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A COOPERATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE THROUGH LIFE STORIES LINKED WITH EMOTIONS: THE 'POLIEDRIC LIFE STORIES' EXPERIENCE

Noemy BERBEL-GOMEZ

*Research Group in Arts and Education (GRAiE), main researcher
Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB), professor
noemy.berbel@uib.eu*

Magdalena JAUME

*Research Group in Arts and Education (GRAiE), member
Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB), professor
magdalena.jaume@uib.eu*

Maria del Pilar ROVIRA

*Research Group in Arts and Education (GRAiE), collaborator
Escola d'Art i Superior de Disseny de les Illes Balears (EASDIB), professor
info@pilarrovira.com*

ABSTRACT

'*Historias de vida poliédricas*' ('Poliedric Life Stories') is a cross-disciplinary and collaborative learning project between the UIB and the EASDIB. Disciplines involved in this collaborative project were Music, Visual & Plastic Arts, Literature, Graphic Design, and participants studied Childhood Education, Primary Education and Graphic Design. The main aims of this experience were to promote the teaching-learning aspects of emotions through intergenerational life stories, and to develop students' creativity by using project-based methodology. Students translated research into practice through life story experiences linked with emotions. This is a GRAiE educational innovation project is funded by the IRIE-UIB. The EASDIB participation is 50% co-funded by the European Union within the ERDF Operational Program 2014-2020 at the Balearic Islands.

INTRODUCTION

'*Historias de vida poliédricas*' ('Poliedric Life Stories') is a cross-disciplinary and collaborative learning project between two higher education institution at the Balearic Islands: the Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB) and the Escola d'Art i Superior de Disseny de les Illes Balears (EASDIB). The main aims of this experience were to promote the teaching-learning aspects of emotions through intergenerational Life Stories, and to develop students' creativity by using project-based methodology.

Life Stories allows researchers to work with a symbolic reconstruction of reality by narratives, and focus on narrators' emotions, that is, what is behind the told story. It is also necessary to say that the Narrated Life Stories approach is a particular procedure based on Biographical Research, which is a wide field of different approaches and research strategies with blurred borders and overlapping areas, situated under a general umbrella of Narrative Research (Zinn, 2004: 3-4).

When it comes to emotion, Strongman (2003: 296) canvassed about 150 theories of emotion, inside and outside psychology, but he didn't conclude with any emotion list. On the other hand, according to Ekman findings (2016: 32), there is high agreement about five emotions (all of which were described in Darwin works): anger, fear, disgust, sadness and happiness. These were emotions used to develop the Life Stories Experience.

The project was developed during the first semester of the 2016-2017 academic year, and disciplines involved in this collaborative project were:

- a) Music Education (third year students of Primary Education),
- b) Language Resources (third year students of Graphic Design),
- c) Artistic and Aesthetic Education (second year students in Early Childhood Education), and
- d) Universal and Catalan Literature (fourth year students of Early Childhood Education).

The project focused on emotions that the person interviewed felt but not really told.

THE LIFE STORIES EXPERIENCE

Working emotions is important for a number of professions such as teacher or graphic designer, and developing different activities while studying to identify emotions is important too. In this project, professors from different background worked with emotions with students, to better understand their own feelings and to approach them to other people's emotions, but also to separate themselves from the individuality and to better understand what is going on in collective situations.

The first aim of this experience were to promote the teaching-learning aspects of emotions through intergenerational Life Stories. So, for the purpose of this project, anonymous participants (from 4 years to 85 years) were asked to record a one-minute Life Story (only audio). It could be an Experienced Life History (past experiences) or a Narrated Life Story (life from the current point of view) (Zinn, 2004: 37).

After that, students from both institutions interpreted Life Stories with regard to the whole interview, trying to identify the emotion under the surface of each Life Story. Proposed basic emotions to work with were: anger, fear, disgust, sadness and happiness.

Despite the majority of emotion's researches focus on facial expression, the added difficult was to identify emotions from participant's voice. If you know how to identify emotions it will be much easier to understand a situation and promote communication through nonverbal language, because emotions are a tool that enhances students' future career (Childhood Education, Primary Education and Graphic Design).

The second aim of this experience were to develop students' creativity by using project-based methodology, so during the project, students translated research into practice, under the close supervision of professors involved in the project: Noemy Berbel-Gómez (*Music Education*), Pilar Rovira (*Language Resources*), Magdalena Jaume (*Artistic and Aesthetic Education*) and Antoni Artigues (*Universal and Catalan Literature*).

- a) *Music Education*. About 68 third year students of Primary Education recorded a number of one-minute Life Stories, from anonymous people of different age groups (4 to 85 years). After that, students had to identify the emotions that each Life Story transmitted. During the second part of the project, professor encourage students to compose original music in groups, related to each recorded life history. They had to use emotions previously identified from recorded experience to create a soundtrack. Some technological skills were required as students had to use 'SoundCool' (<http://soundcool.org/>), an open source software to develop the task. Technology allowed students to compose music in real-time through a mobile device (cell phone or tablet), in a collaborative way.
- b) *Language Resources*. About 22 Graphic Design students worked in team with Primary Education Students, and basically they were in touch on-line (Facebook, email and else). As mates from the UIB did, third year students of Graphic Design also identified emotions, prepared a video from a selection of recorded life stories using 'Adobe Premiere' (<http://www.adobe.com/es/products/premiere.html>), and included the musical composition inspired by the emotion identified.
- c) *Artistic and Aesthetic Education*. About 63 second year students in Early Childhood Education developed artistic productions based on recorded life histories. These art work reinterpreted the works of Kurt Schwitters (German artist, 1887-1948), well known for his Dadaism collages made by waste materials, and Joseph Cornell (American artist and experimental film maker, 1903-1972), influenced by the Surrealists and well known for his boxed assemblages made by found discarded objects. Students interpreted emotions from recorded Life Stories by creating their own boxed assemblages filled with reused and waste material.
- d) *Universal and Catalan Literature*. About 63 fourth year students of Early Childhood Education wrote poems ('dècimes', 10 verses of 7 syllables that rhyme ABBAACDDC) from recorded Life Stories. After that, students sang poems by using folkloric tunes from Majorca (Balearic Islands, Spain), transmitting the identified emotions.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to assess results of the project, there has been a qualitative evaluation of the cross-disciplinary and collaborative learning project based on the observation the experience and during the public expositions of the final works. No major incidents were reported, just some initial communications problems between UIB students and EASDIB students. Despite students showed great social media skills, they were very selective with their virtual contacts, so a first face-to-face contact will be needed in future experiences. Then, on December 21st,

2016 music were played, artworks were exhibited and poems were sung at the UIB events hall. Later, on January 19th, 2017 videos were played at the EASDIB conference hall. Both events were fully booked with students, family and friends.

On the other hand, there has been a quantitative-qualitative evaluation of the students' experience based on an anonymous on-line survey, in order to get some students' feedback. Data showed that students gave a medium score to the questions related to the interest of the activity for their academic future (6.7/10.0) and for their professional future (6.8/10.0). However, the degree of overall satisfaction is remarkable (7.2/10.0) and a one hundred per cent of the students would repeat the experience. It is necessary to say that students are not aware of its importance as they are not used to work with project-based methodology which includes a reflexive practice.

Last but not least, students were asked to write down a micro-narrative such as highlighted below:

- 'It has been interesting to make visual the experiences of other people' (Graphic Design).
- 'It has been very interesting to be able to work on this project that involved different points of view, based on creativity as an important issue in education' (Primary Education).
- 'Getting into the everyday life of a stranger (...). Learning to value a moment, an interest and a passion. Facing my own weaknesses and finding resources to get out of a difficulty, and asking for help and get the project through. Why not trusting from the beginning? Why not trusting in the creative capacity that maybe every human being has because of being a 'human being'?' (Early Childhood Education).
- 'The word that defines my personal experience is enrichment. Although difficulties faced, it is possible to work in a team and compose a melody without being musicians. Listening to an audio, thinking about the music that fits the best and composing is a long process, sometimes complex but very rewarding' (Primary Education).
- 'It was nice to meet the people who had made the music and to be able to communicate with them to create a better video' (Graphic Design).

To sum up, '*Historias de vida poliédricas*' ('Poliedric Life Stories') has been developed as cross-disciplinary and collaborative learning project between the UIB and the EASDIB in order to promote the teaching-learning aspects of emotions through intergenerational Life Stories, and to develop students creativity by using project-based methodology. According to experience observation, artworks, data and students' feedback, both objectives have been fulfilled.

Life Stories Experiences took into account that future teachers applied knowledge in real projects and acquire a specialized knowledge of the discipline they are enrolled. Also, students developed other skills that professors considered useful, such as research skills, problem resolutions skills, design thinking, and team working.

Working emotions in class by using project-based methodology is an original and innovative way to provide useful tools for students' academic and professional future, especially in those professions involving people from different ages, different sociocultural background and different interests, such as teacher or graphic designer.

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