

Arts-based research and professional identity awareness for teachers in one ethnic minority educational context

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Abstract

This article presents art education project involving arts-based research conducted by a primary teacher training student during his final course. He carried out the research to discover if the relationship between one student and his/her teachers could be improved. We begin with a theoretical contextualization, then present a concrete example of the abovementioned arts-based research conducted in a school in Jaén, Spain.

The text continues with a description of the development of the project. We will see what the social situation and its relation with the school were. We will also reflect on how the process of arts-based research begins in such a complicated context.

The article ends with a reflection of how artistic practice is perceived in the contexts and situations highlighted in this research. This is done using conclusions drawn from the evidence that the arts-based research project in question provided.

Keywords: Arts-based research, art education, teacher identity, ethno-communities, "Comunidad de aprendizaje"

Bios

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Guillermo Abolafia González was born in 1992 in Jaen, the city in which he studied primary, secondary, and higher education. In 2014, he earned the title of Graduate in Primary Education - Special Education Mention - at the University of Jaen, where he participates in several courses, seminars, and international conferences. Currently he works as a Spanish Teacher and SEN Teaching Assistant (Special Educational Needs) at George Street Primary School in Hemel Hempstead and has been hired for the 2017-2018 school year as a primary teacher by Hollywell Primary School of Watford, England.

Introduction

The main objective of our university's teacher training is that each student can build by himself or herself an art teacher identity. The question is, what kinds of teachers do these students want to be? In all of the subjects we teach, we propose this position. One of the most significant reflections we offer students is to add the artistic education profile, and we do this in particular in the direction of "trabajos fin de grado", which refer to the final career projects that students do during the last course. Thinking about their future as teachers, they try to bring the arts to their education concepts.

Here, we are presenting a specific example of arts-based educational research conducted in a school in Jaén, Spain. It was the degree project of Guillermo Abolafia González, directed by María Isabel Moreno Montoro. Together, we

are co-authors of this paper. A degree project is the last requirement in teacher training studies. The context of the project was a primary school with a social exclusion situation stemming from three major factors: (1) a cultural factor: Gypsy families, for the most part, value formal education in a different way; (2) an institutional factor: The operation of the school is based on the values and norms of the dominant culture; and (3) a socioeconomic factor: The social and economic positions of the gypsy population are poor compared with the rest of society.

To clarify these three aspects, it is important not to just to analyze them but rather analyze them in the context in which Guillermo discovered his identity as a teacher.

In this paper, we will first contextualize the school in which it was developed, not only in terms of the social situation of the school's neighborhood but also in terms of how the school responds to the school organization of "comunidades de aprendizaje" and how art education works in these schools.

Then, we will continue with a description of the development of the project. In this description, we will examine what the problems of both the social situation and the teacher relation with the school were to prevent or favor the emergence of a teacher profile. How the process of arts-based research begins in such a complicated context will also be highlighted.

The article ends with an examination of how artistic practice is perceived in the contexts and situations highlighted in this research, and also, how this brings out the identity of the teacher. The characteristics that outline a teacher who relates to students from an "emic" position will be revealed. This is done using the conclusions drawn from the evidence that the arts-based research project in question provided, which we will examine through fragments of a narrative.

Some approaches that condition the identity of the teacher

Open space: "comunidades de aprendizaje."

"Comunidades de aprendizaje" (learning communities) is a project in the Spanish educational system that is based on interactive student groups and is fundamental to dialogical gatherings. These communities are a project of the social and cultural transformation of a school and its environment. The goal

is that everyone has access to information about society, with the “comunidad de aprendizaje” concept based on dialogic learning (Flecha, 1997; Habermas, 1987; Hargrave & Senechal, 2000). To convert a school into a “comunidad de aprendizaje,” a plan has to be prepared to maintain special conditions so that the government can authorize it. The mentioned conditions can be summarized in the good practices that we report here as characteristics of this school.

However, we have not found a strong difference between “comunidades de aprendizaje” and traditional schools. For this reason, we wonder if dialogic learning is focused on the same goal as that of any other official structure of the education system: the competences of the students. This school, C.E.I.P. Ruiz Jiménez, was included in the national system of “comunidades de aprendizaje” due in part to the proportion of the Roma population it has. A population that is at risk of exclusion needs different models, but we had to see how these model, “comunidades de aprendizaje”, work and how they adapt to each case. As we see, this school model does not contemplate how to integrate the gypsy culture. Therefore, it is not the school model but rather the interest of the students that is important.

Although, we do not see complete integration with this model, it is true that the objectives of “comunidades de aprendizaje” have no choice but to be beneficial for society. These objectives include the elimination of truancy to ensure the permanence and continuity of students in the circuit of compulsory and post-compulsory schooling. Another goal would be the normalization of the coexistence among people thanks to the dialogic resolution of conflicts (Flecha, García, & Gómez, 2013). These conflicts may seem to be the basis of what Guerrero Seron (1996) pointed out as the institutionalization of the educational system from the XVII century.

However, what is the most interesting concept for us as teachers and students from the university? The answer is the easy way in which we enter through the door of the schools. A “comunidad de aprendizaje” must be conceived as an open space where one has free access to all actors in the educational environment. This space features the integration of students and teachers together with other labor center staff in addition to families, neighborhood or cultural associations, neighbors and co-workers, and the general public with the intention of enabling more to participate in the educational community. The theory of these educational communities presents an interdisciplinary curriculum based on interactive learning projects where dialogue validates

educational action without exercising dominion (Aubert, Arrow, Garcia, Flecha, & Racionero, 2008).

In this sense, we see “comunidades de aprendizaje” as an opportunity to get into the school as something that the center cannot be denied.

Plurality and interactivity in the method of acting

As López-Peláez (2013) pointed out, the current education should “rely on the methodological pluralism” because it “promotes the autonomous meta-cognitive learning so that the student knows his/her own learning process, understanding what they learn and also know how to apply it, becoming thus the director of the teaching-learning process” (p. 74).¹

The route that Goodson used for subjects in a history curriculum is not desirable for art education, as it passes from the marginality of a low status to utilitarianism and ends up being defined as disciplines formed by a rigid and rigorous body of knowledge (Goodson, 2000).

Relationship and dialogue

Relationship and dialogue are basic concepts in our educational approach to overcome rigidity (Goodson, 2000), or to foster interactivity (López-Peláez, 2013) and encourage comprehensive dialogue (Tirado de la Chica, 2012).

Because art is made of the same material as the social exchanges, it has a special place in the collective production process. A work of art has a quality that sets it apart from other things produced by human activities. This quality is its (relative) social transparency. If a work of art is successful, it will invariably set its sights beyond its mere presence in space: it will be open to dialogue, discussion, and that form of inter-human negotiation that Marcel Duchamp called “the coefficient of art”, which is a temporal process, being played out here and now. (Bourriaud, 2006: 49)

The concept of relationship is embodied in how we understand contemporary art against the contemplative paradigm.

1 Original quote in Spanish, translated by the author.

An Arts-based research (ABR) as an educational method in primary school. The case of the young teacher Guillermo

Guillermo thought that his teaching practices were good opportunities for him to search for his identity as a teacher. He did not hesitate to include artistic activity. He needed to know how he could do better and whether to follow the advice of other teachers in the particular center in which he was practicing or follow his desire to relate to the students. That is when he started his ABR to see how the latter worked. In the fragments of his narration that we read below, we can find the results.

Teacher attitude for artistic practice as a model of education

Teachers must be in a continuous process of updating and research. Artistic practices in the classroom are presented as an important method for getting information and creating daily dynamics in the process of educational ethnography based on the arts.

This allows us to think of artistic practice as a model of education. From this perspective, we plan and develop the experience here.

The proposal

The educational proposal was intended to seek the initiative and to eliminate the equivocation of students with any activity in school. Each student in the class had to draw, with the help of other students, his or her outline in any area of the classroom, playing with space freely, with electrical tape colored black, red, or yellow.

Once the students finished their silhouettes, they had to help their partners. At the beginning, no one dared to help her/his partner, but one of them began, and the others followed. In this way, we learned that they had to have one another's help.

Upon the completion of the silhouettes, the silhouettes were filled with nearby objects meaningful to the students.

The rest of the class looked expectantly at how their companions were having fun and how the result of their work was striking, and then, they wanted to do this activity also.

Before creating their silhouettes, they could have started with a phase of reflection on how they were on their personalities and then could have shared this with others to get to know one another better.



At the end, Guillermo was surprised, as he had never seen his students working cooperatively without having discussions about materials or space. He understood that children were not afraid to create for themselves, to be respected, to help one another, and to assume leading roles in the teaching-learning process.

In many of the children, he noticed that they took the initiative to find out what they did not know and did not worry about making mistakes. In order for children to express themselves from the inside, it is necessary to value positively everything they do (Eisner, 2002).

Students can achieve trust and be self-confident with these types of activities. This facilitates the acquisition of personal autonomy and higher self-esteem.

With the help of this proposal, Guillermo realized that the respect of students is not earned by imposing rules or laws but by making them aware of their

actions and creating with them a climate of closeness in the class. He was finding his teacher profile.



The author of all photographs is Guillermo G. A., who preserved the identities of the children.

Outcomes and final thoughts

We offer some extracts of the narration of Guillermo about his experience and what he learned. They are some outcomes from his experience. When he presented his final project grade, part of it was composed of an autonarrative in which he reported on his passing through the school while doing the internship, thanks to which he was able to develop the project.

In concluding this reflection, we will make a proposal for professional identity awareness for teachers to address the circumstances that bring us opportunities for art education.

The narration

A critical attitude is very important. What others do is not always right.

At first, many teachers said I should be firm and force the students to respect me with punishment and voices [...].
Not always what is done as a rule is what we have to do.

Guillermo at first tried to integrate himself with teachers, and a way in which to do this was to behave like them. However, he understood that their relationships with students were not good, and this was due to their dominant and restrictive attitudes toward students who came from a context at risk of exclusion.

I tried to talk to them and earn their respect again making them appreciate me... and they considered me like [...] a “different teacher.

Art education promotes a bond between students and teachers, where all are participants and support one another. Artistic activity that is based on an integrative methodology and that is related to the interests of the students promotes cooperation.

During class, students were unrecognisable, they had not stripped the material and helped each because there was no competition for who did better than each other.

Change is possible, but the Roma have sometimes assumed that the school is not a friendly environment for them. What happens inside the school is far from what happens in their lives. However, when working with themes to which they can contribute their own knowledge, as when we make artistic creations, two things happen: One is that they have something to do in one subject that interests them, and two, others value and appreciate positively what they are capable of doing.

... they (the children) came to make a cardboard bottle reflecting all the names of the children in class, with the message: ‘Best friends.’

It is necessary to promote the benefits of these experiences because an isolated fact only serves as a mere demonstration. To achieve long-term and definitive answers, these kinds of procedures must be established on an ongoing basis.

... they remembered the work done, but an isolated example will never trigger a change of attitude in this type of student. However, what is certain and it has been shown, is that Arts Education, and improves coexistence, fosters an emotional feeling between teacher-student and especially among student-student.

What Guillermo learned is important in a teacher's profile

Let us remember that the main objective of our university teacher training is that each student can build himself or herself an identity as a teacher of art education. After the results shown, we have some principles that we believe could constitute the profile of a teacher. They are likely to evolve over time because this profile is used as a method of education, but it is a method that at the same time is an investigation model.

This is the most important of the discoveries that Guillermo made. There is nothing that can be definitively though; the teacher must investigate daily.

In conclusion, we propose action instead of an attitude of resignation and complaints. Good relationships are established in the attitudes we adopt as teachers, regardless of the structure of the system, although this can help us to find acceptance more easily, for instance, in “comunidades de aprendizaje.”

For Guillemos, it was very important to put artistic activity in motion, which allowed him to initiate control over the group. In the educational art-based research, he verified that through the artistic practice of students, he received feedback not only regarding their personalities but also regarding how he as a teacher has to act. In this way, finding special groups, such as a particular ethnic minority, is not problem. In these situations, it is not about turning the group but rather joining the group.

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