

## An Autobiographical Analysis of my Arts Education

With heavy influences from Western pop-culture, at the age of nine I was convinced I would become the next Hannah Montana. I had created my famous personality called Miranda Roberts, and I designed album covers, a themed birthday party and wrote songs trying to make my gullible dream come true. In such an instance, media functioned as an educative and stimulating impulse to create art. I was, and still am, eccentric, being young and curious about gay people, passionate about feminism and took part in drama, dance and art extra curricular activities available in and outside of school. It was not until the ages of twelve or thirteen that we finally had Art in our secondary school schedules. Classes consisted of drawing shells with charcoal, understanding the proportions of a face and differentiating between an H and 6B pencil. Quite generic stuff, and indeed we were evaluated on a set of criteria according to skill. This seemed like the school's way of legitimating arts education through qualification (Biesta, 2020). At sixteen I was diagnosed with dyslexia and dyscalculia and therefore my father could immediately "blame" these two bumps for the delays in learning. Similar to other students who excel in the arts and creative subjects, I struggled with mathematics and the sciences (Hetland, Winner, Veenema, Sheridan, 2007). Meanwhile Bushati (2018) would signal that this can enhance children's opportunity to learn through different mediums, and "express themselves through art" (p. 37). Reaching my final years at school I needed to make the life changing choice of choosing a university (course). I fought to study Arts, yet to my surprise due to my low qualifications at school and social lifestyle, my parents disagreed. Alas, at the age of twenty one I managed to take part in a Dual Degree program which interrelates arts and culture studies at a university level complemented with fine arts at an arts institute. I can not help but ask myself how did my ethnic upbringing blend with my arts education; result in my decision to become an artist? And how does studying art evolve into an artist becoming everlearning? This essay intends to unravel these questions through literature review and personal investigation.

Ethnicity and location had a great impact on the curriculums our classes at school would consist of (Cutcher, 2015). Great distinction during my formative years in Ecuador during Year Five and Year Seven (nine years to twelve years), that had an indigenous and local approach to education. Bourdieu asserts that culture is embodied in material practices (cited by Sense, 2015, p. 123, on citing Zavellos, 2008). Edna Iturralde's book *Lágrima de Ángeles* (Tears of Angels), follows the story of a young peasant boy, Jaime, who's father travels to the "the great Europe" to find better opportunities and send money home. Jaime, distressed by the situation, runs away to the city where he befriends a girl known as La Flaca. She survives day to day by selling sweets on the streets of Quito, sleeps in an abandoned bus at night and integrates

Jaime into street-child survival. We studied this book around the ages of eleven and twelve. Our class was used to the reality of seeing children sell sweets at stoplights and clean our car windows, it is the reality of many developing countries. Through daily non-verbal, sensory and emotional experiences we made sense of this reality and digested it into our schema (Genderen, Rijkeboer, Arntz, 2012), thus such a novel was adequate for our class. According to Herbert Read, art education serves the purpose to teach morality and community. Studying such literature at preadolescent ages impacts the way children express and create judgements (Keel, 1969). Upon studying, creating posters and presentations on Lágrima de Ángeles our empathy rose, and we were enlightened upon the realities beyond our private education, our everyday lives became a ground of exploration (Stewart, 2019). This fair example is one of many. At the age of fifteen I was living in Egypt. I painted one of my friend's backs, nude. When it came to the end of year art show, this painting was not allowed to be displayed because of its offence. At foetal stages of my art practice, implicitly and explicitly through presentations of culture and traditions I was forming a critical view on life (Biesta, 2020).

I then turned to my parents, who also contributed to my socialisation. Both un-cultured and non-artists, and impotently present when I question my art's legitimisation. Their lack of creativity is contagious and their discouragement lingers in my relationship towards art making. If my current reflection is correct, it seems that art became a coping mechanism for our failures in communication. Stewart (2019) mentions that detaching (art) education and home time should be avoided for a positive engagement with art making. This separation was and still is present. I would spend extra time at school with my art teacher painting or doing research for projects, consequently getting home to an uninspiring environment where dialogue on my artistic incentives was dismissed. Fast forwarding, it was not until my institutionalised art studies at Willem deKoning Academy (WdKA) that I became contextualised and validated my dedication to art. Ironically, when I go back to my parents home to visit them, my art practice falls into inertia from lack of stimulus. WdKA's unique approach to art education seeks us to incorporate our interests autonomously into our art practice. This way we begin to visualise life as an artist, make critical responses to generic scenarios and approach art from multiple perspectives. In their words "learn to think conceptually, explore, experiment and ask yourself questions regarding the discipline" ((de)Fine Art). This compliments Bushati's writings enhancing ideas that art allows students to become proactive, explore different domains, and become multidisciplinary in ways of expressing themselves. Consequently, such education leads to an ambiguous grading system, which can be a cause of alarm for (my) parents. For science and mathematical studies it is easier to quantify a students achievements and allocate a grade, meanwhile in art this is more difficult to evaluate (Galloway, 2009 referencing AEGIS, 2004; Belfiore, 2006; Coalter, 2001; Oakley, 2004). Exemplary is

WdKA's pass or fail grading system. If a student's work complies with the criteria of objectives then they either pass or fail.

Rearranging my cognition into that of an artist has made me more aware of the creativity in the ordinary. Reflecting upon what my education was during school years and now, my attitude towards the quotidien has been enhanced with kaleidoscopic behaviours which contribute to an artistic lifestyle. Art school helps with engraving these attitudes in my everyday perspectives of life, and this justifies why students who want to pursue professional art careers need this stimulus. For a chaotic brain like art school has really helped me achieve the reality I wanted to, and make sense of unordinary perspectives. Coming back to my dream to become Miranda Roberts, a hauntology themed exhibition at TENT Rotterdam touches on the topic of pop-culture references having an omnipresent effect on how we touch reality. I made sense of my surroundings, explored scenarios and applied them to art. Whatever I look at now, I see it as an artist.

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