Arts-based or creative methods should be utilised more in early years education, as they allow the integration of diverse learning content and enable more holistic approaches to learning compared to traditional instruction (Aerila et al., 2019). Furthermore, holistic and creative approaches to learning support children's participation, agency and interaction, allowing them to illustrate and deal with their emotional and sensory experiences (Aerila et al., 2019; Aerila & Rönkkö, 2023; Tzibazi, 2014). At best, arts-based or creative education makes children's inner worlds visible and allows them to work freely and in their own way. This helps teachers to guide children more individually and understand their personalities and emotional experiences better (Essa, 2012; Lo & Matsunobu, 2014), thus leading to more inclusive classroom education, which is successful because it is not based on a pupil's proficiency but rather on the experience of achievement and enjoyment derived from friendship, acceptance and a sense of belonging experienced during the activity (Lo & Matsunobu, 2014).

In this study, we aim to investigate a holistic learning process using crafts as the core element. Implementing creative craft activities or using crafts as the core element in creative learning is seldom implemented internationally (Rönkkö, 2011). However, in Finland, craft is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary schools, whereas in many other countries, craft as a school subject has disappeared or has been integrated into art, design and technology education (Pöllänen, 2011, 2019). In



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Finland, craft education is intended to be both explanatory and experimental, involving a range of visual and technical methods (Pöllänen, 2020). According to the Finnish National Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education [FNBE], 2014), the craft subject is based on the development of pupils' overall control of the craft process, which is defined as a 'holistic craft process' and which refers to the practice of implementing all phases of a craft project by the maker, who is responsible for ideation, designing and making the product as well as evaluating and reflecting on the project (Pöllänen, 2009). According to the Finnish National Curriculum for Early Years Education, the content of the holistic craft process is selected in a way that familiarises pupils with different materials and techniques as well as accords to their skills (FNBE, 2014). In this study, the craft project was the pupils' first experience of engaging in a holistic craft process.

The holistic craft process resembles common creative problem-solving processes. Integrating creative or arts-based activities and imagination into the holistic craft process can promote pupil engagement by enhancing child-centredness and a sense of freedom and creativity (Pöllänen, 2009; Yliverronen & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2016). In this study, the craft process is integrated into a holistic learning process with a creative pedagogy rooted in stories. In storification, learning is consciously supported by stories, storied environments and storytelling (Aura et al., 2021) to create and communicate an atmosphere that makes learning an engrossing and pervasive experience (Akkerman et al., 2009).

The learning process illustrated in the article follows the steps of the narratives and crafts (NaCra) approach, which offers a research-based model for the pedagogical applications of holistic and integrative learning in arts-based content (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2023; Rönkkö & Aerila, 2022). The NaCra approach has previously been utilised under versatile themes, such as local history (Aerila et al., 2019), humour (Aerila et al., 2023), literacy (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2015), STEAM (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2023) and ethical moral themes (Rönkkö & Aerila, 2013). All NaCra projects involve crafts and narratives, but they are supported with other forms of creativity, such as visual arts, literary art and drama. During the integrative learning process, the individual activities merge, so that, for example, the previous activity can act as motivation for the following activity, or the following activity can be the reflection phase for the previous activity. In the process employed in this study, the storied and craft activities are sequential, as in traditional NaCra applications, but also parallel, so that they progress side by side throughout the process (Aerila & Rönkkö, 2023). The focus is on the craft activity. Two research questions (RQ) were set:

RQ1: How can pupils' holistic craft process be planned and implemented to incorporate storified elements?

RQ2: What are the key features of individual craft processes supported by storification?

Storification as a context for holistic learning processes

Stories and other storied materials have always been used as learning materials (Dickey, 2011) and they are a way to make sense of and memorise reality and the world (Bruner 1990; Jalongo, 2019). In contemporary Western cultures, stories are commonly associated with books, but they are also shared through everyday storytelling, through visual and performing arts, pop culture and the media (Kerry-Moran & Aerila, 2019). In general, storification refers to utilising stories more comprehensively to communicate a narrative in a more intriguing and immersive way (Akkerman et al., 2009) or to create a fictional or nonfictional storied environment for more traditional learning activities (Deterding, 2016). Furthermore, storied environments and activities create a shared interest and a positive social atmosphere among pupils and teachers (Aura et al., 2023). According to several studies (Aura et al., 2021; Dickey, 2011), a well-composed storification creates a classroom drama that sparks suspense, sustained engagement and curiosity, which is a prerequisite for exploration and the motivation to learn. Aura et al. (2021) investigated the effects of storification on educational contexts and found that it

supports engagement in learning, empowers pupils, decreases pupils' misconduct and supports the academic performance of pupils at risk.

The core of all storified learning environments is experiential (Kolb, 1984) and arts-based learning (Lawrence, 2008). According to Lawrence (2008), experiential learning is always present in both creating and witnessing art. Furthermore, arts-based learning is learning in an emotional way, which means connecting learning and growth with personal experiences or with issues of universal concern. In a storied environment, children's personal experiences are connected to a broader social and cultural context and the engagement of children with others is supported by a shared context in an imaginary world (Kinossalo & Aerila, 2023). In this way, storification supports inclusion in a conscious way and helps pupils gain a deeper understanding of the world around them (Aura et al., 2021), enhancing their capability to empathise with others (Carpenter & Green, 2012). By absorbing the events in the dramatised narrative, pupils are often more willing to adopt new beliefs and attitudes (Deterding, 2016). According to Dickey (2011), storied environments construct knowledge by merging the existing schema and new knowledge together and transferring the learning content into real-world settings, activities and situations.

In educational contexts, storification is a pedagogical model, which is utilised on a continuum, concentrating on mere physical environments or pedagogical activities or on both. In Aura et al.'s (2021) study, some educators focused on decorating the classroom, some started utilising storification as a support for their existing, more traditional tools and others dramatically altered their pedagogical thinking. In general, the study showed that storification may empower educators and give pupils a feeling of importance. For young pupils, storification is close to play (Aerila & Kauppinen, 2021; Pursi, 2019) and creates a homelike atmosphere (Aura et al., 2021).

The pupil as a designer and maker of crafts in a pedagogical context

The Finnish National Curriculum for Basic Education (FBNE, 2014) suggests that in first and second grade, the design and implementation of the craft process should be based on utilising imagination, stories, drama, play, games and the natural and built environment. When craft design starts from personal life experiences, sensations and narratives, it transitions from a traditional technique and product-centred craft towards the holistic craft process, where design and production progress alongside skill and expression (Laamanen & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2009). In early years education, the crafting aims to develop knowledge and skills in the expression, design and making of crafts so that pupils accumulate experience and learn to design and implement their own craft products via textile and technical work techniques.

During crafting pupils gain experience with longitudinal processes that span multiple working sessions, enabling the implementation of craft products (FNBE, 2014). Typically, pupils in early years' craft classes create small items, such as pouches and bags, paintings, shelves, various decorative objects and jewellery, and they learn and apply techniques, such as nailing, sawing, sewing, crocheting and painting. The framing of these tasks can be arts-oriented or emphasise functionality and technology, but the most important aspect is to give children space to make their own decisions (Aerila et al., 2019). This develops the pupil's ability to see possibilities, analyse alternatives, tolerate uncertainty and experience both failures and successes (Rönkkö & Lepistö, 2016).

Design tasks in crafts often involve imagination and creative solutions (Yliverronen, 2014), and the process of designing can be enhanced by taking inspiration from both tangible and intangible sources (Mete, 2006; Omwami et al., 2020), such as pictures, drawings, examples, visits, trips, memories and various artistic experiences, such as music, literature and movies (Pöllänen, 2009). According to Eckert and Stacey (2000), inspiration can be found almost anywhere, and any detail can stimulate the creative process. In school environments, it is often difficult to get the ideas flowing and it is easy to copy ideas

from others or from the Internet (Laamanen & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2014; Lawson, 2006; Rönkkö et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is often necessary to have design limitations set by the teacher, as in some cases, this can assist pupils in refining their ideas into a workable design (Lahti et al., 2022; Rönkkö et al., 2019 4). Without proper limitations, the design task may become too open-ended and lead to traditional or unoriginal solutions (Kangas & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2018).

In the process of making a product, pupils may encounter a discrepancy between their initial ideas and their actual execution skills, resulting in conflict (Bodrova & Leong, 2012). As the holistic craft process is also a problem-solving process, plans may change during the making process as learning progresses (Pöllänen, 2009; Rönkkö, 2011). From the pupils' perspective, often only the making phase is considered actual crafting (Pöllänen, 2009). The final stage of craft process is evaluation, which involves reflecting on the entire process, from ideation and design to making and the finished product. This includes reviewing the applied solutions and potentially revisiting previously considered alternatives (Pöllänen, 2009; Rönkkö, 2011). Positive feedback and encouragement from both the teacher and fellow pupils play a significant role in the evaluation (Rönkkö et al., 2019). Teachers can employ various evaluation methods, ranging from self-assessment to group assessment or even to organising exhibitions showcasing their pupils' work.

Method

Study context

This study utilised a design research method (McKenney et al., 2006; Stephan, 2014). The intervention was targeted at 12 pupils aged 7-to-8 years old in the second grade of Finnish primary education at a rural school during December 2019. One pupil was excluded from the study as he was absent from several lessons and did not complete all the tasks. The students were given an acronym (P1–12) and no information regarding gender or other personal details was recorded in the dataset.

The intervention spanned five school days over three weeks, with an average duration of three lessons per day during whole-class sessions. Pupils were allowed to continue working between lessons if they had not progressed their work to the same stage as others. The intervention was integrated into the regular school day, and the pupils had breaks outdoors and lunch as usual. The intervention was planned by a student in craft teacher education (later referred to as a student teacher) and two researchers who collaborated with the classroom teacher. Additionally, they were all actively involved in the implementation of the learning process.

Data and data analysis

The data for this study comprised of pupils' outcomes from the learning process: all the materials produced by pupils during storification (e.g., the written messages to Milli, the dictated stories, the verbal evaluations of the soft toy and the collaboratively created map), the design sheets for the soft toy and the soft toys. Furthermore, the video recordings of pupils' activities during the learning process in the classroom and outdoors were used as secondary data to support the analysis. Pupils' dictated stories described and visualised their views on the characters implemented during the craft process (Aerila et al., 2019). In this study, the names of the soft toy characters are presented as they were assigned by the pupils in Finnish. If a name had a tangible meaning, it was translated, and both the Finnish name and its translation were provided.

The researchers performed a qualitative content analysis of the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The data-driven content analysis was performed in two phases, followed by the RQs. First, the learning process was analysed by investigating the phases of the holistic craft process and the elements of storification side by side. The aim of the analysis was to determine the relevance of the storified elements for the implementing the holistic craft process. The result is presented in Table 1. Second, individual craft processes were investigated, and their most dominant features were categorised and compared to the

elements of storification. These data-driven categories were identified as collaborative crafting, theme of friendship, human-like features of the soft toy/bringing soft toy to life, influences of popular culture and the significance of the soft toy.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation ethical principles of research with human participants in the human sciences in Finland (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines, 2019). Prior to collecting data, informed consent was obtained from both the pupils and the guardians of each of the 12 pupils participating in the study. This included obtaining written consent for the use of the pupils' data for research purposes and ensuring that the participants and their guardians were fully informed about the study, the data being collected and how it would be used. In the context of data collection, participation in the study was voluntary and the pupils were afforded the option to terminate their involvement at any point. The assignments constituted an integral component of regular learning endeavours, with all pupils participating in these activities, regardless of their involvement in the study. The photographs of pupils' designs, soft toys and the map, and the written assignments were saved to the university's cloud service alongside the recorded data.

Results

Storification implemented during the holistic craft process

In this study, the storified environment was created by a children's book, literary art, drama and visual art. The storification continued throughout the holistic craft process and ended with a story dictated by the children. The intervention lasted for five days, and the aim of the holistic craft process was to implement an imaginary character by felting.

The intervention started with several storified activities, sourced from a Finnish children's book by Ville Hytönen (2017) called *Pietimetsä Puuh*. The story is about an imaginary forest and its peculiar characters. The story book and its characters were used to motivate children to use their imagination and imagine characters that do not exist in the real world. This motivation was further supported by a teacher in role activity. In this activity, the student teacher took on the role of a professor (later mentioned only professor) leading an investigation of peculiar characters. Before attending the classroom, the professor called 'Mäntypää' [PineHead] sent a letter to the pupils informing them about her investigation and need for help. When the professor later attended the classroom, she read an excerpt of the story in Hytönen's book, where the main characters, Peeter Peeter and Evelin, were on their way to school and had met the smallest and cutest character in the imaginary forest called Pikkukönni. After reading the excerpt and at the end of the motivation phase, the professor informed the pupils that in a forest near their school there might be the same kinds of unique characters. During her presentation, the professor encouraged the children to make accurate observations, explore their surroundings and use their imagination.

The professor started the ideation phase by telling the pupils that she had gained possession of a diary. Based on her investigations, it belonged to an imaginary character, Milli Mörriäinen. However, the key to the diary was lost and she did not know the diary's contents. The pupils were led to the forest near the school, and they participated in an outdoor exploration activity aiming at finding the key. During this activity, the pupils were encouraged to see the forest through the lens of imagination: for example, a hole in the tree could be a home of an imaginary character or a pine cone could be a disguised character. When the key was found, they returned to the classroom and read the diary. From the diary, they learned about Milli's identity, how she arrived in the neighbourhood, her interests and a problem she had encountered: she was lonely and needed a friend. With this information, the design phase started. The children were asked to design a friend for Milli by filling in a planning form that accorded with the illustration of Milli in the diary. The form contained 1) a list of adjectives from which the children

circled the characteristics of their own character, 2) open-ended questions regarding the interests and features of the character and 3) a place to sketch the picture of the character.

The design phase continued the following day and was supported by several storied activities. The professor started the day by presenting a scroll she had found in the schoolyard. When pupils opened the scroll, they discovered a map of a fantasy world. Since the map was small, the pupils drew a larger version of the map together and learned how to enlarge a model. This was a collaborative activity, and all the pupils drew details on a shared paper. Once the map was complete, the pupils were guided to imagine their own character and its home on the map. These homes were drawn and presented to others (Figure 1). After the map activity, the pupils continued to work on their character design using the planning form from the previous day and their experiences of the map activity.

Figure 1.

Collaborative map of the fantasy world.



On the third day of the intervention, the implementation of the craft product started, and the aim was to create a soft toy that corresponded to the designs. The pupils cut the form of their character from foam and started needle felting using wool to create colouring and details. The drawing from the design form was used as a support. The motivation to work persistently with the soft toy was again supported by storied activities. Furthermore, the aim of these activities was to enhance the commitment to create a friend for Milli. At first, the pupils received a new letter from Milli thanking them for her new friends, and pupils wrote back to Milli. As the characters were ready, the meaningfulness of the ready-made character was highlighted by taking the characters to Milli's forest where the pupils were asked to take a photo of their soft toy in their chosen location.

The reflection phase of the holistic craft process ended the storification and the learning process. As a reflection, the pupils participated in storytelling, where they were asked to describe their character's day in the fairytale world. These stories were transcribed word-for-word by adults. As they were ready, the adult read the story and the pupil was allowed to change it if s/he wanted. The story was accompanied by an illustration (storycrafting method, see Karlsson, 2009). The storified reflection was supplemented by asking about the progress of the learning process. This was also written down. All the storification stages during the holistic craft process are compiled in Table 1.

Table 1.

Elements of storification in the context of the holistic craft process.

	Phase of the holistic craft process	Storified elements	Holistic craft process incorporated with storified elements
A week before	Motivation	A letter from a professor	Arousing imagination
Day 1	Motivation	Professor coming to class Children's book: Reading an excerpt of a book	
	Ideation	Searching for a key to the diary in a nearby forest	Thinking of an imaginary character
	Designing	Reading Milli's diary	Planning the imaginary soft toy
Day 2		Map of fantasy word and scaling it up Drawing the character's home	Support for designing Measures for the soft toy
	Drawing a technical plan		
Day 3	Making		Cutting the form Needle felting
Day 4	Motivation	Reading a letter from Milli	Support for making
Day 5		Writing a letter to Milli Introducing soft toys made as a friend	
	Evaluation Reflection	Taking a photo of the soft toy Storytelling a character's day in the fairytale world Drawing based on the story Answering a reflective question on the process	Taking pride in the product Interview of the process

Key features of storification during pupils' craft processes

Storification created a shared context for the pupils and teachers with the friendship theme. Collaborative crafting was present and enhanced in multiple levels: the pupils worked together during the assignment, they shared their plans with each other and also wanted to engage as Milli's friend. Many pupils indicated at some point during the project (in the plan, letter or storytelling) that their character was made as a friend for Milli. For example, as P1's Groke and P12's Goat Man were ready, P1 and P12 wanted to photograph the characters together, as they said that the characters were also friends (Figure 2). Utilising friendship as the main theme was familiar to the children, as it contained mainly positive meanings for the pupils and created a positive atmosphere in the group, which allowed the children to work in a focused and long-term manner on the crafting process.

Figure 2.

Groke with his friend Goat Man.



Storification appeared in pupils' craft processes in varying degrees. Half showcased many elements of storification and immersion in the storified environment. However, the number of storified elements varied and many pupils incorporated elements of their own world into the elements of storification. For example, P5's craft process contained similar elements to Milli's diary, including themes such as fishing, cold weather and rain, as well as the peculiar characters resembling those presented in the book and by the professor. P5's craft product was a bumblebee with human-like qualities living in nature. Furthermore, P5 illustrated the character as a kind and positive figure whose goal was to bring joy: *Kaspar Bumblebee likes fishing, playing with friends, building and making others happy. He is a nice guy and likes to watch fish* (P5's reflective question). P5's immersion in storification was also showcased in P5's letter to Milli Mörrinkäinen, where the bumblebee suggested that he would meet with Milli and showed a genuine desire to form a real friendship:

Hi Milli, I would like to meet at the river today at three o'clock, shall we go fishing and look at the fish, shall we build a house, best regards, Kaspar. (P5 letter to Milli)

P5 also wanted the character to have a first name and a family name like Milli Mörrinkäinen and named him Kasper Bumblebee. In the reflection phase, P5 illustrated the story with a drawing of both the bumblebee and Milli. P5 approached the making of the character with determination and had a clear vision of the character. Figure 2 shows how the bumblebee has movable wings. P5 planned these wings at the beginning of the ideation phase and was able to plan actions and work so that the vision for the character was achieved. It is noteworthy that P5 did not require adult support during the craft process but acted autonomously and with motivation.

Figure 3.

P5's bumblebee called 'Kaspar Bumblebee' (sketch, photo in forest and drawing Kaspar with friend).



Many pupils concentrated mostly on depicting things that were important and meaningful to them and did not connect the craft process in the reflection phase to Milli or other storification elements. For example, P12's craft product was a soft toy goat. According to P12, the goat was aggressive and angry. During the craft process, P12 found it important to attach the horns to the goat and he worked diligently on them. The process of creating the shape of the goat was challenging, but P12 described it as enjoyable because the soft toy got the desired shape. P12 grew a strong emotional bond to the goat, and in the reflective story, the main characters were P12 and the goat. The theme of friendship remained, but moved to the maker himself. However, Milli was mentioned briefly at the end of the story (see Figure 2).

In the game, there is a king, and he has the power to decide what happens to the poor. The Goat Man invented the game and I, too. They were playing floor lava, but they also played the king of the hill. Goat Man had become the king on the hill 5 times, and others had become king 10 times. They threw down the king of the hill, and everyone threw softballs, too. Milli was also the king of the hill 5 times; the Goat Man helped her. The day ended with play, and I took the Goat Man in my arms. (P12 storycrafting)

Some pupils utilised their everyday experiences as ideation for the craft process with hobbies such as swimming, playing, being with friends, exploring and building, or special experiences like celebrating Christmas. For example, some pupils had cat characters with human features (P7, P11) or a game world (P1, P4) as an additional source for their ideation, which are both strongly featured in children's popular culture. Further, P6 and P3 had no concrete elements from the storified activities as they concentrated on making a perfect character with many positive internal and external features. In the reflection phase, P6 concentrated on narrating personal life incidents. Even though the concrete elements of storification were not located in these craft processes, many processes were inspired by the playfulness and imagination of the learning process, and they designed characters with creative elements. P6 and P4 designed traditional fairytale characters: A Troll and a Bogeyman. They might have sourced them from the storification, as trolls live in the forests and cannot be seen, and in Finnish, the word Bogeyman (Mörkö) is vocally close to Milli Mörriäinen.

In the data, all but one pupil implemented a quite consistent craft process. However, P2 designed a toilet seat. He designed and made the toilet seat very carefully and was very persistent with the functionality of the seat cover. However, the story dictated in the reflection phase did not have a character or any other references to the toilet seat, but was about P2's Christmas holidays.

In the reflection phase, all the pupils felt emotionally connected with their soft toy characters and found them meaningful: not one of them said that they had made just a soft toy without a personality. Based on the analysis, bringing Milli to life using a diary seemed to be particularly beneficial. The diary

modelled a deeper exploration of the character's thoughts, emotions and experiences, enhancing the implementation of the soft toy characters and adding depth to their personalities. In this study, satisfaction with the soft toy was closely tied to the successful execution of the toy's details. For those who were disappointed with the technical execution of cutting foam and needle felting, the identity of the soft toy was still important.

Discussion

The holistic craft process emphasises students' interests and encourages co-creation, collaboration and participatory learning. It promotes projects that facilitate hands-on, experiential and multisensory approaches to designing and analysing artefacts, environments and the natural world (Pöllänen, 2020). Traditionally, playful or creative activities are utilised at the beginning of the craft process to motivate ideation, but in this learning process, motivation was maintained with storification throughout the craft process (e.g., Deterding, 2016). The storified activities helped pupils to immerse themselves in the world of imagination and, in Milli Mörriäinen's story, promoted the playfulness of learning: The children felt that they got permission to use their imagination during classroom lessons. Learning took place, as in drama, at the interface between reality and imagination, where learning is effective (e.g., Aura et al., 2021). In this study, the storified environment was created by a children's book, literary art, drama and visual art, which all acted as motivation and emotional support for the craft process. The elements of storification seemed to enhance the arousal of mental images similarly to Pöllänen's (2020) study.

In this study, pupils learned how to implement a holistic craft process. The pupils perceived the soft toys not merely as inanimate objects but they experienced them almost as alive (e.g., Rönkkö & Aerila, 2015). These perceptions varied, with some students visualizing the toys as bearing human-like qualities, while others envisioned them as embodiments of imaginative characters. Some pupils infused aspects of their own life experiences into the soft toys, whereas others drew inspiration from elements prevalent in popular culture. Notably, the sentiment among the pupils was a sense of importance attached to the soft toy. At school, this was pupils' first experience with a holistic craft process, as their previous experience with crafting was based on making "ordinary" crafts (see Pöllänen, 2009) based on a traditional model.

During the learning process, pupils were able to design a soft toy and aimed to transition their design to the product. The transition from ideation to designing and making should be guided more carefully, as some pupils were not able to realise their imaginary character designs due to both the materials reserved for the craft product and their emerging craft skills. Some form of support would have been necessary at the point where their sketches were transformed into actual craft products. The idea of the map exercise was to give the children the idea of making a pattern, but it remained too abstract and did not transfer to the crafting process. However, some pupils whose sketches and craft products were very different were still satisfied with the outcome.

The theme of friendship is apparent in all the processes; all the children participated in the storified activities, and storification enhanced the motivation to work persistently in a long-term project. These results align with previous creative learning studies (Essa, 2012; Lo & Matsunobu, 2014), as the aim of arts-based and creative learning is to enable children to work with their own personalities and in their own way which means that the pupils will use the stimuli of the creative activities as the teacher anticipates. Especially in early years education, creative learning is close to play, which is very dialogical and difficult to predict, as the learning process is affected by the situation in conjunction with the participants. In this study, the storification contained much learning content in its own right, as during storification, the children wrote, read, acted, drew, collaborated and participated in an outdoor learning experience. As emphasised in previous studies on the NaCra approach (Aerila et al., 2019; Aerila & Rönkkö, 2023), this kind of holistic way of learning is effective as it achieves several learning goals simultaneously. Furthermore, this study shows that successful arts-based or creative education can be derived from friendship and acceptance during the learning process (Lo & Matsunobu, 2014).

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