

Social sustainability: Communities and partnerships

Master in Art Education at University of Aveiro; research, practice and collaborative partnerships with schools

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Abstract

The Bologna agreement brought new concepts and changes on Higher Education courses in Europe and also in the professional life requirements. From now on Art teachers must have a Master in Education in Arts (Visual Arts, Music, etc) for teaching at the different issues and levels of teaching. The new art teachers graduated by University of Aveiro have to attend a year of lectures, develop projects at University and have a second year of practice teaching at a secondary or a basic school involved in collaborative partnership with University of Aveiro. The practice, research and strategies as well as the different intervention activities, which take place during the process both at school and the community, are developed in close cooperation between the University and the schools involved in order to promote the enhancement of the educational process. The work developed is presented in an individual reflective portfolio and a Final Report that is presented in a public session before a Professor's Committee. This work shall exhibit the activities, innovative proposals, relevant contributes and professional practices, that

took place during the second year of the course and strongly contribute for the final evaluation.

Key words: master in art education; research; professional activities; practice in classroom; partnerships.

1- Introduction

The Reflective Portfolio is an individual work, still in progress, that seeks to share the experiences carried out by the students involved in the Master's in Art Education during the teacher training program, showing the difficulties and the successes of this process, mainly in the practice in a reflective way and contributing to a correction of methodologies and strategies in order to achieve a better approach of the subject. A senior teacher that helps, advises and evaluates the pedagogic performance of the future teacher supervises the practice teaching at a secondary or a basic school involved in a collaborative partnership with University of Aveiro. Furthermore, the practice and strategies as well as the different intervention activities, which take place during the process both at school and the community, are developed in close cooperation between the University and the schools involved in order to promote the enhancement of the educational process.

This study aims to contribute to an enhancement of teacher training in visual arts, but it is also a preferred means of an overall training of the teacher and students as individuals, especially those whose discovery of the way ahead is still to be defined, as in the case of adolescents.

In this research, rather than providing answers we aim to ask questions and report on a research, still under development, based on the strategies of the Portfolio and the Reflective Self-Representation that can lead to the construction of self-knowledge and self-representation.

2- Importance of Art and Art Education

Art has always been an important way to record the evolution of the human being and this has been demonstrated as a form of communication of societies through the ages, unique and effective.

Creativity, imagination and abstract thinking, essential features in the artistic process, encourage innovation, giving opportunity to the New, to the belief that the impossible becomes possible.

Thus, art education develops a higher thought (Vigotsky: 1979), in a globalizing perspective of the individual, but is this vision established or pursued by today's School?

The objectives of the discipline of Visual Education have been kept through the years and some changes have been made, but it seems to be widespread recognition of the importance of Visual Education in the overall development of the individual, not only in acquiring knowledge, but also in most constitutive dimension of the human being. As mentioned by Sousa, "Only through art is can Man be formed as a whole and develop spiritually, approaching the divine." (Sousa: 2003: 12)

Visual Education appears to contribute the room to awaken the students' senses, skills and competencies necessary for the development of their personality as artistic and thinking individuals. "... school, besides teaching

mathematics, history, science, etc., should also contribute to the mastery of a set of procedural skills involving learning to think, to analyze critically, to relate with others, to invest in development projects, to question, to take initiative, among others. "(Menezes: 1999: 15) "Rather than educating for a scientific *rationale* of artistic techniques, it is important to cultivate a taste for a new way of communicating with others and of self-expression, and it is in this context that a teenager may know himself, a practice of a hygienic and healthy life". (Sousa: 2003: 11).

3- Methodological Considerations

This study is part of the action research method, given its theoretical and practical nature, with special relevance to the psycho-pedagogical aspects revealed by students during the work process.

Thus, we intend to evaluate this research continuously on a careful analysis and reflected on the work performed by students (giving more emphasis to the process than to the final result), relying continually on the Reflective Portfolios of individual students, which are analyzed qualitatively as claimed by Connelly and Clandinin (in Sa-Chaves, ref. Marcelo: 2009): "The study of narrative is the study of form, according to which human beings experience the world. This concept sees education as the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories and teachers and learners are storytellers and characters from histories and stories of their own and others." (In Sa-Chaves, ref. Marcelo: 2009; 23)

It is aimed to do an interpretative analysis of the contents of the students' Reflective Portfolios (Shon: 1987), and to use the system for categorization of

protocols (Morin: 1993), performing a grid analysis focused on the categories of three dimensions inherent to the student (Sa-Chaves: 2009):

- Personal issues - biographical aspects of the student;
- Informative aspects - where we can find the students' work and reflections;
- Project life - where we can meet the students' expectations in the future.

All these variables will be analyzed and evaluated with special emphasis on four assessment frameworks reported by Sa-Chaves and conducting an analysis in order to find, as stated, "...knowledge skills reflective of the narrator and the possibility of making explicit the hidden dimension of discourse." (Sa-Chaves: 2009; 25)

- Focus evaluative / Focus formation;
- Focus sporadic / Focus continued;
- Focus descriptive / Focus reflective;
- Selective Focus / Comprehensive Approach.

Thus, this study aims to find the "hidden dimension of discourse", the best way to build a Portfolio reflective of the teaching of Visual Arts, understanding the student as an individual.

4- Work Development

Visual Education as a school subject has been conducted in replicating the Reflective Portfolio with the students, in a multifaceted and exploratory project, which emerged through an experimental methodology based on the students' wish to achieve more and aiming to enhance self-knowledge. The stages of this work, as well as the basic concepts involved, include a) Reflective Portfolio, b) Self-Representation and c) Self-portrait that will

culminate in a d) Public Exhibition.

STAGE 1: Basis of Reflective Portfolio

The Reflective Portfolio appears as a convenient and useful means of formative assessment (of students and teachers), a preferential use of continuous analysis and reflection on the contents taught.

This initial module enables teachers and students to understand each other in a better way. The Reflective Portfolio, by means of its relevant functions, emerges not only as a device that promotes a "formative assessment" of the students, showing the construction of their paths of learning, but it could also be another tool in the service of diverse research activities to be undertaken by teachers throughout the year.

The use of portfolios is now widely based and described as a "promising tool" for the creation of the educational process and to enhance the 'learning to learn'." (Leite: 2003 in Bernard & Miranda: 2003, 6)

"(...) The exams are not intended to show at what point the student is to help you move forward in their learning, but only serve to put a note on the staff. They serve administrative purposes rather than educational. "(Bross: 1994 ref. by Bernard & Miranda: 2003: 7).

By creating a portfolio, students can understand or witness, above all, the course of teaching-learning process, the proposed objectives and the followed strategies and challenges, easily visualizing what was done and how and the reflections produced. The development of a portfolio implies an active participation of students in their learning, allows a better understanding and the paths followed providing a rich resource for the formative evaluation and learning.

The diversity and quality of information contained in a portfolio, as well as its evaluation criteria, place the student in authentic situations to overcome and solve problems, establishing a project working method.

Finally, the construction of knowledge and skills implies that the student becomes aware of the means and strategies he needs to use, to self-assess and co-evaluate. The portfolio also appears here as a practice of "self regulation" (LOUIS: 1999 cit. Bernardes & Miranda: 2003, 25), covering the development of learner autonomy, and hence this action as being consistent with the various units of the Basic Education Curriculum.

Therefore, we propose general objectives of this module for teaching:

- That students understand what a reflective portfolio is for and how to prepare it;
- That students perceive the differences between a traditional portfolio and reflective collection of work (file);
- That students become elucidated about the processes and characteristics of the portfolios' evaluation;
- That students become motivate to construct their individual Reflective Portfolio and class Webfolio.

STAGE 2: Development of practical work

Developing self-confidence, teamwork and learning some basic artistic techniques are important tasks of the practical work. Based on the planned activities grouped as "Understanding Art," in order to reach a better understanding of the work of art, art history, forms and artistic expression and professions related to Arts aim to reflect deeper and on a more practical way

on the art of the twentieth century, looking more closely at the influence or impact on the art of our days. Contemporary art values the expressive properties of materials and techniques, supporting new artistic systems and universes. That brings a set of new possibilities that were not intended to enhance rather than formal values, structural, plastic and pictorial present in materials and elements of the language of art.

Three techniques were chosen to work with the class developing the practical work related to this module:

Assemblage: This term was incorporated by the artist Jean Dubuffet in 1953, in his interventions on media plans - using various materials, pasting, overlapping, joining etc. It authorizes the implementation of the limits of the screen for three-dimensional space, creating a clear junction of painting and sculpture. Inspired by this concept the students created, individually and together, 3D forms. Ideas and collected materials were shared for the creation of objects that have focused on recovery of "waste" materials, by reusing and recycling them.

Printmaking techniques: the classroom was transformed into an exhibition space open to debate, not only on considerations and examples relating to some fine art printmaking techniques (screen printing, engraving etc), but also about the role of these processes in the (re) definition of the concept of the artwork as a unique object, unrepeatable.

This way, students could become more elucidated, which enabled them to realize that many of these facilities "to make art, assemblage and photography, through various types of image reproduction, are part of a broad range of techniques that have served the area of art.

The main skills to developed were:

- understanding contemporary art;
- developing aesthetic sensitivity and creativity;
- promoting the integration of pupils in the school community;
- promoting a relationship of cooperation between students and teachers;
- developing the skills to use different techniques of expression;



Fig. 4, 5- Printmaking techniques

Photography: With the help of a professional photographer, the class was led through a guided discussion about the relevance of this medium and a session for clarification about the diversity of photographic materials and tools. Starting a more direct contact with the technique and exploring its potential, the students performed "patterns of light" in small groups, inspired by a video of Picasso working - one of the forerunners of the technique and more current examples such as light graffiti.

With the advent of digital technology, photography experienced an unprecedented surge in its history. Today, the ability to capture images with different kinds of devices - from mobile phones to sophisticated cameras - is

permitting widespread, more and better than ever, the immediate transmission and printing of results with complete autonomy. However, it is remarkable that all this abundance and apparent ease means that nothing has changed in the essential premise of the photographic act: the art of seeing. (Conference on Photography, Serralves Foundation, 2008).

In this activity, the look of the student was guided progressively through the example of a professional, invited to participate in class, in order to stimulate the sense of observation and creativity, as well as the practice of basic tools. Students had the opportunity to make their first approach to record and develop their own photographs in a lab.



Fig. 1, 2, 3- Photography: self-Portrait, self-Representation

STAGE 3: reflection on the self-portrait and self-representation

Today's self-representation is a strong trend with active expression in the visual arts, as in other areas (from documentary film to literature) and as such, it is not a new phenomenon in art history. The theme is nevertheless a relevant pretext to bring the students to various artistic creations, broadening their notion on contemporary art.

The resolution to explore the self-representation has arisen, like said before,

following the discovery of a climate of low self-esteem, and trying to implement methodologies that would help young students to face their personal universe in a free, revealing and potentially constructive and reflective way, which would help with their growth. "When we let go the open dialogue at school and especially in art education on what the culture of youth and children really is then we can perhaps say that arts education has a role in the construction of identity. Capacity for critical reflection, imagination and creativity which are explored through the artistic processes of learning are important to identity formation of children and young people and it will be even more important to art education / visual programs to include in their students' interests and their visual reality as priority issues to address." (Eça: 2008)



Fig. 6, 7- Self- Portraits and self- Representation

STAGE 4: practical work of self-representation

"The aesthetic experience is not to become better or worse, but to become more intimate, without being definitive." (Dove: 1995, 390)

Children and young people today are exposed with weakness and passivity to a non-formal education and culture of media (i.e. television, internet, games, movies). This type of learning goes beyond the formal school and is very

powerful. Artistic disciplines help with a reflection and appropriation of the language used by the media, they call for a critical position and are aware of the multiplicity of cultures that opens the mind for the acceptance of differences of cultural and social groups or for a better inclusion.

STAGE 5: Final Exhibition and reflection: "Week of the Arts"

To be held in May, this "**Week of the Arts**" is going to include in its program several workshops, lectures and exhibitions related to the subject, aiming to be a week when activities are carried out from different perspectives of the work of art, enriched by the invitation of artists and other professionals related to arts.

5- Conclusions

An important aspect to refer to is that the teachers of the discipline, as well as the students have built a Reflective Portfolio, as part of the activities of the Master in Arts Education they are attending which has helped them to realize the importance of such procedures, making them more vigilant in pursuit of a systematic and critical reflection, rethinking continuously attitudes, practices and decisions, in different situations.

This study, still in development, has proved a very enriching experience for all the involved, as part of a constructive process and evolution.

The use of the Reflective Portfolio as a tool has promoted a formative evaluation, a continuous reflection of the content taught, with a base motive to systematize the constructive path of learning of each student, helping to deepen self-knowledge and self-representation.

This activity promoted skills acquisition, a greater freedom in the spontaneous expression and the students' creativity and, at the same time, it is possible to analyze and reflect on problems and solve them, which demands a close cooperation between students and teachers and allows a desired interaction promoting the educational relationship between all the stakeholders.

It is important to note that arts education activities, the material used and the works created by students are seen as a way to offer the possibility of expression, developing their creative abilities in order to establish emotional relationships.

This research has been followed by a reflection on the self-portrait and self-representation, so as to maximize the building of each student's personal universe, revealing and reflective of a balanced personal growth. This allows an awareness and acceptance of differences, though sometimes it is hard to happen, especially at this level of schooling.

Thus, it is the researchers' conviction that the Reflective Portfolio, even at an early age, ensures a full and healthy growth of the individual, humanizing Education and gradually developing the Self.

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