

2nd International Conference on Higher Education Advances, HEAd'16, 21-23 June 2016,  
València, Spain

## When Economics Meets Arts... in the Classroom

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### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the opportunities for the use of art as an educational resource to stimulate creativity in the teaching of Economics. The need to promote skill development to encourage reflection, critical analysis, imagination, interpretation of reality, the anticipation of change, the seeking of alternatives, etc. is essential in this area of knowledge. The analysis of the use of art as an educational tool through a classroom experience shows the opportunities offered by this approach, although the extent of its use in university education in non-artistic materials is still very low.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of HEAd'16

*Keywords:* Educational innovation; Higher education; Teaching economics; Creativity; Arts

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### 1. Introduction: Art as an Educational Tool

The efforts made in order to improve the quality in higher education have been focused, during the last years, in the introduction of methodologies, which favor a more active learning and more student participation and in the intensification of the use of new technologies. Within the realm of the teaching of Economics, one can also observe some concern for improving teaching methods through different strategies, such as more inclusive classrooms, constructivist approaches and collaborative learning, more interdisciplinary classes, meaningful learning, more participatory practices and fostering of critical thinking (Peterson and McGoldrick, 2009). Recently, an emphasis

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has been made, both from the administrations as well as from the academic fields, on the benefit of developing creativity as a central element, on which higher education must rely.

Fryer (2009) says that in order to promote creativity, one must know what can allow people to be creative and points out the following as key factors:

- Motivation, in the sense of curiosity and persistence or will to work intensely in order to solve something that is vague and to seek a creative solution.
- A repertoire of creative strategies for problem solving and the ability to apply them adequately.
- The ability to imagine, especially the ability to imagine alternative scenarios and to select those most promising.
- The access and familiarity with the central body of knowledge.
- Information searching skills.
- Other transferable abilities, such as communicative abilities and handling of ICTs.
- Specific abilities of the particular subject.

To this purpose, art, as the space for the development of creativity par excellence, constitutes a useful tool in the teaching task in non-artistic subjects, such as economics.

Eisner (1995) specifies different arguments that justify the presence of art in education. First, there are reasons of a contextual type (via manipulation of art), among which its role in the development of creative thinking and its role as mediator in the formation of concepts, especially in the social sciences stand out.

But additionally, there are other reasons, of an essentialist kind, which are more relevant for Eisner, who highlights the kind of contribution to the experience and the knowledge that only art can produce. This perspective conceives of art as a particular and valuable experience in the sense of Dewey (1949). From this approach, art is able to create forms that allow the expression of values as visual metaphors, that enable our sensitivity, and are able to draw attention to aspects of everyday life that are usually overlooked. Winner et al (2013) note “it (arts education) has also been argued to develop skills that enhance performance in non-arts academic subjects such as mathematics, science, reading and writing, and to strengthen students’ academic motivation, self-confidence, and ability to communicate and cooperate effectively.”

Examples of using art as an educational tool in primary and secondary education abound. In higher education, however, they are scarce and they constitute a very recent phenomenon. In order to illustrate this, one can cite some experiences: for example, Watta and Christophera (2012) analyse paintings, drawings, and engravings that are useful to teach economics; Van Horn and Van Horn (2013) and Tinari and Khandke (2000) use music; Mateer et al (2011), Mateer and Li (2008) and Sexton (2006), explain teaching methods using movie or television clips; Davis (2015) uses poetry. Besides economics, Cepeda (2007), Tereso (2012) and the book edited by McIntosh and Warren (2013) describe several experiences of using art as an educational tool for teaching different disciplines too.

## **2. An Experience in the Classroom. The objective**

The analysis of the experience carried out in the classroom is articulated on the basis of the following research questions:

- The use of art as an educational resource, does it promote critical analysis point?
- The use of art as an educational resource, does it promote the identification of the relationships between the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions, present in the problem of economic development?
- The use of art as an educational resource for an Economy class, does it encourage the development of factors as catalysts for creativity, as defined by Fryer (2009), namely: motivation, the ability to implement alternative strategies for problem solving, the imagination of alternative scenarios, the mastery of basic skills, the search for information, and communication skills?

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