

INVENTIVE TASKS FOR CREATORS: RESOURCES TO BRING THE HUMANITIES CLOSER TO FINE ARTS STUDENTS

A. Larrinaga Cuadra

University of the Basque Country, UPV-EHU (SPAIN)

Abstract

Background:

In the curriculum of degrees linked to the Fine Arts, certain Humanities disciplines play an important role, especially the History, Theory or Pedagogy of Art. Because most of the subjects in students' timetables develop their creative skills manually, it is a challenge for Humanities teachers to attract their attention and develop their oral and written theoretical or discursive skills.

Method:

Years of teaching experience have led us to the conclusion that making "a creative challenge" for the student as creator immediately motivates students to complete their assigned tasks as well as exponentially improves their commitment to quality. This paper will explain in detail a method that has begun to be developed in classrooms through group work, delving into the specific topic of the History of Modern Art, from Manet to the Avant Garde movements, which is common to the training offer of three degrees in Fine Arts (Art, Creation and Design and Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property). The method aims to analyse in depth the manifestos of various avant-garde movements, in order to write and present a manifesto updated for the twenty-first century.

Results:

The project is being developed with the involvement and motivation of the students. The students would not have the same level of motivation had there not been a creative outcome to the analysis of Avant-Garde manifestos. In addition, students are therefore developing written and oral discursive skills applied to their writing and presentation of their manifesto.

Conclusions:

For the development of Fine Arts students, competency in History, Theory or Pedagogy of Art are accessory to them as creators, but essential for them as professionals. Devising tasks and assessments that continue to stimulate their creative skills can really improve their performance and competence in the Humanities disciplines with which they come into contact.

Keywords: Creative tasks, teaching Humanities, Fine Arts degrees, motivate students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The teaching load that we have in the History of Art and Music Department of the UPV-EHU has forced us for several years to perform our educational work in two centres, with students with a very different income profile:

- At the Faculty of Fine Arts of Leioa, we teach the first year course "Introduction to the History of 20th century Art" common to the centre's three degrees: the Degrees in Art, in Creation and Design and, finally, in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property. In the entry profile for the first two degrees listed, a creative, curious student with artistic and aesthetic concerns is needed [1-2]; for the one on Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, on the other hand, interest in the conservation of the heritage and in cultural management by the students is emphasised, as well as a capacity for observation and analysis [3].
- In the Faculty of Arts of Vitoria-Gasteiz, we teach a basic course on the History of Art in the first year, common to the degrees in History of Art, History and Geography Studies, and also an optional course for the third and fourth year of the Degree in History of Art specifically. However, the ability to observe, analyse and having a critical spirit to apply them to the study of the History of Art are required for students admitted to the degree in the History of Art [4].

This coming and going between centres and this contact with students with diverse profiles has always been enriching and has led us to interesting reflections on the improvement of our teaching in both centres. In this piece we will show our conclusions about a specific type of classroom practical work that we have been carrying out to bring to the students of the Faculty of Fine Arts of Leioa the History of Art content. These are practical exercises aimed at promoting student creativity and experiential learning. Mainly, we will focus on a practice that we are developing, experimentally, throughout this course.

The critical understanding of the Theory and History of Art appears as a transversal competence in the educational curriculum of the three degrees in the Faculty of Fine Arts of Leioa [5-7]. That is why not only the History of Art, but also other Humanities subjects such as Pedagogy and Theory of Art appear in the educational syllabus for the three degrees throughout the four courses over which the teaching is distributed.

However, for most of the courses in these degrees students work on their plastic, photographic and audiovisual skills. That is why the faculty of Humanities disciplines have the challenge of making the students develop discursive skills related to the subjects they teach. In the Humanities courses of the Fine Arts degrees, as in many other degrees from UPV-EHU over many diverse disciplines, it is proposed that students cultivate appropriate oral and written rhetoric as a skill at university and that requires the faculty to have conscious and effective strategies for Fine Arts students to acquire a sufficient level of skill in this ability. However, this must be achieved through a few courses, since the Humanities subjects are in a minority compared to other subjects related to the practice of art itself.

Faced with this challenge, our teaching experience has led us to verify that, if promoting creativity is a useful teaching strategy for all types of students [8], for the Fine Arts students it is especially effective and seductive, since it is a quality particularly developed by students who do these courses. Next, we will describe the keys to the practice that we have been developing in this course on the subject of "Introduction to the History of twentieth century Art", a first year course common to the three degrees in the Faculty of Fine Arts of Leioa.

2 METHODOLOGY

With the triple objective of guaranteeing the acquisition of the competences of the course, combating plagiarism –coming up with works that cannot be plagiarised [9]–, and developing the creativity of the students, during this academic year, in our groups on this course that goes deeper into the History of Modern Art from Manet to the Historical Avant-gardes, we have suggested to the students that they carry out the following group task: to analyse in depth the manifestos of several avant-garde movements appearing in the programme, and to then write, and read in public, manifestos that update the approaches of the originals to the 21st century.

For this course, cooperative work is a fundamental methodological tool, since the number of students is greater than 90 and the use of this methodology allows students to receive frequent feedback on their level of achievement in the process of acquiring the skills because of the possibility of presenting more tasks or assessable exercises –if they were to work individually, the burden of assessing them would be too much for the lecturer–. By the date on which the task we would like to present was raised, the working groups were already formed and had already developed group dynamics thanks to earlier, lesser scope assessable works.

Each of the working groups has been randomly given a manifesto –futurist, Dadaist or surrealist–, that must be analysed in depth and then another one that updates it to suit the 21st century must be drafted and read out in public. Initially, they have been provided with the reference text, the material within which it is presented, as well as basic bibliographic texts on the movement that gave rise to it, since this content had not yet been introduced in the lectures (the timetable for the course includes lectures and classroom practical work [10]).

Depending on the various objectives of this assessable task, the work can be divided into three main phases:

A. ANALYSIS OF THE PROPOSED AVANT-GARDE MOVEMENT AND MANIFESTO

The following questions have been suggested to the students to guide them in the analysis of the manifesto that each group has been given randomly to work on:

- In what historical-artistic context was the manifesto created?

- What was the movement that gave rise to it?
- What was the purpose of the manifesto within the movement itself?
- Under what conditions was it made public?
- At whom was it targeted?
- What are its objectives?
- What are its main ideas?
- What kind of speech does it use? (Style, type of literary figures, etc.).
- What repercussions did this manifesto have?

B. DRAFTING OF THE NEW MANIFESTO UPDATING IT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Taking into account that the historical context in which the original manifesto was written is not the same as today, through this exercise we want to promote a reflection by the students on the possibility of updating the ideology of these avant-garde movements to the 21st century and to reflect on the usefulness of its self-presentation resources in our time. Students can take the bulk of the original manifesto's ideas or select only some ideas as a reference for the drafting of the updated manifesto, but it is essential to be inspired by the original objectives, style and tone of the previous manifesto for the wording of the new text.

The aspects to be considered suggested to the students when writing the new manifesto are:

- Given the summary of the main ideas of the original manifesto, to what 21st century situations could they be linked and how can those claims be updated for the 21st century?
- How can the tone of the original manifesto be rekindled in the new one?
- What features of the writing style of the original manifesto could be useful and inspiring for the writing of the new manifesto?

C. PRESENTATION OF THE MANIFESTO STUDIED AND READING OF THAT DRAFTED BY EACH OF THE GROUPS

Bearing in mind the way in which each of the reference manifestos were disseminated in writing and orally, each working group should prepare a setting for the public reading of the manifesto. In this case, the conditions under which the original manifestos were made public can be an inspiration, but an entirely new setting may also be created for the new manifesto. For the oral presentations, the entire classroom space and the technical facilities available in it will be made available to the students.

In these presentations all members of the group must participate, without exception, unless there is a justified cause. The dates for each group's presentation in the courses practical classes have been made public, sufficiently early to guarantee the attendance of all the members of the group in advance.

The requirement given to the students is that the presentations should have the following parts:

- Presentation of the original manifesto and the conclusions of their analysis of it.
- Reading of the updated manifesto.

Each group will have approximately 20 to 25 minutes of presentation time; therefore, the work should show summary and clear conclusions on the original manifesto, and then give way to the reading of the new manifesto.

The teacher will assess this task using a set of assessment criteria for the oral presentation included in the student's guide to the 2019/2020 course that was given to the students on the first day of class. However, students individually (not at the group level), using the same criteria, must take notes on all the presentations and then participate in a vote –the teacher's vote counts the same as that of any student–, which will decide which was the best presentation (peer assessment). The members of the winning group will get 0.5 points added to their final mark for the course. This measure aims to further boost student motivation for this task, which corresponds to 20% of the final mark for the course.

The specific learning outcomes for this exercise have been specified as follows:

- The students will read, understand and analyse several avant-garde manifestos and become aware of the contributions that these movements made to the ideas and practice of art.

- The students will associate the formal features of the plastic language of several avant-garde movements with the proclamation of their objectives made in writing and orally through a manifesto.
- The students will develop their creative capacity by writing manifestos that update the contents of some that the historical avant-garde used to disseminate their ideas.
- The students will exercise their oral expression and their performance skills when preparing a setting for the public reading of the new updated manifestos.
- The students will carry out peer assessment to vote on which they thought was the best team presentation from among their practical group.

3 RESULTS

In previous courses, only the guided analysis of some of the manifestos chosen for this task, had been considered as a practical exercise. Next, students only had to prepare an individual critical appraisal of them some two or three paragraphs in length. In addition, this practical work represented a low percentage of the final mark for the course.

The inclusion of the creative challenge has been decisive in increasing student motivation and interest in the analysis of the manifestos. Another important detail that confirms the importance of the task is to have made it an important part of the final assessment for the course.

Although the oral presentation phase of the work and its assessment have yet to take place, that can provide more data to highlight the effectiveness of this task when it comes to the acquisition of the subject competences, the students are highly involved in the exercise, which we note because of the practical work sessions in the classroom in which the students come together in groups to organise and develop the exercise. We also consider that the methodology of cooperative group working is useful and enriching in the development of work like this one, not only because it requires a consensus of ideas and creative approaches, as was the case for the initial manifestos created in the context of the original movements, but also because the public reading of the manifesto part is done with the support and protection of the group.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The teaching work itself poses a constant creative challenge and any high-quality educational proposal should pursue the development of creativity in the students and teachers [11-12], at all stages of the education system. The design of effective strategies to ensure the acquisition of skills by students and to ensure a high level of motivation in the subjects taught are two of the main challenges for every lecturer.

The design of creative works to be prepared by students, or that involve creativity among other qualities, is not only a necessity, depending on the values that are required in our society today for the professionalization of students, but also a safe bet to catalyse the motivation and involvement of students with the theoretical or practical content developed by teachers.

For all courses the lecturer is faced with the challenge of designing practical work that, among its many possibilities, can guarantee the acquisition of the skills needed for their subjects. This piece has described the characteristics of one that has been designed to bring the contents of the History of Art to students of Fine Arts.

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