

“Student-led education for a better world?” Reflections in conversation

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This essay provokes who the “experts” are in discussions about education: why not the students who are most impacted by it? At the Centre for Environment and Development Studies (CEMUS), a joint centre between Uppsala University and Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, students are hired as Course Coordinators (CCs) to develop and facilitate freestanding university courses. This paper is an outcome of a collaborative reflection exercise in the form of a written dialogue between students, CCs, and a guest lecturer of a CEMUS course “Reimagining Education”. This course focused on approaching learning and education on a meta-level where students and their experience become the subject of collaborative learning. By comparing the experience from this course with other courses at CEMUS and beyond, we discuss whether and how CEMUS challenges traditional pedagogies based on teacher-student hierarchies. Both the capacity for CCs to influence the content and pedagogical arrangements as well as the opportunities for non-CC students to take responsibility in steering class discussions were highlighted as empowering experiences. We reflect upon how this and the use of arts-based pedagogies can lead to fostering community and how it motivates students to collectively engage in their personal learning experiences beyond curriculum goals.

Keywords: sustainability education, critical pedagogy, student empowerment, re-imagining education, active student participation

INTRODUCTION

To detangle from routes of reproduction and envision new paths where the foundation of what we have known to be true is questioned, we propose to examine the making of education in relation to the quest for sustainability. Sustainability requires a “deeper” change in higher education that questions basic paradigms and purposes of education (Stirling, 2004). There are discussions that knowledge of such issues is inadequate and that we need more action-oriented capabilities (United Nations Environment Programme, 2012), transdisciplinarity, as well as explorative learning that allows for emergence of agency towards individual and social transformation (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015). This opens up questions about what (higher) education should be for and how these new forms of education could look in practice. In line with this, Anderson (2017) discusses how the Centre for Environment and Development Studies (CEMUS), a joint centre between Uppsala University and Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, has created new structures relevant for sustainability transformation, including new types of student-faculty relationships, working across disciplines, and learning for action towards sustainability. Furthermore, using CEMUS as one example, Barrineau, Schnaas, and

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Håkansson (2021) propose that orienting pedagogy towards *students as change agents* has the potential to strengthen the capacity of higher education to respond to complex societal and environmental issues by inviting students to meaningfully engage with the complexity and uncertainty that they are a part of.

In this paper, we offer our reflections from engaging in education at CEMUS. CEMUS offers around twenty freestanding bachelor's- and master's-level courses of various sizes and themes on sustainable development in Swedish and English for around 500–600 students per year. At CEMUS, students are employed part-time as course coordinators (CCs) to design, plan, coordinate, and facilitate these courses in collaboration with faculty (see Barrineau & Anderson, 2018), which is a unique model in the world. The first course started in 1992 organised by students that proposed an interdisciplinary course on environment and development, which then got funded by the Vice Chancellor to be coordinated by the students in collaboration with senior faculty (Hald, 2011; Hällström, 2011). CEMUS is also highlighted among a range of examples in active student participation at Uppsala University (Barrineau et al., 2019). Although lectures are a main teaching format at CEMUS, there are also innovative activities such as assignments reflecting on your role in sustainability (“30 Day Challenge” in Barrineau et al., 2019, pp. 104–105), or a “Tentarium” challenging the idea of “exams”—students can revise their answers of their individual *tenta* (written exam) following a *seminarium* (seminar) to discuss the exam questions (Barrineau et al., 2019, pp. 94–95). Some courses are entirely devoted to doing local hands-on projects and many have elements that are co-created with students taking the course (Grandin et al., 2017).

This paper is the outcome of a collaborative reflection exercise on how the CEMUS educational experience shapes the learning on both sides of the coin, meaning students and student-CCs, whose interactions lie at the core of the CEMUS educational practice. CEMUS education identifies itself with a “student-led” education model, which breaks away from traditional teacher–student hierarchies problematized by Freire (2000). We were inspired to challenge CEMUS education by discussing and critically reflecting on first-hand and embodied learning experiences with students in the course “Reimagining Education” (REDU) (see more on the course in the following section). This exercise led to the reflection that the CEMUS model perhaps reproduces similar power structures (cf. Kumashiro, 2000) by putting CCs in a privileged role. It is important to note, though, that our starting point is that we, the co-authors, have valued our experiences at CEMUS, and our intention is to further explore the potential of this educational space and help for it to evolve in new directions. In this paper, we explore REDU as an example of CEMUS education, but more than that, through our reflections on experiences and learning, we identify conditions and barriers for student-led education to be realized and for it to be fruitful in the greater context of the endeavour towards sustainability transformation. Further, we hope this will inspire discussions around fundamental questions about the goals and practices of higher education at large.

A WRITTEN DIALOGUE WITH STUDENTS

One of the CEMUS courses that started in Fall 2019, “Reimagining Education: Learning, Knowing and Doing in a Changing World” (REDU, 15 credits), focused on approaching learning and education on a meta-level where students and their experience become their own subject of

collaborative learning.¹ The REDU course ran for only one term. Although many other CEMUS courses also emphasize the learning process of the students, REDU students were explicitly asked to continuously reflect on their own educational process because of how the course thematically focused on, as part of the course goals, the practice and experience of learning and education, making it a particularly relevant course to explore against the background of this paper. The course had ten students (hence it was a smaller class compared to the average range of CEMUS courses of 20–60 students), which enabled individual and personal student engagement in the form of dialogue in class. When Sachiko joined the course as a guest lecturer to facilitate a discussion around the CEMUS educational model, students' reflections on their own experience of CEMUS sparked the idea to explore them further. So far, publications about CEMUS have been mainly authored by CCs (Anderson, 2017; Ishihara & Marcos Valls, 2017; Parrique, 2015). Against this background, one aim of this essay has been to diversify the perspectives by bringing in reflections of non-CC students into the discussion, inspired by feminist writing methodologies (Livholts, 2012a; Lykke, 2010; MYCKET, 2017; Schalk et al., 2017). All the students of the course REDU were invited to join this essay writing as a voluntary extra-curricular project, and five out of ten students took part. This written dialogue is mainly based on the experience from REDU, while some also referred to their REDU experience in comparison with other CEMUS courses and other educational experiences. This took the form of a written conversation between the students, CCs, and the guest lecturer in a Google Doc over two weeks. The dialogue highlights sometimes contrasting perspectives between the co-authors, based on our different positions (teacher, course coordinator, student) and experiences (counter to students seen as empty "containers"; Freire, 2000), which a single-voiced narrative cannot show.

The essay was then developed in a smaller group to aim for academic publication. Our choice to co-author with students shifts from *writing about* students to *writing with* them in order to include student voices in the debate about higher education (Cook-Sather, 2014), and to engage students as partners (Healey et al., 2014). However, the writing process illustrated a challenge in collaborating with students, where most of the students left the project after the end of the semester, as many were also exchange students that physically left Uppsala. Aster, who is the only student who stayed on to develop this essay, also became a CC during the later stages of the writing process, which carried over a year and a half. Charlotte has also finished her role as a CC during this period, exemplifying the typical fast turnover at CEMUS. Here, as a PhD candidate which is also another form of "student", Sachiko identifies herself as a teacher in this context, collaborating both with former CC colleagues as well as students.² The original written conversation was treated as quotes and excerpts were selected to highlight themes, and edited and shortened for clarity. As we took a writing style that explicitly acknowledges our "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988), we consciously included personal and emotional experience, which is usually "edited out" in academic papers (Livholts, 2012b). Sections in between the quotes are our analyses about the written conversation that connect to the wider relevance and guide the reader. The reason we only invited REDU students into this writing project, and

¹ See course page (<http://www.cemus.uu.se/redu/>) and syllabus (<https://www.uu.se/en/admissions/exchange/courses/list/syllabus/?kpid=37924&lasar=20%2F21&ctyp=1>).

² PhD students are fully employed at Swedish universities, and they often teach lectures and seminars for bachelor's and master's level courses.

not students from other CEMUS courses, was because we were interested in an in-depth analysis of the variety of experiences within a single course. Additionally, REDU provided a good example as the course offered perspectives on learning and education on a meta-level, which is of particular interest in relation to the aim of this in-depth exploration. For the scope of the project, a limited number of possible co-writers was needed, since we were equally interested in the process of co-writing (as opposed to conducting e.g., surveys). We also valued that the group already knew each other and had a common ground for discussion and collaboration, which was needed for such an open-ended process.

STUDENT EMPOWERMENT: “STUDENT-LED” EDUCATION BY WHOM?

Students of REDU (Jessica, Charleen, Mart, Catherine, Aster), its CCs (Charlotte, Ewa), and a former CC/guest lecturer to the course (Sachiko) open a dialogue. We start with discussing what we see as the goals of CEMUS. This discussion serves as a ground for the later reflection on whether and how these goals were perceived as realized during the first (and only) run of REDU in 2019.

Ewa: Student-led education has been the model with which CEMUS tries to break some of the traditional hierarchical boundaries within academia. My previous experience in the Swedish educational system has left me curious about how change in education can happen and CEMUS offers a good start. I believe CEMUS’ ambition is to inspire change,³ by engaging in global sustainability issues and empower and equip students to be able to address and act in a changing world. However, there are different interpretations of what empowerment is (and should be). As students become the creators of the courses offered at CEMUS, there is a high turnover of staff and thus the goals of CEMUS may be interpreted and changed differently depending on who is running a course.

CCs at CEMUS have to be enrolled students and are hired part-time on a temporary contract (approximately five months of internal training and planning and five months of running the course and evaluation). CCs can continue for a maximum of five years, but many finish in one to three years, creating openings for new students to become CCs through a job recruitment process. CCs are encouraged to recreate the course each year within the syllabus that outlines a brief description of course content, intended learning outcomes, and format of examinations, but no detailed course schedule. These changes are made with input from CEMUS staff, the Director of Studies, and a course specific Working Group that consists of researchers, former students, and societal actors which provide critical feedback on assessment, literature, and pedagogical methods (see Barrineau & Anderson, 2018; Stoddard et al., 2012).

Sachiko: When I worked as a CC, I appreciated the freedom, responsibility, and power of designing the courses: deciding what themes are relevant, inviting guest lecturers from practically anywhere (with online lectures), and changing the course structure and assignments every year. At other departments, this is not the case. I was empowered and learned so much by being a CC. But to provoke – who gets to set the goals of CEMUS and the learning that happens at CEMUS? Are students that are taking the courses able to? Is the power only in the hands of CCs?

³ As suggested in Hald (2011).

- Charleen: I am a new student and got to understand the goals of CEMUS through my participation and I agree with Ewa's summation. Talking about empowerment, REDU also gives the students opportunities to plan events and discussions. That creates a feeling of trust and some sort of complicity, a shared respect, empathy, and knowledge with the classmates and even the guest lecturers. The class is meaningful to me and I consider this to be fundamental for learning and personal development.
- Charlotte: As a CC, I have the feeling that our sometimes very atypical ideas of how to create meaningful higher education are supported. We have great freedom to reply to feedback and questions raised by students while the course is running. This freedom goes hand in hand with a lot of responsibility. In my opinion, to become active and experiment with unconventional ideas in a collaborative learning environment with an eye on making space for an expression of pluralistic worldviews is a fundamental part of empowerment.
- Jessica: When students have power over what they can discuss within the classroom and talk out of curiosity, things start to get a lot more interesting in the sense that the power dynamics and hierarchical relationships are torn down and recreated so the teacher and student have a reciprocal relationship. This makes room for the classroom to be more personal, which is something I think mainstream education is lacking.

Here, both CCs as well as students point to the empowering experiences that the learning environment at CEMUS offers. For the CCs, this is exemplified in the freedom and power to design the courses, including being experimental with innovating sustainability education practice. For the students, they illustrate the opportunities to organize events, as well as steering the class discussions themselves. These themes are connected with breaking traditional hierarchies between teachers and students, which is seen as a necessary change in education. This is in line with what Freire (2000) calls for, based on the critiques against the dominant, "banking" style of education, where the teachers as the expert and authority chooses the content and delivers knowledge to the passive and "empty" student. One can argue that unsettling these traditional teacher-student roles and hierarchies is at the core of the CEMUS education model. Based on interviews with CCs, Barrineau and Anderson (2018) show how CCs experience their role as ambiguous; a "majority of CCs saw themselves as facilitators of some kind, something 'between teacher and student,' or a 'co-student'" (p. 23). They discuss that CCs being outside of and between fixed categories such as "teacher" or "student" have generated new possibilities of experimentation and alternative power dynamics. Nevertheless, our written conversation shed light onto another perspective of how these power dynamics are experienced by the students in the classroom.

- Aster: When I think of the CEMUS courses I took, I cannot come up with one central notion that captures its educational brand. The larger classes consist almost entirely of guest lecturers who, in traditional university fashion, impart on us (around 50 students in a lecture hall) one-directional knowledge. REDU on the other hand brings 10 students around a table, with guest speakers joining, often leading the presentations to evolve into conversations. If the CEMUS essence lies in the branded "student-led" education, which students is it talking about? In most of my CEMUS experience it was the two CCs who decided the course themes and invited guests but in REDU, I believe that all of us taking the course are actually "leading" our own education.

- Ewa: If the student experiences from different CEMUS courses are so different concerning what CEMUS is and what student-led education is about (or should be about), then perhaps there has been a change from “the want for transdisciplinary approaches to knowledge” in the early ’90s when CEMUS started, to “explorative pathfinding for transformative action towards sustainability” in 2019.

These reflections about who is the student in the “student-led” education point to a contradiction in the CEMUS education model, one relevant to any educational endeavour that seeks to foster “a better world.” Kumashiro (2000) highlights that any didactically induced perspectives, even those that profess themselves as critical (or transformative) pedagogy, are in fact merely replacing existing power structures with new power structures, in this case embodied through the choices of CCs. If the CEMUS model puts the CCs in a privileged role, with the intention of breaking the teacher–student hierarchy, but with the unintended effect of reproducing power imbalances, can it do so in another way? Can CEMUS move beyond empowerment through “repetition and affirmation” of either the student’s or CCs’ knowledge and worldviews and instead effectively embrace “uncertainty, difference, and change”? (Kumashiro, 2000, p. 44). There have been some examples to devote class sessions halfway through the course to reflect and discuss what are “missing perspectives” in the course (see Barrineau et al., 2019, pp. 96–97), as well as have students in groups design and facilitate activities for the rest of the class to bring in their own interests as well as practice their facilitation skills (see Barrineau et al., 2019, pp. 98–101). Yet, some of these spaces have not been kept as a core element when courses have changed over the years. This is also because many CEMUS courses are ambitious in pedagogy and content and are faced with difficult decisions of prioritization to cover wide topics such as “global challenges and sustainable futures” or “climate change leadership” within a reasonable course workload of 7.5 or 15 credits (both are existing courses at CEMUS) for an international and diverse group of students with different disciplinary backgrounds and previous knowledge on sustainability. Still, building on these examples, can we have more space for students taking the courses (non-CC) to lead the content and secure these spaces to continue over the years? Are we leaving space for non-CC students to critique, reflect, and even bring in or encounter what the course overlooks, what is unsaid, and what is unthinkable?

WELCOMING THE UNEXPECTED: ARTS AND DIVERSE PEDAGOGIES IN REDU

At this point, we must once more acknowledge that the reflections in this paper are mostly influenced by students’ and course coordinators’ experiences and partaking in one specific course: REDU. In the way the course was structured, it did not aim to equip the students with pre-defined knowledge of a specific subject. On the contrary, its aim was to question “what is knowledge and what is education for?” and to give everyone involved the space to collaboratively learn about the multiplicity of how knowledge can be explored. This was guided by weekly changing themes and guest lectures, influenced and inspired by the students’ contributions to the class.

- Catherine: I did not know that CEMUS was student-led until the first day of class and I admit that I was a bit suspicious, like “Will I actually learn something meaningful without a ‘proper professor?’” or “How well can students run a university course?” After the first class, however, I was amazed by how much I had gotten out of the experience. After every session, I left the building thinking about all the topics we talked about and went on and shared it with my friends and asked them about their opinions and reflections. Throughout the course, we walked in the woods,

watched a documentary, had discussion rounds, engaged in a role play, a Skype session with a renowned professor, etc. Every class is unique, and it surprised me every time.

- Jessica: What I value the most about CEMUS is that I don't have to sit at a desk for eight hours a day and hear someone speak at me rather than with me. I feel like my voice matters in the environments my life takes place in. In my opinion, a student-led and relevant curriculum is a part of the transformation needed.
- Charleen: In REDU we had a clay and drama session, something I never had before in higher education! This could be ascribed specifically to the course framework. What learning model used in REDU could be included in other courses and why?
- Charlotte: I highly believe that methods we use in REDU can be translated to other courses. I would encourage every teacher to include, for example, drama in subjects that are heavy in facts or technical knowledge and lack interpersonal activities due to didactical traditions. I don't think that certain methods are only applicable to certain subjects. Rather, a wide range contributes to broadening the horizon, teaches skills, and lets you experience different facets of learning. One important aspect in REDU was to make each other's voices matter; learning from one another's experiences and supporting each other in the individual learning process across a variety of methods.
- Mart: I strongly agree with your idea, Charlotte, that education should be more about learning from one another. That should have a more important part in our educational systems. To add a perspective from natural sciences, in earlier studies I have often experienced, as Aster put it, one-directional knowledge intake. Passively listen to the lectures and then write an exam. Nothing more, no creativity in the pedagogical methods, no fruitful discussions, no learning from each other. One can say that natural sciences are essentially more descriptive and there is less space for interpretation, but I am sure it could still be taught more creatively and inclusively. Another key element I have been missing is a transdisciplinary approach. So far, I was able to find these experiences in non-formal education. And now, after a few months of studying at CEMUS, I am happy to say that I found what I came for.

The use of arts, as well as the use of diverse pedagogical approaches, is highlighted here as what made the students' and CC's learning experience unique. Jan Van Boeckel (2020), who designed the clay workshop mentioned in the quotes, discusses in his article about the value of this workshop being a fundamentally open-ended process where the goal is mostly unknown beforehand. The outcome is not given, though the participants follow certain sequential steps. "Participating, then, involves surrendering oneself to the process, without knowing how or where it will go" (Van Boeckel, 2020, p. 256). The steps in the workshop involve an "organized surprise," or what he calls "wrong footing" – like in sports, when you are expecting a ball in a certain direction, but the ball is kicked in the opposite direction at the last minute and you are on the wrong foot. The participants' imaginative capacity is evoked to overcome this unexpected threshold, and this sort of education, he argues, implies a caring attitude to what is happening now.

These arts-based pedagogies embrace a "slow" education that builds class community and enjoys surprises, which Ayers et al. (2010) discuss as a way to counter the "commonsense" in schooling and resist the standardization of the curriculum. Further, these examples emphasize dialogue and experience in learning, which could be understood as ways to put Freire's (2000) approach into practice (see also Barrineau et al., 2019). CEMUS education experienced by the REDU students, then, can be seen as being participatory and socio-constructivist, i.e.,

learning as a co-constructed endeavour that happens within a social context (Jickling & Wals 2008). Following Jickling and Wals' discussion, this is opposed to transmissive and authoritative approaches (i.e., "banking" style) of sustainable development in education, which at the extreme, there is the risk of education and the student becoming solely an instrument to realize the globalized sustainable development agenda or discourse, with no critical exploration of notions of sustainable development (see also Van Poeck & Östman, 2020). Counter to the one-directional knowledge of large lectures in some other CEMUS courses, the dialogue-based small class and use of arts in REDU invited what Kumashiro (2000) calls "uncertainty," to venture beyond what is known and planned by the students, teachers, and CCs.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PARTICIPATION

- Aster: The concept of openness as a key characteristic of CEMUS caught my eye. CEMUS-related courses, guest lectures, and workshops seem readily available, joinable, engageable. In the context of free higher education in Sweden, the majority of CEMUS courses are freestanding, meaning that they are accessible for every student independent from their personal or academic background.
- Mart: One can argue that community building is just the by-product of the CEMUS educational model, but I see it as one key aspect that makes CEMUS special. Community, either within just one course as we have at REDU, or in a broader sense, formed by having extra-curricular open events, the CEMUS Lounge, a wide variety of educational practices, and the CCs who actively participate in the learning process rather than just representing an authority in the class. I believe this feeling of being a member of a community supports the learning motivation and thus, the whole learning process. However, the community that we have built at REDU differs from the atmosphere in the CEMUS evening course that I am taking.
- Catherine: Education should inspire the form of participation that urges students to dig deeper, to get strong feelings for something they care for – it should encourage active student participation in all forms. And with that I do not mean that every student has to speak up in class. But there are many different forms this can take, such as online blogs, organizing seminars, peer assessment, labs, ... it could even be active listening. When students, however, feel like they are going through a curriculum to get a piece of paper, education has failed them.

As described above, opportunities to take a CEMUS course are relatively open to anyone. Some evening courses have 40–50 students, while REDU was a 10-student class, which perhaps led to a natural development of a more intimate community, as indicated above by one of the students. These final quotes are taken from the reflection on how participatory forms of learning support the development of community in the class and at CEMUS, and vice versa, how the community feeling supports the participation, motivation, and the learning process itself (see also Svinicki, 2016). Regardless of the invaluable experience and building of a strong learning community built on trust and care as described in REDU, the course discontinued due to its small class size. This was a decision made by CEMUS leadership with the background that departments and centres in Sweden get funding based on the number of students. This institutional context becomes a barrier to sustain small sized classes in the long term.

Even though the building of a strong community in the REDU classroom might have been just a by-product of its class size, we attempt to trace back how it evolved and why we argue for

it to be relevant when debating the role of higher education in sustainability transformation. The relationships in REDU described by the students and CCs seem to be based on their experience of an emphasis on care with what the other has to say by giving every student the space and power to contribute in their own way. This experience resonates with how Ey et al. (2020) describes what *care with* involves, namely, “the mutual recognition of an individual’s situation, active listening, the development of trust, and ongoing expressions of solidarity” (Ey et al., 2020, p. 295). Care et al. (2021) argue that enduring sustainability challenges require a leadership that is collective, which embraces critical reflection, inclusivity, and care. This requires reorienting universities to slow down and provide space and time to be creative as well as to develop relationships and cooperation based on care. Students and CC’s alike hold that their REDU experience made visible the relationships with ourselves and each other where discernment is fostered and community built. Facer (2011) suggests this is something needed in future education, together with literacy that connects mind and body as well as nurturing responsibility, which arguably is something that is developed through diverse creative pedagogies. We support Facer’s position that we acknowledge education’s role in nurturing the individual, and the process towards knowing and becoming themselves, creating citizens living in the community, and building sustainability (Facer, 2011, p. 9).

THE QUEST CONTINUES

This essay revolved around the re-imagining of (CEMUS) education based on our experience as students and CCs in co-creating learning in REDU. The exercise of reflecting upon REDU in particular should not lead the reader to view this paper as a mere evaluation of the course. On the contrary, we are opening a reflective discussion on whether and why we identify REDU as an exemplary illustration of the student-led characteristics of CEMUS’ education model on our journey towards sustainability transformation within higher education. Essentially, we identified the following conditions and barriers which surfaced through our reflections upon REDU.

We argue that one of the core ideas behind the unique education model of CEMUS that puts selected students in a coordinating position (CCs) is to empower students and unsettle the traditional teacher–student roles critiqued by Freire (2000). Yet, to what extent are we reproducing similar power structures by having a few students as CCs select the content of courses and invite guest lecturers to come in as “experts”? And if we empower ourselves and each other to have more freedom in leading one’s own education, are we as well equipped to take responsibility for what is to come from it? Moreover, what does it require mentally, emotionally, and physically, when entering the unknown and perhaps uncanny?

The making and entering of new paths when exploring the unknown demands for openness towards the unexpected and the appreciation of learning from failure. Thus, we believe in the need for strong relationships in education based on trust and care as defined by Ey et al. (2020) and Care et al. (2021). The integration of artistic and diverse pedagogies to collaboratively explore what is knowledge and what is education for, is certainly more manageable in a small class and involves slowing down in other cases. We believe that the feeling of community could mature in the way it did due to the focus on listening and dialogue based on reciprocity and care, which demands time and space often defined by the institution as well. Perhaps we need new ways to value, support, and fund such small classes institutionally in order for these spaces to continue.

Drawing from our discussion, we propose that education should go beyond the execution of curricula in a way that invites individual voices to craft their personal learning in response to the

relationships one encounters. We stress educators to foster their educational spaces to empower students in advancing their role from, metaphorically speaking, going to the restaurant, and accepting what is on the menu to instead learning together how to cook without requiring a recipe book. The outcome could be an ever-lasting supply of tools originating from our joint imagination, enabling us as learners to get to know ourselves through exploring relationships with ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

CEMUS shows that alternative education is possible even in established universities. As co-authors, we all value our experiences at CEMUS and our prime motive to participate in this conversation has been striving to further explore the potential of this education and help for it to evolve critically. Through this essay, we hope to engage in a wider discussion about the purpose of higher education and help the students' role within it to evolve critically, especially in the context of the need to transform society towards sustainability. Throughout this endeavour, we encourage dialogue and collaboration with students at different levels in the making of education. This means reorienting towards understanding “students as change agents” which requires loosening the control, and instead embracing “wildness”; encountering the unexpected, unpredictable, and even getting lost (Barrineau et al., 2021). The learning process at CEMUS and that of writing this paper have been far from smooth, with unexpected turns and disruptions. And as we take this on, we struggle, sow, and learn something — together. These conversations, collaborations, and explorations in and outside the classroom might not always be easy, but they *are happening*, and that means that the processes of change and transformation in higher education are being taken seriously. We might as well strive for it to happen in a reflective, intentional, and collaborative manner, in which the students join the group of experts, as experts of their personal learning.

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AUTHOR PRESENTATION

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Ecopsychology, Art and Narratives” and “Perspectives on Climate Change: Ecopsychology, Art and Narratives” at CEMUS during 2019–2020. She holds a Master’s degree in Environmental Communication, and is currently PhD candidate at the Department of Education, Uppsala University.

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