

Building Identities in Arts-Based Educational Research

Construyendo Identidades en la Investigación Educativa Basada en las Artes

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Abstract

In this paper we provide an arts-based educational research about the personal, social and professional identity by the mean of the portrait and self-portrait. We conducted this research providing in different educational contexts an arts-based project with the objective to make participants aware of the aesthetic process and live an aesthetic experience, using the metaphorical and photographic languages. The visual results presented in this paper are photos, installations, performances and assemblages realized by the project participants as portraits and self-portraits. The project participants realized an artistic research based on formal and aesthetic elements, memories and feelings, which allow developing their skills of observation and analysis of reality in an artistic way. During the arts-based educational project the participants were conscious of giving meaning and continuous changes to the artistic process. Furthermore, the participants, doing analysis and self-analysis based on external observation and self-reflection, developed their personal, social and professional identity. This project developed the student's abilities to understand the artistic language and contributed to overcome stereotypes of representation and self-representation.

Keywords

Arts-Based Educational Research, Identity, Portrait, Self-portrait, Metaphor.

Resumen

En este trabajo proponemos una investigación educativa basada en las artes sobre la identidad personal, social y profesional, utilizando el retrato y el autorretrato. Realizamos esta investigación proponiendo en diferentes entornos educativos un proyecto basado en las artes con el objetivo que los participantes tomen conciencia del proceso estético y que vivan una experiencia estética, utilizando los lenguajes metafóricos y fotográficos. Los resultados visuales presentados en este trabajo son las fotos, las instalaciones, las performances, los assemblages realizados por los participantes del proyecto como retratos y autorretratos. Los participantes realizaron una investigación artística basada en elementos formales y estéticos, memoria y emociones, que permitieron desarrollar sus habilidades de observación y análisis de la realidad como proceso artístico. A lo largo del proyecto educativo basado en las artes los participantes estuvieron consientes de darle significado y cambios continuos al proceso artístico. Además, los participantes, haciendo un análisis y autoanálisis basado en la observación externa y la auto-reflexión, desarrollaron su propia identidad personal, social y profesional. Este proyecto fomentó las habilidades de los estudiantes de entender el lenguaje artístico y contribuyó a superar los estereotipos de la representación y de la auto-representación.

Palabras Clave

Investigación Educativa Basada en las Artes, Identidad, Retrato, Autorretrato, Metáfora.

Introduction

This paper proposes a contribution centered on the construction of personal, social and professional identity. This educational research was based on arts and visual culture that are interdisciplinary and multimodal (Marín Viadel, 2005). We carried out an arts-based educational research because this methodology recognises that there are ways to know and to be known that cannot be expressed only

by verbal language (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2008; Eisner, 2008; Marín Viadel, 2011; Rolling, 2010; Springgay, et al., 2005).

Education is one of the most significant processes of identity formation, because learning generates significant changes in personal, social and professional identity (Bajardi & Álvarez Rodríguez, 2013). Likewise, visual culture, both during its production and observation, give an important educational contribution the identity construction providing changes on it (Eisner, 2002; Freedman, 2006). Furthermore, arts promote the introspection and comparison, in fact the educational necessity of the arts is based not only on providing both students and professionals a means to explore themselves, but to also share their emotional and lived experiences with others (Eisner, 1994; 2002; Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001).

Our project, initially experienced by artists and teachers in initial training, has been proposed to pupils of middle schools, Granada University students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and it will propose to professionals in the field of art and education. The project includes a metaphorical process and a photographic process, as artistic research. The main objective is to become aware of the aesthetic process, and live an aesthetic experience. Subjects participate actively in the process taking formal and aesthetic decisions and reflect on objectives, results and development of the process.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this investigation are:

- To reflect on how to develop the visual ability of reasoning, observation and comparison;
- To reflect and to experiment ways to develop the ability of interacting with reality as an artistic process;
- To encourage reflection on own identity in relation to others through the use of metaphor and visual culture experience;
- To think about how to develop the capacity of interaction and collaboration in group and encourage socialization and others social-emotional competencies like empathy;
- To think and to experiment how through Arts-Based Education we can overcome the stereotypes of representation and self-representation.

Methodology

Our qualitative and artistic educational research use portrait and self-portrait, like method and result. We use the portraits and self-portraits as metaphors based on the visual language, on the aesthetic experience, focusing mainly on the personal and social identity, and its intrinsic aspects like body and mind, exposure and privacy, and image and self-image.

We use the object as a metaphor to portrait and self-portrait. Dallari and Francucci (1998) speak in a psycho-pedagogical way of the "own" or "mine", not only in the material sense but in the sense of affections and habits, which are very important for the development and consolidation of personal identity.

The project includes a theoretical introduction that consists in a discussion on the concept of portrait, self-portrait and metaphor, followed by a projection of select images. It consist in a presentation of portraits and self-portraits, works of artists who used the metaphor, the memory and the "mine" through personal effects in paintings, assemblages and photos, such as: *Autoportrait-robot* (Arman, 1992), *Portrait of Federico da Montefeltro and his Son Guidobaldo* (Berruguete, 1497), *Menschenmenge* (Cragg, 1986), *Personal values* (Magritte, 1952), *Rrose Selavy alias Marcel Duchamp* (Man Ray, 1921), *DafEnigma* (Ontani, 1970) y *OBL'io* (Ontani, 1997).

The activity continues with the object choice useful as a metaphor for the self-portrait and portrait. Then, the project activities are differentiated taking into account the participant level. In the case of middle school students we took photos of them with the objects, one as portrait and one as self-portrait. Some of them wore the object choosing the artistic language of performance. The eight

artists-teachers in training took photos (their portraits and self-portraits) and then chose to expose them in an art installation. Instead, university students created with their objects assemblages and small installations within the Faculty Educational Sciences. Finally, exhibitions of the works were mounted.

Here below we present our visual methodology that includes a selection of subjects (middle school students, artists and teachers in training, and university students), objects selected by the subjects and the used references.



Figure 1. Author (2014) *Students, artist and teachers*. Photo Series composed by six photos by the author. Top left, (2012) *Middle school Student 1*; top right, (2012) *Middle school Student 2*; centre left, (2009) *Selfportrait*; centre right, (2009) *Claudia portrait*; down left, (2013) *Granada student 1*, and down right, (2013) *Granada student 2*.

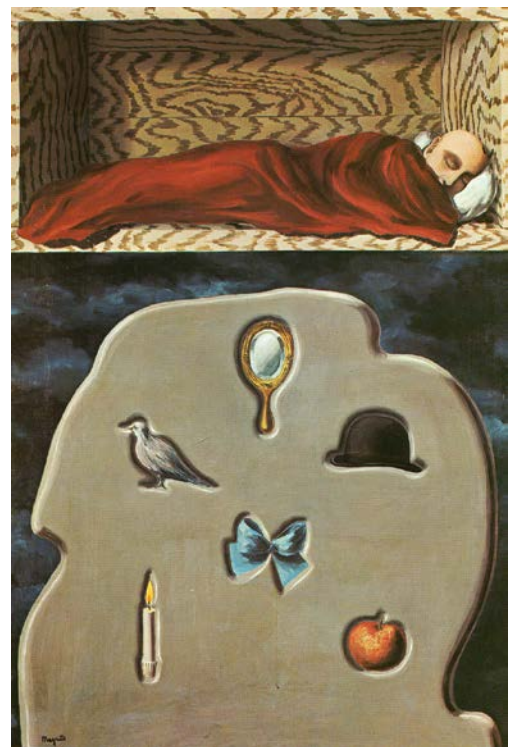


Figure 2. Author (2014) *Personal objects*. Photoessay composed by three photos by author (left) and two Direct Visual Quotation (right) (Arman, 1992; Magritte, 1927).



Figure 3. Author (2014) *Circle Toys*. Photoessay composed by two photos by author (top) and two Direct Visual Quotation (Ontani, 1970 and 1997)

Results

The visual results of the project are portraits and self-portraits of the participants in the project (photos, installations, performances and assemblages). The middle school students participated actively in the entire artistic process, but the photos were taken by an artist-photographer, not by the students themselves.

The artist-teachers in training took pictures of themselves (portraits and self-portraits) and printed them on t-shirts. Also they set up the t-shirts in a room hanging these, as to dry, on a wire and they positioned within the room all chosen objects, creating a dwelling inspired by the movie *3-Iron* (Kim Ki-Duk, 2004). The university students created with their objects, assemblages and small installations within the Educational Sciences Faculty mostly humanizing chairs, tables, corners of the floor, creating their metaphoric double self-portraits.



Figure 4. Author (2014) *Out-of-place Dreams*. Photoessay composed by two photos by author (top) and a Direct Visual Quotation (Magritte, 1952).



Figure 5. Author (2009) *Students Portrait and Self-Potrait*. Photo Series composed by six photos by the author.



Figure 6. Author (2014) *Hanging Fotos*. Photoessay composed by a photos by author (top) and a Direct Visual Quotation (Ki-Duk, 2004).



Figure 7. Author (2014) *Status*. Photoessay composed by a photo by author (left) and a Direct Visual Quotation (right) (Berruguete, 1497).

Discussions and conclusions

Art education develops the cognitive function of observation the world, because the direct or indirect experiences based on the arts enable us to better understand our world and the world around us (Eisner, 2002). Portrait and the self-portrait are examples of these experiences whose validity is recognized because it allows stimulating reflection on ourselves and others, identifying ourselves and others both physically and psychologically (Francucci & Vassalli, 2005; Bertolini, 2009). It's important to work both with self-portrait and portrait, because in the portrait action the "individual self" is defined both in relation to ourselves and to another since man and woman are not only "individual beings" but also "collective beings" (Cionchin, 2009). The portrait enriches the receiver identity because it provides new subjective interpretations and the possibility to reprocess them, thanks to external points provided (Dallari & Francucci, 1998).

The theoretical introduction presented to students was carried out in order to provide the necessary skills to read images and art works, and to improve knowledge of the artistic heritage. Furthermore, with this introduction we also carried out practical activity in a creative and conscious way avoiding and overcoming representative stereotypes (Bajardi and Álvarez Rodríguez, 2012a; 2012b). In particular, in order to promote the ability to think metaphorically, we offered opportunities and examples as incentives to use metaphors both in verbal and visual language (as well in the written language, body language, etc.) (Eisner, 2002)

The project participants, choosing representative objects for themselves and for their workmates, implemented a selection based on formal and aesthetic elements, memories, feelings and direct or indirect experiences, which gave them the possibility to develop their skills of observation and analysis of reality as in the artistic investigation. In fact, when the participants pose as models in front of the photo medium, they make an action, they are protagonists in the artistic process, they are conscious of giving meaning and continuous changes to this process.

The pictures of the middle school students were taken by an artist-photographer. If the students had taken the pictures, they would have experienced and become aware of a further step in the artistic process. However, the presence of the artist-photographer provided an important added value to the project. In fact, normally in the artistic education classes, students have the opportunity to experiment with different artistic languages, including photography, but rarely join moments to interact with external art experts.

Furthermore, this analysis and self-analysis was useful to develop the identity of students and professionals by the other perspective (external observation) and by the practice of self-reflection. On this occasion we do not discuss the possible convergence among the artist/ researcher/ teacher identities proposed by A/r/tography methodology (Springgay et al., 2005; Irwin & Springgay, 2008) but it would be interesting investigate this perspective in the future. After all, in our case the teacher already coincides with the researcher meanwhile the students become investigators, each developing to its own process of artistic- and personal identity-research.

Final exhibition is an important moment because it usually generates "aesthetic amazement" not only in the visitors but also in the participants that experienced the workshop (Dallari & Francucci, 1998). Finally, the exhibition facilitates further reflections to the participants on their work, the self-analysis and the exchange and communication with others. This project contributed, through the use of Arts-Based Educational Research, to overcome stereotypes of representation and self-representation, and enabled to students to learn more about themselves and their social group going beyond the surface.

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