

UNIVERSAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL. EXHIBITION BY PER ISAK JUUSO FOR YOUTH AND CHILDREN

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Abstract. *This article explores the strategies employed by educators at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok, Norway, in the production of educational materials related to an exhibition by Sámi duodji artist Per Isak Juuso. The study examines the process of creating materials that are suitable for various age groups of children and youth, and applicable to both local Sámi and international visitors. The research question is: How can the content of educational material within an art exhibition be designed to appeal to diverse audiences of children and youth? The aim of the study is to identify what kind of educational material about Sámi art can be used by different age groups and backgrounds, including local Sámi and international visitors. This aim is achieved through the following objectives: the design of educational material, presentation of the material to various groups of youth and children and their educators, evaluation of feedback on the content of the developed material, and a comparison, through observation, of the quantity of material used during the exhibition. The results of the research provide recommendations for art institutions and museums on how to develop universal educational materials that are suitable for various groups of learners and can be adapted by teachers to different levels of understanding during conversations.*

Keywords: *children, duodji, mediation, Sámi art, universal educational material, youth.*

Introduction

The article examines the strategies employed in the development, introduction, and usage of educational material used for mediating artworks within an art exhibition at an art center. The core task in working with exhibitions is the educational purpose, as art can serve as a platform for interpretation-based learning and empower participants to be active, creative, and expressive, as stated by Petrey (2012). According to this study, a dynamic and interactive process is at the heart of learning. However, exhibition spaces often provide a passive experience of spectatorship. Exhibition spaces, in general, are often designed with the goal of showcasing artworks in a visually pleasing way, but this can sometimes lead to a passive experience for viewers. Traditional exhibition spaces are typically set up for viewing only, which can make it difficult for visitors, particularly children and youth, to actively engage with the artworks. Petrey (2012) states that art can serve as a platform for interpretation-based learning,

which can empower participants to be active, creative, and expressive. However, the traditional setup of exhibition spaces often does not facilitate this kind of engagement. Furthermore, when the main goal is showing artworks, the educational potential of art exhibitions is often overlooked and not prioritized. The lack of interactive, dynamic and engaging features in exhibition spaces can make it difficult for visitors to fully engage and learn from the artworks on display.

Factors that are essential in welcoming youth and children into an exhibition space include an interactive process, a positive environment, and opportunities for active participation (Petrey, 2012). Therefore, for youth and children, it is necessary to add another layer to the experience of visiting an exhibition at an art center. Passive spectatorship is not sufficient. A means of activating young viewers in an exhibition space is needed. However, smaller art institutions often do not have the capacity to develop extensive materials for various age groups of children, both local and international. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how educators and mediators at an art center can develop universal educational material that allows for activating the space of experience and, at the same time, is useful for teachers of different age groups of students. Another challenge was that it is not always possible for groups of children and teachers to pre-order a guided tour or workshop. Therefore, the developed educational material is intended to be stand-alone, without the involvement of a mediator or educator at the art center being necessary in the process of mediation.

The method of the research was an arts-based approach, as the content of all the materials developed was based on artistic work and had an aesthetic output - the designed educational material for children and youth. According to Greenwood (2019), arts-based research is developed upon an aesthetic understanding of the researched area. Arts-based research always has an aim and objectives, whether within artistic, curatorial, or educational projects (Greenwood, 2019). The materials included artistic materials, observations, and conversations with the teachers who accompanied the groups of children. The analysis of the materials was conducted by the Principle Investigator (PI).

The PI developed the educational material for the exhibition by Per Isak Juuso, which was held from October 23rd to December 30th, 2022 at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok, Norway. The idea and content were developed by a working group of three contributors: the PI, a designer, and a translator into Northern Sámi. As a result, the material was released in English for international groups and in Northern Sámi for local groups in Karasjok. The content of the material was identical in both language versions. The material was released during the Sámi Language Week in Karasjok and in conjunction with the exhibition by duodji artist Per Isak Juuso. Per Isak Juuso has over 25 years of experience with duodji/Sámi handicrafts and is a leader in innovation within this artistic field. The exhibition consisted of art objects made with duodji using

materials such as metal, wood, horn, and leather. Per Isak Juuso works with the composition of different materials and visual storytelling about tradition, materiality, and technique. All the artworks within the exhibition were from the private collection of Bertil Eriksson, a Sweden-based collector.

During the Sámi Language Week, an interview with Per Isak Juuso was conducted, as well as a public conversation with collector Bertil Eriksson. Additionally, a video about the exhibition was developed, featuring images of the artworks and storytelling by Per Isak Juuso. The video was presented in an open event format at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok. The exhibition lasted for two months after the Sámi Language Week. The video was made available on the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art's YouTube channel and social media, while the designed and printed educational material was used throughout the entire period of the exhibition.

Case: Into the exhibition by Per Isak Juuso

The terminology used in the context of Sámi art is very specific and requires explanation. Firstly, *duodji*, as explained by scholar Gunvor Guttorm (2012, 2015), is the expression of creativity for the Sámi people, and traditionally natural materials are used in *duodji*. *Duodji* represents traditional Sámi culture, and in my opinion, it strongly promotes an ecological and nature-friendly creative process of artistic production. Within the context of *duodji*, discussions about materiality are of great importance (Guttorm, 2012, 2015). However, Juuso's innovative approach has allowed for the introduction of non-natural materials in the creation of *duodji*, and this has set *duodji* into a new discussion about the values of nature and the impact of technology on it. In Juuso's artworks, the dominant materials are wood, moose horns, and reindeer horns, but one can also find materials such as plastic.

It is important to mediate and explain art in a way that is tailored to various groups individually. Layering of the narrative and multileveledness of perception (Cupchik & Gignac, 2007; Griniuk, 2022) can be achieved in two different ways: by tailoring the narrative to each audience separately or by designing the content of education and mediation of an art exhibition in a universal approach. Layering of narrative is understood as providing multiple directions the story can take, such as only discussing the shape of an object or exploring questions about nature and the environment. Similarly, multileveledness of perception refers to the amount of information the viewer wants or is able to know and discuss about the artwork. When working with children, it is self-evident that perception would differ when working with first-graders who are 6-7 years old compared to gymnasium students who are 16-18 years old.

Specifically, the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, being a smaller art center in the context of Norwegian art centers, has the goal of developing an

educational arena and attracting young people to experience art, both locally and internationally. However, there is no specific educational department and employees have the task of developing educational material alongside a variety of other tasks. This is a common scenario in institutions like this. Therefore, the importance is to understand the strategies on how the same educational material can become universal - suitable for a wide variety of target groups, applicable by the teachers who are teaching different subjects at school, and capable of evoking discussions that are interesting at all levels of knowledge and understanding.



*Figure 1, 2 Per Isak Juuso. Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, Karasjok
(Photo: Tor Egil Rasmussen)*

The specific aspect of the exhibition by Per Isak Juuso was that the artist works with duodji, and presents an innovative and experimental take on this traditional Sámi medium (see Figure 1 and 2). The objects in the exhibition varied in size and were placed in the display cases in the foyer of the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art. Some of the objects were very small, measuring only 7 square centimeters, while others were 50 x 70 cm or larger. The challenge was to shape the entry point into the exhibition in an explorative approach, by encouraging visitors to look for details and the traces of the artist's innovative play with traditional media. For example, on a duodji knife, Juuso incorporated a smiley (see Figure 3) or in another piece he used plastic to create blue fringes (see Figure 4). Such details were very important. It was crucial to develop materials that would encourage children and young people to look closely, whether at a larger or a tiny artwork.



Figure 3 Per Isak Juuso. Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, Karasjok. The knife in the front of the photo has a smiley on it (Photo: Tor Egil Rasmussen)

The designed educational material (see Figure 5) encouraged visitors to find the object presented in the material, suggest what kind of object it was and answer one of the given questions, which could be answered in a simple way or lead to deeper discussions about ecology or the relationship between human, tradition, and technology. For example, in the artwork titled "The kayak with the el-motor," the children were asked to locate the el-motor in the duodji object. This encouraged the children to look closely, explore the details in each object and consider the object within the context of contemporary socio-materiality. Additionally, the educational material questioned the relationship between the

artistic object and the titles given to them by the artist. For example, in the sculpture titled "self-portrait," made from wood, iron, and the face made from moose horns, the children were asked to interpret why the sculpture is a self-portrait.



Figure 4 Per Isak Juuso. Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, Karasjok. The object contains plastic fringes (Photo: Tor Egil Rasmussen)

Feedback from one of the visiting groups of gymnasium students and their teacher was that the educational material made them find details in the artworks that they would not have noticed otherwise. The most challenging task seemed to be the part where the students were invited to find the object with the smiley, as it was located on the edge of the knife and required to be viewed from a different angle, or to see it the visitor had to move around and look into the object from the level of one meter above the floor. Overall, the materials invited not only to inspect the objects but also to move around in non-usual ways and see the objects from different angles.

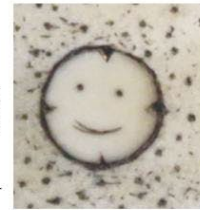
Language played a very important role in the development of the educational material. Since the release was connected to Sámi language week, it was essential to have material in Sámi and also in English in case of having international or Norwegian groups who do not understand Sámi. Interestingly, material in the Sámi language was used much more actively than in English, and some weeks it was necessary to re-print new materials in Sámi a few times to have them available for use and interaction. This suggests that most of the groups of

Find the artwork. Discuss the questions.



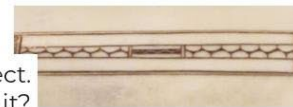
1. Find the object.
What kind of object is it?

2. Find the object with a smiley.
Why does this object have a smiley?

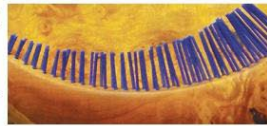


3. Find the object.
What kind of object is it?

4. Find the object.
What kind of object is it?



5. Find the object with blue fringes.
Why does this object have fringes?



6. Find the object.
What kind of object is it?

7. Find the object with claws.
Why does this object have claws?



9. Find the object.
Where is the engine on this object?

8. Find the object.
What kind of object is it?



10. Find the object.
What kind of object is it?

11. Find the object with this face.
Look at the title — Why do you think this object has this title?



Figure 5 Per Isak Juuso. Part of the educational material (Developed by Author, in collaboration with Tue Brisson Mosich and Monika Anti at Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok)

learners were from Sapmi and could understand Northern Sámi, in which the materials were produced. Since Karasjok, where the art center is located, has two schools, one primary and secondary school and one school at the gymnasium level, the initial thought was that the material would be useful for the local teachers. However, groups of students were also arriving from other towns such as Kauntokeino. Nevertheless, it is not known exactly where each group was from, since at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, groups can just walk in without pre-booking, although some groups do book in advance.

Research results: towards universal educational material

As previously mentioned, universal educational material is material that can layer the possible directions where discussions between teachers and learners can go and is adjustable to many levels of perception. In this way, the same educational material, by being universal, can serve educational purposes for children from a very young age to young people up to 18 years old. Teachers shape the discussion, but the materials developed by educators and mediators at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art can serve as a starting point by inviting children and youth to explore the exhibition, notice the fragments of the artworks and to contextualize their observations in the format of the discussion.

The findings of this study are:

- The educational material contains images and questions that can be interpreted from many different perspectives and deepened into a wide range of discussions, targeted at various groups of learners. This approach was taken in order to cater to the wide range of age groups and educational backgrounds of the children and youth visiting the exhibition. For example, when posed with the question of why a semi-abstract sculpture is titled 'Self-portrait', students of different ages would analyze and answer the question in very different ways. A 6-year-old child might focus on the physical appearance of the sculpture and its relation to the human form, while a 16-year-old student might delve deeper into the symbolism and conceptual meaning behind the title.
- The educational material encourages seeing the details, and in the process of looking for the details the learners are encouraged to look at the objects from different positions and to move around it and see it from different angles.
- The educational material can be used as a stand-alone material and does not require the presence of a mediator or educator. This is particularly useful in the context of art education where school groups do not

necessarily book visits in advance but rather walk in at their own time of convenience and subject relevance.

- The development of the material does not require an extensive team of an educational department at an art center, as in smaller art centers, many employees work on the development of educational material in parallel with a variety of other tasks.
- However, it is important to note that the development of educational material is a complex and time-consuming process that requires a certain level of expertise and resources. While it is true that the development of educational material does not necessarily require an extensive team of an educational department, it still requires skilled educators and mediators who understand the nuances of creating materials that can be adapted to various audiences. It also requires resources such as time, funding, and equipment to research, design, produce, and evaluate the effectiveness of the materials. Additionally, producing multilingual materials like in this case, requires language skills and/or translator/ editor to ensure the quality of the materials is maintained in both languages. It is also important to note that the design of universal educational materials is a challenging task, and it is not necessarily an easy task to create material that can be suitable for a wide variety of target groups, applicable by the teachers who are teaching different subjects at school, and capable of evoking discussions interesting on all the levels of knowledge and understanding.
- The learners are encouraged to analyze how the titles of the artwork are given, and how the materials in the artworks are used. They are also encouraged to understand art and innovation in parallel and to discuss art and societal contexts in a holistic perspective.
- The material developed for the Per Isak Juuso exhibition is framed as "universal material" referring to universal design strategies where the items are designed for a wide range of users in this case connected to educational institutions, yet different age groups and different subjects.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore how to design the content of educational material within an art exhibition to various audiences of children and youth and that are applicable to both the local Sámi and international visitors. The culture of exhibition spectatorship present in youth and children require active involvement and participation in the exhibition experience, as well as a safe space for exploring the art venue and artworks within the exhibition. The research team developed educational material for the Per Isak Juuso exhibition at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, using a universal approach for the educational materials.

Through this study, it was found that the development of universal educational material, which encourages active exploration of each artwork, can serve as an effective tool for engaging children and youth in art exhibitions. The images and text encouraged active exploration of each artwork, and the questions developed could be adapted by the teacher to various complexities and themes of discussions. The material could be adapted to different subjects and was designed to be a stand-alone material, so that the educator and mediator did not necessarily need to be involved. This was convenient as it is often the case that visits to art centers are not booked in advance by the teachers. However, it's worth noting that the development of such materials requires skill, time and resources and not as simple as it may seem. One of the key findings from the research is that the universal approach to designing the content of the educational material involved constructing tasks and questions that were open-ended and able to be interpreted on various levels. This multilevel approach to the educational material was effective in engaging the visitors of different ages and abilities, encouraging them to explore the exhibition in their own way and gain insights on different levels. The findings of this study can be useful for art educators and mediators in art centers, galleries, and museums globally, who are looking to create engaging and effective educational experiences for children and youth. Overall, the study highlights the importance of active participation and exploration in exhibition spaces, as well as the importance of designing educational materials that can be adapted to different audiences and contexts.

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