CultureCase

Using contemporary art to explore children’s identity

This research was conducted by **Fiona Collins and Susan Ogier** at the **University of Roehampton, UK**

Summary

This paper describes what happened when primary school pupils in London participated in a project called Images and Identity, using digital art to interrogate the issue of identity in the context of the European Union. Through an approach that used contemporary art and the spirit of dialogue the children were able to arrive at an understanding of the complex and multi-layered nature of identity. One teacher reflected that 'by the end of the project, the teachers acknowledged that the children were more analytical of their personal identity within a wider community'.

The children were aged nine and ten, from schools in culturally diverse neighbourhoods in central London

The programme took the form of five consecutive weekly lessons. The aim of the project was to produce online materials that could be used by teachers looking to explore the topic of identity and the European Union. The researchers took notes and photographs though the planning and execution phases of the classes. They also recorded some of the classes and interviewed groups of children at various junctures in the programme.

Using dialogues of contemporary art to tackle the subject of identity

The work of Gillian Wearing and Cindy Sherman was used to provoke discussions about identity. This was then followed by ‘dressing up’ activities in

which the children chose to wear various clothes and props that conveyed certain meanings for them. They took photographs of each other and displayed them to the class to provoke further discussion about identity. The project culminated in an art project in which children posed for photographs with objects that reflected 'their individual and group EU identities' and they also created an installation using these objects.

Keywords

european union **UK** **observation** **visual art** **identity** **contemporary art** **children**

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