



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Book Launch and Scientific Workshop “Follow Your Heart. The School for Multipotentialites”

Authors:

Margherita Paola Poto, Research Professor, Faculty of Law, UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Emily Margaret Murray, Author, ECO CARE Researcher and Media Content Creator, France

Valentina Russo, Author and Illustrator, Mucho Amor, Italy

Illustrations: Valentina Russo, Mucho Amor; Pictures: Nick White

Septentrio Reports 1, 2023



<https://doi.org/10.7557/7.6986>

© 2023 The author(s). This is an Open Access publication distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) License.

Summary

The overall aim of this report is to document the experience gained during the book launch and co-created, experiential workshop on the book [Follow Your Heart: the school for multipotentialites](#). Reflecting on the dynamic process triggered by the research gathered and further developed throughout the book helps to create ideas and practices toward transformative change in research and education. The authors planned three book launches, structured as innovative academic presentations combined with creativity workshops that follow some of the suggested activities that were specifically created for the book. The first book launch was held in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, UK, and hosted by the educational farm The Good Life Projects, coordinated by Craig, on February 18, 2023. The proceeds from the book launch (collected through book sales) were donated to Windsor Hill Wood, a place of refuge and community in the local area that helps people heal, grow, and rebuild their lives while taking care of nature and encouraging sustainable livelihoods. Windsor Hill Wood as a community and philosophy closely align with the authors' beliefs and the main concepts of Follow Your Heart, which made the overall impact of the first book launch exceptionally more meaningful.

This report is designed to share the key insights from the event and promote further discussion within the field of emotional and ecological education, in line with the project ECO_CARE. The report is accordingly divided into the following sections: 1. Introduction; 2. Follow Your Heart: audience, vision and development; 3. Ways forward; 4. Reference list.

We hope you find this report helpful for your research journey.

Acknowledgments We would like to thank: HKDIR Utforsk, for funding this initiative within the project [ECO_CARE](#); the UiT The Arctic University of Norway Library Funds for funding the open access publication of the book (2022); the publishing house Aracne-La Bussola; Barbie and Nick White from Windsor Hill House, for the support and help in the organization of the event; Craig from The Good Life Projects for hosting the event; Katharine and Christ Thompson for accepting our offer to tie this project to their work at Windsor Will Woods; Camilla Neema Haule, Summer, Jeffrey, Theo, Poppy and Pebble for their participation; and the guests and especially the children who contributed to make this event special with their creativity and enthusiastic attitudes.

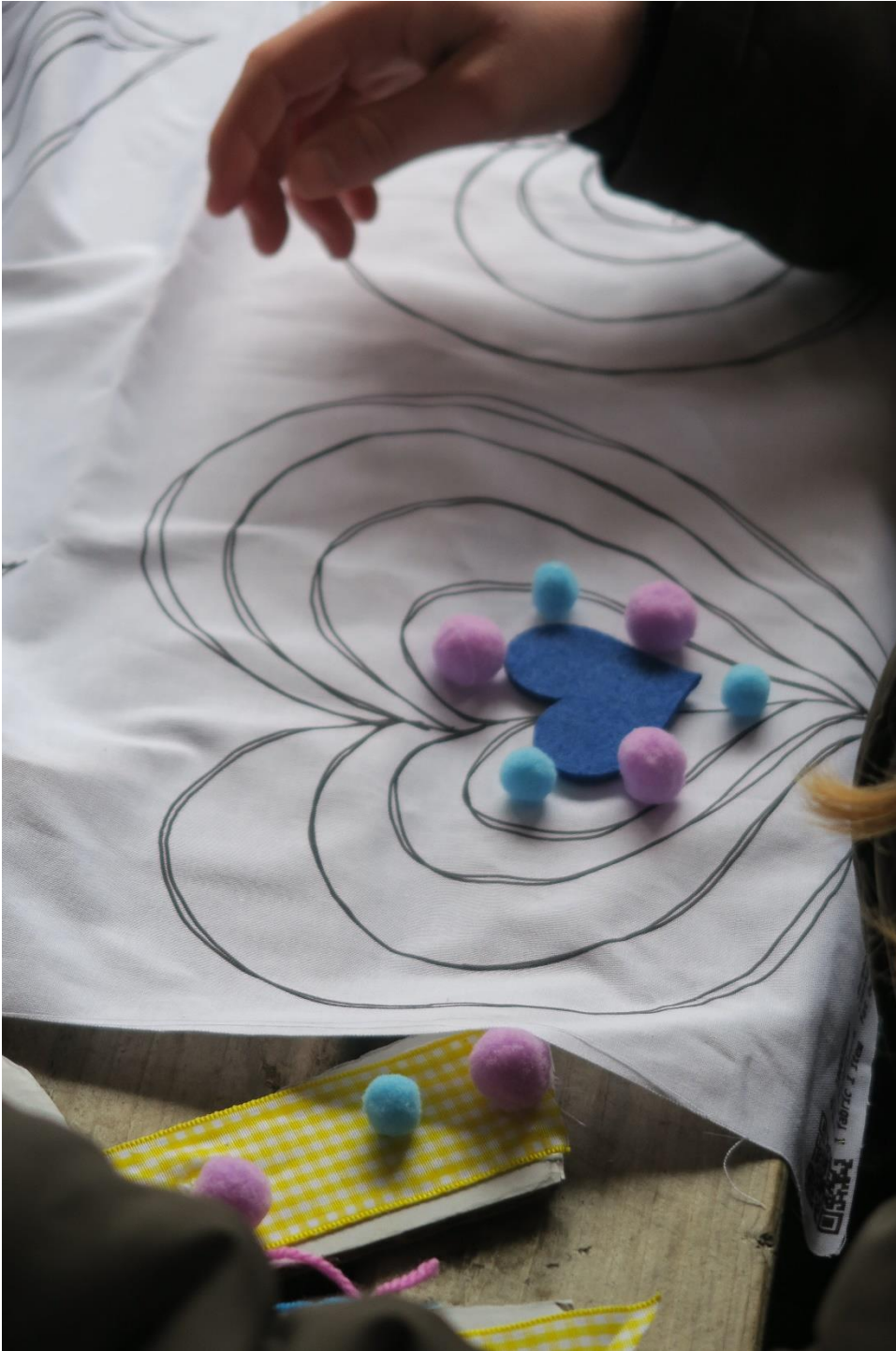


Figure 1. Co-created activity developed by children and adults during the workshop, Rock Farm, The Good Life Projects, February 18, 2023.

Introduction

What The first Book Launch and Scientific Workshop on emotional and ecological education connected to *Follow Your Heart: the School for Multipotentialites* was established to support research on the key importance of emotional and ecological education. The overarching objective was to share with the audience the main message conveyed in the research supporting the book and to involve children by promoting a creativity art workshop. The book authors discussed, analyzed, evaluated, and mapped the steps that led to the knowledge building which constitutes the foundations of the book. Drawing from *Valentina Russo's* difficult experience in a conventional educational setting where her multiple talents were regarded as a limitation rather than a potential, the book's approach critically analyses the heavily hierarchized teaching framework, which dominates the Western education system and academic institutions around the world, proposing an alternative that encourages pupils and teachers to work cooperatively toward the co-creation of a safe learning and social space. In this context, a three-dimensional perspective, focusing on the individual and its talents, the relationship with others, and ecological education, opens the educational space to participatory, relational and co-created approaches. These three dimensions are to be regarded as equally relevant: the sphere of the *self*, where each pupil is supported in their development and is regarded as a multi-talented being with many natural, innate talents whose ideas and opinions deserve to be valued (focus on multiple talents and emotional education). In the second sphere, a *relationship with the group* is fostered by focusing on emotional education in relation to others and strengthening the ability of pupils to recognize social and emotional cues. Through this, children gain a sense of responsibility and care for others. The third dimension involved in a participatory, co-created approach to education is the *relationship with the biophysical environment*. Instilling self-awareness from a young age and teaching pupils to care for others sets the foundation for strong interpersonal and social relations with all beings, including a sense of responsibility and care for the natural environment (ecological education). The connectivity between these three dimensions was then further explored during the workshop, that involved children of all ages, who were asked to explore their talents and creativity by contributing to develop some materials for future workshops (figure 2). Children bond together in a very friendly space, the Rock Farm of Craig, which hosts The Good Life Projects and promotes pet and crop therapy by immersing in the beautiful Somerset countryside.



Figure 2 Co-creating learning materials

Why Developing an approach to research and education that promotes eco-responsible behaviours requires rethinking the foundational pillars of environmental and sustainability research, moving away from the conventional dogmatic approaches constructed on the divide between education and research, and most importantly, conceiving this binomial in its participatory and active dimension.

This event aimed to define and reflect on the importance of emotional and ecological literacy while creating a welcoming space for conversations around the lack of effective and integrated education and research approaches to sustainability for all. Participation of community (parents of school-aged children and children themselves) within the research and education process, such as hosting this event connected to the publication of *Follow Your Heart*, is a necessary step towards further developing the themes and concepts from the book.



Figure 3 Emotional and ecological education with creativity at its heart

Who The target audience included the wider public (teachers, local farmers, social workers, children of all ages).

Where The event took place in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, United Kingdom, and was held at The Good Life Projects premises.

The Concentric Circles Effect: One way that our project team decided to foster empathy, compassion and care through the Follow Your Heart book launch was by donating all proceeds from the event to Windsor Hill Wood. Windsor Hill Wood helps people heal, grow, and rebuild their lives while taking care of nature and encouraging sustainable livelihoods. Proceeds from the book launch will help support art therapy sessions offered by a specialist psychotherapist and a Woods for Wellbeing tutor for the outdoor learning space.



Figure 4 Illustration by Valentina Russo

Follow Your Heart: audience, vision and development

Addressing a specific educational need

Starting from Valentina Russo's original idea, inspiration to further develop this book project came from listening to the community needs of our ECO_CARE project partners in Tanzania, located in the remote area of the Ruvuma region, in the southern part of the country. In this region, most of the public and independent schools face similar challenges from a lack of basic infrastructure (electricity, water, adequate school facilities) to inadequate educational resources (shortage of learning materials, educational equipment, training for educators, and accessibility options for children with special needs). Responding to the specific request from the Nyerere English Medium Day Care in Songea, an early childhood institution with a lack of resources, such as English teaching materials, the ECO_CARE team raised funds—through crowdfunding and the project Ocean Senses, partly funded by the Faculty of Law at UiT The Arctic University of Norway—to develop research on environmental consciousness, the role of emotions, and the importance of creativity in raising the citizens of tomorrow. The funding was first used to support the acquisition of basic materials for the school (from food for the pupils' meals and bedding sets to stationery and toys), and then the development of the Follow Your Heart book as a joint project and toolkit for educators and children. Learning from the experience of the Nyerere English Medium Day Care, its teachers, and Agnes Haule (our project coordinator in Tanzania), ECO_CARE plans to extend the dissemination of Follow Your Heart to the Matimira Secondary School (located in the village of Matimira, Songea District, Ruvuma Region, Tanzania) and the vocational school Veta Herdis Training Center, Ruvuma Region, Nyasa District, Tanzania. In the long term, the philosophy, teaching activities, and vision behind the project Follow Your Heart are expected to be shared with an increasing number of schools, and in line with the ECO_CARE vision, this process will remain mutual, aiming to co-create materials with the collaboration of all pupils, educators, artists, researchers and scientists involved.

The authors of Follow Your Heart live and work between the UK, Norway, Italy, Canada and France, and have many personal and professional connections to the world of education. Through the following book launches and initiatives that blossom out of future research related to Follow Your Heart, the emotional and ecological educational needs of children will be further explored and met with compassion, empathy and care.

Research Question and Design

The research question at the core of the Follow your Heart project is the following: what are the teaching techniques that educators, with the support of researchers, need to develop to nurture the emotional well-being of school pupils, in a way that encourages the development of their talents and their relational abilities toward each other and the surrounding environment? To answer this research question, we gave a central role to creativity in the support of nurturing emotional well-being, proposing a methodology centred around student autonomy, imagination, and creativity. In our view, within an open-minded, creative classroom environment, educators and pupils can grow as individuals and as a group, developing their emotional capacity to deal with different learning, life, and environmental challenges. The central hypothesis of the work is that greater recognition of an emotional dimension within learning—developing emotional engagement in school activities, stimulating emotional engagement through appropriate learning contexts, and facilitating activities that engage emotions and creativity—helps to strengthen the pupils’ learning confidence and nurture their talents. As mentioned above, the emotional dimension is considered in three spheres: the individual, their peers, and the environment. The book takes a tripartite approach where each of the target audiences (researchers and university students; educators; and children) can relate to a specific section that addresses their needs or interests.

Embedded within the first part of Follow Your Heart is an illustrated children’s book “The Story of Cora” created by and for multipotential children. Originally, this first part was intended to be a short comic strip to help teachers and pupils visualize the concept of “multipotentiality” and how it can feel growing up in the Western education system. However, The Story of Cora blossomed into a colourful, emotional thought-provoking narrative that illustrates the uncertainties and anxiety pupils may feel when placed under the expectations of society. The concept of multipotentiality and understanding the importance of nurturing multiple talents and interests, rather than instilling linearity and structure, can foster innovative thinkers who will be equipped to tackle the complex socioecological challenges of the 21st century. The second part of Follow Your Heart outlines the co-created approach that shaped the development of the book, followed by the theoretical concept and evidence-based examples that support the proposed teaching philosophy. This section is dedicated to educators and scholars involved in emotional and ecological education research, yet playful enough to also engage pupils.

Example of co-created content: educational activities

The strongest element of co-creation and participation in the development of Follow Your Heart was the method used for gathering feedback and activity suggestions for the practical implementation of the teaching philosophy. Following completion of the first draft of the manuscript, the authors contacted educators from various academic backgrounds and teaching environments (e.g., private and public-school settings, public health, etc.) via email in request for feedback on the themes of Follow Your Heart and offered the opportunity for educators to propose activities that align with the overall teaching philosophy. Educators were made aware that Follow your Heart aims to be an educational space that brings creativity and imagination into structured, routine Western academic environments, and that activities or lesson planning ideas should foster multiple talents and emotional intelligence. In terms of relational thinking and ecological education, the authors worked with educators to ensure the activities chosen for the book were three-dimensional in that they nurtured the relationship to oneself, others, and the environment. The proposed activities touch upon the three spheres of: (1) the development of the self and the multi-talents of each pupil; (2) social bonding; and (3) connectivity with the biophysical environment. Each activity is structured into: title, school level (welcoming adjustments for children of all ages and abilities), materials need, focus, learning objectives, and short guidance on how to conduct the activity.

The creativity workshop organized during the event aimed to experiment with some of the activities illustrated in the book, while co-creating materials to be used for future workshops giving the activity an element of sustainability and connectivity. The workshop was set in an outdoor learning space, giving children (and their guardians) the opportunity to learn and interact in the natural environment—one of important aspects of Follow Your Heart which is further elaborated on in the “Space” section of *Chapter 3: Follow Your Heart Philosophy*. Prior to the event, the authors prepared a mixture of crafting materials (ribbon, fabric, pompoms, etc.) and cut-out five letters from recycled cardboard to spell “heart”. The materials were placed in a central location at the event and little direction was given to promote self-directed play by both the children and adults. Interestingly, the guests were immediately attracted to the materials and through casual dialogue and snacking on refreshments provided, both children and adults began to pick-up materials and create spontaneously.

In addition to the workshops, guests also had the opportunity to fill out a section of a gratitude journal which was used as a more creative and mindful way of creating a “log” of everyone who attended this and the following events.

Ways forward

The authors of Follow Your Heart plan to further develop this formula (book launch and workshop) in future events and occasions: in March in Turin, Italy (where two of the authors are currently based and where some of the participating teachers will contribute to the organization of the workshop); in May in Marseille, France (where one of the authors is based) and possibly in other locations in the Autumn 2023 (Norway, Tanzania, Canada). The future developments will be further disseminated via the ECO_CARE website and social media. Moreover, the authors have already contributed with a book chapter on the analysis of the methodology adopted in the book and are now co-authoring a scientific article on sustainable education that is expected to be published in 2022. The project received also additional funding from Strategiske Midler 2023 and is expected to further develop following a dissemination and communication strategy co-created by the team members.



Figure 5 Emotions at the center of our investigation

Reference list

Billett, P., & Martin, D. (2018). Engaging students in co-creation of sociological knowledge and curriculum design as a form of deep engagement. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 15(5), 7 <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.15.5.7>

Denham, S. A., & Brown, C. (2010). "Plays nice with others": Social-emotional learning and academic success. *Early Education and Development*, 21(5), 652-680
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10409289.2010.497450>

Murray, E. M., Poto, M. P., Russo, V. (2022). *Follow Your Heart. The School for Multipotentialites*, Aracne-La Bussola.

Murray E. M., Poto, M. P. (2022). Co-creation of educational spaces and curricula to develop an ecology of participation: an example from Follow Your Heart in LOHSE, POTO, Coproduction of knowledge in Climate Governance, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, ISBN 978-3-8305-5538-4.

Murray, E. M., Poto, M. P. (2023) (working title). *Achieving a Common Future for All Through Sustainability-Conscious Legal Education and Research Methods*, in progress.