



Artikkeli I

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European Identity Through Art – Using the Creative Connections Artwork Database to Develop the Use of Contemporary Art in Education

Abstract

In this chapter I will discuss the experiences and different pedagogical uses of contemporary art in the Creative Connections project (2012–2014), which aimed to explore and develop ways of increasing understanding of European identity and citizenship among children and young people by connecting art and citizenship education. The chapter begins with an introduction to concepts of identity, contemporary art in education and the research project. The main body of the chapter describes the use of the contemporary artwork database that was made in the project. The research concentrates on how the given examples of artwork were received and used by teachers and pupils. The findings present the different approaches used in the project to involve contemporary artworks in the context of European citizenship and identity in education.

Introduction

Artworks have always reflected contemporary society and have acted in meaningful roles to build the imagery of national identity. Artists have also used art to study personal history, status and identity using class and family symbols to express emotion and personal experiences. Could art be used, then, to explore identities, to create intercultural understandings of identities and even to build a common European identity? The context for the study is the collaborative research project, *Creative Connections*. Researchers and visual art educators from partner universities in the UK, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Spain, Portugal and Finland collaborated with elementary teachers, art teachers, and civil education teachers to explore ways of increasing transnational understanding in Europe's young people and children. The action research involved 27 researchers, 25 schools, 45 teachers and 1,080 pupils. The partner countries worked together to give a new emphasis to the 'voice of the child' through art, citizenship and digital media by sharing biogs between classes in different countries. Part of the project involved experimenting with the use of online translation software to help pupils to communicate in their own languages. Creative Connections followed the Comenius -funded project *Images and Identity: Improving Citizenship through Digital Art* (2008–2010).

European identity

The concept of identity has been defined and debated in many fields of study from psychology and sociology to communications and cultural studies. When starting the Creative Connections project we discussed whether to use the term ‘identity; ‘subjectivity’ or ‘self’. While the word identity was seen as inaccurate and American in origin, as part of everyday language, it would be more familiar for teachers and pupils. The theories I refer to also use the term ‘identity’: Hall (1999) and Simon (2004) both noted that ‘identity’ is actually only an invention and fiction. But as Simon (2004) concluded, the notion of identity can still be used as a powerful conceptual tool when exploring the processes around self-definition or self-interpretation.

Psychological and communication theories in general separate personal and social identities or distinguish three levels of identity: Individual, relational and collective (Hecht, 1993). Simon’s (2004) *Self-Aspect Model of Identity* proposed that a person’s identity comprises beliefs about their own attributes or self-characteristics. In reality it depends on how a person experiences the given self-aspect. What is part of individual identity for one is part of collective identity for another (e.g. religion or a medical condition). It is more important to note that all of the levels of identity are formed by cognitive and social processes in which the elements of identities develop and emerge through social interaction (Simon, 2004).

Hall (1999) defined ‘cultural identities’ as the aspects of identity that make us part of an ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious or most importantly national culture. We project ourselves onto these cultural identities and absorb their meanings and values. This gives us a sense of belonging to places at a social and cultural level. Identity attaches a person to a structure and makes the world more stable and predictable. But in the postmodern world, identities are more and more scattered, consisting of multiple levels and controversial elements. The identification process is now more open and complicated, and identity is constantly in change. (Hall, 1999). What connects Hall (1999) to the use of art in relation to identities is his emphasis on representations. According to Hall (1999), identities are formed inside representations: how the resources of history, language and culture are used in becoming something; how we have been represented and the effects on how we present ourselves (Hall, 1999).

For over three decades, it has been the goal of the European Community (EC) to create and enforce European identity and citizenship (Mason, Richardson & Collins, 2012) The European Commission’s publication *Education for Active Citizenship in Europe* acknowledges that people in European societies need to engage with the concept of citizenship actively in order to be “architects and actors of their own lives” (EC, 1998, p. 4). The current situation of economic crisis in Europe made the discussion of European citizenship and what it means even more urgent. At the most basic level, citizenship can be viewed simply as “a sense of identity” (Cogan & Derricott, 2000, p. 3) While finding it futile to force a shared sense of European citizenship, in the preceding project, *Images and Identity*, the project team reframed the task to encourage children to reflect upon their citizen selves in a range of contexts, one of which was Europe (Mason et al., 2012).

The main discussion, then, for the Creative Connections project was on how children and young people understand and feel about themselves in the context of Europe and how

they see their own personal, local and national identities. Also, based on Hall and Simon's theories, instead of aiming to find a common European identity, it was more important to create space for discussing identities in social interaction, to explore the representations of identities and for people to create their own representations.

Contemporary art in education

In the Creative Connection project, the artwork examples and art-making process were seen as ways to approach the abstract concepts of citizenship and identity. In art education, pupils are encouraged to value art-making as a psychological manifestation of their social, cultural and individual identities and to use visual images as a means for exchanging and communicating their feelings and ideas (Freedman, 2003). Räsänen captured the essence of our purposes when using contemporary art in mapping identity and as a basis for communicating internationally:

Art makes us see ourselves and our relation to the world we live in. Art education helps to observe differences in human cultures and promotes an ethical attitude towards the unfamiliar. In order to understand other individuals and cultures, we need skills to interpret the art they make. (Räsänen, 2012, p. 1)



Figure 1. the Creative Connections' Artwork database The artwork database categories:

- a. Mapping Identity - Presenting different aspects of personal identity
- b. Mapping Nation - Presenting different aspects of national identity
- c. Visual Reports - Art as reporter of the cultural environment and phenomena
- d. Cultural Guides - Art as a guide for seeing and presenting things in different ways
- e. Action! - Art as making a statement, expressing opinions, activism

Examples of contemporary artworks from the participating countries were chosen to approach the theme of identity visually, even though the images from visual culture that surround young people in everyday life should have priority, given their dominant influence on their constructions of self (Freedman, 2003). The artworks have greater educational merit because artists search for deeper truths behind consumer culture, and their artworks challenge the stereotypes promoted in the mass media (Mason et al., 2012). Juha Varto (2012) emphasized the importance of artistic thinking in art education and the contribution that contemporary art practices in particular can bring:

Contemporary art thus seems able to turn the basics of art education upside down. The change would take its start in the idea that art first has a political function and is thus meant to collect people together and create a platform of communion. (Varto, 2012, p. 81)

Räsänen (2008) also specified contemporary art as a learning environment where it is possible to integrate different subject matters and ethical and ecological aspects. While the use of art to create and share meanings was the common aim of the project teams and the idea of the role of contemporary art was shared by the researchers, the participating teachers had different views and assumptions about it which led to variations in carrying out the projects in schools. Both Räsänen (2008) and Efland (2002) pointed out the importance of understanding the social and cultural context of art. This calls for attention in the selection of the artworks used in teaching and in the importance of the information given about the background of the artist and the artwork.

The artwork database

The database was started by forming five categories based on what Lacy (1995) described as the different roles of art, developed by Hiltunen (2009): A. Art as cultural self-expression, B. Art as cultural interpretation, C. Art as cultural reporter, D. Art as cultural guide, and E. Art as activism. The aim was to cover the whole range of contemporary art from different materials and techniques to different approaches and ways of working used by artists today. The categories were also intended to be used for exploring different approaches to making art and learning in the classroom. In the Images and Identity project, the teachers tended to use artworks only from their own countries, so the categories were used to encourage the exploration of examples from all countries.

Within the given guidelines, the national teams each proposed around 20 artworks from their country's contemporary artists. The category for the artwork was chosen by the country's team with their knowledge of the artist's aims and background. Some of the artworks were included in several categories, when they could be seen, for example, as a presentation of personal and national identity at the same time. Examples for some categories turned out to be easier to find and others had only a few propositions. This gave rise to their being an uneven number of works in different categories. The Finnish team coordinated the creation of the database and made the final selection from almost 120 works to 74. The aim was to present a balanced selection of topics, media and nationalities. The artists were contacted for permission to use their work; some

refused, so the final version of the gallery has 64 artworks. The titles for the categories were also developed into their final form in order to best describe the content for the teachers.

Data and methods

The research project produced a large amount of data, including interviews with teachers and pupils, research diaries, documentations of lessons, and the pupils' work and blog posts. Each researcher had their own research questions and focus inside the common themes, mostly framing their studies on individual cases or the national overview. In my research, I am aiming to find the bigger picture on the use of contemporary art in the project, including all of the schools and countries. By analyzing the blog posts (1,700), case studies (25) and lesson plans (14), I am mapping the story of Creative Connections from three different perspectives: teachers, researchers and pupils.

In this chapter I will focus on the data from the case studies written in the project. The case studies are reports from each participating school written by the country's researchers. They are based on observations on school visits, interviews with teachers, and pupils' comments. The main emphasis in the case studies is on the teachers' experiences, which are filtered through the researchers' views and focus as reporters. I analyzed the case studies using a data-based analysis method. What started to emerge from the texts created the categories: mentions of individual artworks used, mentions of who selected the artworks, approaches, uses, outcomes. Coding mentions made it possible to group the information by country, school level and category in order to draw conclusions. The analysis made it possible to gain an overview of the use of the artwork database and to map out the art educational approaches.

The use of the artwork database in the school projects

The artwork database travelled through the Creative Connections project from creation to teacher training, class discussions, understanding identity and roles and forms of art, to visual inspiration for the pupils' own creations. The training presented the artwork database to the teachers and gave examples of how to use it. A large part of the training involved learning to use the blogging environment. The content and length of teacher training was planned and carried out independently in each country. While in Spain, the teachers met once a month to train and share experiences, in other countries the training was limited to one or two days. In addition, the cooperation between the teachers and researchers varied from co-teaching throughout the project to a few observation visits. The education of the teachers varied from primary teachers to ICT, art or citizenship education specialists. Therefore it can be seen that the teachers had different starting points in using the artwork examples and various amounts of support during the process.

The most commonly reported use of the artwork database in the case studies was to 'generate discussion' or 'promote conversation: Other popular ways to approach the artworks were making reinterpretations or responses, which in some cases were called analyzing and exploring the artworks visually. This is also visible in the pupils' works (Figure 2). In a few cases, the pupils also made written analyses. The artworks were noted in many cases to ser-

In roughly half of the cases, the teachers selected the examples and in the other half the pupils glanced through the whole database and selected artworks for closer analysis. Teachers with younger pupils more often selected the images to be explored and discussed. There were also differences in approach between countries. For example, in Irish schools just one artwork was usually selected to work with in the class. Seven school classes also visited a contemporary art exhibition in addition to using the online gallery. In Ireland, pupils from one participating class were able to see works by Alice Maher, one of the artists presented in the database, in a museum. In Portugal, one class visited a local exhibition by the artist Manuel Lima, and examples of his works were added to the artwork database.

In reality, the database might have worked as an introduction and created discussions in many more cases than those actually mentioned in the case studies. They indicate more the teachers' emphasis on the use of the database and reports to the researcher. For example, a few teachers intentionally used the database to increase awareness of contemporary art in their class, while some teachers reported this as a result of the project, when they used the artworks to generate discussion and an introduction to the theme.

The three schools that did not use the artwork database were all from the UK, where in general there were many obstacles to the project's execution, starting with difficulties gaining permission for the use of the artworks and continuing with the struggle to find schools willing to participate. The strict supervision that teachers are under because of the current national policies made them afraid to take part in a project that made them divert from their routines of executing the curriculum. The reasons for not using the offered examples were the lack of a projector in the classroom or the teacher choosing to use other examples of artwork. In one school, European citizenship and contemporary art were too much to handle, and they chose to concentrate on the topic of Europe with methods more familiar to them than contemporary art. Exploring contemporary art or contemporary art techniques were still part of these schools' projects.

The most popular artworks

Information on which artworks were used most and by whom is important for developing the database for educational use. The case studies show that the use of artworks was similar to the number of artworks in the database from that country (Table 1). Each country also mostly used half artworks from their own artists and half from the other five countries. The artwork examples that were used were not always named in the reports, and some cases just mention using the database in general. Thus the numbers give only an indication of the use.

Particular artworks were mentioned in several case studies and explored and interpreted in pupils' works in many countries. According to the case studies, Finnish artist Markku Laakso's painting "Coffee Break," picturing Elvis by a campfire with a Sami girl got the most attention (from five schools, three Finnish). Still, five mentions out of a total of fifty is not a big number. In total, 29 artworks were named in the case studies. Half of the ten artworks with several mentions are paintings and the rest are also two-dimensional, realistic and easy to imitate and understand. The artworks also present views on personal and national identities from Categories A and B. Clear visual references to some of the mentioned artworks

Table 1: Use of Artworks by Countries (Mentions in Case Studies)			
	Artworks in the database	Artworks used in the country's schools (from own country's artists)	Artworks from the country used (by the case country and by others)
Czech	14	7 (5 Czech, 2 others)	14 (5 in Czech, 9 in others)
Finland	14	20 (11 Finnish, 9 others)	18 (11 in Finland, 7 in others)
Ireland	12	11 (5 Irish, 6 others)	7 (5 in Ireland, 2 in others)
Portugal	11	12 (4 Portuguese, 8 others)	6 (4 in Portugal, 2 in others)
Spain	6	Used generally	6 (6 in others)
UK	3	Used generally	2 (2 in others)

Table 1. Use of artworks by countries (mentions in case studies)

were found in pupils' work (such as Ovacek's painting, used in four schools, see Figure 2), but not for all. This indicates that some artworks were especially useful in evoking conversation and others inspired visual representations.

Using the same artworks in different countries and schools raised the question of how the same image can be seen and understood from different perspectives and cultural backgrounds. Laakso's painting caught the attention of Sami students in Utsjoki who were initially shocked at the incorrect portrayal of a Sami dress in the painting. The project's context then made them think about how other pupils around Europe would interpret the same image. The blogging environment enabled the sharing of these different interpretations, and in this case, it offered an important channel of communication for the students to inform others about the correct version of the Sami dress.

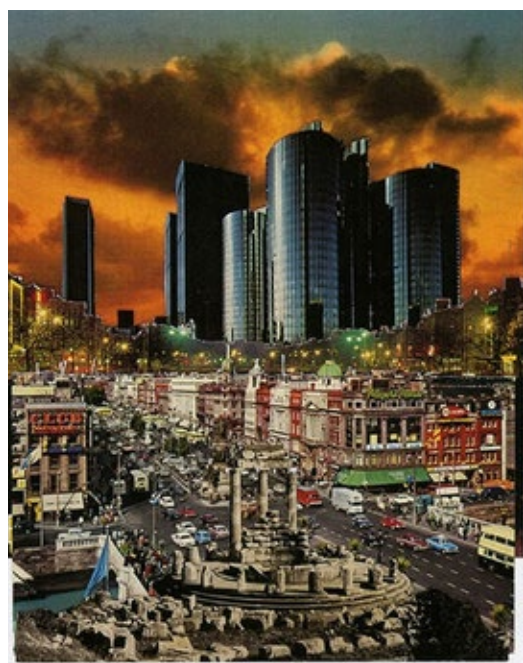
The case studies also show which artworks were used according to the different categories created for the artwork database. Categories A, B and D had the most frequent use and these categories also contained the largest number of artworks. Notably, these three categories are linked through the themes of exploring personal and national identity, while these topics were present in most of the schools' projects. The artworks from the categories of visual reporting and activist art are only mentioned a few times in the case studies. Still, the approaches to art-making introduced in these categories were present in the school projects. Many of the pupils' works are reports of their life and surroundings as drawings or photographs. Also, many art projects have been taken out of the classroom to make statements and so that pupils' opinions have been heard, following the activist art idea of using art to create change.

Different approaches to using the artwork examples

The different approaches in using the artwork examples can be categorized into four groups. The emphasis on pupils' voices was one of the project's aims and this also began to be impor-



Shopping is my hobby ...



The Oracle at O'Connell St. Bridge, IRELANDIS



Figure 3. Alena Kotzmannová's work: Shopping is my Hobby and reinterpretation by Czech pupils.

Figure 4. Sean Hillen: The Oracle in the O'Connell Street Bridge, Irelandis and children's work: Money Rules in Europe.



Figure 5. Murals by the group with the theme “Art of Sport” and one reference artwork, Petri Hytönen’s painting “Finland – Sweden.”

Figure 6. “Money in the sewer” comments on the economic crisis and politicians misusing money; Pedestrian crossing with the consequences of cutbacks in education, health, work, school, justice, etc. “We want the new School!” work includes pupils’ names glued to a fence that bars access to the construction site of a new school building that has been left unfinished.

tant in the search for pedagogical views. The pupils’ works show the variety of the amount of control the children had over the process and how much of their own voice they were able to bring out; in other words, how strictly the teachers framed the assignment in order to control the process and predict the outcomes. The categories start from assignments where the artwork example guided the outcome more strictly, moving to the more open-ended art projects.

1. Making your own version. The artworks were visually analyzed by making a new version, a response, a pastiche, by drawing, painting and staging photographs. These pupils' works have a clear visual resemblance to the original artwork and often imitate its composition and technique (Figure 3). This was a popular assignment and used in many schools and countries, often as individual work related to expressing aspects of personal or national identity.

2. Inspiration for a technique, form or subject. The topics, techniques or visual structure of an artwork served as an inspiration for the pupil's work. These pupils' works still make visual references to the artwork. One Portuguese class analyzed the work of Sean Hillen and made their own vision of a cityscape with layers of the past, present and future, by imitating the composition of the work and using the same collage technique (Figure 4). The difference to the first category is the thought and process regarding the content and the way of working in a group. The artwork form is utilized further to express the pupils' views and thoughts than in Making your own version.

3. Example of a concept. The artworks and categories showed issues that art can address and how those issues can be visually approached. The artwork database was used in dialog with their own work process and several artworks were used during the process. One of the Spanish classes made art projects in small groups with topics chosen by the pupils themselves and used different artworks from the database to reflect their topic, aesthetic style, format and technique (Figure 5).

4. Art as a political tool. The artworks and the categories also served as an example of the different forms and roles of contemporary art. In particular, the political side of art opened new perspectives and community and environmental art techniques took the pupils out of the classrooms. These pupils' works no longer resemble the artwork examples but present more unique processes around actual topics in their community, society and surroundings (Figure 6). The school projects in this category achieved what Varto (2012) saw as the contribution of contemporary art to art education: making art starting from its political function and ability to create a place for meeting and discussion.

Conclusions

As a hypothesis, I was expecting to draw out the art education profiles of each partner country as the results of the study. Similar approaches were found, despite the differences in curricula, teaching arrangements, teacher education and facilities. The uses selected were more directed by the age of the pupils than the country, as the controlled assignments were mostly given to the youngest pupils and the most popular forms of assignments were used in all countries.

What difference did contemporary art make? The case studies report that the teachers and researchers found that it changed the pupils' understanding of art, and developed their visual literacy and awareness of art as a political tool. The experience encouraged teachers to show and discuss images and artworks more with the class, since image analysis was found to be an educational tool. This was new, especially for those teachers who did not specialize in the arts, but in general the pupils' open and enthusiastic response to the contemporary art

surprised the teachers, who had had their doubts. Meaningful use of the artwork database was achieved either because of the teacher's expertise in art education or with the cooperation and support of the researcher as an art educator.

As intended, the artwork database worked as a space for dialog and expression, for talking about emotions and opinions. The artworks made pupils think, understand concepts and reflect their identity and social issues. The contemporary art methods gave freedom to an open-ended process. The categories of the artwork database worked in encouraging participants to explore artworks from different countries and as guidelines for art education in the schools, since connections were found between the database categories and use of artworks. Categories A and B helped to map the different sides of personal and national identities. The other three categories led to pupils approaching art as reporting, guiding and activism.

What about European identity? Art education achieved in the project what Räsänen pointed: allowing pupils to "see ourselves and our relation to the world" (2012, p. 1). It increased cultural understanding through the exploration of artworks and other pupils' works. Building European identity was challenging, with especially the pupils with Asian or African backgrounds failing to see themselves as Europeans at all. Aspects of identity were explored in the art projects, so the cognitive starting points and social space for expressing, understanding and negotiating identities was given, as Simon (2004) required for identity-building processes. The pupils learned about the use of art in expressing identities, matching the importance that Hall (1999) placed on the knowledge of representations in forming cultural identities. Further than that, we were unable to take the pupils on to creating a European identity. But getting to know people and ways of life from different countries through the artworks, other pupils' works and blogging created connections throughout Europe, giving a start to an European identity.

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