



## Using contemporary art, media literacy and action research in a co-operational classroom to teach about globalization

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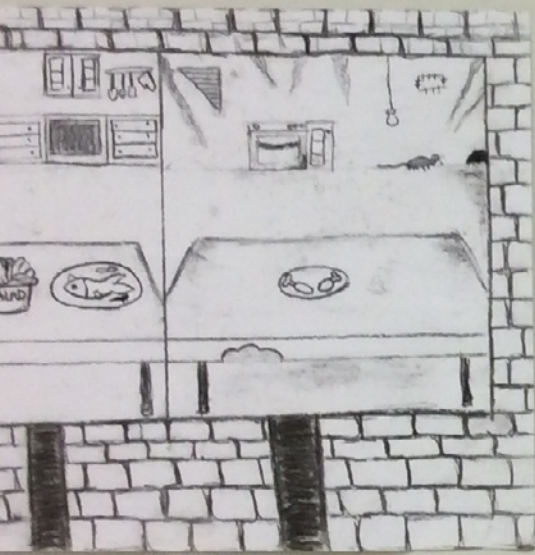
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### Keywords

Media Literacy, arts pedagogy, high-school, globalization

### Abstract

In this visual report, I expose how art can be used as a tool to empower students as social researchers and artists, while acquiring media literacy skills. As an art educator, I planned this lesson based on the pedagogical approach from Paulo Freire and John Dewey. The aim of this lesson was to help students read a world that bombards all of us with advertising among other content, changing the way we perceive reality. The lesson took place in Mas Camarena International School in Valencia, Spain where my former high-school students addressed the questions of: What's Globalization? and How did image and sound changed our perception of reality? During this 3 months project, students from grade 12 learned the technical skills of animation, photography, drawing and storytelling; while developing a unique individual short film inspired by different relevant social issues and contemporary artist William Kentridge. The project had been presented to the school community using the art classroom as an open studio, in which, the smart board functioned as a movie screen. As a result, this lesson strengthened the relationship community-teacher-student while developing a "co-operative" (Dewey, p. 72) process, where teachers also learned from their students while appreciating their films and findings from their art research based project.



## Using contemporary art, media literacy and action research in a co-operational classroom to teach about globalization

In the book "Pedagogy of the oppressed" (2005) author Paulo Freire suggests there's a powerful connection between the style of pedagogy used in school and the way the larger society operates (Freire, p. 6). As teachers, I am convinced it is our responsibility to understand the globalized society context because schools are replicas of the society in which we live. Not only that, but also, schools are institutions where people influence one another's lives. Having said that, this is the reason why What's Globalization? has been used as the overarching question. During this project, students' ages range between 16-17 years, worked collaboratively to discuss social issues in connection to globalization and share their visions about the world. In the first place, they developed an individual question addressing different themes such as consumerism, environment, social networks and modern slavery. Later, I taught them to make accordion books in which they gathered the information that informed their projects. These accordion books functioned as sketchbooks where students made collages, wrote notes about class discussions as well as, the action research results. Students carried out interviews for the project, starting from their own personal experiences, as well as, their community members. They interviewed friends, family, students and teachers. As a result, students gathered this information and developed an idea for a short film. To do that, they elaborated a script, a storyboard, and the accordion book was later exhibited as a research artist-book. In their animation project, students used chalk drawing techniques, photography and edition applications. This project has been presented to the school community using the art classroom as an open studio, in which, the smart board functioned as a movie screen. The animations short films have also specific artists music students chose which includes songs such as: "Society" (Eddie Vedder, 2007), "Of Monsters And Men" (Dirty Paws, 2011) among

others. It is important to mention that, before showing the animations, each student presented their findings to the audience.



Image 1. "After All This Time" Short film by student I.

Link to video: [https://youtu.be/B\\_vSf3\\_9C24?list=PLAV0S46uBj6po9hfx3bzDou\\_9DNWd800T](https://youtu.be/B_vSf3_9C24?list=PLAV0S46uBj6po9hfx3bzDou_9DNWd800T)

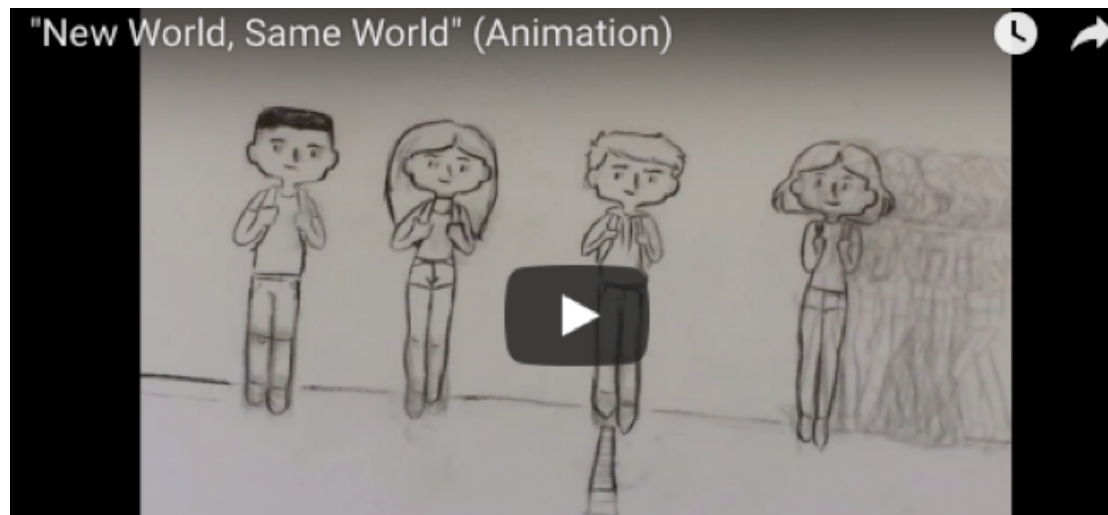


Image 2. "New World, Same World" Short film by student II.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/AJIXSs-4TsE>



Image 3. "Gratis" Short film by student III.  
Link to video: <https://youtu.be/fBLD9BieRcg>

This project took place in Mas Camarena International School in Valencia, Spain during the year 2016. The school offers the national curriculum and the International Baccalaureate Curriculum (IB). While working there, I taught both curriculums, but decided to integrate this project into the national curriculum. Among the reasons that moved me to do that I would like to highlight two. First, the national curriculum is more content based, since it is only focused to prepare students to access the spanish national university system. Second, after studying my MA in Art Education at New York University, I understood the importance of connecting contemporary art and social justice to the school curriculum. In addition to that, I made my decision based on the book "How People Learn" (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, p.136) in which it is explained that: "An isolated environment would not necessarily help students acquire the knowledge. Each of them are culturally responsive, appropriate and relevant for the student." In my opinion as an art educator, relating the world and the school environment are a key factors that guide

our understanding of the human behaviour in its contemporary context. More, this helps educators to arrange the design of the co-operative ground that hosts new models of education with enough room for creativity. In contradiction, the national spanish artistic baccalaureate curriculum demands students to learn lot of technical content about visual communication. Often times, guided by content centered books, it only makes students study by memory lot of technical vocabulary, as it is part of the entrance examinations to access universities. In this system, few space is left for creativity and critical thinking skills. For this reason, I designed this lesson plan in which students incorporated the national curriculum required objectives, while making a creative project. My goal was to create a space in which they were able to express themselves. Not only they learned about photography, animation, sound theory and writing skills, but also, they applied the techniques of action research methods and animation inspired by artist William Kentridge.



Image 4. Action research session



Image 5. Student accordion book

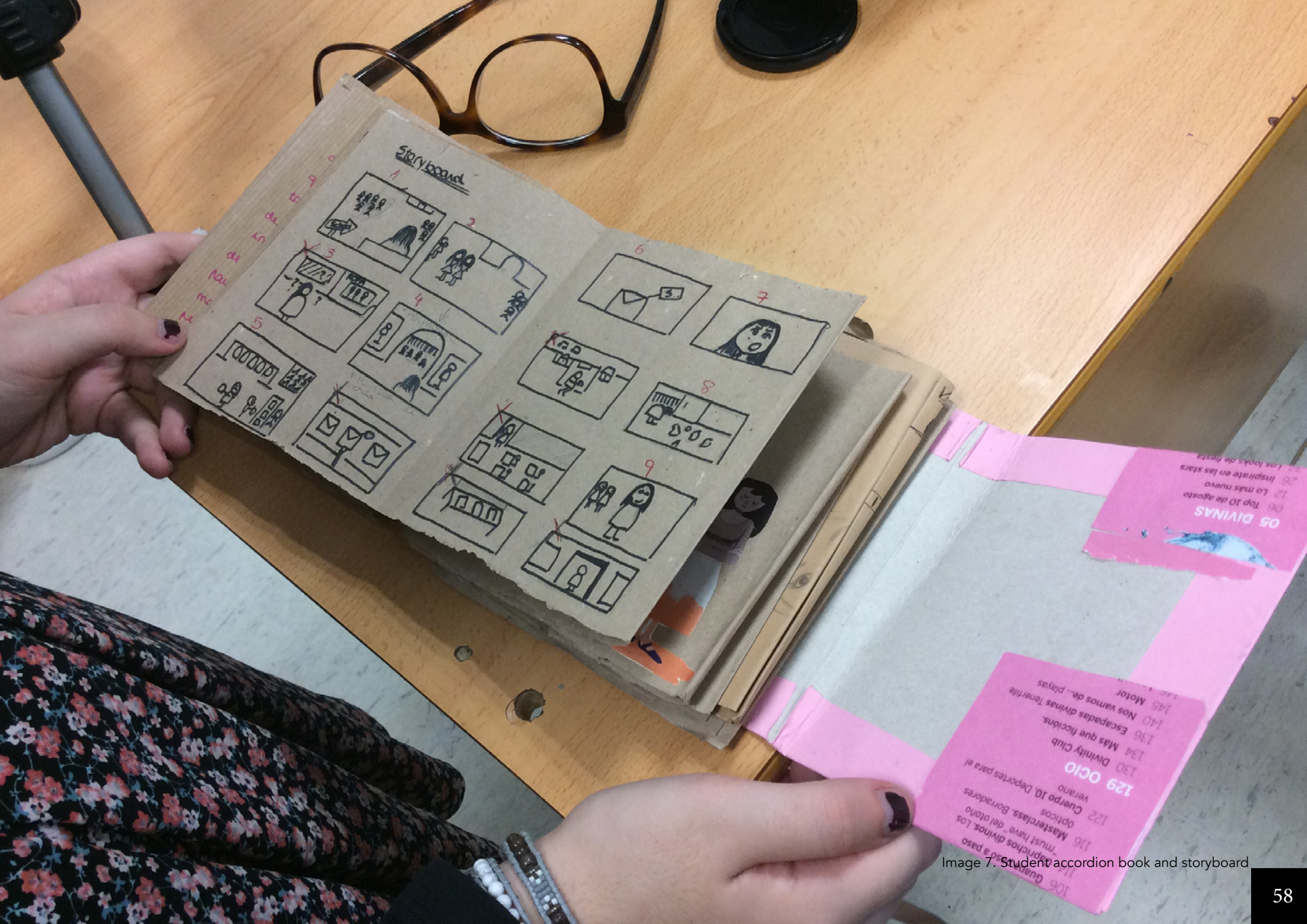
### Stages of the lesson plan, its development applying contemporary art, media literacy and action research

The lesson plan was divided into 3 different stages. At the beginning, students were asked to make an accordion book and were introduced into the action research based method. They started to analyze the expressive function of sound from the scene of "Powaqqatsi" (Godfrey Reggio, 1988) and the final speech of "The big dictator" from Charles Chaplin (1940). Guided by the overarching question What is Globalization?, students described images and sounds while discussing personal impressions about these films. Because they have art 3 times per week, one class was focus on theory, another in action research and the third one in studio time. This means that, while learning about technical skills, students also had time to develop their research and include the secondary question of How did popular culture, digital communication and virtual communities change our way of perceiving reality? in their projects. During this segment of the project, the students' task

was to use the data they retrieved from their research to create a storyboard and a technical script. Among the theoretical content —required by the spanish national curriculum— students learned about the cinematographic, videographic and television industry according to the historical evolution of audiovisual production activities, creating motion pictures and digital effects. There has been also an edition workshop in which they learned basic editing.



Image 6. Student accordion book and storyboard



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# Storyboard

Storyboard panels 1-10 with hand-drawn illustrations.

Image 7. Student accordion book and storyboard

## Project outcome and cultural competence: What globalization means for each student

The lesson plan What is Globalization? had a successful outcome because it empowered students as researchers and artists while opening a dialogue about relevant social issues they will face after they finish high-school. It brought up students self-addressed questions, provided a space for collaborative environment, teacher and peer feedback. For example, students questions connected their personal history to their social context and while doing action research, they let learning happen by discovering different points of views and broadening their horizons. They came up not just with an artistic project but made relevant conclusions which informed other members of the school community.

Among these reasons, as cited in the book "How People Learn" (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000, pp. 140-144), having an appropriate formative assessment, produces a feedback from which students, as well as teachers, can look back and re-think their practice. In this case, the assessment will help them to grow connections about the globalized world in which we all live because they have revised their thinking, and in the case of the other subject teachers present during the students' presentations, to rethink their practice in order to provide more space in which the students can feel empowered as researchers.



Image 8. Student drawing for stop motion short film



Image 9. Students drawings for stop motion short film

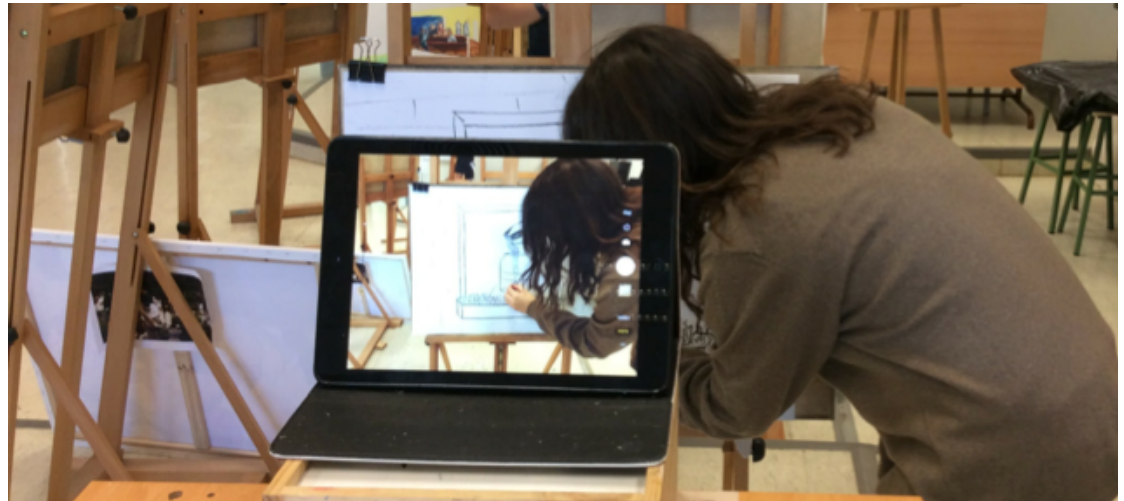


Image 10. Student during a drawing and photo shooting session

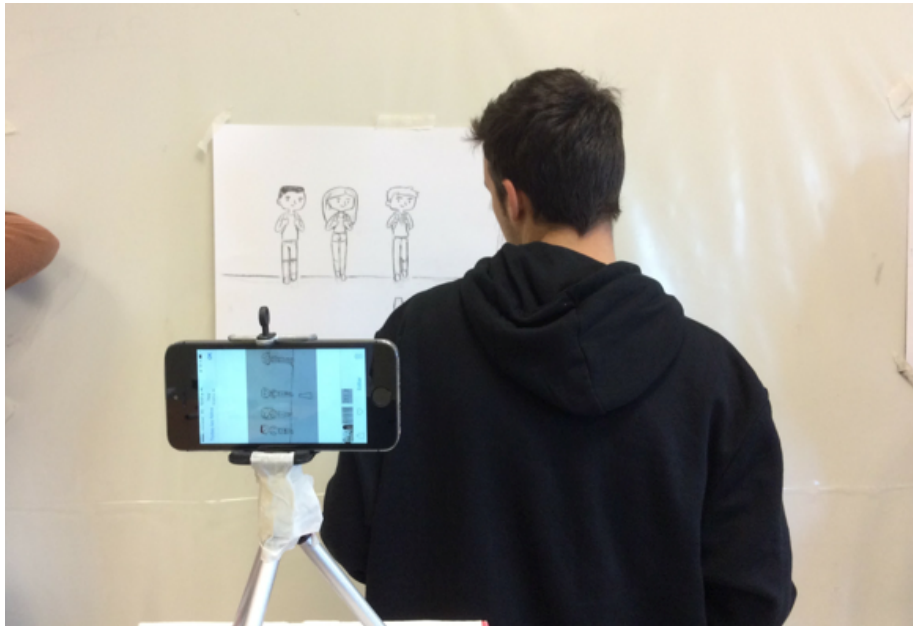


Image 11. Student during a drawing and photo shooting session

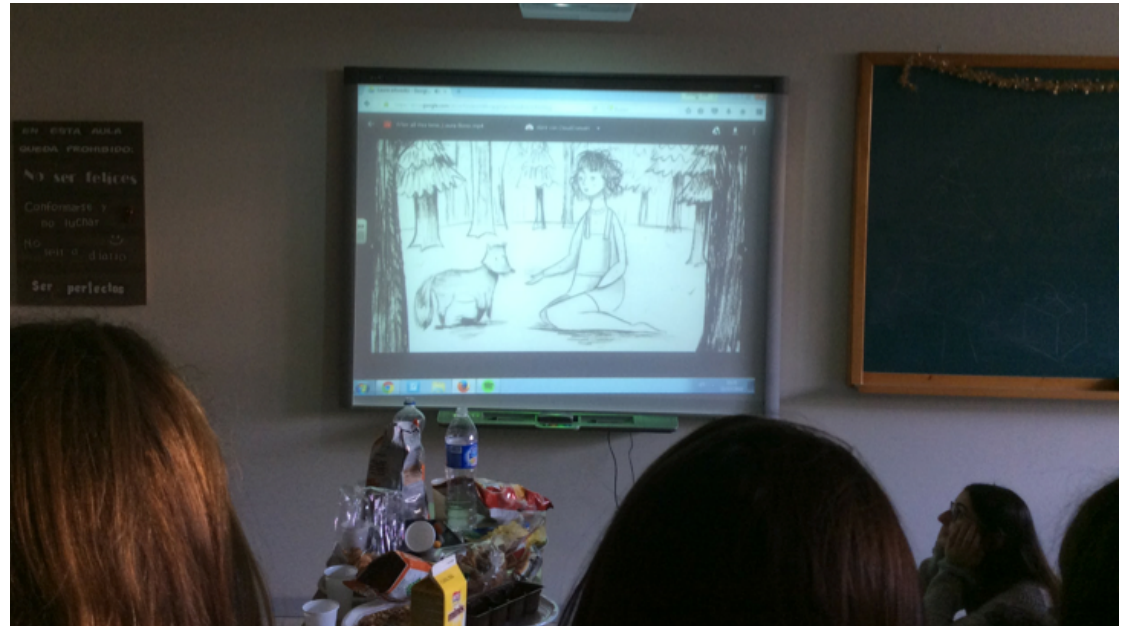


Image 13. Presentation of short films to the school community



Image 12. Student during a drawing and photo shooting session

## Conclusion

From a personal perspective as an art teacher, I found that the contemporary society is a consequence of an old conservative educational system. Robinson says that: "Education should be like agriculture, we need to plant according to the climate" (Ken Robinson, 2014, 19:36). And, we, the teachers, I understand, are the farmers. So, this little seeds that our students are, need the water for the adequate educational nourishment that will enlighten their way up through the progressive spiral of knowledge. In Dewey's words "experience is a moving force" and it is the center from where the path that challenges our mind, emerges by the "exercise of intelligence" (Dewey, p. 79). To sum it up all, I believe an innovative school curriculum has the potential to positively impact students lives since it helps them to understand how the world works. Therefore, shaping an art curriculum based on contemporary art and social justice, as a mean to teach creativity and critical thinking skills, are key to art education today.

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