

The Visual Arts as Means of Teaching History of World Wars I & II

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ABSTRACT

This proposal attempts to connect the visual arts with history in the pedagogical field, especially in teaching the World Wars I & II. The works of art can be considered as a source of History but also as an object of art, which causes aesthetic emotion in students. Paintings, sculptures, engravings and photographs offer information about the events and circumstances of the time and even about their reception then and later, supporting the historical narrative, but also causes aesthetic emotion and affects in many ways emotionally and mentally. The "reading" of art brings various benefits to students, contributing to aesthetic education. With the elaboration and interpretation of the work of art, they practice in the sensory and experiential perception, they become sensitized and understand the functions of art, aesthetic and social, as well as its importance as an expression of collective consciousness. This paper highlights the role of art as a historical source and a valuable helper in the teaching of history. In particular, the experiential approach of historical events is sought through the "reading" and interpretation of documentary sources and specifically of historical paintings, seeking an alternative visual and critical view of historical events and persons. The aim is to highlight the importance and use of the visual arts in the teaching of World Wars I & II by verifying and consolidating historical events, offering an interdisciplinary reading of history and art. A brief role or a bibliographic search related to the specific historical event plays a decisive role in the most effective interpretation of each work, with the aim of a more complete elaboration of the details. In the case of this period, studying a number of works, we find that they cover a variety of topics, so that they correspond to the corresponding themes of history, which is no longer limited to political and military events, but to all aspects of life.

1. INTRODUCTION

The visual arts are art forms such as painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, photography, filmmaking and design. Promoting critical thinking, the visual arts as a complementary factor in the teaching of history and specifically the controversial events of World War I and II, gives stimuli to students while providing them with an interesting aesthetic experience. The visual arts immediately attract interest while still acting as a shaper of historical thought, simulating situations. The use of visual material, even in fragments, gives the ability to visualize important content in an effective way, facilitating the processing of more information with faster analysis, contributing to the cultivation of historical consciousness. A thorough examination of this period is expected to raise awareness of the terms genocide and holocaust, while highlighting individual rights, universal values and students' awareness of minorities and diversity. Through drawing and painting they produce a variety of visual forms, the expression of which is a powerful means of capturing thoughts, ideas, feelings, expectations of their creators, a window into their inner world (Anning & Ring, 2004). Research has also shown that the contribution of the visual arts contributes to the positive attitude of students towards school and consequently to their school success. In fact, when

used in lessons (interdisciplinary designs), the visual arts contribute to the provision of high quality learning (Bamford, 2006). The outbreak of World War I coincided with an era in which the arts and letters flourished. The period up to 1914 was associated with the European avant-garde, an artistic movement that transcended narrow national boundaries and promoted the dialogue of artists in a common, European space. It is also worth noting that the production of works of art, which depict moments or consequences of the war, is of the utmost importance as it captures the influence of historical moments in art. Many artists were inspired by the era and experimented with new techniques.

2. DISCUSSION

Works of art are evidence through which the perceptions of an era and the general trends of a culture are expressed, while at the same time they constitute an international code of communication (Gloton, 1965). As for the history lesson, art is an element of culture while we can not overlook the works of art that are historical sources for the way of life of people, the times they live, the situations and events that concern them. In the case of World Wars, the visual arts fully capture the facts. A preparation however is required before using the visual arts. It is advisable to organize these actions in five phases: a) didactic analysis and documentation, b) preparation, c) projection, d) elaboration and e) evaluation of the project and didactic intervention (Kittelberger & Freisleben, 1994; Sofos & Kron, 2010). It is necessary to explain to the students the purpose of the project, to know what they are going to get and what will be asked of them after the activity. According to the Perkins model, the approach to works of art takes place in four stages: a) spontaneous observation b) open and adventurous observation c) analytical and deep observation d) holistic review of the process (Perkins, 1994). World-class works capture people from despair to rebellion and claim of their rights. They represent torture, retaliation, self-sacrifice, fear but also the expectation of a better life. During the war, artists enlist in the cause of the nation. They captured the horror of war on the battlefields. It should be noted, however, the different perspectives with which the artists created in the western and eastern states dealt with war issues. The visual arts captured the Holocaust worldwide. We come across paintings which were created either by eyewitnesses and artists who experienced the concentration camps or by witnesses-observers of the time. Numerous visual performances are also available for the battles and operations of the wars on the fronts in almost all countries, displaying the soldiers, the sacrifice for the homeland, but also the death and the hardships. The life of the civilian population could not go unnoticed by the artists of the time. It depicts the hunger, the agony, the losses they experienced in their families, but also the offer and help to those who fought. If the “Guernica” of the Spanish Civil War can be considered to mark the violent beginning of World War II, the “Charnel House” marks its frightening end. Picasso, moved by the horror of the Holocaust through photographs of war correspondents and *L' Humanite* newspaper articles about the crematoria of the Nazi Natzweiler-Stroth camp, which contained the last horrific detail, could not help but capture them. The bound hands and the piles of corpses are reminiscent of the first photographs of the camps - and the devastation of the war (1810-20) by Francis Goya, images at the same time unprintable and unforgettable. Black, gray and white return to the style of “Guernica” to express the horror of war. In the field of sculpture we find the aforementioned themes but in this case we move on to the field of public history and especially to the way of managing memory at the public level, as monuments are an important carrier of memories as they are integrated into society. Attention needs to be paid to the distinction of works, which come from the same era or are later. Works such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, the Memorial to the Children Victims

of the War in Lidice in Czech Republic and Nagasaki National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims, are just a few examples. The works that ultimately cause horror are those of the artists who felt the breath of World War I very close to their faces. Like the German sculptor Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881-1919), who had served in a military hospital in Berlin and created "The Fallen Man" (1915-16), a monumental sculpture for a war cemetery in Duisburg. Apart from these viewing a movie or video is an audiovisual stimulus, so extracting information through such a process is a much easier process. In addition, movies that are based on historical events often differ from each other, even if they are based on the same event. This teaching tool is very easy to apply in a classroom, given that most modern schools include media such as internet and projector. The visual arts depict both heroism and bravery but at the same time the misery of war. It would be interesting if teachers would stop a scene and ask students, for example, to predict the sequel. The films that are proposed are indicative, they only cover the last decade with an extremely short summary and it is understandable that some of them are called to be shown in fragments due to the harsh images and the use of indecent vocabulary. Starting in chronological order, in 2008 the film "The Wave" written by Dennis Kiesel concerns a German high school teacher who, on the occasion of a student's comment that "there can be no fascism again today", applies a peculiar experiment in order to teach the regime of totalitarianism and the ease of manipulating the masses, with dangerous developments. Later that year, John Boyne's "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas" was about a young eight-year-old German's friendship with a Jewish peer who develops in a concentration camp in the face of tragedy and conflict. In 2009, the film "The Courageous Heart of Irena Sandler" by Anna Miskowska was released, based on a true story, about the action of the nurse of the same name in Poland who escaped and saved thousands of children of Jewish origin from the danger of Nazi occupation. Brian Percival's "The Book Thief" premiered in 2013 and is now an approach to the immediate aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust through the eyes of little Liesel, who steals books first out of curiosity and later as rebellion in reaction against the Nazi party. In 2014, Robert Enchel's "Men of Monuments", based on a true story, was screened focusing on the events of World War II, with an emphasis on protecting Western cultural treasures from Nazi destruction and looting.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the visual arts could help as secondary sources in an emotional and multifaceted approach to history in the classroom enhancing historical understanding as art tends to evoke and externalize emotions more easily as a means of creative learning and expression. Of course, the problem of historical inaccuracies clearly cannot be ignored or eliminated, but this is not enough to undo the great contribution of art to the history lesson by making student participation more active. Students may be interested in issues such as diversity, trauma, the presence of the past in the present, cultural identity, minorities and human rights. It is understood that this didactic approach presupposes the active involvement of the students and the collaborative teaching. Experiential learning through art is now a dynamic part of the field of education. That is why it is considered necessary to use the arts in education as well as the training of teachers, in order to provide students with a comprehensive education based on creative learning, which aims at the global development of the student's personality and the cultivation of his emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, 2007). The teacher, as a coordinator and mentor, regardless of the subject matter he uses to contribute to the formation of the student's personality, must be inspired by the basic assumption that, like any human being, so every student is a separate entity that has the right to equal conditions and opportunities to participate in the learning process. It is

believed that is served with the visual arts and their subject matter when they are included in the teaching consistently. We observe, therefore, that the enrichment and flourishing of teaching with the involvement of the visual arts offers the educational process vitality, interest, delight and knowledge, opening new avenues of expression and thought. Future investigations are necessary to validate the kinds of conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

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