

Research Article

Doing research together: creating spaces of collaboration with young people using visual methods

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Abstract

This paper illustrates how a visual method emerged in a way that helped in creating spaces with participants for collaboration, participation, and engagement in the research process as well as in the construction and the embodiment of the self. This particular work is part of a wider ethnographic research project with Palestinian adolescents (ages 15-17) in their school context. The paper also highlights the journey of the researcher who positioned herself as part of the field, her interaction with the context and with participants, the experiences, moments; and spaces that were co-constructed. While at the same time showing that involvement also means to be involved and to participate as a researcher and as a person in the lives and the context of participants. The already existing school environment and culture allowed for such spaces to emerge, and therefore research activities and events were embedded within and were created from within the context. Chosen moments of self and identity were mainly embodied through 'expressive' self-portraits using, but not limited to, collage. However, in this contribution our intention is not to focus on the visual product as a final expression of the self, but on the process of self-construction that was taking place continuously through different art processes and other moments over an extended period of time. We argue that a visual method, in addition to stimulating spaces of possibilities for collaboration, opened up spaces of possibilities for the self. We stress that the context composed of time, space, and audience, all which were essential to what and how the self was embodied and performed.

Keywords: collaborative practice, visual methods, self, spaces, contexts, performance.

论文摘要

一起做研究:
使用视觉方法创造与青年人协同合作的空间

这篇论文阐述了视觉方法如何在研究过程中促成协作和参与，以及它如何在自我的建构与体现中发挥作用。此课题是一个针对在校巴勒斯坦青少年（15至17岁）的更大规模的人种学研究项目的一部分。这篇论文还突出了研究者以参与者身份所经历的研究历程，她与研究背景和被研究对象之间的互动，以及由双方合作构建的空间。与此同时，论文指出所谓参与不仅是作为研究者身份参与，而且也是以个体身份融入研究对象的生活背景中。学校现有的环境与文化为创造空间提供可能性，研究活动因此被创造并嵌入这一背景中。特定时刻的自我身份主要通过表达性的、拼贴画形式的（但不局限于）自我肖像得以具体化。然而，论文的研究意图并不聚焦在作为自我表达手段的视觉产品本身，而是关注在一段时期内持续发生的、通过不同艺术手段创作完成的自我构建的过程。我们认为一种视觉方法，除了促进协同合作的可能性，还为自我建构提供空间。我们强调由特定时间、空间和受众组成的背景对于自我体现的内容与方式至关重要。

关键词: 协作实践，视觉方法，自我，空间，背景，表现

Introduction

'Research' may hold different implications and meanings, especially to people having the experience of being 'researched'. Indigenous people around the world are one example (Smith, 2006). Power relations immediately develop between those who want information and claim to have the best methods to achieve it and ways to interpret it and present it, and those who are being asked to give it and show it. Usually 'researched' people have little input in the process of research construction, conduction, and production. Even interpretation at times becomes solely in the hands of the researcher, despite the possibility of multiple readings and meaning making. Adult power takes over especially in research concerning children and young people (Allen, 2008). In this case it is not only how researchers position themselves but also how children and young people are being perceived (Fattore, Mason, and Watson, 2007). When children are thought to be 'incompetent' and 'incomplete' their agency and participation is undermined. "Such practices have historically been translated into methodologies where young people represent the passive objects of study by adults, who define the research parameters" (Allen, 2008, p.565).

Working with and being around young people was always fascinating to me*. I was fortunate to be part of hundreds of conversations and narratives with young people during my teaching years at Birzeit University in Palestine. Therefore I chose to do research differently, in a more collaborative way. In collaborative research participants are more engaged in the research process, their knowledge and input are valued, and a shared understanding can be achieved together.

This paper demonstrates how a visual method emerged from within the research context, and how it opened up spaces for participation and involvement. This particular work is part of my PhD research. I am a Palestinian and therefore I decided to work in a Palestinian context. Research activities and fieldwork took place in Ramallah/Palestine with adolescents in their school context with the aim of investigating the self-presentations of young people. I spent eight months in a school and gradually became involved in the context and with the participants, particularly in art classes of one group, and in psychology classes of another group where a visual method was first explored.

In the coming sections we* first introduce the research context. Then we show how a visual method emerged and how it created spaces for collaboration with participants, and later on how it created spaces for self-construction and presentation. The chosen moments of self and identity were embodied through 'expressive' self-portraits, using but not limited to collage.

Research context

Research activities took place at The Friends School, a Quaker's school founded in 1869 in Ramallah/El Birah, Palestine. Research activities took place precisely in the high-school campus founded in 1901. A visual method emerged during an ethnographic study that started in October 2012-June 2013 with some 11th and 10th grade students, during their psychology and art classes respectively. Research participants were between the ages of 15-17 years old.

As research activities were highly embedded within the school context and as the school culture can tell something about participants and about modes of interaction, it becomes necessary to tell something about the context that framed our research. We see our research as culturally oriented; we were part of the field, not collecting data, but participating in the process of their creation (Loots, Coppens, and Semijn, 2013).

The school's vision, mission, and history

Quaker education strives for excellence in education and willingness to experiment with new methodologies and curricula. The school works on the development of the person as a whole, physical, mental, spiritual and social, while encouraging every student to reach her/his potentials. It recognizes that every person is different in an environment where diversity is well celebrated. The school also strives to and helps each person recognize their responsibility to society and live in a sense of community; it also nurtures traits such as compassion, cooperation, honesty, simplicity, and integrity. The school believes in and encourages freedom of thought and expression. It advocates non-violence in resolving conflicts, and promotes and believes in equality regardless of gender, social status, culture etc. The vision of the school is reflected through daily interactions between students, teachers, parents, workers and administrators (The Friends School, 2006).

The Friends School has a long history in Palestine. It has served the community not only as a school but also as a center for refugees, a hospital, and a center for community lectures, concerts and other cultural activities. Its long-standing history makes it well rooted in the Palestinian struggle, as it has experienced the Turkish, British, Jordanian, and Israeli occupation, and the World Wars. The school has also experienced a sequence of nightly shelling by Israeli tanks and attacks by helicopter gunners during the second Intifada. Despite all, the school is a model of Palestinian resilience; it is growing each year, and continues to provide new opportunities for its students.

School culture: enabling the research process

The school environment, structure and culture were ideal to accommodate the research project as well as to accommodate me, a researcher who was staying on campus almost every day for a period of eight months. My relationship with the Friends School in Ramallah started since 1993 as a student, and later in 2004 as a teacher at the learning support unit. In 2012 I came back as a researcher without a predetermined research process in mind. But I knew well that the environment of the Friends school is ideal for an emergent research methodology, and for a methodology that is highly based on relationship and interaction.

The people and the overall atmosphere made my fieldwork possible and allowed me to interact and communicate in ways that I personally preferred and cherished, in other words they allowed me to be who I was. I never needed to pretend to be a different person, or to be submissive, or a pleaser just to fit in or get the information I needed. These kinds of insights are important to my work; reflecting on 'myself' in the context can tell something about that context. I was part of this research as much as my participants were. I was there to create spaces for them to talk and to embody themselves; at the same time I was there in their space to experience it myself, and to experience myself in such spaces. The fact that this space made me feel 'good' about myself, motivated me, aroused my curiosity, taught me new things and enabled me to be in mutual relationships with its people; showed how enriching and healthy the space was. Keeping in mind that the same space may bring different feelings for different people, it was not the space as much as the moments of interactions we created in the space. My fieldwork and presence were appreciated and welcomed; I was allowed to be wherever it was serving

my research. This reflects the school's vision to support research and researchers and to encourage knowledge creation.

It is worth noting that this school is different than any other private school in Palestine. The principles and the spirit of Quakerism can be felt in the atmosphere and in how teaching, learning, communicating, and even 'discipline' is taking place.

One important school feature that facilitated my interaction with students and their context was motion and mobility; the whole school moves every 55 minutes. This place is never static; students are not bound to one class all day, each class is held in a different location. Students are always on the move walking from area to another inside school. This feature has several implications; in terms of education it means that students go to the best-equipped space to learn something, on a psychosocial level these 10 minutes between each class can be considered a personal space. Students use this space in many different ways, in addition to arriving to the next class on time; they use it to run fast errands, as well as chat with their classmates, discuss things, and see their friends. Students are treated as responsible and trustworthy persons.

Those 10 minutes worked miracles for me; made my presence more dynamic, allowed me to get to know as many students as possible, to have short conversations and ask questions on the way, and allowed participants to show me around. Students in the same class may have different schedules and this is because the school is offering an IB Program*, which allows students to choose different routes and subjects. The different schedules for the same class is so sophisticated to the extent that it offers students several free classes each week. This is another space for choice and personal scheduling. It also reflects the school's vision for self and interactive learning.

Spaces of possibilities for collaboration

This section illustrates how collaboration started with research participants and how a visual method emerged from within the context to open further spaces of collaboration and engagement with participants. It is important to note that at the beginning of the fieldwork we did not have a fixed vision of a visual method. Our intention was to learn about the selfhood of young people

through a visual medium, and specifically to collaborate with 10th graders. Initially we were inspired by the work of Squire et al. specifically on how participants in their study created life size body images they called 'visual autobiographies' (Squire, Esin, & Burman, 2013). In our research however, a visual method evolved in collaboration with participants, its specific features emerged with time. Creating 'life size body images' or autobiographies was explored with one group of participants attending 11th grade during their psychology classes. While negotiating the process participants decided not to create 'life size body images'. They preferred to keep their options open and create visuals in shapes and sizes of their choice. Almost all participants in this group created their visuals, their self-presentations, using collage. After the process of creation all participants talked about their visual in one-on-one encounter. This was followed by a group discussion, a special moment of 'audiencing'. With 10th graders the research process was more grounded within art classes where I collaborated closely with the art teacher. Participants created what we called 'expressive' self-portraits. During this journey they were invited to learn about people who used art as means to construct moments of their lives and selves. The visuals of 11th graders were exhibited and discussed as examples. Students were also prompted to think and to reflect on their lives and selfhoods. Exposure, reflection and conversation accompanied this journey of creation.

An invitation to collaboration

Uncertainty is not easy to bear at times; especially in a world that demands structure, control, and speed. However, coming into the field with open-structured ideas is the first step into collaboration to allow ideas and plans to emerge and develop to be within the context and together with the people in the context. The first two months at school were dedicated to communication, interaction, and building relationships with participants and with their space. Communicating ideas and fragments of ideas was an invitation to participants to step in. As visual methods were on the horizon of my thoughts I decided to participate in art classes. It was important to see how art works at school and what values and perceptions are attached to it. It was also important to explore whether art can open opportunities for a visual method to emerge. The interactive nature of art classes facilitated sharing ideas and getting familiar with the participants. My intensive presence at school allowed me to interact with people in the context in ways that produced more opportunities to share thoughts and ideas for the creation of a shared understanding. This is how

collaboration with 11th graders came into existence, an opportunity that allowed us to explore a visual method together.

Visual methods: offering opportunities to explore together

I was given the opportunity to talk and present something related to my research and qualitative methodologies in general to 11th grade psychology students as part of their study unit on research methods in psychology. This opportunity, besides giving me the feeling of being welcomed, brought about the feeling of being able to contribute, at the same time it was an opportunity to communicate and discuss initial research ideas.

The idea of using visual methods in research was completely new to students. They showed interest in that particular part of the research project. Together with their teacher we decided to explore it and learn about it together. In other words they wanted to become research participants in order to experience a visual method.

Two weeks prior to creation, practicalities and ways of collaboration were discussed and negotiated after which a written document about the collaboration was uploaded to their class blog. It was titled "Making Art and Making Selves" inspired by Riessman (2008). During this particular visual encounter I was keen on knowing how participants experienced the process and on listening to their comments and suggestions.

Nine students out of 11 decided to take part in this project. Two psychology classes during the first week of December 2012 were dedicated to the creation of the visuals. Each student basically created a visual in the form of a collage, to embody something related to their identity, self, stories, issues of concern, things they care about, who they are etc. They were encouraged to think about their audience and how they like to be seen and to whom. Materials such as magazines, paint, coloured paper and hard pieces of cardboard were provided. Students brought in some personal items to use in their embodiments. Giving broad instructions was intentional so as to give space to participants to form diverse and unlimited meanings and interpretations of the task.

It was interesting to notice how some students came in with clearer ideas on what and how they want to embody things while the majority had their ideas developed during the creation period itself. The time gap that was about two

days between the first session of creation and the second was essential for participants to think and rethink about their selves and their visuals.

The power of the visual: offering different modes of communication, expression and collaboration

We can ask people to talk about themselves and their identities. The scenario in this case may take the form of an interview or a dialogue and most probably it will be a one-encounter thing. When using only verbal methods, questions may appear to be imposed, participants may not be in the mood to discuss certain issues, or may need time to do so, some questions may sound intrusive, irrelevant, or may not be understood clearly. The whole thing may appear to be the researcher's project. On the contrary our visual method evolved with time during an ethnographic fieldwork, which enabled interaction and relationship building.

Working through a visual method allowed for a different relationship and different modes of expression and communication with participants. It created a shared project where participants were active, involved, made choices and it enabled a sense of ownership. Participants constructed what they wanted to show and tell, they embodied their choices in their visual and in their way of talking about it. It became a project we created together.

It is argued that visual methods empower research participants. It provides them with power and choice over what they choose to embody and capture, and how they prefer to bring in their experiences and talk about them. Visual methods enable participants to take part in the research process along with the researcher. For example being in negotiations with the researcher on the creation and the meaning making (Rose, 2014). We have seen how the creation of 'expressive' self-portraits opened spaces for participants to lead the dialogue, talk about their visuals as experts, chose the way to introduce themselves and their work, and the parts they want to talk about. It gave participants time to think before they responded (it was several days in our case) as well as it also gave them time to be involved in their selves and in their creations, something that Bowes-Catton, Barker, and Richards (2011) also mentioned in their study.

Visual methods can reveal implicit thoughts, feelings, and even issues and ways of talking that an ordinary interview cannot naturally achieve. Participants can

be more involved and more emotional, adding richness and more dimensions to research data (Rose, 2014). For example the small sized images of Christmas brought in how its meaning has changed to Maria, this is how the dialogue emerged,

*I have here images of Christmas
Although I don't like Christmas very much
But
But
But mmmmmmm
I am starting to like it more
Because it is the time when you are with your family
There is love
And all these things
...
Can I ask more?
Yeah of course
What happened? What is the story of Christmas?
Okay
Mmmm
Ehhhhhh
The thing is that when I was a little girl I used to like Christmas
Then I stopped liking it
First of all
...
When it was Christmas like before six years
Like
Ammmmmm my grandmother died*

These gestures and the way of telling brought the conversation to a more emotional level, which was mutual.

Visual methods fit well with the research on self and identity, a diverse and a flexible medium to embody almost anything. Self-portraits in general are the least structured and the most open compared to other visual methods such as relational maps and timelines according to the studies of Bagnoli (2009) and therefore more participatory.



Figure 1. Maria's visual

Visual methods: opening moment(s) of audiencing

The audience and audiencing are natural accompaniments to a visual method. Another chance for creating collaborative spaces in our research was achieved through those moment(s) of audiencing, where participants were not only involved in their own creations but also in those of others.

Participants knew that other people would be looking at their visuals, at what and how they chose to display things. Images hold “a social function and an aesthetic one. It says something about who we are and how we want to be seen” (Rose, 2007, p.26). An audience in mind to a certain extent will shape how participants will embody their ideas.

Once an image is being produced, especially within the context of school and school activities, an audience always exists. During this specific research activity ‘audiencing’ was not a one-moment thing and was not a well-organized formal event. As a researcher I was an ‘audience’ all the way through, starting from

the first scratches of performance. In addition to that, research participants were constant ‘audiences’ to one another during the process of creation. It was important to see what different arrangements meant for participants, and how they experienced what we have created together. Because they were strongly involved in their creations, finding a focused moment to discuss the process was essential. Therefore, a specific and conscious moment of ‘audiencing’ was achieved and videotaped. At the time of the group dialogue the story of each visual was already revealed or created through individual dialogues (discussed in the last section of this paper).

Visuals were exhibited in a classroom setting and during a psychology class. All students were welcomed to participate even the ones who did not create. The idea behind what developed into a group dialogue was to achieve two purposes. The first was to give participants the chance to experience the ‘audience’ and be ‘audience’ in a more direct manner, whereas the second was to share feedback on the whole process.

Compared to the dialogues I had with each creator, participants were self-conscious and protective of what they tell about their visuals in the presence of others, choosing carefully what to reveal and how to reveal. One participant said, “It is just that we don’t all trust each other.” The fact that participants showed hesitation in discussing their work in the presence of others tells something about how personal and serious their self-embodiments were. It also showed that they really trusted the researcher.

It was interesting to see how people react to others' work; “I know this talks about Tania...the colour purple...the words weird and sorrow...she always tells me don’t hide yourself and always speak your mind...” Nadia* commented on Tania’s visual. In another moment Mahmud asked Noura, “Does the black in your visual tell something?” It was also interesting to see how participants respond when asked about their own work; Noura replied, “I started it with black...it is how I see my life...as not a good one...but then I discovered...if I look at it from a different perspective my life is fantastic compared to other peoples’...so the black is how I see it internally, and the white is how it looks from the outside...”

It is true that how an image is composed in terms of size, colour, texture, etc. influence how it will be seen and that it can position the audience in a certain

way, but this is not the whole story. Who is looking when and where are basics in how an image is seen and interpreted.

Spaces and practices of display invite different ways of seeing. Images displayed in a classroom bring different reactions than if the same images would be displayed in a special exhibition space. Looking at images when the creators are around can be a quite different experience than when looking at them privately. Some participants were not hesitant to articulate how they did not see relevance in two visuals of which their creators were not around; “I don’t see Reem in this” one participant said.

Different audiences in different time frames read images differently. One participant saw the rainbow-colored butterfly coming out of a cage as a symbol for freedom and hope, and another saw it as the ‘coming out’ of being a gay or a lesbian. The second interpretation in particular may not be made explicitly seven or eight years back in time, and may not be thought of or verbalized at the present time in a different school setting in Palestine.

When we look at images it is not a one-way ‘vision’, we never just look at the composition but we always look at the relation between things and ourselves. We always bring in our own ways of seeing, which includes our experiences, backgrounds and identities (Rose, 2007). This is what Faris stated during ‘audiencing’; “When we look at a portrait we try to make meanings according to how we see things, but the artist may have a totally different idea”. Ways of looking at things reveal something about the audience and their particular culture. ‘Audiencing’ was important for this research since we are interested in the creators who are also audiences at the same time.

During moments of giving feedback, one participant mentioned that “Maybe for 10th graders ask them first to think and talk about themselves, write something, create the visual, and then compare both”, giving the impression that she preferred more structured and conscious thought before creating. This brought up a discussion on different approaches of work; the conventional way of having a clear idea before creating a visual, and that of constructing ideas while engaging in the process of creation, as Irina expressed, “I started randomly choosing images from the magazine, and with time I started covering things up and transforming it...because I started knowing what I wanted...I did not have an idea beforehand”.

Participants realized that even words could mean different things to different people, “Maybe we should not have used words in the portrait and just tried to find visual ways to express an idea...but also we have seen that even words can be interpreted differently by different people”, Nadine commented during audiencing. On a personal level, participants seemed to have gained something; “We discovered things about ourselves and we expressed things we wanted to express...” Nadia mentioned.

Expressive self-portraits: a shared project with 10th grade art classes

During the academic year of 2012/2013 I was a regular participant in 10th grade art classes. What I experienced in those classes motivated me and enabled me to imagine a visual method in collaboration. Art had its own space at school; two small workshops at the basement of a new building showed how art is valued and is being taken seriously. Students were learning to draw in different forms, shapes, and styles based on different periods in art history. They were learning history by being exposed to cultures, contexts, persons and individuals. Names such as Rembrandt, Van Gough, Picasso, Magritte, Frida Kahlo etc. were familiar to students along with art periods as impressionism, cubism, expressionism, surrealism, pop art etc. Students were learning about art in context, but were also learning basics of colour mixture, shading and proportions.

Each class was a mixture of brief instructions, videos, live illustration, and of course artwork. The learning atmosphere was highly interactive where some classes were held outside. Students were encouraged to experiment with new things, make mistakes, and be creative in their own ways. An art exhibition took place in November 2012, and this showed how students’ work is being appreciated.

The ‘expressive’ self-portraits, as Samah* came to call it, became a shared project with 10th grade art classes. Through ‘expressive’ self-portraits we were inviting students to go beyond what is usually seen in a self-portrait, it was an invitation to reflexivity, to expressing thoughts, ideas, issues, and to expressing emotions in relation to the self and the world through the visual. It was not about demonstrating art skills and techniques but about how one chooses to express ideas and emotions, and how one constructs themes through the visual.



Figure 2: Noura's Image



Figure 3: Butterflies coming out of the cage

Spaces of possibilities for the self and self-construction

In addition to the fact that a visual method allowed for moments of collaboration, it also allowed participants to embody and experience their selves, and choose what they want to show and how they want to show it. It may seem that research sometimes imposes things on participants just for the sake of achieving its goals. However, the self is always present and performed in context; not only through verbal modalities but also through fashion, body art, objects people collect and exhibit, photos they take, among many others. People are already using different forms of embodiment (Bagnoli, 2009). Acknowledging the fact that people do not always express what they want to express or what they experience visibly, one should keep in mind that the context, the setting the 'where' influence what is expressed and how it is being expressed. According to Foucault the self is not a substance but a form, it is experienced and thus performed differently in different contexts and positions, it is always varied and multiple (Reavey, 2011). At the same time we believe that the experience is created in the performance; the self is experienced when performed. The already present school context and the spaces we created together with participants allowed some possible forms of the self to emerge and to be embodied and experienced and yet others to be verbally expressed during the dialogues that followed.

The 'expressive' self-portraits project took a different course than the first visual encounter, in spite of that our work with 11th grade was an inspiration. The project with 10th grade was not an imposition of our research; it was already a planned activity of the art curriculum, however this research enriched

it and was enriched by it. Students were invited to go through a whole process of preparation and stimulation, to reflect, construct and embody their selves. We believe that the art education at school jointly with this research method enabled participants to go through a process of self-construction, discussed in the following sections.

Stimulating reflection: exposure

To be exposed to alternative experiences, cultures, persons, and groups can activate reflection (Mackenzie, 2002). "Reflection...can be triggered by new experiences..." (Blöser et al., 2010: 247) making it experience-responsive, and therefore exposure can be essential in the process towards the selves we are becoming.

Students were introduced to the person, culture and artwork of Frida Kahlo. They watched a documentary as well as the movie *Frida* (2002). Students were able to see a strong connection between Kahlo's life experiences, psychological journey and her self-portraits. Taking into consideration that they were not lectured but were exposed to various types of media that triggered discussions and critical reflections. For instance during one discussion Samah, the students, and myself were trying to construct meanings and understandings regarding Kahlo as an artist and as a woman who lived in the Mexican culture and during the Mexican revolution. Students started discussing different conceptions of femininity, comparing and contrasting with the Palestinian culture. At another point students were asked to look at and learn about one or more of her self-portraits and write a short critical reflective report. They were also introduced to 'symbolism' in visual arts in the work of Paul Gauguin specifically in the 'Two Faces of Paul Gauguin'. These can be considered experiences of 'exposure'.

A more intimate exposure followed; during one class visuals of 11th graders were displayed and discussed. This is another exposure incident similar to that of Kahlo's but this time these were very recent self-portraits coming from their own context, from their school and created by people they know. I presented some of the symbols based on the dialogue I had with its creator. I took permission from 11th grade participants before discussing their visuals with 10th grade, as well as I made sure to discuss the least personal symbols and names were anonymous. As audience, some students started looking at other parts of the visuals, things I left out, and they started to analyse things and create their own meanings. The fact that participants were able to guess the

creator behind some self-portraits tells something about the connection and the interaction between the image and its audience, moreover it shows that identity was present in these visuals. This was another space for participants to reflect as audience and also to start thinking as future creators.

The creation of an expressive self-portrait was the major task. Students were given a sheet of inspirational and stimulating questions to reflect on the self and its relation with the world. The questions were unstructured, unlimited, and definitely not leading questions. Participants were not obliged to answer all of them and they were not even required to write down and hand in their answers. The questions were intended to aid them gain access into themselves, activate reflection, and activate the journey of construction. Participants were encouraged to choose what they like and want to reveal, and the way they want to translate their thoughts into a visual. Furthermore they were encouraged to think about how they want their audience to react to their artwork. Some of the questions were as such, 'who am I?', 'where am I going?', 'what am I learning?', 'how do I perceive the world?', 'How do I relate to others?' 'what liberates me?', 'what confines me?' etc.

Diana Meyers in her article on intersectional identity and the authentic self (2000), mentioned similar kind of questions that are according to her key to redefining the self. Meyers' questions encourage thinking about the kind of person one thinks is, the kind of person one aspires to be, things that matter to the person, the groups one belongs to, how these groups hold the person back and how they are of significance among other questions.

Meyer's questions as our project's questions are relational, looking at the internal and the external worlds in a never-ending cycle of interaction. They provoke thinking about life dimensions that are sometimes taken for granted. Such questions also increase sensitivity to one's own experiences, allowing us to attend to signs of dissatisfaction and alienation. New meanings, attachments and possibilities emerge that can be the basis for new actions and directions. With time one's 'self-portrait' becomes richer and more authentic, but never static and never complete!

Questions as such also induce imagination. Imagination almost always occurs during the act of reflection; it prompts critical reflection by emotion, desire, and bodily feelings (Mackenzie, 2000). The above questions have no time

boundaries; one can relate to them in any time frame; past, present, and future. Imagination also has no limitations of any kind. Imagination abstracts us from our habitual modes of understanding ourselves and our relations with others and the environment. It opens spaces to try different possibilities and alternatives of emotions, beliefs, desires, and actions. As wild as imagination can be it always contains a sense of us. Questions like, 'where am I going?' and 'what best represents me: body, mind, spirit, or society?' are open spaces to construct the inner world at the moment and try to represent it visually. This is how Maral described parts of her visual, "this is the drawing of the inside...the big cliff here does not symbolize anything concrete...it sort of symbolizes uncertainty...this is me hanging off the cliff...this is a hand of the creature...it's not a real thing that you can put a name on, it is just happiness put into flesh..."

The idea of providing students with inspirational/stimulating questions came about only after we realized that students might need more structure, based on the experiences and feedback of 11th graders.

Time and context

Time was essential. What is meant with time here is the extended range starting from the first moment of exposure to the time of creation (creating the expressive-self-portrait) and even it extended to the time of talking about the creation; the 'visual dialogues'. Time was essential for participants to process things, think, reflect, and discuss with others. Time resembled the process of self-construction. The self/identity was not always predetermined or ready to be translated into the visual even during the time of creation (the precise moment/s dedicated to the physical creation of the visual). This is how Lubna described parts of the process of her creation; "My idea was to combine scraps of paper to make the shape of my body, but that idea evolved into using those scraps as organs to my body. As I cut out pictures from the magazine, I wasn't really thinking about that whole organ thing. I wanted the pieces to go together naturally."

The process of self-construction continued through the moment of the 'visual dialogue' itself; many participants talked about things they would add, remove, or modify in their visual if given another chance or more time. Therefore what was created and how it was talked about represent one moment or one dimension of the many possible dimensions of identity. It can be seen as a performance of the moment.



Figure 4: *Maral's Visual*

We believe that the specific context and the spaces we created were enabling to the process of self-construction, and this conveys a message that the self is not out there, it is not something we need to find and discover, but it is something we can explore and construct. It stresses the idea that identity develops in dialogue with culture, others, and life experiences. It evolves with encounters and dialogues we have with early 'attachments' in our lives (Raggatt, 2006).

However, when exposed to different and other experiences our reflexivity increases in a way that we start looking for and choosing other attachments, new dialogues emerge and new experiences as well, giving our identities different forms and shapes. Because there is no limit to the number and types of people we will encounter in our lives and thus the experiences we develop, our identities are always subject to change. Change does not mean becoming a totally different person, although this is a possibility, but change can include additions, modifications, enhancements and enrichments to what we already have, it can also mean getting rid of parts we no longer feel connected to. Rawan illustrated the idea of change by pasting 9 different faces of the same person in her portrait and she said, "I am now in a phase where I experiment

with things...maybe now I have an idea about myself, maybe I know who I am now, but I know I will not stay like that, I will change, I know well that after a while I will learn new things and then change.”

Identities are complex and are multi-layered, thus reflecting the richness and the complexity of one’s social experiences. The more experiences we encounter and the more diverse they are, the more open we are and allowed to be open to new ones, the more possible it becomes that we choose to add or modify things related to our identities. We are constantly constructing the persons we are becoming. This is how Muna replied when asked about how she would see her expressive self-portrait one year from now, “For sure things will change...there are things expressed here that I may not like anymore...because persons change, even in one year, and change a lot, but parts of it will still talk about me...”

Context and space allow different versions of the self to be embodied and expressed, spaces are associated with different meanings and versions of agency, “I really wanted to create my expressive self-portrait within the group and not at home...at home I could not create it in the way I wanted to...” Sabine said when she missed the opportunity to work on her visual with a group that met during Easter break for two days in a public venue organized by our research. “Space is therefore an integral influence on the selves that we can be” (Reavey, 2011, p.9) Here again home as a space with its audience enables specific versions or parts of the self to become visible and not others. Sabine implied that she felt more comfortable within the school and research context to embody aspects of herself she would not dare to when being at home. This makes identity not only a performance of the moment as in time but also of context as in space. Socio-spatial contexts can facilitate or restrict embodied expression (Howarth, 2011).

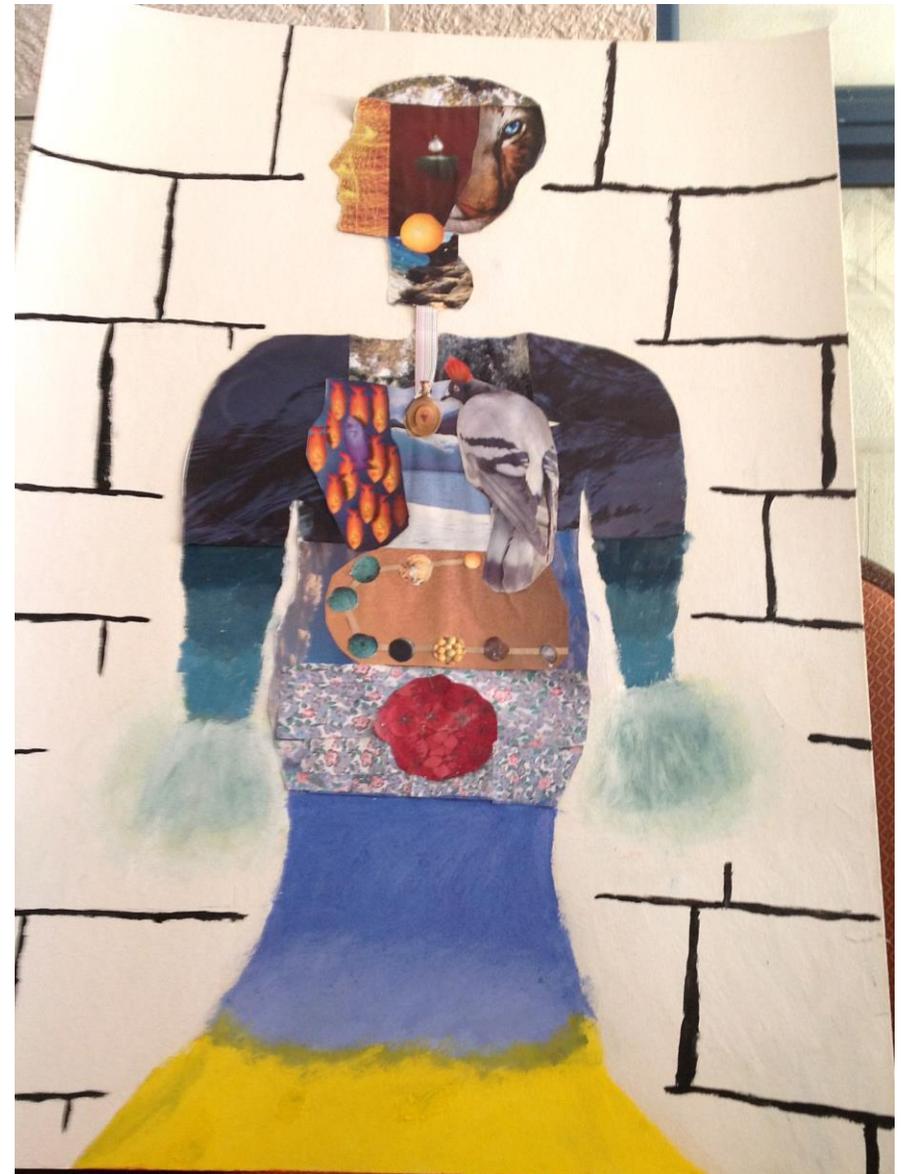


Figure 5: Lubna’s Visual. Inspired by Pink Floyd’s ‘another brick in the wall’



Figure 6: Rawan's Visual

Visual dialogues: performing the self

I came to call the part participants talk about the visuals they created 'visual dialogues'. 14 students from both 11th and 10th grade chose to talk about their visual and 4 chose to just write about it. Not the researcher, but the creator and the visual itself directed the dialogue. A dialogue emerged while bringing in the self and identity through the visual. Narratives and stories were produced and created. This was another space for participants to construct and perform their selves and identities. Participants not only talked about the content of their production, but also about the process, the decisions they took, as Noura expressed, "I started from the center and started with black, I wanted to paint the whole thing with black, but then I stopped when I realized that my life is worthy...so I decided to keep the edges white". Stories and other events emerged that were at times not visually embodied (Radley, 2011), Dana for instance started telling about her grandfather, his death, her feelings, and how he influenced her life through the infinity sign she had at the center of her portrait.



Figure 7: Dana's Visual

Stories and therefore identities are not accomplished and ready to tell but are always in the process of being made, they are created in conversation with others. "There is no such thing as inward generation, monologically understood" identity as Charles Taylor puts it (1994, p. 32). Human life is dialogical and through dialogue with others and with culture we learn different modes of expression that we use to define and redefine ourselves. The self is constructed and reconstructed through this process (Anderson, 2007b). Therefore the visual as a product is not seen as the final expression of the self, but as part of the process of self-construction. The self can be experienced in different dimensions and in several positions, because it "is embedded in the context...therefore there is the possibility of many potential selves" (Anderson, 2007, p.17a). The stories and the narratives that emerged are only one moment of the adolescents' lives, and this moment was constructed in relation to the visual and in relation to my presence. "A life story that is provided in an interview (or any other particular setting) is, however, but one instance of the life story...the particular life story is one (or more) instance of the polyphonic versions of possible constructions or representations of people's selves and

lives” (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998, p. 8). And clearly certain people, events, and objects interact with different moments of the narrative. Experience can be told and retold differently in different times and in different spaces and with different audiences (Squire, Andrews, and Tamboukou, 2013). Different voices or positions in a narrative can be diverse and conflicting voices may exist (Raggatt, 2006). During different moments of the dialogue Maral said, “society can’t tell me who I am...community should not put limits on you...” and at another moment she said, “these bars represent the limits I set for myself...it is fear of trying to be as free as possibly I can” there is the voice of despising the limits and the voice of fear of being free at the same time. Therefore, we are aware that we are studying and looking at identity in a specific moment, and as one possible representation of many.

The dialogical spaces we created were very similar to day-to-day natural conversations. There was no set of questions or agenda. I came to each encounter with interest to know the person and to create an understanding of their visual together with them. It is about trusting uncertainty and trusting that being together and with the visuals is enough to create enriched moments. I did not need to prepare questions, or to give instructions, or to explain myself, I just needed to be there, be interested, curious, listen and respond accordingly. Questions I asked during these dialogues aimed at getting more clarification and expand my understanding but were never meant to direct the conversation or to guide the participant. Therefore there were a lot of responsive improvisations based on what was said and based on inner thoughts created by what and how it was said, not to mention gestural and embodied responding. I was keen to tell Jana how I saw a connection between two symbols in her portrait; how the wings are carrying the crown up high; how her feelings of empowerment are stemming from the surrounding social support.

The voice recorder and my visual memory have vivid moments of changes in voice tone, the presence of certain vocal sounds, smiling, laughing, in body positions and other gestures. This is another level of experience with others, a more spontaneous one, what Hoffman called ‘embodied knowledge’ (2007, p. 69). Conversations are an embodied performance. The body is involved and engaged in listening, responding, understanding, and meaning making. In conversations with others it is a collective performance. The voice, the gaze, the pointing finger all become ‘semiotic signs’ (Hydén, 2013, p. 130) This was

clear in the vocal sounds and the change in tone and pace when Maria was telling about the death of her grandmother and the instance when the soldiers invaded their house at night. Looking back at the transcript one can see how the incident of the death came up, with a lot of hesitations and vocal sounds Maria was building up towards this emotional memory, at the same time she embedded it in the present moment (excerpt and image in pages 7 and 8).

Another important aspect, when in dialogue with others especially in research settings, is to try to enter each dialogue with fresh eyes and mind. Visual dialogues took place after me being at school for about three to four months and some dialogues only took place at the 7th and the 8th month, in other words I had an idea and some knowledge about participants, however, I tried. On the other hand the kind of relationship that we create is important in bringing about mutuality. Relationship building started long before participants created and talked about their visual, it started from the moment I entered the school context and began to participate and interact with students. The visual dialogue was not our first moment of interaction; it was one of many moments. Relationship and conversation are interconnected according to Anderson (2007c). The way we engage in conversation with others form the kind of relationship with them and the other way around. To invite people and participants to join a collaborative relationship we need to communicate this to them, through the way we meet and greet them, through the way we show we are interested to learn about and from them and to understand them from their perspective. Mutuality also meant that I allow myself to be asked. When I was open to talk about myself; my personal and professional experiences in response to what participants were curious to know.

Every conversation started in a different way depending on the person, on the visual, on me and the person together; our history of earlier conversations and encounters and on the school context at that moment. At moments we found ourselves looking at the visual again and again, trying to create new meanings together. Several moments of co-construction took place. Maral was trying to find a concept that described her experience when she was saying, “this community should not put limits on you...it should not...it should not...” and then I continued, “normalize you” immediately she said, “it should not normalize you, exactly, this is a great word”.



Figure 8: *Jana's Visual*

The dialogical space allowed participants to talk about their visual as experts; leading the dialogue, choosing the way to introduce their work and the parts they want to talk about, and the other way around; the presence of the visual

enhanced our dialogical space. These spaces have empowered participants' agency all the way through the processes of reflection, and through the visual and the verbal embodiments. The presence of the visual particularly may have enhanced our modes of communication and of mutuality by which the dialogue was created.

Conclusion

We have presented an example of a visual method, how it evolved in a way that opened up spaces for collaboration in research, for participants to be more involved. This paper also presented how a visual method opened up spaces for the self to be constructed and performed. Choosing a visual method to do research took us into a journey of exploration, and of exposure to other people's artwork and lives, and into a journey of reflections, discussions, and conversations; and of course into a journey of creation and construction. The visual became a mean to get participants involved in the research process as well as means for self-construction and performance.

A focused attention was given to the already existing school context and to the contexts we have created together, believing that time, space, others, and the processes of interaction are corner stones in the creation and performance of selves and narratives. Therefore, identities and narratives "are socio-cultural embedded performances, in which selfhood is continuously and multifariously constructed and reconstructed...are open, never-ending co-constructions" (Loots, Coppens, and Semijn, 2013, p. 110). These notions are inspiring our analysis of the created visuals, something that will be dealt with in another article.

At the end we acknowledge that there is no one-way of doing things, and that we only explored one mode of what visual methods offer, but we are sure that visual methods bring in inspiring moments of interaction and togetherness and bring in deep insights into issues being explored, which is the 'selfhood' in our case.

This piece of writing is also a performance, in which my experience was created. We presented a journey of a visual method that evolved in a very collaborative way but not a collaborative text, wondering how would different participants react to this text and how would they make it different.

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* First person pronouns refer to individual fieldwork and research of the 1st author.

* 'We' refers to joint theoretical work.

* International Baccalaureate; the school received accreditation by the International Baccalaureate Organization in 1999, offering students for the first time in Palestine an IB Diploma.

* Names of participants are made anonymous.

* Samah Zakak is an art teacher at the Friends school.