

Intercultural film literacy education against cultural misrepresentation: Finnish visual art teachers' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Cultural misrepresentation simplifies cultures and their minorities, promotes racism, nationalism and eventually weakens democracies by spreading false information through audio-visual media. Intercultural film literacy education combines intercultural education and film literacy and uses a film as a starting point to discuss the cultural context, to analyse cultural representation and to evaluate how the culture is portrayed from a stylistic and formal point of view. The current study builds upon the previous research that linked intercultural education and film literacy to discuss how visual art teachers understand and practice intercultural film literacy education towards critical analyses of cultural representation in audio-visual media.

The research data includes eight semi-structured interviews with Finnish visual art teachers, which were analysed using a thematic approach. The findings reveal the need to broaden the concept of intercultural education to include LGBTQ+ people and focus on their experiences. At the same time, the findings highlight the importance of critical thinking to combat cultural misrepresentation, as well as the broader view of film literacy, which includes video-based social media. Finally, the results reveal a lack of cultural representation in an already limited number of teaching materials.

Keywords: *intercultural education, film literacy, cultural misrepresentation, representation, visual art, Finland.*



INTRODUCTION

The Netflix hit series *Emily in Paris* has produced two seasons since its debut in 2020, and recently has been renewed for two more (Keslassy, 2022). Despite its popularity, the show has been a subject of controversy from early on due to how it represents, or rather *misrepresents*, different cultures. The first season saw a backlash regarding offensive, out-dated and fantastical portrayal of Paris and French people (Henley, 2020), while the second season was heavily criticised for its Ukrainian character, to the point that Ukraine's minister of culture issued a complaint to Netflix (Abbott, 2022).

Emily in Paris is not an isolated case within film and television that sparked claims of cultural misrepresentation. The recent study revealed demeaning portrayals of Muslim people of various nationalities across 200 top-grossing films from English-speaking countries released between 2017-2019 (Khan et al., 2021). Such instances of cultural misrepresentation have long been recognized as harmful, since they reduce people and cultures to few basic and often false characteristics (Frederick, 1993). However, there is no escape from them, because they offer familiar codes that large audiences can easily connect with (Hyde-Clarke, 2008). Sassy African American women, nerdy Asians, German Nazi-sympathisers, and dangerous Arabs are among many characters who continuously populate popular media offering one-dimensional recognizable images that are far removed from reality, thus misrepresenting the people and their cultures.

Cultural misrepresentation is based on the concept of representation, thoroughly discussed by Stuart Hall and the colleagues in the book titled *Representation: cultural representations and signifying practices* (1997). Hall (1997) defines representation as production and circulation of meanings through language, which enables us to refer to real or fictional objects, people, or events. So, cultural misrepresentation is about creating and circulating false meanings. And while mis- in misrepresentation indicates absence of the intent of causing harm (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017), if repeated often enough the false meaning might overshadow reality. As Hall (1997) states: "It is we who fix the meaning so firmly that, after a while, it comes to seem natural and inevitable" (p.21).

The most common form of cultural misrepresentation is stereotyping. Stereotypes are used to form an identity of the Other, occasionally taking the form of humorous teasing, but more often turning into petrified value judgements that lead to discriminatory

acts, violence and even genocide (Cambridge, 2018). Stereotypes focus on a few simple, memorable, and widely recognized traits, reduce everything to those traits, exaggerate and further simplify them, and finally fix them without change to eternity (Hall, 1997). Cultural stereotypes simplify cultures, reducing them to few vivid and exaggerated characteristics that are no longer based in reality.

Misrepresentation is connected to what Klein & Shiffman (2006) call symbolic annihilation, which happens when the media ignores and excludes minorities or presents them from a one-sided perspective. By presenting certain characters at the expense of others or by excluding them from narrative, the media reflects and reinforces social values of preferability of some groups over the other. Hence, symbolic annihilation is about underrepresentation (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). In a way, underrepresentation is a side effect of misrepresentation, since by relying on stereotypes the media refuses to broaden the portrayal of various minorities and present them in their diversity (Merskin, 1998).

Problem is that such simplification of cultures and their representatives not only reduces richness, diversity, and complexity of the human world, but also eventually promotes racism and nationalism (Hughes, 2009; Sayer & Meadows, 2012; Silvestrini, 2020). To combat cultural misrepresentation in audio-visual media, the current study focuses on the concept of intercultural film literacy education, suggested by Sergei Glotov and Sirkku Kotilainen (2021). This definition links intercultural education with film literacy, thus combining the attention to cultural diversity and importance of cultural exchange and dialogue with knowledge of film language and an ability to critically analyse and evaluate film's content (Glotov & Kotilainen, 2021).

Nowadays, films, as well as other types of audio-visual content, are easily available, sometimes being only a click away from a consumer, thanks to the rise of streaming services, such as US-based Netflix, HBO Max, Amazon Prime and Disney+ to name but a few. Netflix, being the biggest of such services (Pajkovic, 2021), offers a vast catalogue on a global level, constantly updating it with originals and archival content and encouraging audiences to watch more through their advanced recommendation algorithms (Rodríguez Ortega, 2022). Other services follow Netflix's example, by providing a buffet-like selection of media from different periods and across the world.

Such accessibility of audio-visual content highlights the importance of promoting film literacy in the digital age.

Censorship, cultural customs, religion, economic, and social norms influence the way people produce, consume, exhibit, and interpret media. Intercultural education draws attention to cultural differences and promotes their open and respectful exchange. And, as Glotov and Kotilainen (2021) research suggests, when linked with film literacy, intercultural education may stimulate critical examination of films' messages, form, and style, while broadening one's knowledge of another culture. Especially considering how often film gives new insights into other cultures and customs (British Film Institute, 2011).

Although previous research has linked intercultural education and film literacy, there has not been much of the academic discussion on schoolteachers' perspective on that. Most notable exception is a cross-country study *Film: A Language Without Borders* (2019) done by the British Film Institute that researched films' potential to bring together students from different cultures, and interviewed teachers, who participated in the project. The current paper aims to expand understanding of teachers' perspective on intercultural film literacy education, by focusing on Finnish educational context and investigating how visual art teachers adopt intercultural education and film literacy in their professional careers. Thus, it is important to pose a research question as: *How do Finnish visual art schoolteachers understand and practise intercultural film literacy education?*

The research is conducted in Finland, a multicultural country located in Northern Europe. Finland has comprehensive teacher education offered by several universities, each of which is in charge of designing our curricula, although following the recommendations from the Ministry of Education (Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2011). The combination of a three-year Bachelor's degree and two-year Master's degree in appropriate subjects is required for teaching it on different educational levels (Niemi & Jakku-Sihvonen, 2011). In the case of a visual art subject, a degree in teaching can be obtained from capital-based Aalto University. At the same time, Finland has a strong media education tradition, which can be traced to the 1950s, stimulated by the concerns for the effects media has on individual and the society raised, with media education becoming a part of school curriculum already in 1970 (Kotilainen & Kupiainen, 2014). Hence, Finnish schoolteachers are highly educated people, familiar with media education and its significance.

The current study is based on a series of 8 interviews in English with professional visual art teachers working in Finland. The main aim is to shed light on teachers' experiences with intercultural education and film literacy in Finnish schools, allowing us to see how these concepts are interpreted on an individual level. This article presents the results of that study, as well as broadens the understanding of intercultural film literacy education.

Conceptualising intercultural film literacy education

Although there are many different definitions of culture, the current study uses David Matsumoto's (2007) description that states that human culture creates and maintains complex social systems, institutionalises, and improves cultural practices, creates beliefs around the world, and communicates the meaning system to other people and following generations. This broad definition is useful since it emphasises the presence of human culture and how it is based on social systems and communication.

As Rey-von Allmen (2011) states: "speaking of culture implies recognition of values, lifestyles and symbolic representations that individuals and groups refer to in their relationships to others and in their understanding of the world" (p. 33). Cultures are never static and always evolve and shift, while also being in contact with each other. Intercultural education is a concept that offers a dynamic perspective of cultures in contact, by generating shared cultural expressions through mutual respect and dialogue on the local, regional, national, or international level (UNESCO, 2006).

Today, intercultural education is regarded as a proper response to the challenges of, as Portera (2011) puts it, real (immigration, refugees, students, researchers, tourists) and virtual (Internet) mobility. With constant migration of people for voluntary or forced reasons, the cultural palette of states continuously diversifies, since people move together with their customs, beliefs, traditions, and world understanding.

Alred et al. (2003) note that people are born and socialised into specific groups, which eventually leads to assuming the conventions and values of those groups as natural. However, they become intercultural, once they have some experience that leads to question, but not to reject, those conventions and beliefs. Such transformation is possible through intercultural dialogue.

This dialogue goes beyond the respect for different cultures towards developing an understanding of the Other. It allows not only to get to know others through their experience, but also to analyse their own values and beliefs (Alasuutari & Jokikokko, 2010). The commitment to such dialogue is an integral part of intercultural education, to what the prefix inter- (meaning in the midst) indicates. As defined by the Council of Europe's (2008), intercultural dialogue "fosters equality, human dignity and a sense of common purpose, and aims to develop a deeper understanding of diverse worldviews and practices" (p. 17). In educational settings, teachers are the ones responsible for overseeing the intercultural dialogue between the students and between themselves and the students.

As Glotov and Kotilainen (2021) study affirms, intercultural dialogue can be integrated into film literacy education to simultaneously advance students' knowledge of film and to broaden their understanding of other cultures. Film literacy describes the abilities a) to analyse various elements of film language, b) to interpret the meaning of films, as well as c) to produce a film of one's own (Reia-Baptista et al., 2014). Film literacy can influence people's taste, screening habits and encourage self-expression, thus affecting the way people consume, interpret, and produce films.

Traditionally, films are described as moving images that communicate information that creates experiences often driven by stories and characters that evoke emotions and feelings (Bordwell et al., 2017). As Glotov and Kotilainen (2021) argue, such definition can include both blockbusters and wedding videos, however, we use different standards when watching and evaluating these films, because they exist in contexts (historical, artistic, cultural), and the knowledge of those contexts is a big part of film literacy that enables deeper analysis and understanding of film. Overall, film literacy enables us to put a film in various contexts and supports critical thinking towards film messages and film production.

Films are produced to engage us with its contents and to create a para-social bond between viewers and characters (Grodal & Kramer, 2010). People connect with characters, empathise with them, and follow their journey. The ability to empathise is essential to intercultural dialogue and the skill to mediate between cultures (Alred, 2003). Empathy opens up possibilities for respectful intercultural dialogue, and, by their design, films stimulate it. Hence, films can be used to promote intercultural education and to learn about other cultures, while film literacy provides a critical outlook towards cinematic representation of those cultures.

On a European level, films are recognized as a fundamental part in building European identities (School Education Getaway, 2017), while film literacy promotes knowledge of, and interest in European audio-visual works among people of all ages, but particularly young audiences (Reid, 2018). Films are integral in building cultural and national identities. According to the report on film literacy in European countries (2012), film literacy in Finland is integrated into a general programme of media education in the national core curriculum developed by Finnish National Board of Education. Finland has a long tradition of media education, that currently it is being aimed towards all demographics (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). Film literacy is a part of media education, and, thus, is taught in Finnish schools. While some lower and upper secondary schools have an optional separate course on film, usually it is studied within other subjects, most notably, visual arts (in Finnish - *kuvataide*).

National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) describes that the task of visual arts is to guide students to explore and produce images of culturally diverse reality through the means of art. Visual arts classes support the development of critical thinking and lay the foundation for local and global agency. It is up to each teacher to decide the extent of film literacy education in their visual art classes. The current study acknowledges this situation and looks into individual experiences of teaching film literacy. It also recognizes the growing internationalisation of school classes in Finland (Kovanen & Kotilainen, 2018) and delves into teachers' experiences with intercultural education.

All in all, intercultural film literacy education uses a film as a starting point to discuss the cultural context it came from, to analyse cultural representation and to learn more about that culture, and to evaluate how exactly the culture is portrayed from a stylistic and formal point of view.

INTERVIEWS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This research is based on qualitative data in the form of semi-structured online interviews that were completed during August-September 2021, in the beginning of the new school year in Finland. Overall, 104 emails were sent out to visual art teachers inviting them to participate in the study. The emails' text contained an explanation of the research and its aims and methods, information on how the data would be stored, kept, and reported, and a note that there would be no material compensation for the participation (Finnish

Social Science Data Archive, n.d.). The email addresses were obtained through contact pages on schools' websites.

Out of 104 sent out emails, only 14 were responded to. 8 teachers agreed to be interviewed, with 6 people turning down the invitation for different reasons (e.g., health, work overload). The small size of the data set can be also explained by language barrier, as well as by absence of any compensation for participation. However, it should be noted that researchers in Finland had often struggled to attract more than 14 teachers for their studies, if conducting interviews (Hyvönen, 2011; Sinkkonen & Kyttälä, 2014; Jokikokko & Uitto, 2017; Fornaciari, 2019; Li, 2021). Nevertheless, the value of this research is in offering an in-depth personal perspective of visual art teachers that highlights their experiences, feelings, and worries.

Eight one-on-one interviews were arranged online using the software of teachers' choice (Microsoft Teams, Google Meet or Zoom) and at the time suggested by them. Each teacher was interviewed individually and only once. The interviews lasted on average for 30 minutes, excluding the small talk. All the interviews

were recorded with participants' permissions. Each interview started with a description of the research, data collection, analysis, and reporting methods, as well as the research purpose. Next, a verbal content was obtained for participants to further record and use their data for the research purpose. Participation in the research was voluntary; no interviewee was pressured to participate or to share information they did not want (Resnik, 2015).

Among other things, the interviewees were asked to provide examples of intercultural education and film literacy education in their schools, as well as to discuss how they integrate intercultural education into film literacy. Teachers were also prompted to describe challenges they have encountered while promoting intercultural film literacy education, as well as to give suggestions on how intercultural film literacy can impact students' media use and understanding of media content.

The table (Table 1) provides background information on each of the interviewees. Each of the teachers was assigned a random number to protect their privacy.

Table 1. *Individual background information*

Teacher	Gender	Cultural background	Years of experience	Place of work	School level
1	Woman	Finnish	24	Oulu	Upper Secondary
2	Prefer Not to Say	Finnish	7	Helsinki	Upper Secondary
3	Man	Foreign	4	Helsinki	Preschool
4	Man	Finnish	3	Helsinki	Upper Secondary
5	Woman	Finnish	(undisclosed)	Oulu	Upper Secondary
6	Woman	Foreign	13	Helsinki	Preschool
7	Woman	Finnish	15	Helsinki	Lower Secondary
8	Man	Finnish	28	Helsinki	Upper Secondary

As seen from Table 1, out of eight respondents six represent the capital area of Helsinki in Southern Finland, with two people coming from the less-populated city of Oulu in Northern Finland. Most of the teachers come from upper secondary schools, which is equivalent to senior high schools, completed after compulsory basic education (Pollari et al., 2018). Two teachers come from preschools, and one teacher works for lower secondary school, which comprises grades 7-9.

The teaching experience range is from 3 to 28 years with four teachers having more than 10 years of experience, three – less, and with one teacher abstaining from providing such information. In terms of gender the study is quite equal, there are 4 women, 3 men and 1

person, who preferred not to disclose their gender. Additionally, while most of the interviewees were born in Finland, two preschool teachers come from foreign backgrounds.

This research adopts thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analysing, and, eventually, interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2018). There are six steps involved into thematic analysis: 1) familiarising yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes that focus on specific characteristics in the data, 3) generating initial for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) writing a report (Nowell et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2021). Once all the interviews were transcribed, the researcher followed each of these steps.

The analysis was done solely by the researcher, with the coding process done twice with a month and a half break between each session, to give the developing analysis some distance.

The coding words (e.g., “classroom activity”, “trans-youth”, “empathy”), were added to the Microsoft Words file and then manually assigned into categories. Each category was refined into initial themes, which were reviewed after some time had passed. Overall, three themes were produced from the data analysis: Lack of cultural representation in teaching materials; Inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture; and Development of critical thinking.

Before transitioning to the findings, it is important to acknowledge this study’s limitations. Firstly, the small size of the dataset means that the analysis is not extensive and represents the opinions of eight teachers, most of whom come from the capital area of Finland. Secondly, as Baxter and Lederman (1999) note, in interviews, it might be difficult for teachers to communicate and articulate their perceptions of their own teaching, since they tend to construct reasons that would sound right and logical to the researcher. Added to this is the fact that interviews were conducted in English, the second language for all the participants involved. Hence, further research is needed that would increase the number of participants, and, hopefully, communicate in their native tongues. Nevertheless, this study provides insights into pedagogical practices of Finnish visual art teachers and allows us to see how intercultural film literacy education is practised in different levels of education.

FINDINGS

The findings present in detail each of the three patterns decoded from the thematic analysis: lack of cultural representation in teaching materials; inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture; and development of critical thinking. The quotes from teachers are presented with original wording, the pronouns are assigned based on each teacher’s gender identity (see Table 1). The identity of each teacher is hidden behind the pseudonyms Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3... Teacher 8.

Lack of cultural representation in teaching materials

Each of eight interviewed teachers mention that their classes have people from various cultural backgrounds, however, it is often challenging to practise an inclusive teaching that makes students feel welcomed. Teachers

say that they always need to make an extra effort to find information and materials on different cultures and come up with ideas on how to integrate those into teaching. This extra effort is difficult because not only does it demand more time from teachers, but also there are not that many materials to begin with.

Teacher 3, who works in a preschool, mentions how difficult and time-consuming it is to find materials that represent specific cultures that can also be suitable for children. He needs to find the content, then review it, and then come up with some additional tasks, such as role-playing, for example, to engage children with the material. The teacher dubs these efforts as “the biggest time-consuming thing”.

Teacher 4 recognizes the importance of intercultural education, since “we live in this global world, where it is important to be able to watch the world from other perspective than your own”. However, as the teacher continues, it is a problem to find materials that are not Western-centred and made by White people. He recalls a case when one of the textbooks they were using had an outdated representation of Native Americans, students called this out and made the teacher write feedback to the publisher.

Teacher 4 continues that he would love to have a “more culturally diverse bank of material <...> but I have quite limited time to find new material, so it is about good luck, if something approaches me”. This teacher recognizes the lack of cultural representation, as well as its importance, but, similar to Teacher 3, struggles to find time to search for the correct materials.

Teacher 6, who teaches in a preschool, provides various examples of how they promote intercultural education through various activities, such as celebrating national costumes of each culture represented in the classroom, or watching videos that showcase different cultural customs around the world. Nevertheless, this teacher expresses her exhaustion from constantly looking for the materials that represent various cultures and claims that “Finland is really lacking intercultural education materials and resources for teachers”.

Teacher 7 acknowledges the colonial past of Europe and mentions how it stimulates her to find a greater variety of teaching materials, but, similar to Teacher 4, she encounters the same problem of materials being predominantly White. She talks about various ways she has been trying to seek out more materials, for example, from Facebook groups of education professionals, but “there is never enough hours” to do that.

Teacher 1, who comes from an international school, emphasises the importance of having materials in

different languages. Although all her students can speak English, she believes it would be more impactful to reach them in their native tongues. She remembers that in the beginning most of the materials were in Finnish, and she needed to translate them into English. Since then, the situation has improved, but she believes it would be better to have more language variety overall.

Teacher 8 describes several trips abroad that made him recognize and admire the world's cultural diversity. Ever since he has been trying to increase cultural representation in the classrooms, which was not the easiest task, considering the lack of accessible materials and the outdated nature of some of them. He emphasises how it is always a single person effort, and that during his 28 years long career it has been challenging to come up with new ways to promote intercultural education.

Overall, the teachers recognize the importance of larger cultural representation, however they struggle to find suitable materials, since the majority of available materials lack cultural representation.

Inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture

Several teachers indicate that intercultural education encompasses more than ethnic diversity and includes LGBTQ+ culture. LGBTQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer, while plus indicates other gender non-confirming, non-binary people. LGBTQ+ culture is a very broad term and varies from country to country, nevertheless it includes some common aspects, such as understanding of sexuality and queer identity, cultural works, and biographies of notable LGBTQ+ people, common experiences of coming-out and discrimination, and notable art forms and events, such as drag or voguing, and pride parades.

Teacher 2 talks about the importance of inclusive education not only when it comes to cultures, but also sexualities. Without going into much detail, the teacher discusses that last semester they had to deal with rude and offensive behaviour in the classroom by introducing what they call community-based practices completed and agreed upon by all students. The teacher remarks that plenty of students wondered what it has to do with visual art classes, to which the teacher responded that they teach more than that together with the subject. This teacher also highlights the significance of being well acquainted with trans-youth and what it is like to be a transgender person. The teacher mentions that there was a lot of self-reflecting work done on that topic to be able to bring it to the classrooms.

Teacher 5 hopes that there would be more lessons that deal with experiences of transgender people. She accentuates the growing number of young people that she sees “who are lost, don't know who they are and where to belong to, and what to like”. And she proudly mentions one of her ex-students who currently creates educational materials that support trans-youth in schools.

Teacher 4 clearly states that intercultural education should include topics of sexual orientation and explore LGBTQ+ culture in various countries. This teacher encourages students to express their gender and sexuality openly and freely. The teacher also mentions that Helsinki Pride events were incorporated into education, and students together with staff members were encouraged to express their support.

Finally, Teacher 7 points out heteronormative nature of teaching materials that completely lack diversity when it comes to gender and sexuality and its effects on visual art. She shares an observation that out of 40 artists that she needed to discuss with students 39 were cisgender heterosexual men and only one woman, what encouraged the teacher to contact materials' authors and call for a wider representation of people.

Overall, half of the interviewed teachers advocate for an inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture into intercultural education to promote diversity and acceptance, however, the level of such inclusion depends solely on the teacher and their familiarity with the topic, since teaching materials continue to be largely heteronormative.

Development of critical thinking

Interviewed teachers see potential in intercultural film literacy education to critically examine cultural misrepresentation in audio-visual media. The teachers understand film literacy not only in relation to films, but also to any audio-visual formats, such as YouTube or TikTok videos, or Instagram reels. They also emphasise a noticeable shift towards consumption of social media videos instead of films and TV. Hence, they find it important to develop a critical attitude towards cultural representation in those media as well.

Teacher 1 highlights the importance of post-screening discussions, when students can share their thoughts and feelings, as well as their experiences and backgrounds to see how they relate to a film. It is crucial for the teacher to examine the point of view of a film, recognise the broadcasted messages and analyse them critically with references to students' own experience.

At the same time, this teacher believes that watching and discussing films about various cultures can inspire students to learn more about the said cultures and connect with other people better.

Teacher 5 seconds the importance of discussion and developing connection with other people. Although she is unsure of the effect those discussions have on the students, in her teaching she aims to increase their understanding of media. Her goal is to introduce film as more than just an entertainment, by discussing their backgrounds, ideas, production, and then assisting students in understanding the director's choices. Teacher 2 describes one of the exercises they completed, when students were tasked to "analytically put the movie into small pieces where they can find representational issues". The purpose of such a task was to develop critical understanding towards the way film represents different people.

Teacher 3 mentions how it is important to discuss film characters and their motivations with children in his preschool. The way he does it is through various activities with a hope that children would reflect on the film and its characters and remember it in the future. Another preschool teacher – Teacher 6 – describes a week-long experiment they did when children were tasked with creating a short film from scratch. Apart from teaching about film production, scriptwriting and the basics of editing, this experiment allowed them to showcase that the films are produced by someone, and they do not necessarily reflect reality.

Teacher 8 also points out that "film and television is an illusion, everything is made, sounds, little details, nothing is true", and that he hopes to convey this message to students. He shares a worry that his pupils think that the world is the same as it is presented in the media, thus, he encourages them to be more critical. "You have to be critical, and you have to think for yourself that things that you see and hear are not true".

Teacher 7 recognizes the power that film has to provoke emotions from viewers and open their minds to other people and experiences. However, in her teaching she makes it clear to students that they can be manipulated, and how "little tricks and tips can shift your understanding of what's happening, what's left out of the image". She also brings up deep fakes and how they can twist our understanding of the world, which is especially crucial in the case of videos on social media.

Overall, the teachers see the development of critical thinking as the key aspect of film and media literacy, they articulate the importance of analysing film, television, and other audio-visual media content for the

messages they might convey and for the ways they represent the world and other people. However, several teachers worry if their teaching is impactful and actually changes pupils' media outlook.

DISCUSSION: BROADENING THE CONCEPTS

Intercultural Education towards LGBTQ+ culture

One of the findings is the inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture into the discussion on intercultural education. The interviewed visual art teachers recognize the significance of one's sexuality and gender identity and how it is interconnected with the person's culture. It is especially interesting to see teachers focus mostly on experiences of transgender people. LGBTQ+ rights in Finland are one of the most advanced (ILGA World, 2020). However, as of February 2022, Finnish transgender people are still enduring injustice, being forced to undergo sterilization before acquiring legal gender recognition. The existence of such outdated policies even in the advanced democracies such as Finland highlights the importance of stimulating the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people into intercultural education.

At the same time, as Karttunen (2021) study suggests on the example of University of Oulu there is a lack of training on working with LGBTQ+ people in Finnish teacher's education, with rare discussions being a part of bigger issues such as bullying or misgendering. The current research's findings also correspond to Karttunen's (2021) in that the teachers recognize the importance of inclusion of LGBTQ+ themes but lack support and guidance.

There is also a limited scholarship on inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture to intercultural education, since, as Paul Gorski (2009) writes, intercultural education tends to lack the conviction to address the grave injustices experienced by many included in intercultural dialogue. However, as Fred Dervin (2015) reports, intercultural education can easily include LGBTQ+ people, since many topics in intercultural education touch upon sexualities (e.g., family, hobbies, and political opinions). Rita Betro (2014), who discusses inclusion of LGBTQ+ people into intercultural education in Ontario, Canada, emphasises the importance of nurturing the voices that were previously silenced to have a platform to join the international community.

The inclusion of LGBTQ+ culture into intercultural education then influences understanding of intercultural

film literacy education and brings up the discussion on portrayal of LGBTQ+ people in audio-visual media. Although there is a growing number of queer characters in film and television (Smith, 2020), there is still potential for misrepresentation and symbolic annihilation of LGBTQ+ people (Klein & Shiffman, 2006). The inclusion of queer media into film literacy and discussion on them from intercultural perspective can potentially not only give voice to previously silenced, but also challenge the dominant heteronormativity, which, as the current research findings suggest, is much present in existing teaching materials.

However, as Rita Betro (2014) highlights, there are challenges in discussing LGBTQ+ culture in a classroom, for example, when a person expresses a wish to be excused from such activities based on their religion. Intercultural education alone, and intercultural film literacy education by extension, are not enough in securing inclusive, and respectful dialogue; at least “a critical examination of the heteronormative structure and assumptions of curriculum is also required” (Betro, 2014, p. 150). Nevertheless, such conversations on LGBTQ+ representation in audio-visual media from an intercultural perspective is a step towards an inclusiveness in and outside of education.

Film literacy towards social media

Another conclusion from the findings is that teachers understand on a personal level the importance of intercultural film literacy education to increase students’ awareness of cultural representation in media and be critical of the messages it conveys. The interviewed teachers practice a variety of activities and exercises that aim to promote critical attitude towards audio-visual content and its messages, especially, when it comes to cultural representation. Several interviewees describe their efforts not only to teach that what is shown might not always be the truth, but also to emphasise how audiences can be manipulated.

One of the teachers brings deep fakes into discussion and stresses the role that audio-visual social media plays in shaping students’ perception of the world. With recent digital advancement and global increase in time spent online due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Lemenager et al., 2021), young people consume and produce more of audio-visual content. Apps such as YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram stimulated the rise of “producers” (van Dijck, 2013) people, who blur the lines between public and private worlds (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009). This

highlights the importance of expanding film literacy beyond film towards audio-visual contents produced and consumed online.

One of the pre-school teachers described a small conflict, when one of the international pupils was ridiculed by others for using hands to eat food, as accustomed to their culture. The teacher then showcased a YouTube video to students to increase their awareness of how food is eaten in various cultures, including the one the pupil was from. Thus, the teacher promoted intercultural exchange by using an online video that authentically represented cultures. However, YouTube and other video-based social media can both represent and misrepresent a culture through a great variety of content available (vlogs, documentaries, top 10 facts, commentary, compilations, reaction videos). Hence, intercultural film literacy education should and can be broadened to include other forms of audio-visual media apart from traditional film.

The inclusion of social media into film literacy prompts a discussion on a possible extension of that concept towards recommendations algorithms. Although none of the interviewed teachers discussed the role of algorithms, the growing body of the research showcases the need to acknowledge their influence on students’ social media consumption (van Audenhove et al., 2020; Jacques et al., 2020; Werning, 2020; Dezuanni, 2021; Vartiainen et al., 2022). Algorithms offer personalised content, what Rodríguez Ortega (2022) calls “planned differentiation”, when each user gets a content tailored to what algorithms perceive as users’ tastes.

Pajkovic (2021) showcased how in just a few days Netflix algorithms recognize patterns of users’ behaviour and encircle them in a similar content that they previously responded to. Such barricades of one type of content may result in limiting one’s exposure to alternative content, perspectives, and information sources, especially if we talk about social media algorithms (Conroy et al., 2012). Thus, if a user responds to a content that involves cultural misrepresentation, for example, some TikTok videos, there is a potential for them to receive similar suggestions that would further push a misrepresentative narrative. By expanding film literacy towards understanding the role of algorithms, there is a potential to increase critical awareness of how students use the media and what content they consume.

Overall, to answer the main research question of how visual art schoolteachers understand and practise intercultural film literacy education, the study concludes

that teachers use intercultural film literacy education to combat cultural misrepresentation by developing critical thinking towards content of film, television, and video-based social media. At the same time, teachers promote an inclusion of LGBTQ+ people into intercultural education, by doing self-reflecting work, using new materials, and openly criticising existing ones.

CONCLUSION

The research showcases how visual art teachers understand intercultural film literacy education to increase students' awareness of cultural misrepresentation in media and be critical of the messages it conveys. However, it is up to every teacher to decide how intercultural film literacy education is implemented and how extensive it would be. Such findings showcase that not much has changed in a decade since the report on the status of film literacy in European countries (2012) has been published.

It takes personal effort to expand one's own knowledge and understanding, to search for suitable up-to-date and high-quality materials and to introduce them to the classes for already overburdened and burnout Finnish teachers (Santavirta et al., 2007; Pyhältö et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the lack of appropriate materials is a problem present not only in film literacy education, but in Finnish media education in general (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019).

Simultaneously, the existing teaching materials lack cultural representation, which contrasts the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education that emphasises exploration of culturally diverse reality through visual art (2014). Hence, available teaching materials prevent teachers from working towards promotion of cultural diversity. Such a task is made more difficult for preschool teachers who need to find materials suitable for small children.

Finally, few teachers expressed insecurity in how impactful their teaching is, stating that they are unsure if students actually begin to critically approach media and its messages. There is a limited time for film literacy education in visual art studies, and one cannot be sure if that is enough. Therefore, one of the directions for the future research is to study the impact the intercultural film literacy education practices have on students. Additionally, further research is needed that would analyse actual teaching methods and information that teachers share with their students.

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