Original Paper

Transforming Students' Knowledge about Democracy and Citizenship through Art and the Use of Educational Media

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Abstract

Democracy and citizenship are two values that are closely linked to the education of each individual. Most education systems seek to transform attitudes and enhance individuals' knowledge by offering courses related to citizenship and democracy. In Greece until the school year 2019-2020, the course "Modern World, Citizenship and Democracy" was taught to 11th grade students. In a sample of 76 students, research was conducted to explore how different works of art can contribute to the expected transformation. Students were given a digital list of concepts related to "Democracy" and "Citizenship and Rights" and were asked to choose a concept and link it to a work of art by submitting their project to a digital repository. The concepts that students mostly chose were racism, democracy, and rights (individual, political, social). In addition, projects were recorded, in which the selected work of art referred to two concepts. The works of art they chose were mainly: painting, cinema, photography, and sketch/comics. The use of the internet as a source of artwork was limited. There seems to be a strong correlation between the choice of concepts and socio-economic reality. In addition, the operation of the digital classroom and the dialogue developed in relation to their projects, strengthened the educational framework, created a variety of perspectives, and contributed to the expected transformation.

Keywords

Art, Democracy, Citizenship, Digital collaboration

1. Introduction

Although knowledge is directly related to science, art and knowledge are not widely regarded as related. It seems that some philosophical thoughts do not associate art with knowledge and do not consider art a form of knowledge (Eisner, 2008). A more commonly accepted view is that art is related to concepts such as feeling, beauty and expression. According to modern research, art and specifically aesthetic

experience can stimulate the development of mental functions and allow the mind to better process new knowledge (Marković, 2012). The teaching of social sciences through art stimulates the incentive to research, creative thinking and thinking ability of students (Freedman, 2000).

The section that follows provides an overview of the literature concerning the use of art in education and how it facilitates the transformation of knowledge. Next comes the presentation of the research, conducted with the participation of 76 High School students, which relates a work of art to a socioeconomic concept that has already been taught. Following that are the outcomes of the research and their interpretation. The work concludes with a discussion of the results and conclusions based on the students' choices, both at the level of artistic creation and at that of scientific concept.

2. Literature Review

Science is a system of knowledge related to nature, society and thought. Its purpose is to interpret facts and phenomena and to discover the laws that govern them. The majority of scholars recognize that science carries a cognitive valence, both in the case that is perceived as a methodical research process and in the case that it is considered a product. The question that arises is whether art when used in the educational process can go beyond the aesthetic and emotional level and affect the cognitive one. Prominent philosophers, scientists and educators give a positive answer to this question.

The German idealists (Kant, Hegel, Schelling) had posed the question of whether aesthetic experience could lead us to the truth and offer the recipient a stimulus to transform his way of thinking. Kant in Critique of Judgment formulated a different kind of rationality and called it rationalist aesthetics. According to it, aesthetic experience interprets social reality using deep, authentic emotions, in a holistic and expanded way in relation to the empirical traditional way of perceiving social activity (Kokkos, 2010).

In the early 20th century, John Dewey argued that aesthetic experience was the pre-eminent means of developing imagination, which he considered to be a fundamental element of the learning process (Dewey, 2005). Works of art, on the one hand, do not just have a physical substance but are imbued with the imaginary dimension that the artist gives them. On the other hand, in order to understand their meanings, the individual needs to use his own imagination to the fullest. For these reasons, the aesthetic experience is broader and deeper than the usual experiences gained from reality and is a significant "challenge of thought" (Dewey, 2005). At the same time, the clash of old perceptions with new ones, which emerge through contact with art, "results in the reconstruction of the past" and thus enhances the ability to understand reality in a new way (Kokkos, 2010).

The Frankfurt School, as the founders of Critical Theory, linked the arts with the subject's ability to form a dialectical relationship with the work of art. Multiple unique interpretations can be extracted and contribute to human emancipation. The core of their thinking was that the intellectual content and structure of important works of art contain features that are rarely found in social reality, which is

dominated by tools of expediency and conformity. Works of art contain the expression of social consciousness and every art form translates social reality.

In the early 1970s, educator Paulo Freire introduced meanings and coding derived from works of art into his teaching (Morris, 2008). Its purpose was to decode the receivers' representations of situations and experiences that are in their lives. The interactive analysis of each element and then the synthetic, holistic analysis of the whole issue under consideration, helps to transform the existing perception of the individual and dialectical synthesis of higher quality knowledge. Nelson Goodman, who moves within the philosophical current of aesthetic cognitivism, attempts to overturn this perception, pointing out that matching the scientific with the mental and the aesthetic with the emotional is nothing more than an obsession, an obstacle that makes it difficult to realize that in reality in the aesthetic experience emotions function cognitively (Goodman, 1976). According to the theory of multiple intelligences, art and aesthetic experience can enhance kinesthetic, virtual, spatiotemporal, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 2011). Art can go beyond rational arguments and use a multitude of symbolic means to delve into other kinds of intelligence besides linguistics and mathematics.

David Perkins argues in favor of the involvement of art in educational work (Perkins, 1994). The author opposes the passive perception of the receiver, through the contemplative observation of works of art. Distinguishing intelligence into neurological, empirical, and contemplative, it focuses on the latter. He argues that the latter is cultivated through art and reinforces the other two. The Harvard Graduate School of Education for the last 50 years has created Project Zero and designed a series of educational approaches that suggest the cultivation of skillful thinking through the dipole of thoughtful dispositions and skills. The most famous is the series of "Artful Thinking", which promotes the systematic use of works of art in the classroom in order to develop thinking and learning (Tishman & Palmer, 2007).

According to the emerging field of educational neuroscience, the brain is characterized by inherent plasticity and always employs the self-organization of its structures, in order to be able to adequately respond to the needs imposed by the external environment, with which it interacts each time (Doukakis & Alexopoulos, 2020). The "performance" of its response to it increases exponentially, if it is "exercised" in organized learning social environments enriched with multiple stimuli, capable of causing the further reorganization and evolution of its infinite neural networks. Hardiman relates art, as a tool of educational neuroscience, to the achievement of learning goals (Hardiman, 2012). It is claimed to be a powerful tool that helps educators translate the scientific findings of neuroscientists into teaching practice. The use of art in teaching enhances the long-term memory of the subject and helps to retain both the content and the individual concepts. Creativity "vibrates" between thought and emotion, which could increase the interactions between the cognitive (thinking and reasoning) and non-cognitive (sensory and intuitive) areas of the brain in visual, spatial and language circuits, depending on the activities in which the students participate (Hardiman, 2012). The use of art as an appropriate teaching practice can provide the multiple representations that are necessary for the input of new information, which will be transformed into new synapses and new circuits.

29

The above highlights the role that art can play in education. At the same time, the development of digital tools has provided significant opportunities for redefining the educational process. The integration of digital tools can empower students and facilitate the learning process. In the above context, it was considered to be of research interest to study the integration of art into a course related to democracy and citizenship. The aim is to explore whether the inclusion of activities that provide students with opportunities to engage in art and at the same time work with multiple representations helps to transform their attitude and improve their knowledge. The intervention aims to provide a framework of approach to education, which helps students to enhance long-term memory, through the provision of multiple representations of school knowledge. It supports a dynamic involvement of students in the educational process. This involvement is attempted through the citation and analysis of socio-economic concepts with the main form of their expression being image and speech.

Based on the above views of philosophers, scientists and educators and the aim of this research, the following research questions emerged:

1.   What is the percentage of involvement of students in the use of speech and image in the educational process?

2.   What art forms did the students use to approach the concepts of democracy and citizenship?

3.   How did the students use the technological facilities and tools in the context of the course?

In order to answer the above questions, a quantitative research was conducted. In the following sessions, the research approach will be described and then the results will be presented.

3. Research Approach

The research takes advantage of the curriculum of the course "Modern World, Citizenship and Democracy" that offers students the opportunity to reflect, discuss and comment on the political and social situation in Greece, Europe and internationally. The structure of the course helps students to reflect, develop skills and change attitudes, cultivate their thinking and creativity. The course includes authentic articles of specialists, thinkers and artists and enables the development of students and the differentiated role of the educators.

76 students participated in the research. Girls made up 52% of the sample. The students came from three different classes. Each class had 25 or 26 students. Students were given the concepts presented in Table 1 and asked to relate a work of art of their choice (from the list of work art) to a concept. The work would include both the artistic creation and a text of 100 to 150 words, which evidences the connection of the work of art with the concept.

Table 1. Concepts and Work of Art

Concepts	Work art
Democracy	Music
Direct/Indirect democracy	Cinema movie
Demagogic reason	Comics
Racism	Painting, engraving
Stereotypes	Literary, poem
Prejudice	Stage play
Citizenship	Architectural construction
Nationality	Sculpture
Political apathy - indifference	Photography
State of justice	
Social state	
Rights	
Political cynicism	

The Blackboard Learn digital platform was used as a medium of completing the project, where students submitted both their work and their accompanying text. Initially only the educator had access to the students' work. Then, the educator transferred the work of each class to a new digital space, without the accompanying text, and gave access to all students of the same class. Without specifying what concept each work was related to by the student who submitted it, he asked the other students to relate the work of art to a concept. The aim was to find out to what extent the students had the same perspective for each work of art. Finally, the work of art of each student was discussed in plenary, followed by a constructive dialogue that contributed to the transformation of their view.

4. Results

4.1 Concepts and Work of Art

The participation of students is considered very satisfactory. 86.8% of the students (66 out of 76), delivered the work on time. The use of the internet as a source of finding a work of art was limited and no similar artistic proposals were observed (Table 2).

**Table 2. Categorization of Examined Concepts and Works of Art**

Concepts/ Work of art	Music	Paintings	Photography	Image	Sketch	Graffiti	Literature/Poem	Dance	Total
Democracy	1	5	1	1	1		1		10+3
Democracy Distortion			2	1	2		2		7
Racism	4	6	5	7	3	1			26+8
Prejudice									0+5
Stereotypes		1		1					2+7
Civil rights	2			1	1		1	1	6+7
Apathy				1					1
Rights/ Racism	1		1	1	1				4
Prejudice/ Stereotypes		1			2				3
Racism/ Stereotypes				2					2
Democracy/ Rights	1	1			1				3
Racism/ Prejudice							2		2
Total	9	14	9	15	11	1	6	1	66

Only two submitted works were the same and were probably caught on the internet. Works of art of high aesthetic value were observed, which according to the Frankfurt School can activate critical thinking and bring to the fore ideas and emotions, which are usually preserved in the background.

The concepts that were chosen to a greater extent were racism, democracy, rights (individual, political, social). The choice of these concepts is a result of the socio-economic reality of the country in the present time period. Students' choices are related to issues they experience and therefore some choices were favored over others (e.g., citizenship) with which they are less socially familiar. The connection of a work of art with two concepts at the same time was observed. The students' proposals that involved two concepts were 14, i.e., 21% of the total assignments. This percentage shows that students had difficulty recognizing the differences between close social phenomena (stereotypes - prejudices), as well as the strong correlation between two concepts (democracy - rights).

A wide variety of different types of artwork were selected by the students. 11 different types of art were suggested, and the students chose 14 different art forms to interpret the socio-economic reality. The

predominant art forms were painting, cinema, photography, and sketching/comics (Table 2). The choices reflect the students' preference to relate the taught concepts with the help of the image, rather than speech. 23% of the proposals (15 proposals) are related to arts that contain speech, 60% are related to image (40 proposals) and the remaining 17% (11 proposals) connect image to speech (sketches, comics, Graphic Novel) (See Figure 1).

Art that

- contain speech   - related to images   - connect image to speech
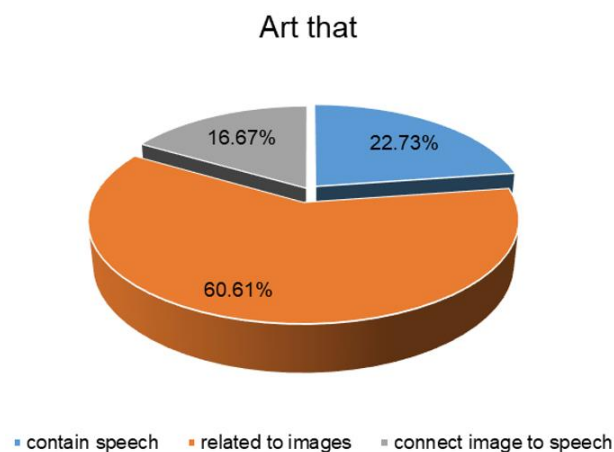
Figure 1. Students' Preference

Several works of art that the students handed over were classics, such as paintings, literature and poems, and others were contemporary ones such as music pieces, graffiti and contemporary dance. A number of sketches of low aesthetic value were also observed, which mainly supported their involvement in speech rather than in the image. Finally, proposals that transcend national cultural boundaries suggest the inclusion of students in the global cultural environment. In conclusion, the degree of cultural composition of students is characterized as high, which is explained by the social, economic, and educational level of the students' environment.

4.2. Technological Tools

The available digital tools contributed to the intervention. The students did not use artwork from internet, although they seem to have borrowed ideas from the internet in order to find works of art. At the same time, the use of the platform served as a medium for facilitating the educational process. The presentation of the works of art through the platform enabled the students to connect asynchronously and see the works of their classmates without knowing who they belong to.

They were then asked to correlate each work of art with one or more concepts to see if the students' perspectives matched. Of the 66 works of art, only 10 were related to a different concept to that chosen by the student who submitted the work of art. Of these works, 6 belonged to works of art that involved two concepts. It seems in this way that the students had developed to a very high degree an appropriate perspective both of the concept and of the association with a work of art.

5. Discussion

The research highlighted the potential of students to express themselves through art for concepts such as democracy and citizenship. With the social reality that surrounds them and daily and directly touches their life and their world as "raw material", students read and understand the multifaceted "language" of a variety of materials, which include images, paintings, literature, poems, music pieces, graffiti and contemporary dance, and have the opportunity to reflect, feeding their thought and mood. In addition, it seems that the dominant role in the students' choices is played by the experiences and representations that they have created from the socio-cultural environment in which they live and move. For this reason, the educator is required to have a differentiated role in the classroom. Thus, she/he needs to have the role of facilitator and supporter of the students, utilizing the digital tools and offering the opportunity to the students to act and produce. In addition, the need to formalize students' knowledge on the one hand and to modify and overcome the erroneous pre-existing knowledge on the other hand are two of the most critical stages of teaching.

At the same time, research highlights the crucial role that technology can play. The critical "reading" of the students' work could not have taken place without the use of the digital platform. This shows the added value that technology can have, so that the latter can function as a medium of teaching and learning. Thus, the technological tools, in addition to their repository role, also functioned as a medium for interaction, reflection and creativity.

Finally, it seems that the education of students on issues of democracy and citizenship needs to take place within a framework of cooperation, mutual respect and understanding. With the help of dialogue and exchange of opinions, students can discuss and judge the political and social stage in their country, and in the world. Thus, students can study and reflect, develop skills and attitudes, cultivate their research thinking and argue on issues of democracy and citizenship.

6. Conclusions

Starting with a curriculum that favors an alternative approach to school knowledge, the work of students has a multiplier effect on learning outcomes. Art influences in different ways and creates attitudes and behaviors that determine the personal values of students.

The engagement / self-action of the students, the dialogue that developed in the classroom after the end of the work and the enrichment of the lesson, strengthened the educational framework and created a variety of perspectives on each examined concept. The students had the opportunity to get to know a different perspective of the concept that they had probably dealt with themselves. The "training of the eye" of the subject is a learning outcome, which can be served by the multiple representations of the arts on the same learning object. The richness of the alternative proposals of the students creates an added value to the educator, since she/he comes in contact with art forms that she/he did not know and creates a "repository of ideas" for future use in the educational process. Finally, interventions like this one, go beyond the

simple description of "general education" and provide students with a comprehensive education, based on creative learning, aesthetic experience, and critical thinking.

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