

ID: 217

Academic paper (20+10 min)

Topics: Contemporary artistic and art educational approaches to diversity and cultural changes

Keywords: drama, eco-anxiety, emotions, drama education, arts mediated research

Education for Hope in times of Eco-anxiety: The Potential of Drama

Anna Elsa Aurora Lehtonen, Panu Petteri Pihkala

University of Helsinki, Finland; annaelehtonen@gmail.com

Climate change causes many direct and indirect emotional impacts. The difficult emotions can be described as part of “eco-anxiety”, which is a real challenge in education and a growing theme in interdisciplinary environmental research. Arts-based learning, such as the use of drama, has a wide potential to address these difficult issues.

Eco-anxiety often hides behind various mechanisms of denial and socially constructed silence. Participatory performance-making enables students to think and feel about issues which are generally unspoken. These include fears, dilemmas, and cultural prejudices. Arts-based learning situations can offer a safety space and give means for emotional involvement, personal meaning making, critical thinking, and active agency. Personal perceptions of meaning can become enriched in artistic encounters of drama with other people and the world.

Our presentation brings together drama education, research on climate change education, and interdisciplinary perspectives on the psychological and social dimensions of climate change. We draw on material from a) various drama workshops and b) theoretical literature. Our main question is: How can art-based methods help to produce a process where anxiety is encountered in such a way that hope is strengthened? We discuss studies in environmental education which emphasize the significance of hope, but we also enrich existing research by showing how education for hope is linked with giving enough attention to the difficult questions and emotions of participants in the drama workshops.