WHAT ART CAN DO

Using dialogic teaching and essential questions on the aesthetical and ethical value of art in society, to raise students' awareness about cultural identity and diversity

Sequence 1: Momondo - Let's open our world;
Sequence 2: Richard Mosse - Incoming;
Sequence 3: Francis Alÿs - Mosul paintings from the frontline.

Introduction

In contemporary art, artists are thinking about the ways in which art and artistic creativity may contribute to a better world. In this context, arts education now seems even more important than ever before. Art has been an important resource for humanity in all ages, but it may be even more essential in our turbulent world of globalization, climate change and digitalization. Artists often look at the world with an open mind, and yet they comment and criticize the world as well. They can create new views and new solutions that go beyond ordinary ways of thinking. Artists focus on the outside world from within, and think about a future society but they also focus on the world within, on the emotions related to the human condition. Artistic imagination and the reflection that is evoked by art, are valuable resources for knowledge and inspiration and are crucial for good and relevant education as well. Artist Francis Alÿs has nuanced these high expectations of the contribution of artists to a better world: “There is something peculiar about the times we live in, and with them, a different expectation of the artist’s role. When the structure of a society collapses, when politicians and media have lost credit and terror invades daily life, society turns toward culture in pursuit of answers. The painter is expected to look at its reality without any filters...Yet, is the artist able to assume those roles from a moral, intellectual, and emotional point of view?”

By

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Subject

Cultural and arts education, about the (aesthetic) power of art to evoke new insights on essential and ethical issues in contemporary society.

Time

90 minutes

Aims

- Raising students' awareness about the value of cultural diversity in a globalized world
- Using dialogic teaching to reflect on aesthetical powers of art for important and actual ethical issues, such as on cultural identity and cultural diversity in contemporary society

1 Artforum https://www.artforum.com/words/id=66451
Learning about the possibilities and the impact of aesthetics and visual design on communicating about specific (ethical) issues

Learning about the ‘dimensions’ of cultural and arts education, such as: fact and fiction; aesthetics and ethics; the global and the local

Learning activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring</th>
<th>Exploring (visual and conceptual) images from different contexts (media - art)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning</td>
<td>Envisioning - emotions by looking at gestures, facial expression and visual elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exchanging</td>
<td>Exchanging - ideas and opinions on essential questions about cultural identity and diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engaging</td>
<td>Engaging - with ‘the other’, with the power and the value of art for the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding</td>
<td>Expanding - viewpoints on the debate about refugees and about cultural (national) identity</td>
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These learning activities were presented as crucial learning activities to educate with the world in mind at the ‘Future of Learning’ program at Harvard Graduate School of Education, 2009.

Educational concept

Perkins and Gardner from Harvard Graduate School of Education, have written on the importance for art educators to educate with the world in mind (Perkins, 2009; Gardner 2006). They argue we live in a fast changing and globalized society that requires students to learn about relevant issues in society, such as cultural diversity. Perkins (2009) promoted the concept of 'learning by wholes' to make learning at school more relevant for students.

Perkins’ first principle is ‘Play the whole game’. In this lesson, students do not learn about art by memorizing facts first, instead they learn about art simply by looking attentively and imaginatively. Furthermore, dialogic teaching is used to explore images (media/contemporary arts) in a reflective way, asking students not to evaluate and discuss but instead to listen to each other carefully with an open mind. The second principle is: 'Making the game worth playing', in this lesson 'essential questions' (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013) are used to relate the images to actual issues on cultural diversity. What does cultural identity mean in a globalized world? Is your cultural identity bound to the place where you were born and/or to the place where you live now and/or to your parents? What does this mean for citizenship of refugees? The third principle is 'Work on the hard parts'. By looking at images from different contexts (media/commerce; visual arts) students examine the power of artistic creativity and visual designs in communicating on ethical issues in different/specific ways and they reflect on it by talking and listening to each other and building on each other’s responses.

Level/age group

Grade 10/11, Students age 15 to 17

This lesson can be used at the start of a lesson series on the value of arts in society.

Preparation

Teachers can use the information from this lesson plan to prepare their lesson. Furthermore they can find additional resources in the references. It is important teachers themselves have seen all videos before these are used in the lesson. A computer and beamer can be used to view the videos and images. The way in which this lesson was organized can of course be adapted by teachers to fit their own specific groups and contexts.

Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What:</th>
<th>Dialogic teaching/ scaffolded dialogue - (reflecting through verbalizing)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How:</td>
<td>In ‘Dialogic teaching essentials’ Alexander (2010) explains the principles of dialogic teaching (the following is quoted from Alexander, 2010).</td>
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<td>- &quot;Collective - participants address learning tasks together</td>
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<td>- Reciprocal - participants listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative</td>
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Scaffolded dialogue is:
Expertisecentrum Kunsttheorie

Collective
Reciprocal
Supportive
Cumulative
Purposeful
Give rise to new questions
Teaching that requires students to think
Scaffolded dialogue involves:
Interactions
Questions
Answers
Feedback
Contributions
Exchanges
Classroom organisation
Reflecting on concepts:
Nation states
National history
Cultural identity
Cultural diversity
Hybrid identities
Globalisation
Performing the lesson
Keywords/questions
Hybrid cultural backgrounds
How about the dimension fact and fiction in media?
The paradox of a staged documentary?

viewpoints
- Supportive - pupils express their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers, and they help each other to reach common understandings.
- Cumulative - participants build on answers and other oral contributions and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding.
- Purposeful - classroom talk, though open and dialogic, is also planned and structured with specific learning goals in view. Alexander further explains when dialogic teaching is either true dialogic or not by providing two tests:
  ‘If an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, it falls out of the dialogue.’ (Mikhail Bakhtin, Speech Genres and other Late Essays, University of Texas Press).

Alexander (2010) also explains what scaffolded dialogue involves for teachers:

- Interactions which encourage children to think, and to think in different ways
- Questions which require much more than simple recall
- Answers which are followed up and built on rather than merely received
- Feedback which informs and leads thinking forward as well as encourages
- Contributions which are extended rather than fragmented
- Exchanges which chain together into coherent and deepening lines of enquiry
- Classroom organisation, climate and relationships which make all this possible.

- Why: In news media, images and discussions on refugees were framed in a very specific - non-differentiated - way. The debate in news media on refugees and migrants has been polarized and this type of polarization seems to do no justice the globalized society we live in and in which a lot of students (and teachers) do not have one single cultural identity but have hybrid identities (Bhabha, 1994). The concepts of 'nation states', of 'a national history' or of 'citizenship' in the examples used in this lesson, are rather problematic concepts. Thinking about these concepts by looking at specific examples from media/art may support students’ in a more nuanced way of thinking about cultural identity, cultural diversity and also about the value of art for evoking different viewpoints (Agamben, 1998; Mosse, 2017).

Sequence 1: Momondo - The DNA journey (on travelling and cultures)

- What: The teacher may start the lesson by telling about his/her own cultural background and may then ask students how many students were born in the Netherlands and also have Dutch parents and grandparents. In a contemporary Dutch society, this will involve many students coming from hybrid backgrounds. Often students do not know about each other’s cultural background.
- How: Then the video 'Momondo, the DNA journey' is shown, and afterwards students talk about what aspects from this video are related to 'facts' and what aspects are related to 'fiction'.
- Why: This video deliberately aims to evoke curiosity and emotions in the viewer, about the cultural backgrounds of the participants shown and about the value of travelling and learning about other cultures. It is not a documentary movie, although at first sight it may seem to be documentary: it is staged as such. By looking carefully, students’ become aware it is evidently staged and directed. By asking students first to focus on the facts, and then
on 'fiction', they will discover this themselves. Because the emotions of the actors, the emotional music all attention is directed on the content (overcoming prejudices).

At second sight, one becomes aware of the fact it is staged because of specific ways of acting (very expressive gestures, facial expressions), of the specific film design used (very specific camera viewpoints, editing, lighting), because of the specific music selected (emotional character of the music). The message of this video is 'An open world begins with an open mind'. Actors talk in a chauvinist way about their national identity, they are proud to be British, French etc. and they talk about other nationalities in a negative way. When they are asked whether they would like to have their DNA tested to discover their nationality, they all agree. They then discover, each person is a hybrid, consisting of many different predecessors from many different countries. The underlying message is very evident and effective, students were visibly taken by the message of the video. This is due to the deliberate design and the specific staging of the message in this video.

- **Dialogue - reflecting:** The teacher then reveals the background of this video: Momondo, a global travel search site (although not dependent from flight companies). More information is provided by the teacher: Momondo was founded in 2006 in Denmark. Their vision: "We think everybody should be able to travel the world. Our vision is of a world where our differences are a source of inspiration and development, not intolerance and prejudice. Our purpose is to give courage and encourage each one of us to stay curious and be open-minded so we can all enjoy a better, more diversified world."

A dialogue on this issue is started about this video, the specific design and the purpose of the company. The teacher asks students if and to what extent the additional information changed the way they thought and felt about the (content of the) video they had seen or not. The teacher finally summarizes various viewpoints of the students' and asks about what aspects there is consensus and about what aspects there is dissensus.

**Sequence II: Incoming - Richard Mosse (2017) - a different perspective.**

- **What:** The teacher then continues by showing photographs from 'Heatmaps' and film stills from 'Incoming' by the Irish-American artist Richard Mosse (2017), without explaining what technique was used. Students are asked to look very carefully and to explore and envision, what is happening in these images and why the artist-photographer may have used this specific design. Another dialogue takes place. The teacher focuses on the dialogue being: collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful.

- **How:** Once students have grasped some of the choices and the possible meanings of the work, the teacher can explain about the concepts of the artist-photographer for this work. (Information about the concept and techniques used can be found in the article by Mosse 'Transmigration of the souls' in the book 'Incoming' (2017) and/or by reading the information on the website of the artist: [http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming#](http://www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming#) and/or by viewing the video from 'Canvas' [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0IUuYjdrOU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0IUuYjdrOU) in which the artist explains the concept and technology).

- **Why:** Through focusing on this different perspective on refugees, the predominant ways in which governments and media represent refugees is revealed. This enhances critical reflections and stimulates engagement with this important issue in our contemporary world. It demonstrates the power of art, and shows 'what art can do' (title of this lesson).
Dialogue - reflecting: Richard Mosse and his colleagues wanted to: "use the (military) technology against itself to create an immersive, humanist art form, allowing the viewers to meditate on the profoundly difficult and frequently tragic journeys of refugees through the metaphors of hypothermia, global warming, border enforcements, mortality and what the philosopher Georgio Agamben has called 'the bare life of stateless people'." Mosse in the video by Canvas [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pO1UuYidrOU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pO1UuYidrOU) The teacher can stimulate a nuanced conversation by showing film stills from 'Incoming' to students. These images show for example a woman in a blanket - with a quiet facial expression, expressing either relief and/or sadness (What may this woman be experiencing? - focusing on students' to envision and empathize); on a child focusing on a mobile phone (Skin colour has become invisible); on the warm-shadows of hands of rescue workers (asking students' how this technology has become a metaphor through this technology).

Sequence III: On the painting by artist Francis Alïs embedment as painter in the Kurdish Army in Mosul (2016) and on visual elements of Light and shadow as metaphors for life and death.

What: Belgian-Mexican artist Francis Alïs, was invited by the Ruya Foundation to make an artwork for an exhibition on Iraq-art in Venice. Alïs then embedded as an artist with the Kurdish army or Peshmerga at the frontline in Mosul during their campaign to liberate Mosul. Francis Alïs made notes, drawings and a series of oil-paintings on canvas, using only white paint on canvas, focusing only on light and shadow.

How: The teacher shows these works to students and explains about the context in which these paintings were made. In an article from the website 'Artsy' Francis Alïs says: "The question is really about the role of the artist as a witness. What can the artist say that hasn't been said by media?" These questions are used for a final dialogue/reflection. During the dialogue the teacher may add this quote from Alïs (in artforum). "There is something peculiar about the times we live in, and with them, a different expectation of the artist’s role. When the structure of a society collapses, when politicians and media have lost credit and terror invades daily life, society turns toward culture in pursuit of answers. The painter is expected to look at its reality without any filters...Yet, is the artist able to assume those roles from a moral, intellectual, and emotional point of view?"

Why: In this lesson on travelling - migration - refugees, this perspective of the artist embedded at the frontline focuses on the main issue of this lesson: What art can do. It not only questions on 'What art can do?' (the role of art in society, in war) but it also demonstrates 'What artist and art can do', namely focusing on a humanist perspective, focusing on multiple - critical and empathic - perspectives adding more nuanced views to the predominant perspective and one-liners in mainstream news-media.

Recommendations

Scaffolding dialogue: is not an easy task for teachers. Teachers have to support their students' thinking without directing the content of the conversation too much. This requires from teachers they expect their students to learn from each other through verbalization and reflection. The role of the teacher is to scaffold the process of exchanging ideas and preventing discussion (instead of dialogue). Students' listening to each other and building on responses is crucial.
Witnessing or experiencing emotions of 'the other' evokes and activates our own emotions and this will lead to a deeper understanding of the situation of 'the other'.


However, teachers - as experienced viewers - can support enhancement of students' skills in observing, analyzing and interpreting visual design elements in media/art by asking questions about specific design elements and the meaning(s) these may convey. Teachers may also focus on creative activities used by artists (van de Kamp, Rijlaarsdam, & Admiraal, 2016 - Table 1: Matrix of creative generation activities).

- **Immersion:** in order to immerse students in the classroom, teachers may use/make or order cardboard VR viewers (for example: [Report from Syria](https://www.vrmaster.co/virtual-reality-webshop/) Journalist Sander van Hoorn reports in a 360 degree video for NOS jeugdjournaal. Walking through Syria and talking to Mohammed (age 13), [https://youtu.be/anLYGtPf1HA?list=PLftCRix5cQNo_q6OMjO7ir13MknDYXwKk](https://youtu.be/anLYGtPf1HA?list=PLftCRix5cQNo_q6OMjO7ir13MknDYXwKk) or in the destroyed city of Aleppo, [https://youtu.be/ixp9UZvmf0](https://youtu.be/ixp9UZvmf0) Furthermore, this award winning documentary VR movie can be used: [VR-Clouds over Sidra](https://with.in/watch/clouds-over-sidra/).

**References**

- Alÿs, F. (2016). *untitled, Mosul (dead IS)*, oil on linen, 5 1/2 x 7"; *untitled, Mosul (surrendering IS)*, oil on linen, 5 1/2 x 7"; *untitled, Mosul (shadow to shadow)*, oil on linen, 7 x 5 1/2". [https://www.artforum.com/words/id=66451](https://www.artforum.com/words/id=66451) © Francis Alÿs.
http://www.momondo.nl/letsopenourworld/
Incoming Installation View. Richard Mosse in collaboration with Trevor Tweeten and Ben Frost.
The Curve, Barbican Centre. 15 Feb – 23 Apr 2017. Photo by Tristan Fewings / Getty images
Richard Mosse. Still frame from *Incoming*, three screen video installation, 52 mins 10 secs, with 7.1 surround sound.

https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-happened-francis-alyss-front-lines-iraq
Francis Alÿs, *untitled, Mosul (shadow to shadow), 2016*, oil on linen, 7 x 5 1/2".
Francis Alÿs, *untitled, Mosul (dead IS), 2016*, oil on linen, 5 1/2 x 7".
Francis Alÿs, untitled, *Mosul (surrendering IS)*, 2016, oil on linen, 5 1/2 x 7".