

Art Street as a Way for Reflective Thinking in the Field of Adult and Primary Education: Examples of Educational Techniques

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Abstract—Street art, a category of artwork displayed in public spaces, has been recognized as a potential tool for promoting reflective thinking in both adult and primary education. Educational techniques that encourage critical and creative thinking, as well as deeper reflection, have been developed and applied in educational curricula. This paper aims to explore the potential of art street in cultivating learners' reflective awareness towards multiculturalism. More specifically, two artworks displayed in public spaces have been selected: the artwork of Kleomenis Kostopoulos and the artwork of Rustam Obic. The reason of this selection is because of their strong symbolism towards multiculturalism. The street arts have been elaborated by adult (+18) and minor students (K-12) in educational settings, under the same educator's guidance, following appropriate for each age learning techniques. Adults cultivate their reflection using Freire's learning method, whereas minors cultivate critical thinking using visible thinking techniques from Project Zero. Through qualitative methodology (context analysis) the depth of reflection/critical thinking has been emphasized for both age groups. The case study shows that street art can play a significant role to the promotion/cultivation of deep thinking towards challenging contemporary phenomena like multiculturalism.

Keywords—Street art, observation of art works, reflective awareness, educational techniques, multiculturalism.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE paper claims that artwork displayed in public spaces can promote observers' reflective thinking, by looking at them through special educational techniques.

The paper is divided into three sections. Firstly, the role of art in learning process is established based on theory and research data. Then, two learning approaches are presented based on thoughtful observation of two particular street arts. The differentiation between the two approaches is related to the concept of «thinking». Firstly, minors (7 years old) strengthen their critical thinking through by looking at street art using Visible Thinking techniques [1]. Secondly, adult learners strengthen their reflective thinking by recognizing their possible dysfunctional assumptions [2]. To make this happen adult learners are using Freire's methodology based on Codification and Decodification [3]. In both cases multiculturalism is a matter of interest regardless age, nationality, or preoccupied points of view on the subject. In addition, through the use of well-known educational techniques

-regardless age- a learner can dive into the phenomenon of multiculturalism, making more thoughtful approaches on the issue.

The learning approaches mentioned above, take into account the way both adults and minors learn.

- a) According to Thimas, adults normally differ from the child more individuality and more social purpose. Adult education, accordingly, makes special allowance for individual contributions from students, and seeks to organize contributions into some form of social purpose [4]. Their orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not single learning subjects [5]. So, in the context of an adult learning lesson plan “adults, often, call on their experiences when they are involved to learning activities and operate as recourses for others in the learning event”. Also, adult learners confirm, add, or transform the way they interpret their experience through critical reflection [6]. Thus, transformative learning leads them to new mental schemas concerning the learning subject, which is more liberating, free from preoccupied dysfunctional points of view in relation to the issue to be studied -in our case: refugee [7]
- b) K-12 students, on the other hand, activate their critical thinking by using skills like: compare, contrast, problem solving, research, analysis, synthesis. This means that they try to be well informed, use credible sources and mention them, consider the total situation, keep their thinking relevant to the point, keep in mind the original or most basic concern, look for alternatives, are open minded, are sensitive to the feelings of others and their points of view [8].

In conclusion, the different paths of thought at the level of minors and adults are expected to be reflected in the way they learn in an educational context. The research approach that follows examines the possibility of the contemplation of adults' and minors' way of thinking when they receive the appropriate stimuli. In our case the stimuli are works of art.

II. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

A. The Role of Art in Learning Process

The dynamic role of art in learning and teaching has been

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established through theory, research, practices and techniques. Undoubtedly, it has been documented that:

Systematic and thoughtful observation of works of art provokes critical thinking and reflection [7].

Learning methodologies in order to observe works of art for a variety of educational purposes (e.g. cognitive awareness, critical and creative thinking cultivation, emotional empowerment etc.) have been developed and implemented by respectful educational organizations (e.g. Project Zero/Graduate Harvard School of Education) [1]-[8].

Observation of works of art can help us to transform our dysfunctional assumptions on critical matters of social, political, or even personal interest through the releasing of imagination [9].

According to Freire's way of thinking, works of art contained elements of cultural references. Through the «coding and decoding» process in the context of thoughtful dialogue, the Freire's learners not only realized their role in society and professional life, but also why they held this role [10]. Alongside with the understanding of oneself in social and political reality, learners themselves overcome their oppression by planning their dreams of a better and fairer world. Perhaps, it is important at this point to re-clarify the concepts of *coding* and *decoding*, mainly because they will be useful in the practical application of Freire's teaching model that follows in the next section.

Coding was the existing situation, that Freire's illiterate learners experienced, without fully knowing all its dimensions. This existing situation was illustrated in Brennan's works of art, which referred to illiterate learners' subjects of interest. In a way, these sketches were the visual stimulus from which a process of thoughtful learning began [13].

Decoding was the process of reflection caused by the appropriate critical questions, due to specific works of art. Thus, works of art trigger a dialogue, an interactive process between learners and teacher. From such learning experience *deductive words* are derived which were initially refer to direct descriptions of "what is happening" to be replaced with other words which are less direct, but more abstract [11].

Somehow learning in a Freirean way of teaching gradually put learners in front of contemporary crucial matters to be addressed systematically by them [12]. On the other hand, art is rich dynamic information material that enhances aesthetic perception, expands culture, and evolves K-12 student's cultural consciousness. Generally, it could be agreed that the arts act as a magnet/anger for our senses [13]. In addition, important scholars link the observation of the arts with cognitive development [14].

Of course, the cultural value of works of art in the learning process has been established since decades [15]. From the range of methodologies that involve arts in the process of critical thinking, we focus on Project Zero and specifically on Visible/Artful Thinking techniques [1]. From the wide range of visible thinking routines to cultivate critical thinking the *I see I think I wonder thinking routine* has been selected for the implementation our case study.

B. Selected Street Art as a Mean for Cultivating Thinking

All theorists of the field agree that to foster critical awareness by observing art, works of art must have qualitative characteristics like unconventionality, universality, authenticity, uniqueness, in combination with messages, symbolisms, interpolations, activation of emotions, along with high quality of aesthetics [16]. It is also worth noting that Freire himself, as well as Project's Zero researchers, follow more or less the same selection of criteria to cultivate critical awareness in students [3]-[17].

By observing Qbic's and Kostopoulos's works of art street, we can easily distinguish features that are universal, unconventional and make us wonder or think out of the box about multiculturalism [18], [19]. Both works of art are full of symbolism and carry messages that activate our critical and creative thinking, in addition with the activation of emotions. Mostly, those two works of art are relevant to contemporary culture and to life experience of today's learner regardless age. We believe that those two representative street arts can be indeed simple in their complexity and offer decoding possibilities regardless age. In general, street art can be a powerful tool for unlocking our feelings and thoughts concerning multiculturalism.

III. WAYS TO APPROACH STREET ART

A. Methodology of K-12 Case Study

The study for K-12 students adopts a qualitative methodology, (context analysis). This approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the two selected street arts and also allows to find their impact on learners' critical thinking.

- *The learning process:* The selected street art is approached by applying the VT thinking routine: I see I think I wonder. During this process the students can see their thoughts unfolding as well as those of their classmates. At the end of the process, they can draw conclusions, make generalizations and came to a consensus about multiculturalism.
- *Educational context:* Social Studies
- *Learning subject:* Multiculturalism
- *Learners' demographic characteristics:* 2nd graders of an urban private primary school (Athens-Greece).
- *School year:* October 2023

B. Methodology of Adult Learner Case Study

The study for adult learners adopts the same as previous qualitative methodology that allows for an in-depth analysis.

- *The learning process:* Initially, the selected street art is approached by asking a simple question like: *What do you see?* Thus, productive words-phrases are recorded by the educator, without judgments or interpretations (coding phase). Then the decoding phase follows in which deeper issues arise from productive words-phrases (thematic representations). To achieve such a goal the educator asks: *What general/abstract/holistic concept do you think your initial observation represents?* (decoding phase)
- *Educational context:* Adult Education

- *Learning subject:* Multiculturalism: Freiers' approach to learning and teaching
- *Learners' demographic characteristics:* Adult post graduate students at Open University of Greece.
- *Academic year:* October 2023

Common target for both learning approaches was the cultivation of reflective awareness towards multiculturalism.

C. Learning Implementation

K-12 Implementation: Indicative Example: 2nd Graders' Comments on Multiculturalism Following a VT Thinking Routine

Comments: The children carefully observed this artwork and developed their reflection on it. After completing the thinking routine, students were given a title to the project, which reflects the basic characteristics of an ideal multicultural society.

TABLE I
I SEE I THINK I WONDER (VISIBLE THINKING K-12)

I see	I think	I wonder
I see three children	They are friends. They gathered for a purpose.	Have they always been friends? Is their purpose to make a district with different houses? Do they want something else?
They wear clean clothes.	They stay at home with their family in their own neighborhoods.	Do they come from afar? Who brought them to this meeting point?
The children are of different heights	They are also different in age.	Do they have the same interests?
They are from different continents	It is not from all continents. They speak different languages.	Will children from other continents join the group How do they get along, since they don't speak the same language?
The child coming from Europe has his back turned to us.	I wonder if he is ashamed of sth	What did he do and is he ashamed?
Children hold their homes in their hands.	They are houses from different cultures. They have colluded to build a district. They are ready to offer their homes.	Will they unite the houses they hold or will they build a new one? To whom do they offer their homes? Do they just want to show them to others?
Children don't talk.	Perhaps one child wants to learn the other's language.	Have they learned the language of others? Can everyone understand the smile? They seem to be confident.
Children are different from each other.	But all houses are the same size. We are different, but something may unite us.	Cultures have the same value. Do adults think the same? It will be a district of love because they hold their homes on the chest that symbolizes the heart. It is out of question.
They bring a miniature of their home. Every home is different. Every child is different. Each home has a warm interior.	All children proudly hold their home, that is, their culture. Just as warm is our heart when we love.	Where will they find space to build their home? The love we have for our home carries over to our hearts. We carry it everywhere. Do we also carry hard feelings everywhere?
	The painter wants everyone to see his painting.	What does it symbolize that everyone should learn?

Indicative titles

Based on the previews comments the teacher asks children to give a title to the street art. The students as a group came up with the following titles:

- 1) Unity
- 2) All together
- 3) Peace is coming.
- 4) Love
- 5) Happiness is being given by us.
- 6) I carry my house everywhere.
- 7) I don't care to differ. I care about having friends.
- 8) I want to remember.

Adult Learners' Implementation: Indicative Example: Post Graduate Students' Comments on Multiculturalism Following the Freirean Methodology of Coding and Decoding

Before the process of observation begins, the trainer asks students the question: "What is your point of view on the subject of multiculturalism." Afterwards, the coding and decoding process begins, as indicated in Table II.

Students elaborate and comment on the preview questions in groups [5]. At the end of the process the trainer asks adult learners the same question: "What is your point of view about multiculturalism".

Comments: Initially, multiculturalism was seen as the coexistence of many people of different cultures and origins. At the end of the process, however, there was a shift in this view

to a more stochastic level. Thus, coexistence was considered to require the effort to understand the other, the change of attitude of life to achieve openness in the way we deal with contemporary social phenomena. In the context of this change, the concepts of equality, respect, deeper thinking on the issues of multiculturalism were discussed. In any case, dealing with the phenomenon was seen as a sign of progress.

IV. COMMENTS FROM THE CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The context analysis of the responses of Postgraduate Program adult students of HOU revealed the following:

Initially, multiculturalism was seen as the coexistence of many people of different cultures and origins. At the end of the

process, however, there was a shift in this point of view towards a more thoughtful level. Thus, coexistence was considered to require the effort to understand the other. Also, multiculturalism was considered as a chance to become

openminded while adult students deal with contemporary social phenomena. In the context of this mindset change, the concepts of equality, respect, and scholastic thinking on the issues of multiculturalism were discussed.

TABLE II
CODING DECODING PROCESS (FREIRE'S LEARNING APPROACH: ADULT LEARNERS)

Codification	Decodification	Critical questions
children of different races	globalization/multiculturalism	WHAT: What brings us together?
children in traditional/casual clothes	unity	SELF REFLECTION: <i>According to our experiences</i> , are we approaching or moving away from Western European civilization and why?
children's profile	culture	What past cultural mindset do we reproduce/accept?
e.g., curiosity, creativity, thinking	21 st century life skills	SELF REFLECTION: Am I cognitive and emotional ready to take a critical stance against my historical past
heart artery	cultural continuum	WHY: Why are traditional cultural structures located on the center of the hart?
digging a hole in a wall	exploration of the structure of society/ introspection past political- cultural structures	WHY: <i>According to our belief system</i> , do we prefer to accept the traditional structure of Western European society, or do we prefer to explore it and why?
a scene from life in a Western European palace during 17th century/Western European civilization	awareness of the historical past/older cultural mindset/traditional structure of Western European society	FINDING OUT: What past cultural mindset do we reproduce/accept?
a painting of the Baroque period inside a work of graffiti/"Las Meninas"	timelessness of art/cultural integration	FINDING OUT: What consequences does introspection in culture have for citizen of tomorrow? CREATIVE: What work of art from your cultural heritage would you choose to replace "Las Meninas" to approach the Central Idea of heritage?

However, some students had broader points of view on the issue of multiculturalism from the beginning of the learning process. Thus, it was initially considered that in the context of multiculturalism, an individual develops itself in a heterogeneous society, without however losing his/her free will and without losing the value of his/her personality. In this case, the process of coding and decoding highlighted deeper thoughts on the subject of multiculturalism such as a) the abolition of past dysfunctional stereotypes, b) the acknowledgment of the role of children in the development of a successful coexistence among people, c) the acknowledgment of role of empathy as an integral part of the acceptance of others, d) the acknowledgment that the knowledge of the structure of cultures as a factor that helps to address any current social challenges.

The context analysis of the responses of 2nd graders (K-12) revealed the following:

2nd graders make remarkable comments as well: They questioned not only how far away the children's homelands might be, but also the reason why they were there at that place. They expressed questions related to the concept of communication. They wondered about the symbolic role of houses that children hold in their hands. In fact, they concluded that cultures have the same value, just as houses have the same height. In an optimistic tone, they assumed that the houses to be built in the new district would be houses of love. They justified their point of view precisely because in each of them there is a small spark. They also raised concerns like: "Will there be space to build the new district?"

V.FINAL THOUGHTS - CONCLUSION

The two proposed artworks presented in the context of this paper can be considered as case studies aiming to highlight the depth of reflection that they can provoke, if they will be observed through specific methodological approaches as those that are suggested in this paper.

Minors and adults recognized many symbols through the decoding process, which helped them develop a more meaningful understanding of the concept of multiculturalism. Their points of view about multiculturalism broadened at the end of the process. In any case, they develop an attitude against multiculturalism that is characterized by the openness it deserves.

A comparative study between two research groups (2nd graders/adults) leads to the conclusion that regardless age students' initial limiting points of view about multiculturalism shifted somehow. The content analysis of the answers given by adult students to the initial and final question on the issue of multiculturalism proves that their thinking became more reflective on the topic of multiculturalism. On the other hand, the titles given by 2nd graders to the artwork highlighted the characteristics of an ideal multicultural society. Therefore, it would be interesting if Street Art, under certain preconditions, could be incorporated into National Curricula as an integral part of learning and teaching that provokes students' reflection.

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