

4th Conference on Arts-based Research and Artistic Research

Rethinking arts-based research, artistic research – and global/local communities.

*Sub-theme: Arts-based research and/or artistic research and the norms of communities
(cultural, geographic, scientific, etc.)*

*Art-based Research: Contemporary art and other informal artistic disciplines as a tool for
social integration of a community.*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the investigative methods of Arts Based Research (ABR) and Arts Based Educational Research (AbER). The first type connects the concepts of “science” and “art,” while the latter encompasses “science,” “art” and “education”. These types of research present different areas of study that are complex, broad, diverse and respond to specific approaches.

Emerging contemporary art can be used to highlight the sociopolitical situation of communities at risk of exclusion. It can also help to raise awareness within the art and education communities about the need to include a new theme: the specific situations of people living in conflict areas.

Based on the idea of emerging contemporary art, we aim to create an art project to be conducted in class with students of infant and primary education degrees, so that they, as teachers, can present their pupils with the current reality of certain countries from an artistic perspective.

Initially, we analyse the works of Ai Weiwei and the Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation, the latter developed for Syrian and Lebanese children in refugee camps. Then, the idea is for the future teachers to present their group creations based on this theme through installations, interventions in public spaces, or puppetry. Other types of creations include photo essays, photo installations, and photo books.

The proposed methodology is qualitative, based on data collection, interviews about emotions, sociopolitical context, descriptions of personal experience, drawings and photos depicting the children’s emotions and expressions before and during the theatrical performance.

The aim is for children to create their own puppet characters through which they can

express themselves. Then, the children construct and tell their own story in front of the others. In this way, they have the chance for their voice to be heard. Later, their story is performed in a theatre performance.

The conceptual and theoretical framework is based on Arts based Educational Research (AbER). We examine which is the most suitable methodology to study emerging artists and puppet shows from the perspective of social integration.

Finally, many authors involved in different areas of education have studied the field of Arts based Educational Research, in terms of how to document the diversity and complexity of these issues, and how methodology and epistemology have raised questions about the advantages and disadvantages of using this method to apply art in education.

Keywords: Arts-based research (ABR), Arts based Educational Research (AbER), Contemporary art, Puppets, Education.

1. Introduction

The effect of the current social situation on the fields of education and art is complex. It requires a comprehensive knowledge of what is occurring in different parts of the world. According to Burnard, Mackinlay, and Powell (2016), intercultural art practices enrich and propose new forms of representation: *“In today’s globalized world, intercultural arts are characterized by catalytic coalescence between culturally diverse arts practices that integrate elements of each. This usually results in new artistic outcomes with multiple identities that cross cultural borders and involve exploration of the plethora of cultural modes of representation comprising the auditory, linguistic, visual, gestural and spatial. Some intercultural approaches may give partial attention to specific cultural factors such as ideology and discourse patterns, yet neglect other interpersonal and cultural factors that could impact on cultural exchange and understanding”*.

The concept of interculturality is fundamental to establishing and structuring educational artistic practices. Furthermore, this global concept must be developed through ideas related to the local environments of specific communities.

2. Background

This project was conceived in response to an article written by Susan Samham, editor of the EFE Agency, on June 4, 2015. The journalist wrote about the activities carried out in Lebanese refugee camps by a group of puppeteers from the *Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation*, a centre which trains people as puppeteers to perform in conflict areas.

The significance of migration caused by war has an influence on how we can help

refugees to overcome the trauma that they experience. It also demonstrates the importance of developing programmes in schools so that they are prepared to facilitate cultural integration and awareness.

These migrant children may possibly become students in our schools, and therefore, it is essential to plan the process properly.

3. Artistic research methodologies in Art and Education: Arts Based Research and Arts based Educational Research.

Artistic research methodologies in the fields of Art and Education are divided into two main groups: Arts Based Research (ABR) and Arts based Educational Research (AbER).

The research methodologies in Art Education are the same as those applied in the fields of social and human sciences. Arts based Educational Research examines education from an artistic perspective.

There are two renowned research groups in the field of Arts based Educational Research: The British Educational Research Association (UK) and ABER SIG (USA).

In 2005, *“Artistic research, theories, methods and practices”*, a book about the creative methods of Fine Arts, was published. This work offers an extensive methodological study of the new approaches to research visual culture, with a focus on practice-based and practice-driven approaches within contemporary culture.

According to Hannula, Suoranta, & Vaden (2005), the use of research analysis, in this case Arts Based Research, to study art and media representations, and the objects connected to both disciplines, can respond to popular culture, for reasons of satisfaction, pleasure, or therapeutic experiences:

“How should the artistic research view point respond to the claim that art is used in the same way as popular culture, above all for pleasure and therapeutic experiences? A response characteristic of artistic research is to analyse different media representations in a comparative study. Put briefly, nothing human is alien to artistic research: its theoretical and empirical research objects can include the rich world sliding from high art to popular culture, including performances, events, films, posters, animations, advertisements, comic strips, hobby magazines, tabloids, toys, computer games and trading cards. The value of studying the latter lies in the fact that they are perceived as representing and presenting that reality in which people live and which they produce through their own actions.”¹

(Hannula, M. Suoranta, J. & Vaden, T., 2005, p. 72)

4. Social experiences connected with Art Education

We study the cases of specific artists and organisations whose artwork is related to the themes of conflict and social integration, such as the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, and the Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation.

On February 13, 2016, the Spanish newspaper, El País, published an article in its online Arts section, about an installation by Ai Weiwei, an artist and activist of Chinese origin. Ai Weiwei's installation was made up of hundreds of lifejackets used by refugees to arrive to the European coasts, attached to the columns of the Berlin *Konzerthaus*. This installation was produced to commemorate people fleeing from war.

The material used in this installation was sourced from thousands of lifejackets worn by refugees and immigrants while crossing the sea from Turkey to Greece. The artist, who lives in Berlin, is currently working on art projects related to this subject area. The elements incorporated in his work are used as symbols to express and communicate shocking events. This particular work is located in the Gendarmenmarkt, a main square in Berlin that hosts Cinema for Peace, an event that coincides with the Berlinale, awarding prizes for films about humanitarian, analytical, and social themes.



Fig. 1. Installation Ai-Weiwei. *Konzerthaus Berlin*, 2016. Photo: Oliver Lang

Reference: <http://www.cntraveler.com/stories/2016-02-18/ai-weiwei-covers-berlin-landmark-with-14000-refugee-life-jackets>

Fig. 2. Installation Ai-Weiwei. *Konzerthaus Berlin*, 2016. Photo: Clemens Bilan. Getty Images

Reference: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/in-europe-the-refugee-crisis-as-art-14000-bright-orange-life-jackets/2016/02/15/d6d23c50-d3f5-11e5-a65b-587e721fb231_story.html

Another project by Ai Weiwei related to the issue of refugees was inspired by his visit to the Greek island of Lesbos. This piece, entitled “*Zodiac Heads*,” created in Prague, represents the heads of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, covered by golden thermal blankets, similar to those used in rescue operations. The aim of this piece is to raise awareness about the suffering of refugees fleeing from war-torn areas. This work has been exhibited in museums throughout Europe, forming the basis of the artist's installation.



Fig. 3. *Circle of Animals / Zodiac Heads*, 2011. Ai Weiwei. Bronze. Reference: <http://arrestedmotion.com/2015/09/showing-ai-weiwei-circle-of-animals-zodiac-heads-cac-malaga/>

Fig. 4. *Circle of Animals / Zodiac Heads* Ai Weiwei, 2016. Trade Fair Palace. Prague, Czech Republic. Reference: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/5-times-ai-weiweis-art-has-called-attention-to-the-refugee-crisis/>

Moving on to a different focus, we present the workshops carried out by puppeteers from the Arab Puppet Foundation, which incorporate play-oriented activities aimed at helping children overcome a traumatic experience. This Palestinian-based group specialises in puppetry training for areas of conflict, and is responsible for bringing puppet shows to Syrian children in refugee camps in Lebanon.

As published in the Puppet residency booklet in 2011, the *Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation* defines itself as follows:

“APTF is a platform to revive, continually challenge and rethink the art-form of puppetry in the Arab World. APTF assists the professional development of artists associated with puppetry. It embraces new methods in the field, and provides skills and specialized programs to experienced and novice puppeteers, puppet-makers, educators and social workers. It also collaborates with artists and professionals from a variety of complementary fields and disciplines to explore new possibilities in the art and craft of puppetry.” ²

(Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation, 2011, p. 4.).

The foundation’s activities include different art practices and art



Fig. 5. An actor from a theatre puppet show performs at an UNERWA school in Burj al-Barajneh (Beirut). May, 2015. Photo: Mohamed Azakir/Reuters.

Fig. 6. The Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation team. Show at an UNERWA school. May, 2015. Photo: Mohamed Azakir/Reuters. Reference: http://avax.news/touching/Children_in_Burj_al-Barajneh_Enchanted_by_Show.html

residencies. In 2010, the *Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation* had its first residency in Beirut. The participants were from a diverse range of countries. Most were apprentices who completed a three-week intensive puppetry course.

The second project, entitled *Palestinian Refugee Camps in Art Residency*, took place in 2011. Participants from different refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and occupied Palestine were united to strengthen community networks for collaboration in cultural initiatives, with a main focus on puppetry. Three participants from the area of occupied Palestine were not granted permission to cross borders to take part in this activity.

5. Visual culture related to visual social projects

Visual culture has been studied extensively, however, in this project, we propose an activity aimed at the preschool classroom. The themes that will be used are related to photography, drawing, and sculpture.

According to Hannula, M. Suoranta, J. & Vaden, T. (2005), there are two ways to research the arts. The first type is concerned with studying artistic products of popular culture, whereas the second type involves data-based analysis of the products of visual culture.

“It is possible to differentiate between two large trends in the artistic research of cultural artefacts. On the one hand there is the analysis of the reception - or popular reading - of the products of popular culture, which means studying the meaning given by people to different artefacts, that is, man-created objects (e.g. TV programmes and commercials, advertisements, newspapers, video and computer games, toys, etc.). [...] On the other hand, there is the data-based analysis - or researcher reading - of the products of popular culture. Research wise, it would be possible to proceed in two ways: either along the road of a thematic analysis that supports the researcher’s own thinking or according to some ready-made theoretical framework. For instance, film researchers have adapted theories first developed in other disciplines by means of which they study their research object: e.g. semiotic analysis, the study of the rhetoric of visual narration, the aesthetics or genre-analysis of film, etc.” (Hannula, M. Suoranta, J. & Vaden, T., 2005, p. 77)

This study is concerned with visual culture, however, professors, such as Kerry Freedman from the Northern Illinois University, who have researched this subject with a focus on art education, offer a different point of view.

“The images and objects of visual culture are constantly seen and immediately interpreted, forming new knowledge and images about identity and environment. It mediates the social relations formed between artists, artists and spectators, and

between spectators. Art and Art Education are forms of mediation between people in which a series of professional and discursive practices play an important role.” (Freedman, K., 2007, p. 27).

Photography is the main subject of interest for the activities in this study. Due to its usability and ease of evaluating results, we propose a number of different photography formats, such as photobiography, a medium studied by Fina Sanz in her book, *La Fotobiografía*.

As Sanz (2007) states: *“Photobiography graphically displays the social and cultural universe from which we have come, as well as the rituals and myths in which we participate. It offers us specific images of the social values shared by our ancestors, it shows us the position that we held in the family, and the changes that we have undergone, all of this manifested through our body, face and gaze.”*

Sanz (2007) defines photobiography as: *“A data collection technique through photography, indicating the most important events and experiences, while paying attention to the feelings and emotions that are generated by these experiences. The technique of autobiography brings the researcher close to the humanist character of qualitative research.”*

Therefore, the visual culture presented by teachers and children can be enriched artistically through photo essays, photo installations, photo books, and photobiographies:

Photo essays: A photo essay is a series of photographs or set of images in book or magazine format, which narrate a story or explore a topic with the aim of producing an emotional response from the spectator. Photo essays present photographs with profound emotional states, and can be differentiated from purely photographic works in that the images are accompanied by explanatory subtitles or text.

Photo installation: This subgenre of Installation Art features three-dimensional pieces designed to transform a specific space. The concept of photo installation is concerned with interior spaces, whereas works created in outdoor spaces form part of public art, land art, or even intervention art, when referring to interventions produced in the public domain. However, there is a great deal of overlapping between these concepts.

Photo book: Images make up a significant part of the overall content of this medium. Photo books were originally small collectable publications that contained photographic prints and were distributed in instalments to readers interested in the subject.

Photobiography: This is a photo data collection technique through photography, which recounts life through images, generally focusing on familiar events and everyday occurrences. This medium can help children to learn about their roots, and perhaps also encourage them to start taking photographs of their current and new environment.

6. Educational art project with a social character

This didactic art project is designed for preschool and primary school teachers. More specifically, it is an activity to be conducted by teachers with children who have experienced difficulties with social integration.

In this study, we analyse a number of interventions that have been carried out in different countries, which use art activities with thousands of children who have experienced a shocking event. In specific terms, we examine activities that have been created in response to the situation of migration. Furthermore, we consider the possible projects that can be developed in schools to research the use of art as a means to help children overcome traumatic experiences and integrate in the schools of their host countries. Finally, we propose activities adapted for schools to be carried out in stages using simple materials.

Aims:

The general and specific aims of this activity and didactic proposal related to the social theme of refugees are as follows:

- To reflect, in the classroom, upon the situation that refugees are currently experiencing in certain countries.
- To present how education and art can contribute to minimising and alleviating human suffering, especially for children who have a great ability to cope.

Contents:

The themes included in this project concern three specific fields of art. Firstly, we will present work by artists from each field related to these themes. Then, the children will be given freedom to participate in the activity in a creative manner. The concepts addressed will be related to the notion of opposites, such as, ephemeral — lasting, freedom — repression, good — evil. In addition, we will consider broader ideas, such as journeys, voyages and luggage.

- ∴ Photography will be used to consider the aforementioned concepts. The children will take individual photographs or produce a series of images, adopting the format of photo essay, photo installation, photo books, or photobiography.
- ∴ Through drawing, the children will be able to clearly and simply express their real-life experiences and circumstances, as well as the life that they hope to achieve for a prosperous and normal future.

- ∴ Sculpture will be used to work with puppets, intervened objects or assemblage. The children will paint, assemble, recycle and build a new sculpture, or regenerate an object that is meaningful to them, such as their belongings from their journey, etc.

Implementation of the activity

The development of this activity is based on the understanding that different areas of art, such as drawing, photography, and sculpture, can provide an educational support to narrate and overcome a traumatic event, for example, migration due to war. It also responds to the idea that the process of making other children aware of another reality, regardless of whether they have experienced it, will enrich their world view. Therefore, a series of tasks will be carried over a number of weeks in order to determine the most suitable classroom schedule for the implementation of the activities.

- ∴ We propose that the teachers view works by artists, such as Ai Weiwei, the Arab Puppet Foundation, and other works of collective and collaborative photography related to photo essays, photo installations, and photo books, in order to raise awareness about the situation of the refugees. The teachers will also create art pieces using intervened objects and assemblage.
- ∴ For the children, we propose that they take photographs. These can be single pieces. The children will also produce drawings reflecting their experience and adverse situation, as well as their future plans for life from a more positive perspective. They will also make puppets, creating different characters to overcome certain fears, and to represent characters that produce stimulating and positive memories in their life through a theatre performance.

Schedule

The activities will take place over ten weeks as follows:

- Session 1. Week 1 - 2: Task 1.
- Session 2. Week 3 - 5: Task 2.
- Session 3. Week 5 - 7: Task 3.
- Session 4. Week 7 - 10: Task 4.

7. Conclusions of the analysis of the activity

This activity gives teachers the opportunity as professionals to engage and actively participate in a tragic and unprecedented situation.

Our subject area is of particular use in this context. We have personally observed the interest shown in these activities through our work with NGOs in Peru, as well as our teaching in schools with experience in intercultural orientation. This is due to the fact that there are students from several different countries now living in the Canary Islands. However, the current serious issues regarding refugees present certain identifiable features. Therefore, it is relatively easy to prepare activities that will yield good results and benefit the children's schooling and integration.



Fig. 7 & 8. Puppets, 2009. Faculty of Education. UCA. University of Cadiz. Felt. // Felt and straw

Firstly, let us consider the puppets created in the refugee camps. We are already aware of the great benefits and magnificent results produced by these puppets, due to previous workshops carried out in the Faculty of Education in Cadiz, Spain. We believe that this activity could be expanded to the children's new schools in their host countries, involving teachers of different subjects, since puppetry is a universal language. The refugee camp puppeteers consider their suitcase as the only equipment they need in order to work.

Since the aim is to include this experience as art research, and due to the difficulties involved in following a methodology and analysing results, we believe that photography is an appropriate tool, as it captures expressions and changes in attitudes. In addition, it incorporates images which enable students to show themselves, and can be a beneficial tool in their development. Lastly, it facilitates the research evaluation process.

In this regard, we have watched puppet shows that we consider inappropriate due to the use of characters that are sometimes responsible for the children's situation. One example is the character of the Syrian president, which we believe could represent for the children one of the figures that is responsible for their current circumstance. This may have an

inappropriate or undesired impact on the children.

On the other hand, the themes and characters presented by the Arab Puppet Theatre Foundation are very interesting and suitable. The protagonist is a mischievous child, and the conversations are about typical customs and food that the children know and miss.

The teachers take photographs on their arrival, then a series of activities is conducted, and later presented. The children participate by creating their own report about their experiences of arriving to a new environment. Finally, the families are able to collaborate, which helps to expand and improve the workshops through collaboration and integration.

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