Bilag 9

Socially constructed norms as learning content in art education

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“I hadn't really thought about it before: that there could be situations where you were in doubt  
about which gender was the most appropriate for doing things”. (Danish student, 15 years old)

This presentation will evolve around a study that took place in a Danish school focusing on why  
and how young people could work with and challenge stereotypical identity construction in an  
educational art project. In the study we wanted to examine how it is possible to work practically and  
explicitly with social constructions in an art educational context, which relates closely to the  
students own community and way of living. We have found that art education inspired by  
contemporary art practices holds a potential for working with the socially constructed norms of  
everyday life.

Through different approaches we will argue that it is important for young people to experience how  
social constructions can become visible, and how it is possible to interact with these social  
constructions through socially engaged art practices. We use socially engaged art as a broad term  
for contemporary art projects that intervene in reality and have a direct impact on the mechanisms  
of social constructions. When we let ourselves be inspired by socially engaged art and bring it into  
the educational context, we see how the social can be dealt with in a different way.

In educational work with social constructions it is important to use tools, which are heuristic,  
challenging and embrace complexity. As our “pedagogical lens” we are inspired by performative  
methods from the socially engaged art practices. Using performative tools and perspectives in  
school, as well as bringing everyday life experiences into account, makes it possible to work  
constructively with social constructions in the students' lives: it increases their options for  
performing; it strengthens their competences in identifying and performing on the basis of a critical  
distance to norms.

In our presentation we will argue that art education holds special potential for working with  
transformative processes and that art teachers has an obligation to take ‘bildung’ issues seriously.