

Anita Sinner, Rita L. Irwin & Timo Jokela (Eds.)

VISUALLY PROVOKING

Dissertations in Art Education

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**VISUALLY PROVOKING:
DISSERTATIONS IN ART EDUCATION**



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**RESEARCHING EDUCATION THROUGH
VISUAL INSTRUMENTS IN A/R/TOGRAPHY:
PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGES
IN DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS**

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Figure 1. Direct Visual quotation (Mena-de-Torres, 2015, p. 33). Use of visual abstract.

The Role Images Play

What role should images play in the discourse on educational arts based research? Can an academic text organize knowledge through visual instruments that integrate aesthetic qualities? Does research that uses images as its method of argument deserve a space in the scientific field? Is it necessary to establish research instruments in order to introduce images into an a/r/tographic research report? Does this contradict a methodological approach?

In this chapter we present two doctoral dissertations that have attempted to respond to these questions (Genaro-Garcia, 2013; Mena-de-Torres, 2015). These research projects, developed at the University of Granada, tackle a working hypothesis of openly integrating exclusively visual arguments. In recent decades, we have gradually become accustomed to seeing images gaining space in new sections of research reports and doctoral dissertations as images have begun to perform unexpected functions.

What is most significant in these two research projects is not only a use of images that is not restricted to the spaces and sections traditionally considered to be visually inclined, but also that both projects use images in a similar way. That is to say, stable uses for the aesthetic in visual a/r/tography have begun to be developed in doctoral dissertations, which imply the development of equivalent instrumental forms. In research methodology, this fact is significant because it clearly signals that the field of arts based research is demanding a certain degree of

systematization. This is the case for both doctoral dissertations that we present here.

Doctoral Dissertations as an Environment for Methodological Development

Doctoral dissertations are a specific genre within academic literature, a particular type of document that usually presents one of the first research projects of its author. Doctoral dissertations are not only an entrance for researchers into the academic field, but it has been demonstrated that they are very useful as a space for methodological experimentation. By their nature, given the context of their creation and development, they tend to deal with emerging, fresh and ambitious work and they tend to be attentive to the latest methodological developments.

In a little more than twenty years since the first publications related to arts based research were published, we can affirm that senior researchers have earnestly undertaken the work of justifying the approach and illuminating the path (Eisner, 1998; Barone & Eisner, 2011; Irwin, 2010; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Marin-Viadel; 2005, Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008). However, it must be acknowledged that they have only been capable of advancing when they have walked in the company of doctoral candidates. In other words, doctoral dissertations have become the primary focus for implementing best practices in arts based research and are mainly responsible for the continued growth of the methodological model¹.

The advances developed through doctoral dissertations using these approaches

¹ See www.artography.edcp.educ.ubc.ca

have been critical in achieving the current thriving state of arts based research. This is due primarily to two reasons: (i) because those who have promoted these methodologies since their beginnings belong to the university community, and their efforts have largely facilitated development and recognition within the university's academic environment of the value of projects that use art and images. The first step in accomplishing this is through graduate student research. The second reason, (ii), is because the innate freshness and daring ambition of doctoral dissertations has united with the embryonic state of the methodologies that sustains them, which has permitted and favored this methodological adventure.

The two doctoral theses that we present here utilize artistic images to develop their introductions, to present key visual concepts, to cite the most significant authors, to present and to sequence their arguments, to present their hypotheses, to present their critical positions and to deduce their conclusions. However, from our perspective, the most interesting aspect of these two doctoral dissertations is that they introduce images following pre-established standards, using justified and reproducible techniques with objectives declared and explicitly described before their use.

Developing Research Instruments in A/r/tography and Arts Based Research

What converts these two dissertations into pioneering works in methodological development in visual a/r/tography and visual arts based research is precisely the efforts taken to describe and validate the instruments that they develop and use.

The way in which the aesthetic use of information is produced in different sections of these two doctoral dissertations is not in response to a whim or a moment of inspiration by their authors. On the contrary, the functions and purposes of the use of artistic strategies, as well as the objective and the technique that they make use of are described precisely and specifically in the dissertations' methodological section and are designed explicitly as arts based research instruments. This leads to an unequivocal approach for using images that is argumentative, explanatory, and demonstrative, rather than validating images exclusively as narrative or rhetorical devices. Furthermore, it provides the necessary methodological foundation and evidence that enables other researchers to debate or build upon this use of images in research. That is to say their aesthetic use of information: (i) permits the validation of images as research instruments, and (ii) supports debate in the academic environment, and/or (iii) justifies and promotes its use in other research contexts.

The development of arts based or image based research tools has been an endeavor that a group of researchers from the University of Granada have dedicated themselves to during recent years. This dedication comes from a certainty that this development is paramount for the growth and influence of artistic research methodologies. Without methodological systematization – that is to say, without the characterization, description and systematic use of the techniques and strategies that belong to artistic research methodologies – it would be very difficult for these methodologies to improve as research methods, and, thus, to penetrate the methodological paradigm currently in place

in universities and in the rest of the scientific community. Thus, it is necessary to direct our efforts towards the development of contrasting and verifiable techniques that can have different uses, variable applications and multiple functions, and that could be considered specific, useful, and functional for the research purposes described.

To put it in another way, just as qualitative research has established triangulation, the use of the participants' observations, interviews or biographies, to be an appropriate, useful technique with a long history of use; and just as quantitative research has

established tools such as the introduction of control groups, statistical studies and analysis or the use of multivariables as appropriate and effective research instruments for the scientific community; in visual arts based research, we should start to establish a sufficient number and variety of research tools that have demonstrated their versatility, validity and effectiveness for the achievement of particular research results.

This does not imply a negation of the essence of aesthetic strategies that characterizes a/r/tographic research. It only implies an effort to order and systematize the way in



Figure 2. Direct Visual quotation (Genaro-Garcia, 2013, pp. 116–117). Use of photo series.

which these aesthetic elements are utilized. The relevance and usefulness of particular artistic research instruments do not exempt the researcher from performing the same effort of systematization that researchers in the rest of the social sciences must perform.

Photo Series, Photo-essays and Visual Quotes as Educational Research Instruments in the Visual Identity of Teenagers (Genaro-Garcia, 2013)

This is one of the first Spanish doctoral dissertations that specifically addresses the use of visual arts based research tools. The author produces photo essays and photo series composed of three types of images: (i) visual quotes that have used the self-portrait as a visual method of research; (ii) self-portraits of the research project participants; and (iii) self-portraits of the researcher. This combination of elements analyzes, compares and creates arguments based on artistic material.

One of the most unique strategies adopted for this project is that the researcher creates self-portraits as a way of substantiating and connecting to other approaches to the self-portrait, such as to the work of the most significant visual artists that have characterized, described and substantiated the self-portrait as a research tool for researching identity, gender, culture, memory and personal idiosyncrasy.

The images make up the bulk of the research project, forming the beginning, middle and end of the project. The educational processes (a critical approach to the self-image during adolescence) are not described by text or simply illustrated by

images: they are created as critical images. Each image arises from the artistic concepts that demonstrate the educational content and objectives of each project. The images are the primary research results, but they also contain the arguments and are used as rationale in diverse stages of the research project. The researcher's subjectivity characterizes the whole process, with a notable self-narrating and autobiographical character since she makes herself and her own self-portraits the basis of subjective interpretation of the research results.

The principle methodological instruments that are used in the research project for the analysis and discussion of the results are: the sequential series, the visual quote and the photo essay.

Sequential series

The sequential series is the most effective instrument for describing the process of change. Normally a sequential series is organized through a coherent set of images that show key phases in succession to demonstrate how the events unfolded. Order that is chronological, increasing, decreasing or visual is what generates the logic that the series proposes. Photography is especially recognized for its capacity to offer us instant and repeated aspects and slight variations that suits a description related to a sequence of events. All phases included in a sequential series are crucial for comprehension of the described process. The sequential series that we present here (Figure 2) is composed of eight photographs of ID cards of the author of the project. The eight photographs come from successive ID cards of the research author. The succession is chronological



Figure 3. Direct Visual quotation (Mena-de-Torres 2015, p. 199). Use of explanatory photo-essay.

(Genaro-Garcia 2013, pp. 116–117). Other examples of the use of this instrument include Molinet-Medina (2010, pp. 100–101), Marin-Viadel and Roldan (2012a, pp. 72–73) and Genet-Verney (2013, p. 49).

Explanatory photo essay based on visual quotes.

This type of photo essay gives a visual explanation, structuring images and interconnecting them. It can deal with self-portrait photographs or photographs that document a process. The photo essay can exclusively

use original photographs from the research project (by the researcher and the participants) or the photo-essay can use visual quotes from recognized authors published in quality sources (see for example Mena-de-Torres, 2015, p. 199). Other examples of the use of this instrument are Roldan and Marin-Viadel (2012, pp. 118–119) and Cepeda-Morales (2009, p. 20).

Interpretive photo essay

This photo essay is primarily used as an example of exposition and presentation of results, in which particular aspects of

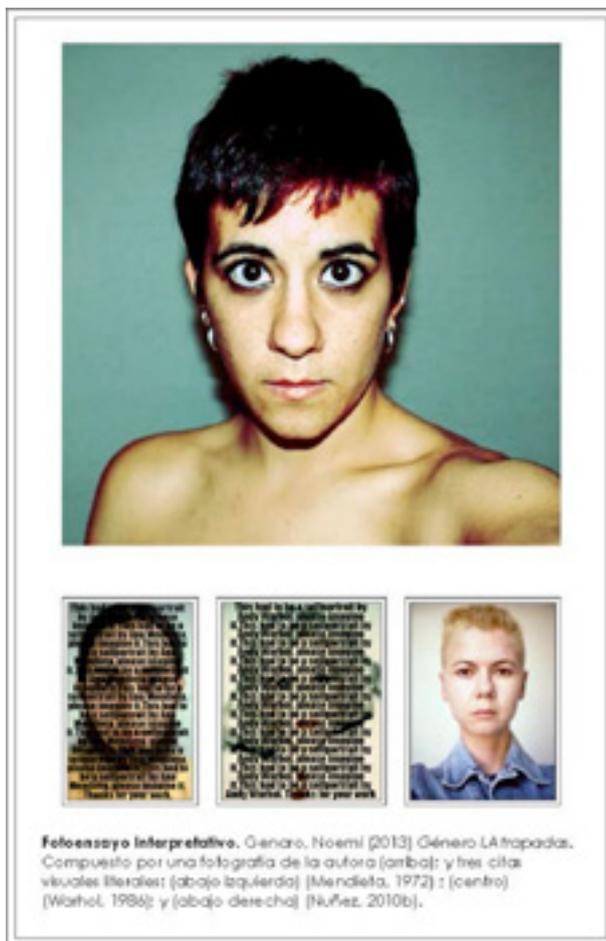


Figure 4. Direct Visual quotation (Genaro-Garcia, 2013, p. 67). Use of interpretive photo essay.

the research are interpreted and analyzed. In our research this type of photo essay is organized primarily with self-portrait photographs, for example, of the visual conclusions of the experiments that they present; they can then be accompanied by visual quotations or be original photos (Figure 4). Other examples of the use of this instrument include Rubio-Fernandez (2014, pp. 94–95) or Pérez Montañez (2010, p. 99).

The Construction of the Visual Concept of Education based on the Visual Commentary and the Visual Chart (Mena-de-Torres, 2015)

In this doctoral dissertation the author endeavors to establish, in explicit detail in the methodology section, the nature and functions of two specific tools that are necessary to achieve the objectives of his research project: visual commentary of an image and the visual chart.

Visual commentary

Visual commentary is a methodological strategy by means of which images are used to conduct observations, clarifications or explanations of another image. The author of the commentary explores the image that is the object of study, through the evidence and emphasis that is produced through visual means. This exploration is accomplished without the existence of a translation into a written medium. Visual strategies typically used in the analysis of paired images are strategies of comparison, continuity, extension, contrast, analogy, metaphor, metonymy, movement/translation, association, identification, etc.

Fragment by fragment analysis

Fragment by fragment analysis is composed of a group of image fragments extracted from the analyzed image. Through the placement of the fragments, it tries to underline, highlight and explain the significant details

that they want to comment on. Characteristic of fragment by fragment analysis, we organize the analysis of the content from a selection of image fragments without needing to include images by other authors. The main advantage that this visual analysis tool

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

fotografías de acceso libre: 18.540	fotografías educativas: 1.477
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Es la institución cultural más antigua de Estados Unidos. Su función es la de preservar, investigar y divulgar la historia y la cultura de Norte América. Alberga una de las colecciones bibliográficas y visuales más amplias del mundo. Concretamente, las imágenes fotográficas que conservan son de gran interés temático y estético. A diferencia de otros archivos, ésta conserva un número significativo de fotografías de artistas que trabajaron durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX. En sus fondos se conserva el material fotográfico del proyecto fotográfico de documentación del medio y cultura rural promovido por la Farm Security Administration. Este archivo tiene la mayor colección de fotografías educativas. Mayoritariamente son imágenes de artistas, así que la visión que tienen de la educación es especialmente interesante. En sus trabajos documentan la realidad educativa, pero también la analizan y la interpretan. Sus imágenes representan una de las principales referencias visuales para investigar fotográficamente sobre la educación.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/> [26/06/2014]

estilo visual: PUNTO DE VISTA | SEGUNDO PLANO | INTERPRETACIÓN | PROXIMIDAD | POÉTICA

motivos fotográficos EDIFICIO | RETRATO | ACCIONES EN EL AULA | RELACIONES PERSONALES



TABLE 9. FOTOGRAFÍAS EDUCATIVAS. ESTILO Y MOTIVOS FOTOGRAFÍCOS EN LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Figure 6. Direct Visual quotation (Mena-de-Torres, 2015, p. 215). Use of visual charts.

presents is the formal coherence that the images retain that then shapes the visual commentary into a set (see for example, Menade-Torres, 2015, p. 109). Another example of the use of this instrument is that of Marin-Viadel and Roldan (2012b, see p. 121).

Specific visual commentary

Specific visual commentary is composed primarily of images created by the commentator, with the specific purpose of making a comment. The distinctive feature of this analysis tool resides precisely in how the author of the comment has to produce the necessary images for the study. To visually comment through one's own production of images implies a prior, thorough and comprehensive review. From this review a specific aesthetic and a series of complex associations and symbolic, formal and aesthetic relationships with the analyzed work are generated. This does not imply emulating or performing visual alliteration, but rather it implies questioning the studied work based on the aesthetic and conceptual questions and answers that are asked and resolved in the terminology of the analyzed piece. The main advantage that this instrument has is visual coherency within the set of images (Figure 5). Another example of the use of this instrument can be found with Pérez-Cuesta (2010, see p. 43).

Visual chart

Among other tools of Visual Arts Based Research or A/r/tography, the visual chart stands out as a method of organization, visualization and comparison of images and

their content in qualitative terms. One of the potentials of arts based methodological approaches is that it permits the introduction of the unique and singular experience of the world through scientific and systematic research processes.

The way in which we organize ideas, but also, the way in which we arrange images, allows us to visualize how we view, analyze and conceptualize the world (Siegesmund, 2014; Varto, 2013). The visual chart provides a structure whereby the use of a visually specific grammar makes it possible to relate, articulate and exhibit in a concise form the associations that are born through the research.

The visual chart permits the arrangement and grouping of images according to concepts. This organization systematizes the visualization of results allowing the qualitative analysis of the conceptual and aesthetic relationships of the images that the chart is comprised of. The intersection of data is presented through charts where visual strategies, aesthetics and thematic terminology connect or dissociate the data. Through these three elements the visual exposition and argumentation is realized, based on how each of the creators of the visualized aspects or images constructs specific concepts based on aesthetic and thematic questions. Visual charts configure a sufficiently broad map that synthesizes the idea, strategy and visual perspective posed by the images that comprises the chart (Figure 6). Another example of the use of this instrument is in Marin-Viadel and Roldan (2014, see pp. 92–93).

Visual a/r/tography research instruments

In this chapter we have tried to justify the necessity of defining and validating several research instruments in visual a/r/tography. Similarly, we have tried to demonstrate several image based research instruments, characterizing them and connecting their results with other research projects in which the instruments have been used in different contexts. We understand that this work has not been completed and is only beginning. This work should continue into the future, in order to strengthen the development of arts based methodologies (Gutiérrez, 2014, p. 32).

To meet current regulations, doctoral dissertations in Spain should justify their validity by combining their final reports with publications in the better professional research journals. This links the professional editorial field with the academic field. Given that these two fields currently do not assume the same criteria for the admission and validation of research reports, it is urgent that they take steps to validate the methods and instruments belonging to arts based research, so that they can be recognized not only in the university academic community, but also in professional fields of study. We understand that it would be necessary to establish three interventions: (i) to promote specialized journals that permit the publication of image and arts based research; (ii) to promote the discussion with current publishers and journals; and (iii) to design and disseminate methodological standards that favor the admission of arts based research.

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This timely book contains a splendid variety of essays in the diverse and developing area that is visual inquiry & doctoral study in art education. With eloquently presented studies, conducted by art educators using a range of art-based methods. The richly illustrated investigations from ten countries, mean that there is something for everyone in this volume. Whether you are an artist, educator, researcher; or consider yourself a combination of all three, I believe this is a necessary addition to your bookshelf.

Glen Coutts,
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