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Visual Journal: writing through images

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Abstract:

This project aims to cultivate creative and artistic habits in children with a connection to learning and classroom experiences. Children often try to express their experiences and thoughts through drawing, investigating and making notes. These reflections can be observed in the notebooks that they use in different subjects. Creating a visual diary has a double function: (1) to help students to think and express themselves visually, and (2), to provide a physical space where they can manifest their thoughts and feelings.

We present an educational experience conducted with students of the Dallas Independent School District in Texas, who will create their own visual notebook at school. One day of the week will be designated for this activity, however, it may also be conducted at other times when required. The visual diary will be integrated into the normal classroom routine in a progressive and sequenced manner. This experience is designed to be implemented over a period of thirty-six weeks. The first twelve weeks will focus on developing different techniques and drawing resources, while during the last two weeks, each student will research something of personal interest using different techniques, resources and strategies.

The creation of the visual diary will take place in hour-long sessions over a period of 14 weeks. The students record their school experiences in their individual notebooks. These experiences are not limited to the classroom, but encompass broader aspects of their daily school life, including interactions and relationships with other children, walks and excursions, conflict resolution, and feelings. Above all, they have the opportunity to document aspects of their life that affect them in a positive and enriching way, as well as those that have a negative or harmful effect.

This research study presents a set of practical resources for teachers to implement this initiative. In addition, we will create a board on Pinterest where resources and ideas related to the creation of the diaries can be shared. This board will also be used to gather the classwork produced by students from the Dallas Independent School District in Texas, and the first-year undergraduate students of primary education from the Department of Education of the University of La Laguna, Tenerife. Ultimately, the purpose of this project is to establish a connection between the work created by the primary school children in Texas and the future primary school teachers in Tenerife. The project design follows a constructivist approach in line with the research of Dewey and Eisner. Lastly, the concept of the visual journal is also associated with different formats such as the visual diary, intervened book, sketchbook, and the creative essay.

Keywords: visual journal, creative challenge, creative essay, illustration, primary, sketchbook.

1.1. Introduction

This teaching proposal is aimed at primary school children. Therefore, it is crucial to consider not only the child developmental stage associated with this age, but also the role of the teacher. As Eisner states:

The concept of child development, and the associated role of the teacher, is based on the idea that the child develops best from the inside out, rather than from the outside in.

[...] In addition to being different in terms of their level of development, children also differ as regards their cultural environment, which influences their understanding of the world. Therefore, the horizontal axis is a continuum that represents cultural differences. These differences refer to economic situation, social status, and geographical location, in short, any factor that is not related to development. [...] Recognizing that cultural factors affect how a child or group of children conceive a specific educational environment, highlights the need to cater to this environment, not only by considering the formulation of objectives for teaching art, but also by deciding on the content and the method.

(Eisner, 2000: 55-56).

2.2. Theoretical framework

The teaching model is based on a constructivist learning approach that is flexible (in terms of task organization for designing the visual journal) and interconnected (as it should relate to other subjects in addition to art).

In constructivist learning, more importance is placed on the actions and active progression of the students during the learning process. Although learning can be facilitated, each student undergoes a process of reconstruction in relation to their own experience. Therefore, learning cannot be measured as it is unique to each individual.

This teaching model can be implemented with a set of contents, method and objectives which determine the teaching-learning process, and should be flexible and connected with other subjects of the official school curriculum.

The main idea is that learning should be student-centered, in other words, students acquire new knowledge drawing from their previous knowledge. Learning should be active, therefore, it is beneficial for students to participate in activities rather than passively observing a lesson.

Some key figures of constructivist learning include Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget gives importance to how knowledge is constructed based on interaction with the environment. Vygotsky studies the way in which one's social environment generates an internal reconstruction.

The child must develop a sufficient level of technical and expressive skills in different areas of knowledge into order to be able to apply them appropriately in the area of art. Likewise, these acquired skills should also be applied in other curricular subjects. Eisner states:

The acquisition of these diverse disciplines, such as the area of art, is not achieved automatically. Each discipline has to be learned. As is common to all disciplines, there is a technical dimension that is formed by the language that constitutes the discipline, by the specific terms or forms that are used, and by the way it works in a specific task, in other words, how it functions. In the area of visual arts, children develop expectations of the visual form, often based on illustrations from books which they use to learn to read, as well as the type of art that they encounter at home and in their community. These art forms influence the way in which the child conceives art.

(Eisner, 2000: 63)

2.1. Connections between Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Fine Arts and art educational models in the US

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Fine Arts establish four basic strands that provide an organized structure for knowledge and skill development in art throughout elementary education. The four strands are:

1. Foundations: observation and perception.
2. Creative expression.
3. Historical and cultural relevance.
4. Critical evaluation and response.

These four basic content areas apply from kindergarten to 12th grade in the Texas education system. Each main content area contains further TEKS that aim to develop specific skills. These TEKS are adapted to the progression and capabilities of children at the different stages of education, namely, elementary, middle and high school.

If we compare these four basic strands with the discipline-based art education model, in particular Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), there is an evident connection. According to Dobbs (1998), state frameworks have taken a leading role in the evolution of discipline-based art education, by organizing content in art education by means of a multifaceted approach. In the 1980s, several states reviewed their curricular programming based on four basic pillars: artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural context, and aesthetic value.

The DBAE model, created in the 1980s by the Getty Center for Art Education, establishes four disciplines that have since served as a reference model for curriculum planning in the different states: art production, art history, art criticism and aesthetics. The focus of this pedagogical framework includes educating students to create and understand art, while also developing a critical mind from an early age. Therefore, art education must incorporate these four elements while also being appropriately adapted to the developmental stage of the students. The purpose of this model is for students to attain a structured body of artistic knowledge based on works of art, giving equal weight to each discipline.

Through the educational proposal of the visual diary, we intend to contemplate these four disciplines in accordance with the aforementioned curriculum model. However, it is important to recognize that the very nature of each discipline is dependent on a certain stage of child development. Consequently, not all disciplines can be afforded the same level of importance at the different stages of elementary education. For example, Foundations and Creative Expression carry more weight than the third and fourth basic strands. However, cultural and historical contents must be developed in a meaningful way that is connected to the children's experiences.

One of the interesting differences that we encounter between DBAE and TEKS is the aesthetic content. Rather than educating children's tastes, TEKS offers a more perceptual approach towards art, in the form of Foundations: observations and perceptions. According to the stages of aesthetic development (1996), the first and second stages can be associated with the aesthetic relationships that the primary school child establishes with a work of art. Since our educational proposal is aimed at the early years of a child's schooling, we should encounter this first stage of aesthetic development. According to Housen (1996), during the first stage, children are "accountive viewers" who use their senses, experiences and memories to establish a connection with the work. Their aesthetic appreciation is based on what they already know, and above all, on what they like, as they form an emotional relationship with the work. A similar study by Parson (2002) discusses the stages of aesthetic appreciation known as favoritism at this early level of schooling, highlighting the emotional relationship that the child develops with the work based on color and thematic elements.

The connections identified between the different educational models, stages of aesthetic development, and the standards of the education system in Texas, form a solid body of contents that can be used to design an educational proposal. Importantly, this proposal must carefully consider the knowledge of first

graders in order to have a clear idea of what to teach and how to adapt the contents to the appropriate developmental level.

2.2. Connections between art and the core subjects

After reviewing the TEKS for Visual Arts, we intend to determine a connection between the contents of art and other core subjects, such as Reading and Language Arts, Science and Social Studies. We will now proceed to describe each of the subjects that we will develop in the first grade classroom in the subjects of Spanish Language Arts and Reading (SLAR), Science and Social Studies, with the exception of Math.

Spanish Language Arts and Reading

This teaching proposal aims to develop the majority of the standard TEKS for the first-grade curriculum: reading (TEKS 1-16), writing (TEKS 17-19), oral expression (TEKS 20-22), and listening comprehension (TEKS 27-29).

The area of reading is centered around understanding different types of texts that are always accompanied by images, thereby providing a key support for children to understand the story. Specifically, TEKS 16 (16.A, 16.B) refer to the comprehension of images and their impact on the meaning of a story. First-grade writing is essentially an introduction to written expression and provides students with structures to organize a text, as well as vocabulary to begin to express themselves. In this sense, images are crucial for expression, since children are able to communicate through drawings much more fluently than through words alone. On the other hand, oral expression is closely connected with the written conventions and phonetics of language.

TEKS 23-26 address the development of research skills by applying all of the different language skills in the creation of projects. Each skill relates to a specific research process: TEK 23, developing a research plan; TEK 24, gathering information from different sources; TEK 25, responding to research questions and synthesizing information; and TEK 26, organizing and presenting research ideas.

Science

Many TEKS relate directly to the specific content matter of each subject: Matter and Energy (TEKS 5); Force, Motion and Energy (TEKS 6); The Earth and Space (TEKS 7&8); and Organisms and Nature (TEKS 9&10). Each of these contents can form part of an idea or project that we develop, in particular those related to the areas of matter, movement, organisms and nature. We wish to emphasize one of the premises of teaching science in the first grade, that is, for students to construct their own initial knowledge by exploring the environment through the senses. Initially, children use their senses to observe and experiment with the natural environment. This serves as a basis to describe and understand more complex experiences later on. In addition, we also highlight the contents related to TEKS 1 to 4, concerned with enhancing the processes of reasoning based on the student's first scientific investigations.

Social Studies

Several TEKS are related to the contents of other subjects, including History (TEKS 1-3), Geography (TEKS 4&5), Economy (TEKS 6&7), Government (TEKS 8&9), Citizenship (TEK 10), and Culture (TEKS 11&12). Each of these contents can be included in an initiative or project that we conduct in the classroom, especially those related to culture, history and citizenship. TEKS 17, 18 and 19 are of special interest for the purposes of the visual diary in the area of Social Studies, as they relate to communication skills, individual expression through different languages, the development of critical thinking, and the ability to resolve problems and work independently. All of these skills can be developed in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner, since our aim is for students to be able to independently and critically express themselves through different languages.

2.3. Why do we need a Visual Journal?

Students tend to have a separate notebook for different subjects such as Language and Writing, Science, and Social Studies. In other words, the learning process is divided into different contents, schedules, activities, and skills. However, it is crucial to recognize the importance of connecting these closely-related content areas. Therefore, the visual diary is presented as a common space to be incorporated into the classroom where curricular and non-curricular contents meet.

Similarly, the classroom is not just a place where subjects are taught. In fact, it is home to a wide range of activities and elements which breathe life into the classroom, including events, excursions, birthdays, parties, routines, surprises, conflicts, new classmates, and awards. Yet, there is an apparent lack of physical space or time set aside for reflection during the school day, and, therefore, the visual diary aims fill this void.

The school timetable comprises a set of subjects, however, there is often a lack of connection between the teaching content of general classroom subjects and that of specific subjects, such as art, music and physical education. In this context, art education can be a key factor in creating and establishing a relationship between these different areas of learning. The four basic strands established by the curriculum are connected with the content taught in the different core subjects.

Language is one of the key components used to express ideas, contents, reflections and thoughts in the diary. Therefore, oral, written and graphic expression will not only present in SLAR class hours, but in all activities and experiences conducted in the classroom with the visual diary.

Continuing with this idea, the classroom can be considered a container of languages. We speak in Spanish and English, and also communicate through images. Images offer a vehicle through which to learning new vocabulary in another language. In the diary, children are free to incorporate any new words or vocabulary that they learn during the week.

The visual journal is not restricted by a specific structure or design, as is often the case for the notebooks in other subjects. Instead, it can incorporate pages of different colors and textures, and the overall design is decided upon freely by the student.

3. Visual Journal

Firstly, it is important to define the concept of the visual journal. This resource aims to promote communication between students and also with their immediate environment, while helping them to gain a gradual understanding of art through the use of new techniques of expression.

A visual journal is unique to its creator, and different people keep one for different reasons. Some use the journal as a way to observe and illustrate their environment, others as a document of their lives or as a record of travel. For every journal-keeper, the visual journal is a unique and personal expression that evolves over time. No two people approach the journal in the exact same way. Each visual journalist must find his or her own voice – his or her own journey – in order for the journal to become personally relevant and important.

(Scott & Modler, 2010: 14)

Visual journals are used for a wide variety of purposes and multiple different formats can be created depending on the desired result and the set of artistic skills that one wishes to develop.

The visual journal can serve several purposes. For many people, it is part sketchbook, part diary, part notebook, part dream journal, part daily planner, part to-do list, part doodle pad and part trash heap. Whatever the purpose the journalist has in mind, one

thing is constant – the visual journal transcends words and transcends simple image by melding words and visual references. This melding of written vocabulary with visual vocabulary makes the visual journal truly special and powerful. Often when words fail, we can best express ourselves through color, line, shapes and images, and when we cannot find the right images, words can take over and express our thoughts, feelings and ideas. The visual journal is a record of our lives with all the experiences and memories thrown into one ever-expanding document.

(Scott & Modler, 2010: 17)

The visual journal is constructed from a visual and textual experience. It is used as a diary to express emotions and to develop artistic skills by experimenting with new techniques. On the other hand, a sketchbook is a notebook in which the artist sketches down ideas and drafts for subsequent art creations, such as paintings and sculptures. While sketchbooks do often feature notes, references, key words or other scribbles to support the creative process, they do not tend to capture the more intimate state or mood of the artist.

In the book, *China Days: A visual Journal from China's Wild West*, one can appreciate how drawings, images and text are used at random to narrate everyday life in China. Meanwhile, Henrik Drescher



Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5. Images from the book: *China Days: A Visual Journal from China's Wild West*, 2014. Author: Henrik Drescher.

documents his experiences in notebooks which illustrate everyday life in the Yunnan Chinese province, a world away from the big cities of Beijing and Shanghai in the east. The book portrays an array of images ranging from mountainous landscapes to street markets. The images reflect the vibrant outdoor way of life that takes place in the streets. The photographs are accompanied by drawings, which lends an even more poetic and compelling character to the book.

3.1. Concept of the contemporary visual journal.

The idea for the *contemporary Visual Journal* is based on the notion of **wandering, daydreaming** and the theory of **dérive**. We will now discuss each of these concepts in order to define the contemporary visual journal.

Wandering is both a state of mind and a physical act. You can choose to enter into it whenever necessary. It involves total immersion in the current situation and a willingness to be open to whatever may occur, to what you encounter at any given time. It is to exist in a state of naivety in the most genuine sense of the term, without presupposing anything about what you see.

(Smith, 2016: 11)

The attitude of the wanderer can be useful when gathering information for the visual journal, as these individuals observe their surroundings with an openness toward unexpected events, randomness, and the unknown, and they are also willing to interact with this environment.

The same author describes the concept of daydreaming as *"the state of finding oneself lost in one's own thoughts; a state of dreaming while awake"* (Smith, 2016: 13), and the concept of Dérive as *"an unplanned journey with the aim of having a new experience"* (Smith, 2016: 110).

Although the aim of this teaching proposal is for children to express their artistic ideas in a certain format, namely, a book, the approach should be open and pluralistic. For this reason, different formats and aids should be provided so that the children can express themselves not only on paper, but also with fabric and other materials. Despite our definition of the visual journal, students should not receive a biased perspective of the creation of the visual journal. Therefore, we will explain different types of book formats, including visual diaries, intervened or deconstructed books, sketchbooks, creative essays, accordion books, tunnel books, and textile books.

The visual diary, which shares similarities with the visual journal, can be a useful resource for collecting data for image-based research. The book, *Image-based Research: A sourcebook for Qualitative Researchers*, describes the concept of the visual diary and how it can be used in qualitative research to collect data.

The notion of photographs as visual diary reintroduce the researcher and the qualities of the medium into the research process. That is, a diary is a self-reflexive and media-literature chronicle of the researcher's entry, participation in, and departure from, the field. The images generated within this paradigm are acknowledged to be the unique result of the interaction of a certain researcher with a specific population using a particular medium at a precise moment in space and time. Reviewing these many variables in the photographic process more clearly distinguishes the notion of a visual record from that of visual diary. Consonant with these different views, when considered and constructed as visual records, photographs may offer greater potential as comparative data, uncontaminated by the idiosyncrasies different photographers might introduce.

(Prosser & Schwartz, 2005:108)

As stated in the introduction of the book, *Visual Diary Guide - Teacher Edition*, in 2014 the Australian government invested resources in the development of creativity and innovation as a part of a growth strategy in school curricula.

In 2014, the Australian Government was investing into creativity and innovation as part of a growth strategy. Critical & creative thinking ranked 4th in the Australian Curriculum after Literacy, Numeracy and ICT, across all subjects. In the Arts, it made explicit references to how to achieve this with the use of visual journals. In a way, this represented a sea change in the way creativity was being taught. But by what means? Where would teachers get practical help to make this happen? The Visual Diary Guides provide just this kind of help. Produced by an artist-teacher, in two integrated parts they address both students and teachers while aligning with the Australian Curriculum. They begin by identifying 'inspiration' as the fuel for the creative activity.

(Senhali, 2015: Review)

The **intervened book** can be defined as an open-format book which makes use of diverse materials and techniques. The books can form part of a series or be presented as single editions. This format shares a certain similarity with the artist's book, examples of which can be appreciated in the *The Book: A Contemporary View*. This title, published as a catalogue to accompany an exhibition at The Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts Gallery, addresses themes such as the book as object, subject and concept, as well as artist-made books, book installations, and deconstructed books.

The **sketchbook** is used for taking notes or making preliminary sketches of designs as part of the creative process. Sketchbooks can be used to observe and capture the natural and artificial forms found in the artist's environment. Furthermore, they can also be the product of an intervention, in this case, the visual diary, as it is a description of the internal creative journey based on the composition of ideas.

There are a number of different interpretations of the sketchbook. One example is the **urban sketchbook** which is used to make visual recordings of architectural shapes found in a certain environment. Drawings by Chris Wilkinson, exhibited under the title of *Thinking through drawing* at the Royal Academy of Arts from September 2015 to February 2016, depicted pencil and watercolor sketches of people and buildings, documenting the appearance of the city over a thirty-year period.

Similarly, the Smithsonian Archives of American Art contain a large and varied collection of scientific notebooks featuring anatomical illustrations and drawings dating from 1840 to 1970. Furthermore, The Sketchbook Project is a collection put together by a group of art curators from around the world who offer online exhibitions of the work of different artists.

More recently, events, such as the *Sketch Drawing Prize*, have given recognition to the sketchbook format. This is the only award in the United Kingdom dedicated to sketchbooks. In 2011, 42 artists were selected for their informal, intimate and contemporary expression of language through their sketchbooks. Later in 2013, some 54 artists were chosen, which ultimately led to the creation of a catalogue featuring artists from both years.

A **creative essay** is a narrative form of writing that involves features of non-fiction. It can be based on memories or personal writing with a non-linear time narrative. There are various types of creative essay such as a description report or a narrative article that describe a place, object or person that holds some importance for the author. This type of writing usually deals with first-person events and can be of interest to the design of a visual journal due to the fusion of visual and textual elements.

Furthermore, it is interesting for children to encounter alternative book formats, such as the accordion book. This format does not require stitching or binding; instead it folds into itself and can be opened and closed with a string.

Tunnel books or peepshows create a three-dimensional scene with a combination of a background, figures and objects that are superimposed on different planes of paper.

Finally, using the visual journal can lead to the creation of fabric and other materials. In this way, students can experiment with different tools and observe how these different materials behave on different media.

For example, Isa Beniston creates clothes that resemble sketchbook drawings. The drawings are lighthearted, colorful, and combine portraits, scribbles and paint strokes.

3.2. The habit of drawing

The habit of drawing is of fundamental importance to establish a constructive and developmental relationship between children and creative skills. These include drawing, painting, collage, photography and other materials that can be incorporated in the visual journal.

Umoto's book entitled *Illustration school: Let's draw a story* provides a progressive technical guide for children to start drawing through illustrations. It is a highly visual book with little text, and is therefore very suitable for the elementary and primary education stages. In addition, it gives the child firsthand access to this procedural knowledge.

It is worth mentioning the seventeen general features of children's drawing proposed by Eisner in his book *Educating Artistic Vision*:

1. *The characteristics found in children's art change according to the chronological age of the child.*
2. *The level of complexity of children's art increases as children mature.*
3. *The cohesiveness of the shapes and forms of the drawings increases as the child matures.*
4. *Children tend to exaggerate the aspects of a drawing, painting or sculpture that are more meaningful to them.*
5. *Children create works that place more importance on pictographic objectives during the last stage of preschool and the first years of elementary education. Later, these objectives extend to problems of representation.*
6. *The scribbles produced by preschoolers tend to be driven by the kinesthetic and visual pleasure that arises from their actions.*
7. *The types and forms of drawings that children are able to produce correspond to their age.*
8. *The degree of differentiation generated in children's drawings relates to their conceptual maturity.*
9. *Drawing and painting tend to serve different purposes for young children; the former is used to express ideas while the latter to express feelings.*
10. *The use of shapes, color and composition is related to the child's personality and social development.*
11. *Children living in different cultures create visual forms that have remarkable degrees of similarity, especially at the preschool level.*
12. *The human figure is the most common theme drawn by school children.*
13. *When young children draw, they tend to pay no attention to a model or still life even when it is placed in front of them.*
14. *Drawing skills tend to stop developing around the period of adolescence.*
15. *During the preschool and early elementary education stage, children tend to focus exclusively on the forms that they are going to draw, paying very little attention to their surrounding broader visual context.*
16. *There are no significant differences between the sexes as regards skills in the productive domain.*
17. *Children tend to prefer artistic forms that do not have an ambiguous visual character and which related to their level of drawing ability and age.*

(Eisner, 2000: 103 – 112)

Another important point regarding the content of the visual journal, whether visual or textual, is that these ideas or drawings express moods and feelings. This concept applies to the fact that artistic forms express feelings in works of art, which is of significance for the area of aesthetics, and, in our case, the visual journal. One of the advocates of this notion, Suzanne Langer, states that, "[a] work of art is an expressive form that we perceive through our senses and imagination, and which expresses human feelings" (Langer, 1957: 15).

In this way, as Dewey explains in his book, *El arte como experiencia*, it is important to make a clear distinction between sensitivity, sense, and sensation. Likewise, a consideration of these conceptual differences is relevant to the creative process involved in producing the visual journal.

"Sensitivity" covers a broad range of content: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, and the sentimental together with the sensual. It includes almost everything, from a simple physical and emotional shock to sensation itself, that is, the significance of things, present in the immediate experience. Each term refers to a phase and real aspect of life of an organized creature, while life occurs through the sense organs. However, sensation -in the sense of being so directly incorporated into the experience that it illuminates its meaning- is the only one that expresses the function of the sense organs leading to full realization. The senses are means by which the living creature participates directly with the events of the surrounding world.

(Dewey, 2008: 25)

So-called "visual records" are sometimes used in the process of drawing. These are tools or resources that offer a form of representation. Eisner states that:

The acquisition of visual records is extremely useful for everyday life. Normally, we see things in an instrumental way; that is, we frequently see objects before being able to recognize, classify or utilize them. We use the qualities that we perceive in the world as notes with which we carry out the things that we wish to do. (...) However, in the field of visual arts, it is necessary to organize these visual records in order to see how the visual world is organized. It is necessary to organize them because they often interfere in our aesthetic perception of the visual world. Artists use certain mechanisms to help to organize these visual records, such as extending the arm while holding a pencil in the hand; a mechanism used to visually measure the forms that they are observing. At other times, they look through cardboard templates to structure the area that they wish to observe.

(Eisner, 2000: 62)

The forms of representation that children develop are also examined by Eisner in his book *Education Artistic Vision*. According to the author:

Another characteristic of perceptual development is the fact that, at any given time, young children often focus on just one aspect of the visual world, and do not realize the relationship that this particular form, or set of forms, has with a wider visual field. Piaget calls this process centralization, that is, the tendency to focus on specific forms or on aspects of the form without relating this aspect to a larger field. Piaget calls the opposite process decentralization.

(Eisner, 2000: 64)

3.3. Learning a language visually

Learning a language requires the cognitive ability to acquire new foreign vocabulary and expressions. However, in our case, it is also concerned with how to represent visual and textual codes in the visual journal.

In this context, the typography and lettering play an important role, since the student gradually gains an understanding of how messages can be used to transmit more serious concepts. For example, newspapers make use of different fonts for specific functions. Whereas Times New Roman is commonly used for more serious content, fonts like Comic Sans, Chalkboard or Courier, which imitates the style of an old typewriter, may be employed due to their fun or informal character. Some of the most frequently used fonts in art magazines and publications are Helvetica and Futura.

Of course, the lettering of a font can be designed by hand, and this can provide a further teaching resource for children. More specifically, it enables them to learn vocabulary while adding a more personal and artistic touch to the words that they write in their notebooks.

Typography is the study of how the form and positioning of the letters interact on a supporting medium. It is important to consider the typographic composition, in other words, the way in which the movable types are set before entering the printing press. This system of printing has been used for centuries all over the world. However, today, fonts are designed digitally and organized into databases.

On the other hand, lettering is the art of creating letters through drawing. This art form makes use of single-use letter designs rather than predefined types, such as in typography. Lettering is produced by hand using different materials, including pencils, pens and paint brushes. This process can also be performed digitally with vector graphics editors such as Adobe Illustrator. Printing and painting also make use of techniques associated with lettering.

4. A visual journal in a classroom

In this section, we present a **series of proposals** to be conducted in the classroom, which can be connected with other subjects such as language, literature, natural science, and music.

Keri Smith's book "*El mundo imaginario*" can serve as a resource to draw some useful ideas which can be implemented with students; an example of which is writing a manifesto. Through this activity, children learn about this written form by being exposed to some specific examples from the 20th century. The manifesto is a form of expression that has been used by artists and creative groups to drive certain artistic movements.

As Smith states (2015: 46), a manifesto is a document used to declare one's goals, plans and dreams. It normally consists of one page featuring a list of points. A manifesto is read on many occasions to remind oneself of one's goals and to not lose sight of them.

The same author states that a manifesto is derived more from a series of vital intentions or purposes, and is less related to the idea of the conceptual artistic manifesto. Therefore, while our proposal includes the real-life objectives, dreams and plans of the children, it also includes a manifesto of an art movement invented by the children. Prior to this activity, the children will be presented with examples of art manifestos, including Dadaism, Futurism, Neoplasticism, Cubism, and Surrealism.

Another proposal could be the **creation of a dictionary** incorporating concepts and ideas that are new to the child's world, or alternatively by gathering facts and knowledge in the form of an encyclopedia. Through this exercise, children can be introduced to new words from a specific topic, such as ecology. In this way, different areas of the curriculum can be reinforced, for example, language and literature; Spanish for the American children, and English for the Spanish students from Tenerife.



Fig. 6. Images from the book: *El mundo imaginario de*, 2015. Author: Keri Smith. Paidós. Page 47.

Fig. 7. Images from the book: *El mundo imaginario de*, 2015. Author: Keri Smith. Paidós. Page 74.

On the other hand, the visual journal can be used to design a utopic city. This activity can foment creativity and the sense of three-dimensional space by means of drawing and painting. To conduct this exercise, teachers can present the ideas and drawings of Leonardo da Vinci from his work *The ideal city*, and fragments of Tomás Moro's book, *Utopía*, which addresses the themes of political, social and cultural order. The selection of the texts, drawings and paintings will be based on values of ethic and aesthetic quality.

The imaginary world of by Keri Smith offers a description of the concept of utopia stated by Steve Lambert:

Utopia is a combination of three Greek words: eu ("good"), ou ("no") and topos ("place"). Therefore, the literal meaning of "utopia" is "good no-place". It is important to remember that it is impossible to achieve a utopia, since it is a "no-place". The reason why we imagine utopias is that they provide us with a point on the compass which guides us on our journey. With a sense of utopia, we are lost, we travel without direction, between assumptions and the hope of advancement. Utopia is not a destination, but rather a direction that compels us to progress.

(Smith, 2015: 9)

Alternatively, children can observe microorganisms through a microscope with the help of the book, *Tiny: The Invisible World of Microbes*. Then, in their visual diary, they can draw what they see through the microscope. This activity encourages children to learn about concepts of the natural world, from the minute, almost imperceptible perspective of living microorganisms, instead of just from everyday tangible objects. This activity could be contrasted with the design of an ideal city or utopia on a macro scale.

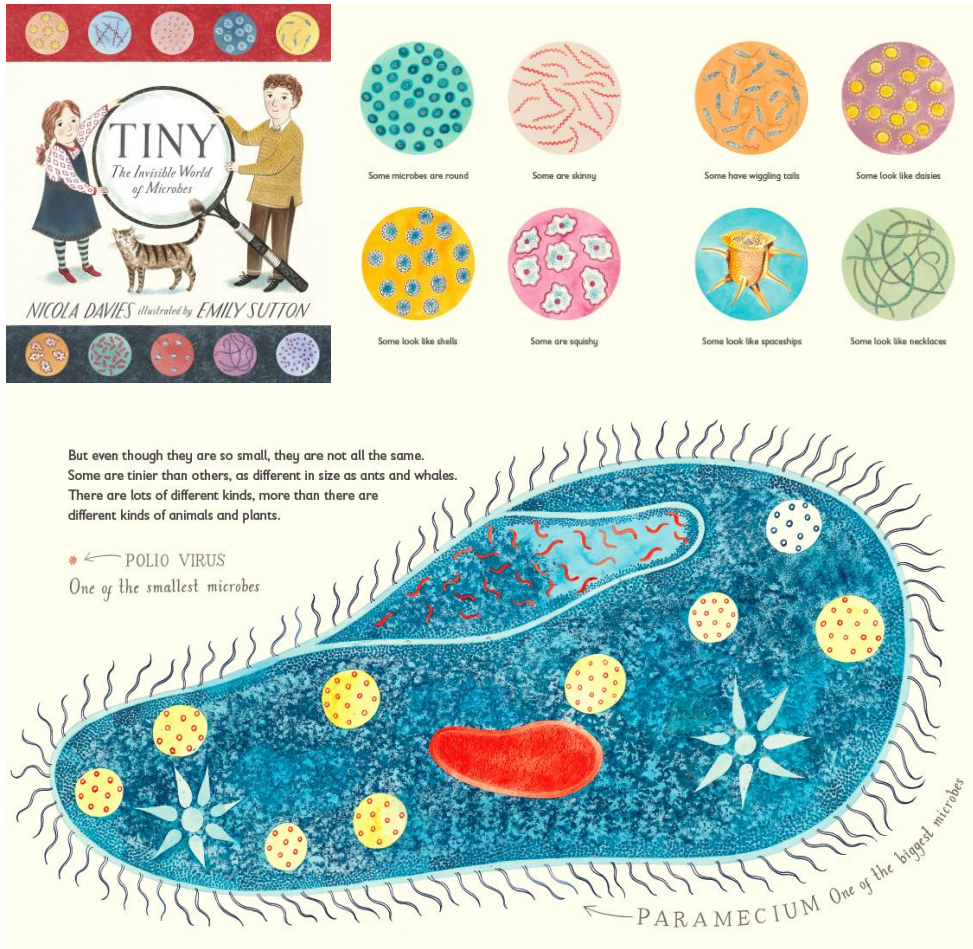


Fig. 8, 9 & 10. Images from the book: *Tiny. The Invisible world of microbes*, 2014. Author: Nicola

Another exercise that can be carried out is to design a poster in which the authors invite the audience to the imaginary world that they have created. In this activity, children can be shown the basics of design with examples from the Bauhaus movement.



Fig. 11. Images from the book: *El mundo imaginario de*, 2015. Author: Keri Smith.

In addition, several pages of the visual journal can be designated to creating a fashion show. Children can be introduced to some examples of Bauhaus artists who worked in this field, for example Oskar Schlemmer, whose work incorporated different clothes and fabric.



Fig. 12. Images from the book: *El mundo imaginario de*, 2015. Author: Keri Smith. Paidós. Page 87.

Fig. 13. Triadic Ballet, 1926. Oskar Schlemmer. La Bauhaus, Berlín.

Another idea is the creation of a meeting space for the inhabitants of their imaginary world. This may be a forest or another natural setting. The children can draw this space or take photos of open green spaces. It is important that the use of the visual journal is not restricted to the classroom, but that it is carried and taken to different open spaces. It is an open notetaking system that should be available whenever necessary. In this way, children can use the visual journal to learn about nature, including the living beings and native plants that they observe in their immediate surroundings.

Finally, children can use the visual diary to design a place space or playground, focusing their ideas on what they consider to be the ideal play space. The teachers can introduce the children to the concept of perspective and how to organize objects in space.



Fig. 14. *Wonder Space II*, by Toshiko Horiuchi MacAdam and Interplay, at Hakone Open Air Museum. Photo © Masaki Koizum.

4.1. Methodology

The methodology of this teaching proposal is flexible in terms of the planning. Overall, it aims for students to develop different competences in relation to art or other curricular areas. The design and creation of the visual journal will provide an introspective exploration of the children's feelings, while they simultaneously acquire specific concepts through each of the proposed activities.

For this purpose, the subject of art must be related to the areas of natural science, literature, reading and writing, in addition to the comprehension of texts for the acquisition and development of a second language, in this case Spanish.

More specifically, we implement the problem-based learning methodology, a student-based pedagogy in which "students gain important knowledge, skills, and dispositions by investigating open-ended questions to "make meaning" that they transmit in purposeful ways" (Kraus & Boss, 2013: Section 1). Students acquire technical knowledge and attitudes by researching specially created projects with specific topic-based questions. This methodology helps to develop key elements such as empathy and group cooperation, as well as providing an active style of learning in which the teacher tutors, motivates and advises. The students learn by assuming a role of responsibility in terms of decision-making and working on projects that deal with real-life topics. This boosts motivation as the students are obliged to learn and search for resources by themselves, however, the teacher does provide certain initiatives to enrich the learning experience. The students work in small groups to solve problems, by obtaining and applying different knowledge and resources. The students evaluate their individual work as well as that of the whole group. Finally, the teacher is involved in the overall assessment which is comprehensive and evaluates both the process and the result.

4.2. Objectives

It is important to highlight that the purpose of the visual journal is to introduce children not only to manual art skills, but also to provide them with a more personal perspective of contemporary art. This is achieved due to the fact that the principal resource used is a physical object that is built by the children themselves; it serves as a personal and intimate object that they can carry around. Furthermore, our intention is for children to obtain a broader sense of what a book can be. In addition to the visual journal format, we would like children to consider other interesting and enriching possible interpretations of the book format, such as visual diaries, intervened books, sketchbooks, and creative essays. In addition, we hope to awaken and enhance all five human senses in American schoolchildren by experimenting with drawing and painting.

Finally, although the purpose of the visual diary is to teach English through a principally visual approach, images should be used together with text in order to help children understand basic linguistic concepts.

5. Purpose

The purpose of this educational experience is to help students to learn Spanish, develop artistic skills, understand how different artistic book formats can be used in preschool and elementary education, and how different school subjects, such as natural science and literature, are interconnected.

Furthermore, it aims to promote children's interest in contemporary art and modern art, a sense of visual aesthetics and composition, and the use of images, symbols and signs.

6. Conclusions

The visual journal is a valuable tool for students and teachers to create cross-curricular educational art projects. The contemporary visual culture of schoolchildren and future elementary schoolteachers is

replete with images, signs, symbols and logos; elements that are studied in the areas of semiotics, modern mass media, and new media art.

Therefore, a notebook, similar to a personal diary, is a suitable and practical medium to be used by children, as it is a familiar, everyday tool.

The visual diary helps to boost oral and written expression, as it can be created individually and subsequently presented to a group. In addition, children can use this resource to improve their drawing skills and familiarize themselves with new non-toxic drawing tools and techniques.

In addition, photography and cuttings from newspapers and magazines may be incorporated into the visual diary. In this case, children can be introduced to different concepts of photography and cinematography, offering a new two-dimensional perspective.

After researching a number of teaching resources and publications, our ultimate aim is for schoolchildren and future schoolteachers to be exposed to and learn through enriching creative processes in the area of art and other subjects, such as science, mathematics and English. In short, the visual diary is both accessible and personal for children, and is an ideal resource for teachers to design teaching activities in the elementary school context.

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