

Altermodern Art Education

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MARIKE HOEKSTRA (marike.hoekstra@ahk.nl)

Introduction

I would like to thank the organizing board for the opportunity to share the results of our two year-research project on Altermodern Art Education with you, here in Liverpool. The research-project has recently been finished and will be published by the end of November.

My name is Marike Hoekstra. I am an Artist Teacher and researcher on the subject of the role of artists in education. I conducted this research in cooperation with Talita Groenendijk, who is an art educator and anthropologist and who has recently finished her doctoral levels with a research on observational learning and creativity.

My presentation starts with a short introduction to the theoretical outlines of Altermodern Art Education. I will proceed with the research methods, the research question and the project we initiated. I will end with results, some suggestions for teachers and concluding remarks.

Unfortunately English is a foreign language for me and I will therefore read my presentation from paper. I hope you will forgive me.

Altermodern art

Altermodern was introduced by the French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his essay *The Radicant* and was the title of the Tate Triennial in 2009, presented by Bourriaud. To illustrate the difference between modernism, postmodernism and the altermodern, Bourriaud elaborated on the root-comparison made by Gilles Deleuze. When a radical plant, like a tree, symbolises modernism, with its universalist ideals and western hegemony, and postmodernism is best symbolised by a rhizome, like root-grass, with its multiplicity and relativism, the altermodern must be compared with a radican, like ivy or strawberry-plants. The radican is multiple and constantly moving, rooted in different origins and forming new roots as it moves. Radican art is intercultural and hybrid. Unlike postmodernism it is constructive and despite the lack of formal universal criteria, it can be assessed by translating contexts.

In short: altermodern art is art in the age of globalisation and has a dynamic understanding of culture. In altermodern art it is the journey that matters, not the origin or the destination.

Altermodern art includes actual themes pointed out by Bourriaud, such as: exiles, travel, borders, energy, archives, heterochronia and viatorisation.

From Altermodern art to altermodern art education

Bourriaud inspired Dutch art educators to formulate ideas on altermodern or intercultural art education. His ideas on art were recognised as coherent with development in art education in Holland. According to Robert Klatser (2010) Dutch art education is in need of change because of three major problems. The first problem is that art education in Holland does not correlate sufficiently with developments in contemporary art. The second problem is that art education today does not include actual themes like globalisation, migration, hybrid culture and hybrid construction of identity. At last art education has too little relation to the lives of the young people it involves. Based on Bourriaud and Klatser we found similar notions in other texts and included them in our theoretic research. I would like to mention Authentic Art Education (Haanstra and Anderson and Milbrandt), Intercultural Art Education (Rachel Mason), aspects of Visual Arts Education (Paul Duncum) and ideas on flexible curricula (Steers, Wilson and Olivia Gude). Altermodern art education might thus prove to be more of a synthesis of several approaches than a completely new concept.

Our theoretical study concluded with the translation of three central concepts of altermodern art to art education.

First: new ideas on culture ask for art education that is intercultural.

Second: Bourriauds focus on the journey can be understood as a need for process-oriented art education.

Third: multiplicity must be translated in student-based learning in art education.

Central ideas

The consequences for the content of art education are several. Art history cannot be offered chronologically but is rather to be offered thematically. Art is not to be introduced by a western canon, but preferably by including contemporary art. Students must be allowed and stimulated to express the world they live in and to experience processes without predetermined products in mind.

The central idea on didactics is that learning must be initiated by the student. Student-based learning gives room for the student to decide on subject, form, material and creative process. Teaching takes place through dialogue between student, teacher and work in progress. Students are stimulated to collaborate and teaching must give room for the student's creative processes.

In altermodern art education the creative process can be unpredictable. A product cannot be prescribed and there is room for experiment, investigation and coincidence. Techniques are learnt 'en passant' when the student or the work in progress requires this. The use of non-conventional and digital media and techniques will be stimulated.

Research questions and research method

The central question for our inquiry was: What will Altermodern Art Education, as art education for the 21st century, look like? The theoretical study provided us with the three design principles: intercultural, process-oriented and student based.

These design principles were used as guidelines for the projects we investigated in our empirical studies. We wanted to know how teachers would interpret these design principles and how they would work with them. How they would evaluate implementation and results, how teachers would reflect on working in an altermodern project and what learning experiences students would have.

We set up a research project inspired by design research and action research. The aim of the research was to find out how the design principles would be implemented in real life classroom situations so we could further develop the possibilities of altermodern art education. There were no examples to copy, no methods to use. We therefore choose to ask teachers to develop their own projects based on the design principles we described. Unfortunately we had little opportunity to design various cycles, but separate lessons could be regarded as mini-cycles. Unlike design research our research was not strictly design centred because we considered teacher-independent design irrelevant. It is isn't exactly action research either, because we started from a theoretical starting point. Our research method has similarities to both design and action research.

During the project we collected various data: interviews, teacher written reflections, observations and learner reports.

Project design

Last year we were able to set up an experimental project with six different art teachers in five schools. The teachers were trained in two short sessions and prepared themselves by reading the theoretical part of the research. We agreed on a limited project period of 8 weeks, each with one single class. Ages and levels of the students varied, but all the teachers had quite a lot of teaching experience. The teachers were selected by their motivation to work with the goals of Altermodern art education. Part of the teacher training consisted of presenting ideas on the projects and reflecting on the other teachers ideas, under the supervision of the researchers. The group of teachers had several meetings during the project to give and receive feedback and they used a weblog to upload their reflections and student material, in order to learn from each other and be open to criticism.

Due to the freedom we gave the teachers in designing and conducting their own projects, the projects were different in many aspects. In the limited time I have for this presentation I cannot get into the details of each project, although I would love to tell you what happened in these classes. I will therefore tell you a little bit about just one of the projects.

Project: Travel

This project involved a school with a majority of children from an immigrant background. Art lessons in this school follow a more or less traditional curriculum and are mainly teacher based. The teacher involved wanted to participate in the project because of the difficulties he experienced in motivating his students. He expected the students to be more involved when they were allowed more initiative. Cultural background had never before been explicit content, but the teacher saw a lot of possibilities because of the personal backgrounds of most of his students.

The project was called "Reizen", (which is Dutch for both travelling and travels). After introducing the central theme to the class of 15 years-old, the teacher introduced criteria for the creative process. A product was not prescribed and all the students were given a personal A3 dummy.

It was not easy for the students to begin. When there are no clear criteria, no subject given, no materials prescribed, what will you do? Uncertainty made the students awkward and it took some lessons before they were used to the increased responsibility. They explored several aspects of the central theme that they were familiar with, like holidays, the countries their parents come from (Morocco and Turkey) and the travels they dream of making when they are adults. They referred both to TV shows where models travel around the world and to traditional cultural values. They used images from popular media like manga and anime and popular photography websites. Some individual students took the theme to a more abstract level by analysing what travel means ("It could be anything").

Halfway during the project the teacher took his class to visit two artists working in studios close to the school. The artists told about their motivation, about their subjects and background and their artistic process. None of the students had ever visited an artist studio before. During the project the teacher introduced various process oriented visual artists.

Since there was no product prescribed, everything the students produced was considered product. That consisted largely of sketches and notes in the dummy's, collected material from the internet. The students were assessed by a combination of self assessment and assessment by the teacher, based on the process criteria handed out in the introduction. The students were generally very realistic about their assessment, they were quite critical of their own processes.

Afterwards the teacher reflected positively on the project, although it had been hard work. Students who are not used to freedom do not take initiative easily and need a lot of individual encouragement and coaching. A lot had been achieved in the orientation on process, which was more clearly defined in advance. The introduction of a central theme had helped to allow students to include intercultural experiences and values and this affirmed the teacher in his expectations.

Results

The results of the project were various, due to the variety of schools, teachers and approaches. I just gave you one example, which is not representative of the other projects. Not one project is.

There are, however, some general remarks to be made on the implementation of the design principles intercultural, process oriented and student based, which we concluded after completing the six single case-studies.

Intercultural was by far the most difficult design principle to work with. It worked best in the projects where central themes were used like travel or beauty and identity. Teachers found it hard to combine content with the enlarged freedom they gave the students. Intercultural themes were not often sought for by the students themselves, although this could have been due to the lack of variety in population in most of the classes. This should be further elaborated.

Process oriented was successfully implemented in most of the projects. Although art education in secondary schools in Holland is claimed to give room for process, teachers in this project used criteria

that come closer to (contemporary) artistic process than they are used to. This was valued by the teachers, but not always by the students, who complained about the time spent reflecting on their creative process.

Student based was understood by most teachers as more freedom for the students. Students were free to choose subject, form and material, and make decisions on the course of their creative process. This was not always easy for students (and teachers) but it was highly valued. More freedom gave the students a sense of ownership, which increased their motivation.

Suggestions for teachers

Based on the experiences in our research project we formulated suggestions for teachers who want to work with the three design principles.

Intercultural

To give room for intercultural art education it can be useful to design explicit interventions to introduce intercultural themes in your class, to make clear to your students that these themes are allowed in art class.

When looking for inspiration, it is important that you use contemporary hybrid art that works with intercultural themes.

The use of a central theme that focuses on hybridity and gives room for personal experience is a good starting point for students to explore the intercultural from their own perspective.

Process-oriented

Model (altermodern) creative processes by including this in the structure of the lesson, studying artistic processes or inviting artists into the classroom.

Take time for individual advice and support to encourage investigation both in form as in content. Document the stages of the creative process and take time to reflect on products as stages in an ongoing process.

Student-based

Be flexible: advise when necessary but refrain from intervening (without leaving the student on his own)

Help students get used to increasing autonomy

Use 'enabling constraints' to balance support and freedom

Does every student need the same amount of freedom?

An openly formulated central assignment or structure can be a framework for the students to experience a lot of freedom in.

Conclusion

Summarizing the results we conclude that the design principles *process-oriented* and *student based* have been tried out successfully but that *intercultural* requires more development and research. The project Altermodern Art Education has been inspirational but intensive for both teachers and students.

Our two year research project has given us a lot of material and ideas. Notions on altermodern art education as art education for the 21st century have been described, implemented and analysed. Based on the results of these 6 cases the outlines of AAE will be further developed and hopefully implemented in the teacher training program of the Amsterdam School of the Arts. Of course we hope that our publication will inspire teachers to develop and implement their own ideas on altermodern as the basis for contemporary art education.

Thank you very much for your attention.