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Design of Ex-Libris to Face Identity Problems in the Teaching Community

Abstract

This research establishes the need to train primary school teachers in visual literacy. It initiated from an exploratory study which analyzed the learning process of pupils in order to evaluate the educational possibilities of visual culture, using a case study as methodology, and Arts-Based Educational Research which involved one hundred university students. The objective was to evaluate the benefits of using a creative arts workshop aimed at future primary school teachers, integrating issues of identity and social themes. Among the outcomes, what stands out is the motivation of the students for the use of graphic design, given that each student was able to create their own ex-libris (book-plate). We work to support the encouragement of future teachers' creativity.

Keywords: education, teacher education, art education, design, visual literacy.

Projektowanie ex-librisów jako sposób na rozwiązanie problemów tożsamościowych w społeczności nauczycielskiej

Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia potrzebę szkolenia nauczycieli szkół podstawowych w zakresie umiejętności wizualnych. Powstał na podstawie badania eksploracyjnego, które analizowało proces uczenia się uczniów, aby ocenić możliwości edukacyjne kultury wizualnej, wykorzystując jako metodologię studium przypadku oraz badania oparte na sztuce i obejmując łącznie sto osób studiujących na uniwersytecie. Celem badania była ocena korzyści płynących z użycia warsztatu kreatywnej sztuki dla przyszłych nauczycieli

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Article received: 14.07.2023; accepted: 22.04.2024.

szkół podstawowych, integrując kwestie tożsamości z tematyką społeczną. Wśród wyników wyróżnia się motywacja studentów do wykorzystania grafiki, zważywszy na to, że każdy z nich stworzył własny *ex-libris*. Nasza praca skupia się na zachęcaniu przyszłych nauczycieli do kreatywności.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja, edukacja nauczycieli, edukacja za pomocą sztuki, design, kompetencje wizualne.

Introduction

For the last three decades, working as a university professor in Art Education, I have maintained that we need to train teachers in visual culture, encourage visual literacy and artistic practice. In primary school, teaching in art and visual culture is very rare, due in part to the lack of trained teaching staff (Duncum 2015). This is of concern given that we live in a society inundated with images, especially with the digital technology innovation, which has triggered a digital *tsunami*. Young children and teenagers are experiencing a torrent of online experiences which incorporate the consumption of images. Images created and disseminated by the younger generation include sketches with familiar and social media networks. This leaves the educational sector (especially schools) aesthetically segregated, thrust into a setting removed from the potential offered by ICT for pupils. Encouraging visual literacy in primary schools depends on teachers since they are the ones who pass on their knowledge in class (Lobovikov-Katz 2019). The following research addresses the problem, raising as a topic of study the benefits that design workshop practice can provide in the initial teacher training. We understand this practice as a process of self-reflection, introducing identity concept into the process. To do this, we collect the opinions of the participants in the art workshops, inquiring about the benefits of these workshops in the teaching process.

I propose that we place emphasis on visual culture in teacher education (Mirzoeff 2006), enabling them to enjoy images from the practical perspective, and communicating this knowledge. I refer to making a critique of such images, encouraging non-prejudiced opinions, replacing out of date sketches and drawings and discarding pre-established interpretations, inspiring future teachers to become creators of images, to feel like artists, to be innovative in their production and to take advantage pedagogically of the use of digital devices (Huerta 2021a; 2021b). In this line for creativity, I also propose a greater use of technology in redefining its role in education, since digital devices as well as most of the applications we utilise are based on images. As a strategy I submit here a piece of research which brings together graphic creation, investigating into the field of identities, and the use of art workshops for teachers. One element which is useful to remember from the start is the alphabet, a collection of images, beyond their more usual use as a collection of linguistic and verbal symbols. During workshops we verify a series of benefits

for the students. This has been interpreted from the graphic results of their work, which also included evaluating the entire workshop process. The main research problem is to find out what benefits this artistic practice has provided for the students, which leads us to consider how each design made has evolved, emphasizing the personal opinions of each student.

Letters as images, and the function of typography as a visual narrative

The alphabet, although an ancient tool, is one which is very present in all our daily activities, both virtual and analogue. The letters of the alphabet form part of the educational ritual, given that learning letters is essential for reading. In spite of the importance acquired by this tool in the educational field the fact is that there has never been a real institutional interest in conveying to pupils the graphic possibilities of the Latin alphabet. This is because knowledge of the letters is acquired exclusively for their use as linguistic signs. However, viewing the alphabet solely in this context runs the risk of losing the visual potential of alphabet letters (Huerta, Monleón Oliva 2020).

As an implicit part of establishing visual literacy, I propose incorporating the alphabet as a visual form in teacher education. I lean towards the option of 'typography,' a term which – although it comes from the tradition of printing – also enables it to frame the different types of lettering (calligraphy, typed letters, creative lettering), without altering their etymological meaning. In training teachers how to utilise letters as images, it is necessary to carry out graphic design workshops and creative exercises (Rolling 2017). Studying letters as visual artefacts can be an important qualitative step for teachers, since it encourages them to take an innovative and more creative approach to the language (Huerta 2016). The study of language as a visual concept and viewing the alphabet as a collection of images allows teachers to incorporate into their cultural framework a collection of elements linked to the humanist tradition, considering that arts and the humanities go beyond their practical uses to foster civil and cultural development.

Visual literacy is presented as an important concept for a pedagogical entity (Davis et al. 2023). Images can convey knowledge, and the alphabet is a collection of images. It refers to involving students in a workshop where they each design their own ex-libris (book-plate). In this project, both the choice of images and the selection of typography for the text are equally important. Thus it is fundamental that the letters are understood as genuine visual artefacts. Conducting this type of practical exercise highlights its value, as well as the essential role played by the alphabet in this creative proposal based on the design of a book-plate (Hamlin, Fusaro 2018).

Designing an ex-libris (book-plate)

The role that bookplates play in this investigation helps us reconstruct the process of their creation. The concept of identity is closely linked to the creation of an ex-libris, since it encourages each participant to investigate their own desires and personal expressions. This practice stimulates reflection on who they are themselves. It also helps to reflect on their status as teachers. In the final written reflections, comments appear such as: “I never imagined that I could create my own image”; or “The design of my bookplate helped me get to know myself better.” Five graphic examples of the results are presented here, demonstrating a small selection from the one hundred designed bookplates.

The choice of this element which originates in the tradition of book manufacturing emanates from the educational possibilities conveyed, above all from the perspective of identity. We especially focus on aspects of cultural identity, which in the case of future teachers includes both the educational and the professional identities. Educational identity depends on the level of education a person has or the types of schools they have attended. Career identity forms when a person selects a career path and may evolve alongside changes in the person’s job titles and responsibilities. Ideas must be expressed in a graphic design. A book-plate is a stamp which reflects the book’s owner. It relates to an aspect of book collecting, deriving from the tradition of libraries, conveying the message: ‘this book is from my library.’ A book-plate comprises a series of elements which portray the defining characteristics of the book’s owner, essentially their calling card. Traditionally, the print of the book-plate is joined to the flap of the book, inside the cover, or on the first page, thus demonstrating the ownership of the copy. It functions as a seal, a label, a paper impression carrying an inscription of the name of the person, incorporating visual elements alluding to their defining characteristics. The name of the book’s owner is combined, within the ex-libris, with figures or graphic representations of their tastes and interests. It is precisely the identifying nature which makes the proposal of designing a book-plate an interesting one. The name given to the project was ‘Identities’.

This exercise enabled participants of the workshop to discover their interests, explore their personality and identify graphic elements which represent them, by means of references, symbolism, and actions. The image formed part of the ex-libris, as did the accompanying text. Ultimately, the text is part of the image within the book-plate. For centuries, books were only an option for people who were rich enough to afford them and so we often find heraldic shields among the traditional examples of ex-libris, being symbols of the families in possession of these important libraries. We also find allegorical or symbolic representations of their own powerful estates. When books became objects of mass use, the ex-libris tradition increased exponentially, and out of it grew an entire industry for those people who were able to create their own personal collections. All that enabled a convergence of the various pieces of the framework, such as culture, literature, book collections, art, identity, symbolism and design (Maia 2023).

Figure 1. Ex-libris designed by the student Diego Fernandez Catalan



Source: private resources of the author.

Thus we see that book-plate design goes beyond mere graphical components, given that it includes elements of identity, it upholds the humanities and culture, it follows the concept of book collection and design using symbolism and supports historical notions from the viewpoint of art and creativity (figure 1). When it comes to the artistic tradition of the ex-libris, it is worth highlighting its link with the illustration, since the ex-libris is a piece of graphic work (Munari 2008). The book-plate illustration similarly refers back to the original graphic work, invoking a direct connection with artistic creativity (Benjamin 2003). Any examples of artists combine with explanations about the expressive potential of a book-plate, where an appropriate image is selected from an infinite range of possibilities. In the tradition of ex-libris design, images tend to be related to the person's profession, interests, their hobbies, and even allude to the passage of time and death.

What is displayed is relevant because books are durable and, in contrast with people who age, a book's contents remain the same, thus allowing the type of representation which customarily incorporates skulls and other allegorical elements. With regard to the techniques habitually used to produce book-plates, these are drawn from the tradition of creating illustrations and engravings (woodcuts, chalcography, lithography, screen printing, photo illustration). In this case it is about creating a design that fuses traditional illustration techniques (an ink drawing on paper) with applications used to create drawings on screen.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research, in which I analyse the process of the case study and its results, to which I incorporate Arts-based Research as an element of the research methodology. I approached the theme using classroom-based research, taking into account the problem of teaching about space and its link to power relationships (Sancho-Gil, Sánchez-Valero, Domingo-Coscollola 2017), given the discriminatory social stereotypes present in the learning environment. When it comes to dealing with questions of identity, we may approach aspects linked to personal issues, reflecting on who we are, what defines us, and how we portray ourselves to the world. This approach enables criteria to be established with regards to the ways in which we incorporate visual literacy and knowledge about images into arts training for primary school teachers.

Standard techniques of case studies were used as interpretative tools: diagnostics, focus group, pre-test and post-test, participant observation, and debate as a source of argumentation. The object investigated emanates from a university educational context. The research activity is educational and the subjects are evaluated by their participation in that activity (Smith, Flores 2019). It is noteworthy to record that among the important tasks which define the current arts education research it is required, on the one hand, to know, interpret, and evaluate the research linked to that field of study, and on the other hand, to use the theories, methods, norms and working methods of the group of professionals whom we are evaluating in art and education. Following these precepts, this research was established as a case study. Robert Stake indicates that the case study is not a methodological choice, but rather a decision about an object that is to be studied (Stake 2005). It is an important research tool due to the complex nature of both teaching and learning. Such complexity requires exploratory and comprehensive research which goes beyond merely seeking causal explanations.

This work is a collective case study, according to Robert Stake's typology. It is a class, a group of students who represent a particular phenomenon: the student learning process. This process consists of a three week-long graphic design workshop aimed at creating a bookplate, which involves one hundred students and the professor. The use of art-based research addresses both the design process and the results obtained. Personalized help for each student covers an important part of this methodology. This is a process of co-production of knowledge which takes into account the experiences of the research participants. When students create a personal image, it represents an observation of the everyday, the diverse, and even the marginal (Land 2018). A student may see a tattoo as something which can be used as an illustration for their ex-libris, or alternatively might use an allegory to denote how they feel about a particular music band. The incorporation of personal elements at the same time involves being attentive to the interests, experiences, and knowledge of students (Bourriaud 2009). This is exactly why I advocate art experiences for furtherance of social transformation, using a critical focus in approaching current

problems (Giroux 1990). I deal with the artistic experience as an intermediary action between expression and contemporary social discussions, with a political dimension and as a transforming experience. All these questions are related to promoting humanities in the educational sector, incorporating visual culture and supporting arts education as a real engine for social change.

I present a research model that compromises artistic practices as agents to articulate subjectivity related to social issues. The study comprised a total of 100 participants, studying for a degree in primary school teaching. They are part of the "Arts and Humanities" program and are taking an optional module entitled "Didactic Proposals in Art Education." Thus, they are students with an interest in arts and the humanities and in poetic creativity, but who have had little opportunity to develop practical artistic work. This is an important aspect of the research, given that the school system does not approach art in a practical way, due to the lack of professionals who are specialists and have sufficient expertise. The module which is the focus of my analysis is part of the third year program of the primary school teaching degree course, and the average age of the student is 21 years. This module was considered for two reasons: the curricular content of the subject promotes a link between the subject of identity and the teaching speciality, and the opportunity presented for the students involved in the research to encounter art in practice (Dewey 2005).

The process included debates, proposals and looking for formal solutions to problems, based on self-reflection and making activities dynamic by holding creative and participative workshops. I covered the influence of personal heritage, namely those aspects which in reality "belong" to us (Wang et al. 2023). The techniques used for gathering and structuring the data were as follows:

- diagnostics carried out at the beginning of activities via pre-test,
- holding workshops involving the design of an ex-libris as a process,
- organization of focus groups,
- diagnostics at the conclusion of activities via post-test,
- use of participant observation by the teacher involved,
- final discussion as source of arguments.

The analysis was based on the discussion of the data collected, and consisted of establishing categories for evaluation, both at the beginning as well as at the final diagnostics stage. All information collected also had an artistic component, given that the created designs enabled us to evaluate the graphical narrative, which is of significance for the research. We articulate this creative facet from the Arts-Based Research, as a medium which favors the analysis of the results obtained.

Results of the "Identities" project using the design workshop

The "Identities" project invoked a connection between letters and imagery with art manifestations. A historical element interesting for student teachers is that illustrators were always specialists in writing. In fact, there is an old tradition of calligraphy

teachers which is worth recovering. I explained to the students that some decades ago, there existed a “Calligraphy” course in teacher training, which was taught by a drawing teacher to those specializing in art. This module disappeared many years ago.

Since the alphabet is a technique which pupils learn for reading and writing purposes, we should pose the question of discovering the graphic possibilities of lettering. In the art tradition, letters were strongly present in works of art, from cubism to the surrealist movements, as well as dada, futurist and deco. Artists such as Klee, Picabia, Braque, Picasso, Gris, Magritte and Erté habitually incorporated letters and texts into their works, as well as members of Schwitters, Hausmann and the Bauhaus did. In the 1960s, artists from the situationist and pop art movements applied letters and text to their creations, e.g. Warhol, Indiana, Twombly, Rauschenberg and Johns. Students need rationale to combine art, design and education. In addition, since the trainees will be teaching their pupils how to read and write, it is an advantage if they know the secrets hidden behind the alphabet as an artefact of visual agency. We also incorporated into theory classes some of the traditional artisanal lettering designs, which have made creative calligraphy fashionable, as well as using letters as decoration, in relaxation therapy and entertainment (figure 2).

Figure 2. Ex-libris designed by the student Paula Garcia Quiles



Source: private resources of the author.

When it comes to incorporating art and design into teachers’ educational resources, their task is considerably simplified if they have background knowledge (Clarà et al. 2019). For instance, identifying “letters” with “drawing,” represents a huge step forward. The majority of my students say that they “cannot draw,” but when asked if they know how to write, they all say “yes.” I proceed to explain that “writing” is also “drawing.” They know how to write, because they learned it at school, but they claim to “know little” about art because during their years at school, they had almost no contact with the visual arts.

When we describe writing as drawing, students feel much more confident about taking on visual arts. We should remember that these are future primary level teachers, not students of art history or fine art, graduate students who are taking a mandatory module in art (lasting for four months) that is part of their study program.

This preliminary experience comprised making a design reflecting their own identity. Following an initial discussion with the students to prepare them for the task, it was decided to concentrate on the idea of a symbolic element that would represent them.

I held sessions to explain how to think about letters of the alphabet as images in their own right. Later, each student created their design, based on outline sketches and drawings, and they shared their ideas and progress. Some opted to incorporate motifs of animals with which they feel a connection. For the purposes of stimulating debate, all students were encouraged to present their proposal in online class and discuss it with their classmates. We then held a workshop session which covered IT apps. This exercise served to identify the optimum typography for the design of their ex-libris and was an enjoyable aspect for them, given that they previously had no knowledge of how distinct typographies can represent personalities, opinions or emotions. I covered areas such as legibility and letter composition, which led to an explanation of concepts of typography such as family, body, interlinear, style, spacing and composition. The students established a distinction between letters and script and their role in graphic design. The sessions represented an all-round genuine exercise in visual literacy.

Figure 3. Ex-libris designed by the student Maria Jose Saval Ferri



Source: private resources of the author.

Another aspect worth mentioning in the process of designing the book-plate was the difficulty students had in deciding on the visual motif (figure 3). Selecting an element with which to identify oneself is always a challenge. They were given suggestions to help them in their selection, for example their favorite photos, or other photographic elements they liked. I encouraged them to search among different sources, including museum websites, to be able to optimize their graphic ideas. Some students opted for their love of travel. I urged them initially to focus on a sole element, although it is not always easy to develop the idea if the option has been narrowed down to one selection. The practice of determining a focus and, moreover, eliminating other options is also a part of the design process (Hofverberg 2024).

A diagnostic process was carried out for the activity part of the project and also for aspects of theory, as well as to review the prior knowledge of students. They were asked to complete a questionnaire to evaluate their knowledge of artistic practices and about the use and creation of images. Based on this diagnostic tool, responses were organized into the following categories:

- knowledge of art and artistic practices,
- dealing with questions of identity in art class,
- use of design in artistic education,
- letters of the alphabet as visual forms.

In the future, these teachers-in-training will bring this type of knowledge about typography and design to primary classrooms. Artistic methods can be used in the child's educational process by instilling knowledge and practices about graphic design. Teachers can benefit from such methods if they are able to do it themselves. Thus, it is necessary to use active learning and visual methods in the educational process, as suggested by David A. Kolb's theory of experiential learning. Let us remember that the so-called creative teaching methodologies use, among other things, visual methods in the learning process.

Category: "Knowledge of art and artistic practices"

This category was among the most common responses identified in the diagnostic stage that was related to the lack of knowledge of the visual perspective and the prejudices acquired over the years by the respondents with regard to artistic practice. We saw frequently repeated phrases in the diagnostic as responses to the following question: "Do you consider that you have good training in visual arts?". The vast majority (96%) responded in the negative:

Personally, I do not consider that I have good training in visual arts since the only thing I have ever done has been drawing or making my own creations, but without following any design [student AAC].

Up to now I don't think I've had good training in visual arts, since any training I've done in this subject has been based on the same kind of methods used when I was at school myself, when in art class we were expected to paint, but really nobody explained to us how to do it, so we all just did what we wanted [student CLZ].

In the few cases where respondents answered positively, we found that they tended to be children of artists, design professionals or architects, but even they also described a lack of school education in art:

Since I was little, art has been something very present in my home, given that my mother has a great appreciation of it and loves to sketch, to paint, to visit museums... I have always been drawn to everything connected with art and I love to discover new artists and works. However, I don't consider that I have good training in visual arts due to the fact that when I was at school, art was a type of skill which wasn't given priority and it wasn't really of interest to me [student LGS].

We were able to demonstrate, by the responses collated, that students had no experience in the use of lettering as a visual image. A significant proportion of the students (86%) had discovered their own capacity and felt motivated by the exercise. The activity was genuinely challenging, incorporating reflection, identity and design, encouraging learning about the strengths of artistic creativity, and exploring the possibilities of the visual arts. It is noteworthy that all students remarked on their lack of a relationship with either art/artistic practices or design throughout their various educational experiences. Thus, when they were asked the question: "Before taking part in this ex-libris workshop, have you ever designed anything?" Again, the majority (87%) answered that they had never had any involvement with design.

No, I have never had the ability to design anything or felt proud of any design of mine, which makes me embarrassed [student ASS].

No, I only draw for pleasure, mostly images of landscapes using electronic devices such as a tablet, using the freehand drawing tool, but I just do it as a hobby [student ISS].

However, some students did refer to 'design' in a wider sense:

Sometimes I made something, but it was mainly things for class. I never made anything on my own initiative. When I was younger I used to really like drawing and I did a course at a fine arts academy, therefore I was able to choose the designs that I wanted to work on [student CRS].

In terms of a book-plate I have never designed one, but it may be that at one time I designed my own ballet costume, trying to shape my idea on a page and clarify it [student MFI].

Category: "Dealing with questions of identity in arts classes"

Initially, this category caused doubt in students with little experience at establishing graphic solutions to represent themselves. Their school education has tended to favor using verbal expression to display ideas, resulting with students being unfamiliar with the visual potential of images. Workshop practice helped them overcome these limitations. The following answers were given to the question: "Do you believe that it is a positive idea to approach identity issues in class?"

Yes, because for me art is a tool which can be used to channel our feelings about the world or about a specific situation. If we talk about identities, we can focus more on that which defines us as people: emotions, ideas, beliefs, character etc. [student ARM]

I believe that approaching activities in relation to questions of identity involves an internal reflection about ourselves which I consider essential [student AMO].

I consider that establishing questions of identity in class is positive, because in this way pupils can reflect on who they are, how they see themselves and what they feel identifies who they are [student CSS].

Taking account of the initial accounts in this diagnostic, the design workshop was undertaken, putting a critique of the insight of each participant at the center of the analytical process. The design activity and creation of ex-libris responded to other relevant questions, such as the interests of the students or their links to networks and organizations (sports clubs, cultural associations, political parties or fan sites of musicians or sportspeople). We carried out a process of identifying the stereotypes which form a part of the daily life of the students, based on their own experiences, attitudes, and ways of interacting with the world (figure 4).

Figure 4. Ex-libris designed by the student María Fernández-Reyes Martínez



Source: private resources of the author.

The ex-libris workshop enabled students to identify elements of visual literacy, such as the impact of images, the role played by text in visual artefacts, and the importance of the symbols with which we identify (Calvino 2013). After the tasks were submitted, we held a debate to discuss emerging areas of interest and to explore how we could apply the learning to primary school classes which is where our future teachers will work. Both the process and the outcomes allowed us to critically evaluate the project, which is artistic in nature and involves personal works which convey feelings and problems. The approach enabled the use of various materials

and procedures (Sennett 2008), incorporating elements of visual language with specific objectives. One such objective was the inclusion of letters from their name in the concept of the image that identifies them. For instance, when student AGM was asked if they found it difficult to choose a graphic element to represent themselves in their bookplate, they responded:

Yes, quite difficult, because I didn't know how to arrive at just one thing that represented me. So, I finally played with the letters of my name because I believe there's nothing that represents me better than my own name. I hear it daily, and when I hear it, I relate it to myself [student AGM].

Category: "Use of design in art education"

This category offers an evaluation of the extent to which students understand that design forms part of arts education, as well as whether they consider that the subject of design should be directly included in the school curriculum. As an element of design, typography is among the more characteristic arguments of graphic development, thus we asked students the following question: "Were you already aware of the value of letters as images?" Again, the majority of responses (73%) were negative.

The truth is no, because I have always been taught that letters are just symbols which, when combined with other letters, can form words [student LGM].

Not at all, although they have always attracted me and I have had a lot of curiosity [student ARC].

However, some answers were affirmative, coming from students who practice lettering, who are interested in written culture or create works of graffiti art.

Yes, I love "lettering" and I would like to be trained in this type of art [student ASR].

I often use the Chinese or Japanese alphabet when using letters as images due to the complexity of the designs of some of the characters [student COP].

I don't really know about the potential, but I have worked with graffiti drawings, giving a visual power to something which is not customarily seen this way in daily life [student ACP].

Category "The letters of the alphabet as visual forms"

The post-test which the students took part in after completing the ex-libris workshop was intended to evaluate whether they had previously worked with the alphabet as a visual form. Again, the majority responded in the negative (72%), although there were a few surprising responses.

Yes, with some of the children I teach. I have sometimes used different types of alphabets, different letters, colors and shapes etc. [student ARM]

I had not taken advantage of the rich potential of letters from an artistic and image viewpoint. I think it is very interesting and we should try to do this more in the classroom, given the potential benefits [student AQM].

I had never appreciated the value of letters as images. When I was at school I never learned about letters as images, just as a way of shaping theoretical content [student CSV].

Incorporating inclusion and respect for diversity

We used Project Work as an educational strategy. It is a subject with 60 teaching hours, delivered during the term. The “Identities” project is the first of five that take place during the duration of this unit. The first project serves to enable students to explore their interests and learn about how they relate to art and arts practice. The work was based on reflection and artistic proposals, where the visual aspect predominates, taking note of arts-based research. The workshop presented within the context of the “Identities” project aims to show the potential of visual literacy among students who will become primary school teachers. The research explores the environment of the students themselves and their respective realities. We encourage discussions about diversity, addressing it without taboos or prejudices, and tackling disagreements. Generating an approach to the defense of human rights and studying diversity by the use of images can take place with the incorporation of a visual study to our educational resources, considering cultural and artistic concepts created by dissident movements, as well as their models of creation, presentation, consumption or critical receipt. This means that it would not be about autonomous objects but tools which allow us to understand the organization of contemporary societies.

Figure 5. Ex-libris designed by the student Lucia Luis Mateo



Source: private resources of the author.

During the book-plate workshops, some students decided to submit as their design a tattoo they have, while others opted to use something related to their personal interests. We saw examples e.g. of coats of arms representing sport teams, or images related to musical instruments, and even references to celebrations or ideologies with which they identify. This provided a backdrop to the tastes and preferences of their generation, capturing stories and exhibiting their shared collective subjectivities.

Identity is also a question of aesthetics, which serves as a reflection on LGBT cultural identities and their political dimension (Greteman 2017). Affirmation of this sensitivity has converted into a specific cultural and artistic identity, empowering a visual panorama to overcome marginalization. Although the constitution of these communities responds equally to power relationships which drive reproduction of cultural legitimization, the fact is that the substance of the artist serves as a vector of individual emancipation with collective potential. Being able to speak openly in class about diversity, especially through the use of intense images, may allow us to establish a connection with the students, who feel very motivated by these issues which unite personal problems with movements for social change.

Interest in the approach to diversity appeared in the answers given to the question: "What aspect stood out particularly from the ex-libris workshop that you have completed?"

The ex-libris workshop has been very interesting for me and the aspect which has stood out most is that it has brought out my creative side and I have been able to create a logo which represents me [student AGM].

What I liked most about the workshop was getting to know the history of the alphabet because I didn't know anything about this and it's something we take for granted. I think it's another way of working with art, with the students and not doing the same thing in the art lessons, given that children can tend to get a bit bored [student AMH].

I think it's a point of contact between ourselves and the drawing, so we represent ourselves through an image [student ACP].

I really enjoyed creating my ex-libris. At the beginning it was difficult to come up with an idea so that I could take it forward, but once I found it was surprised with my ability, given that I have not drawn anything for a while [student HPP].

I was impressed with how I was able to develop my drawing. I'm very proud of it because I have been improving since my first attempt at doing the ex-libris, up to the point where I submitted it [student JAA].

The final part of the post-test, which was open in nature, was intended to help us in determining what questions we can improve on in the future with this type of project. We asked students about any relevant aspects which stood out within the "Identities" project involving the design of a book-plate, to which they gave the following responses:

This project has helped me to get to know myself better and to select what areas take priority over others in my life and what it is that represents me. It also enabled me to get to know my classmates, to discover their favorite artists, and to learn to interpret their works, given that every person sees a work of art in a different way [student AMH].

This first project has been very interesting for me for various reasons: I have learned how to choose a very significant feature which describes me perfectly; I have got to know some classmates who I did not know before; that there is a great variety of styles of letters; I have had to draw a personal feature and I have produced a drawing, something which I would not have anticipated [student ASV].

I have been able to make new discoveries and also design a graphic element representing me [student ASM].

The fact that class members were able to consider what it is that represents each one of us and that afterwards we all drew this. In education, drawing is seen as something secondary, as a fun activity, which it can be, but to be able to go beyond that is different, to work with it and think about it as something complex. The same activity could be transferred perfectly to a primary school classroom and I think it could work really well [student COP].

The most relevant aspect of this project for me has been the autonomy when it comes to creating the ex-libris in our own style [student ETM].

I have enjoyed this preliminary point of contact with the subject and I think that if it is going to be as dynamic as what the book-plate project has been it is going to be something I will enjoy and that I will learn a lot of things that will help me in my future as a teacher [student HPP].

Figure 6. Ex-libris designed by the student Lucia Diaz Garcia



Source: private resources of the author.

Discussion

The successes of the project in approaching creativity and developing inclusion arguments are auspicious in respect to transforming attitudes towards arts education, given that the student cohort was inspired to formulate a series of thought-provoking elements, as well as increase their motivation and be stimulated to move forward. Therefore, it is about incentivizing this type of strategy in order to achieve advances in arts education in the context of improving educational outcomes and supporting social transformation.

We are aware of the deficiencies in arts teaching at primary school, but this situation should not hinder our desire to increase the role of visual arts and a knowledge of images in the school curriculum. On the contrary, we should be resolute and constantly demand better support for the creative arts in the educational sector. In order to achieve it we should investigate and demonstrate to political decision makers and those who manage the educational sector that arts education constitutes a required element for visual literacy, both for pupils and teaching staffs at all educational levels. Having dealt with this problem for years with fellow teachers, we always agree on the effort involved in eliminating barriers that separate our students, future teachers, from the possibilities of practicing art. A good example of this situation is the responses of a student to the questionnaire that was given to them, which we then transcribed.

Question: Do you consider that you have a good background in visual arts?

Answer: I don't think so, since I have never trained in it. In primary and secondary school, I studied art, but they never gave me the necessary training to consider myself a good artist.

Q: Do you think it is positive to raise identity issues in class?

A: I consider it truly positive, so the students will know the aspects that make them unique and different. Thinking about your own identity can help you improve and observe your personal strengths and points that require improving.

Q: Before doing this bookplate workshop, had you designed anything?

A: I had never made a design similar to this before, I had made the occasional drawing, but never anything as elaborate as this.

Q: Has it been difficult for you to choose a graphic element to represent yourself in your ex-libris?

A: I found it very difficult, I consider myself a person who likes practically everything, and choosing a single aspect of myself to represent me has been the most complicated task of the ex-libris project.

Q: Had you previously considered the richness of letters as images?

A: No, now I realize that letters can express a lot and can offer vital information to understand the design.

Q: Have you ever worked with the alphabet as a set of visual forms?

A: No.

Q: Do you think it is good to feel like an artist to create images?

A: Feeling like a good artist gives you a good attitude to create incredible designs. Everyone has an artist inside who can create wonderful graphic designs.

Q: As a primary school future teacher, do you consider important to work with your students on the shapes of the alphabet, its history and creative possibilities?

A: Yes, since it offers a broader perspective on how to create more personal and original drawings. Knowing the different shapes of the alphabet can guarantee a very peculiar personality in each of the designs.

Q: What would you highlight about the ex-libris workshop that you have done?

A: Thanks to it I have been able to discover aspects about myself that I did not remember. I loved being able to make a personal design and not have to make a drawing according to specific guidelines.

Q: Comment on aspects that you consider relevant to the project entitled "Identities."

A: The originality of each of the bookplates. I would never have thought that a simple drawing could convey so much about a person. With an ex-libris drawing, you can get to know a person much more than you would think. Furthermore, with this job, you force yourself to be more creative and original, you force yourself to say a lot about yourself in drawing format, and that is a wonderful thing. Finally, I would also like to highlight that although each one has done it with the format they wanted, in my case, drawing on paper has made me remember how relaxing and personal it is to make a drawing.

Conclusions

By developing a pedagogical discourse based on which we will train future primary school teachers in visual literacy, we established the need to improve the work of teachers. Using the concept of approaching letters as images, the cohort of trainee teachers can better perceive the creative possibilities of images and texts. At the same time, we activated language and visual arts resources, considered current school requirements, characterized by the predominant role of the image as well as the use of digital technology. We also attempted to approach the design specialty and typography to the university student cohort, from aesthetic, cultural and ethical perspectives, and establish criteria for social implications. The incorporation of design and typography in art education classes enables a significant number of students to overcome their existing prejudices towards art practice, thereby maximizing their creative potential through the study and creation of images.

We attempted to convey the concept of the alphabet as a visual entity with creative possibilities. In this way we introduced students to knowledge of the letters as another element of visual language, something which enables us to evalu-

ate questions of identity and social restoration, backed up by innovative teaching techniques and visual literacy. The positive results of the “Identities” project, articulated in the workshop by means of the design of a personal ex-libris, supports the involvement of trainee teachers who have arrived at university having had virtually no contact with creative arts. In a short period of time, the students recognized the value of images. Through simple exercises, we facilitated a discourse that empowered them through their personal achievements. These advances will provide them with a great knowledge of the potential contained in images, and will ultimately generate and improve the dissemination of visual literacy. If primary school teaching staff assume their creative potential in visual material, they will transmit a positive message to school pupils.

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Ricard Huerta, PhD – artist and Full Professor of Art Education in the University of Valencia (Spain). He is a regular member at the Institute of Creativity and Educational Innovation, and member of InSEA and ICOM. Head director of the Research Journal EARI Educación Artística Revista de Investigación. Director of the master-studies program "Art Education and Museums" (University of Valencia). Director of Museari www.museari.com Graduate in Fine Arts, in Music, and Communication. Head of the international project Women Teacher. Invited researcher in universities of France, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, Cuba, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina, Portugal, Paraguay and Chile.

He has coordinated several publications and activities inside the areas of Visual Arts, Education, ICT and Museums. Head of the project "Dechados Inclusive creativity in secondary school". Member of the Seminar on Gender and Sexual Diversity of the Museums of Catalonia. He has published books and articles in specialized journals, having coordinated numerous publications within the field of art, education, educator training, heritage and museums. Letters and alphabets are a relevant aspect of his work both at an educational level and artistic creation. He has presented exhibitions with themes heavily impregnated by typography and calligraphy in different countries. He has directed twelve international seminars on research in art education and six international congresses.

Ricard Huerta – artysta i profesor sztuki w dziedzinie edukacji artystycznej na Uniwersytecie w Walencji (Hiszpania). Jest stałym członkiem Instytutu Kreatywności i Innowacji Edukacyjnych oraz członkiem InSEA i ICOM. Redaktor naczelny czasopisma naukowego EARI „Educación Artística Revista de Investigación”. Dyrektor studiów magisterskich „Edukacja artystyczna i muzea” (Uniwersytet w Walencji). Dyrektor Museari (www.museari.com). Absolwent kierunku sztuki piękne, muzyka i komunikacja. Kierownik międzynarodowego projektu Women Teacher. Prowadził badania na uniwersytetach we Francji, Włoszech, Hiszpanii, Wielkiej Brytanii, Kuby, Urugwaju, Kolumbii, Peru, Ekwadorze, Argentynie, Portugalii, Paragwaju i Chile. Koordynował liczne publikacje i działania w dziedzinach sztuk wizualnych, edukacji, ICT i muzeów. Kierownik projektu „Dechados: Inkluzyjna kreatywność w szkole średniej”. Członek Seminarium ds. Równości Płci i Różnorodności Seksualnej Muzeów Katalonii. Autor monografii oraz artykułów publikowanych w specjalistycznych czasopismach, koordynował liczne publikacje w dziedzinie sztuki, edukacji, szkolenia nauczycieli, dziedzictwa i muzeów. Litery i alfabety są istotnym aspektem jego pracy zarówno na poziomie edukacyjnym, jak i artystycznym. Prezentował wystawy o tematyce silnie nasyconej typografią i kaligrafią w różnych krajach. Zorganizował dwanaście międzynarodowych seminariów na temat badań w dziedzinie edukacji artystycznej i sześć międzynarodowych kongresów naukowych.