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Contemporary art as a resource for learning about human rights: a case study of the use of the *Placenta Methodology* with hospitalized adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The *Placenta Methodology* is a critical art education system developed at the Complutense University in Madrid (Spain). This article explores how the Placenta Methodology (Acaso, 2009) can be used to develop educational projects. In this case the authors used this methodology to work with hospitalized teenagers on the topic of human rights, using contemporary art as a medium. In the workshops they aimed to promote a critical perspective to show that art is connected to real life, and to encourage the participants to question the importance of technical training in being a contemporary artist. By placing this kind of art education project in a new environment (in this case the hospital), the authors wanted to promote the role of art education as an intellectual force instead of merely teaching handicrafts.

INTRODUCTION

Since 2003, the Complutense University in Madrid and the University of Salamanca (specifically the Research Group at the Pedagogical Museum of Children's Art and the Department of Social Psychology of the University of Salamanca) have been conducting research into the possibilities of improving the situation of hospitalized children and teenagers through contemporary art and creativity. The *Proyecto curArte* (Ullán & Belver, 2007) is a multidisciplinary project that designs and implements artistic activities intended to address the specific needs of hospitalized children, and to understand health and wellbeing through art.

Bearing in mind the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we feel that it is necessary to afford hospitalized children the same level of normalcy as experienced by other children and teenagers outside the hospital, as it is their right to play a full role in cultural and artistic life (article 31.2). In addition, everyone under 18 years of age is entitled in this Convention to quality education regardless of the context they may be in (article 28.1). For this reason, the activities we propose can be understood as an educational program that enriches the time they spend in hospital, especially in summer when teenagers are often alone in hospital (the sub-project *curArte en Verano*, *curArte* takes place in the summer).

When implementing the autumn/winter programs (2009/10) we realized by accident that the teenagers taking part in those activities were completely unaware of their rights, both the general rights through their status as human beings and their specific rights as hospitalized teenagers. They knew absolutely nothing about the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In fact, they were not even aware of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This led us to think that the content on which we would work in this, our third edition of *curArte en Verano*, should deal with this subject. As the starting point, we decided to work on the UDHR, leaving the Convention on the Rights of the Child for subsequent editions of the program. Bearing in mind the characteristics and interests of the teenagers we had worked with in previous versions of the project, we decided to schedule five workshops around Articles 13, 19, 25 and 26. These articles deal with aspects relating to immigration, the right to education, freedom of expression, social wellbeing and health.

Once we had chosen which articles we wanted to work on, we faced the problem of choosing the most appropriate ways to present them. We opted for contemporary art as a suitable tool (Antúnez, Ávila, & Zapatero, 2008) for reflecting on the UDHR for the following reasons:

1. **It develops a critical spirit**: one of the characteristics of contemporary art is the critical spirit it attempts to inject into social reality in order to change it (Burgess, 2003). We can find countless examples of this, from the work of consecrated artists such as Damien Hirst or Shirin Neshat, to the work of collectives of artivists such as The Yes Men (www.theyesmen.org) or the Yomango movement (www.yomango. net), where artistic language is used to analyze and denounce the unfair situations arising in both our immediate setting and remote corners of the planet (Atkinson & Dash, 2005).

2. **It connects with real life**: through contemporary art works, we can connect the articles of the UDHR to specific cases in real life. Contemporary art places its focus on those every day phenomena to which we habitually pay no attention and which, through systematic repetition, we have accepted as normal without considering their true meaning (Tallant, 2006). Contemporary art can act as a vaccine to prevent alienation in the light of the petty injustices of our everyday lives.

3. **Technical ability is not strictly necessary**: artists today use simple techniques and strategies, within anyone's abilities. In order to carry out a good project, it is no longer necessary to master complex techniques so technical virtuosity is no longer synonymous with artistic creation (Balestrini, 2010). New technologies have brought

the visual idiom within the reach of anyone considering the use of images to convey ideas and, through the Internet, we can endow ourselves with legitimacy.

Based on these three intersecting axes, we designed educational actions that were divided into five workshops with the above-mentioned goal of helping the participants to learn about the UDHR.

ART EDUCATION AS A RIGHT

The links between human rights issues and *curArte en Verano* are (unfortunately) born out of our everyday reality. News stories on television and in the newspapers fill our breakfasts every day with terrible news of abandonment affecting children in multiple countries around the world. Mass media all too often uncover situations of injustice affecting childhood, showing that while the Convention on the Rights of the Child was approved 20 years ago, these acknowledged rights are often not respected.

The Convention, which extends its protection to all minors in its first article, has the greater good of the child as its main driver and comprises a variety of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. As of today, it enjoys a great worldwide consensus as it has been signed by each and every one of the countries belonging to the United Nations except for United States and Somalia. Nonetheless, it is paradoxical that, despite its overwhelming support, these rights are being systematically ignored by many of the signatory countries. As we are told by Silvana Calvo from the Study Department of "Manos Unidas" (Hands Together): "There have been advances, but there is still a lot to be done; the rights of minors are still being violated. There are children who have to work, are still illiterate, are sexually exploited, suffer displacement" (Lladó, 2009). This situation, in breach of acknowledged children's rights, arises in many cases through such circumstances as marginality, poverty, wars, and social customs that are not appropriate for children.

When children and teenagers become hospital patients, their lives undergo a radical change and, in many cases, this experience leaves an indelible mark on their personalities. Traumatic situations in childhood are well known to have a decisive influence on us. Shortcomings and unfair or regrettable situations affecting us as children, whether at the affective, physical or mental level, may in the long term lead to major traumas that are often difficult to overcome, potentially affecting not only quality of life but even becoming a danger for the survival of the individual. Everything that can be done to make a minor's stay in hospital more bearable will be positive for the recovery of their health and for avoiding future problems (White, 2009). Art education understood as a process for generating knowledge and analyzing such subjects as visual culture, identity

and desire, becomes a powerful instrument for inclusion, and for connecting to the asphyxiating reality and everyday life taking place outside the hospital.

AN EDUCATIONAL PROJECT ABOUT UDHR

A team of artists and professionals in art education leading this project (Clara Megías, Eva Morales, Jesús Morate and Raquel Sacristán) designed 5 workshops lasting 2 hours each that took place between July and August 2010 at the Adolescent Psychiatry Unit of the Gregorio Marañón Hospital in Madrid. This is a short-stay hospitalization unit located within the Psychiatry Department of the hospital and its aim is to study and stabilize acute psychiatric conditions that would require full-time hospitalization for a term of one to three weeks.

Name of the workshops	Number of participants	Ages
Tormenta (Storm)	11	13-17
Edupunk?	11	12-16
¡Aquí no hay playa! (There's no beach here!)	13	12-16
Área de salud (Health Area)	4	14-16
Rotolando	10	13-16

The first workshop, entitled Tormenta (Storm) was based on Article 19 of the UDHR which states:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Therefore, this session revolved around freedom of expression and its various manifestations. In this workshop, two art installations were created with the aim to change the atmosphere in the hospital through the use of contemporary art. The purpose of one of the installations was, first of all, to help teenagers reflect
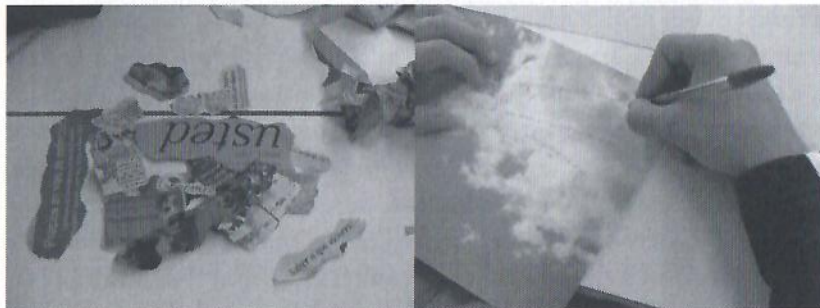

Fig. 1 and 2
Photos of the process for producing the clouds installation as part of the Tormenta workshop

on the role of newspapers in the creation of public opinion and, as a result, on the construction of reality; secondly, to help younger children think about the flexible, mutable and intangible quality of the world of ideas.

The second workshop was called Edupunk? in reference to the term coined by Jim Croom (Piscitelli, 2010) and was built around Article 26:

> Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Using the above statement as a starting point, the structure of the workshop was organized around the concept of the hidden agenda in secondary schools. All the participants attend secondary schools and we wanted them to question the current educational system in both its public and private sectors. The use of contemporary art techniques in this workshop comprised the creation of an artist's notebook in a traditional handwriting exercise book, where they make notes and drawings on the subjects discussed in the course of the session. For example, there were discussions on whether or not it was a good idea to apply inflexible timetables as a way to organize the learning time in the school, or the convenience of the traditional exam-based assessment system. Finally, the participants drew up a list of tips for future teachers so as to build a better educational system together.
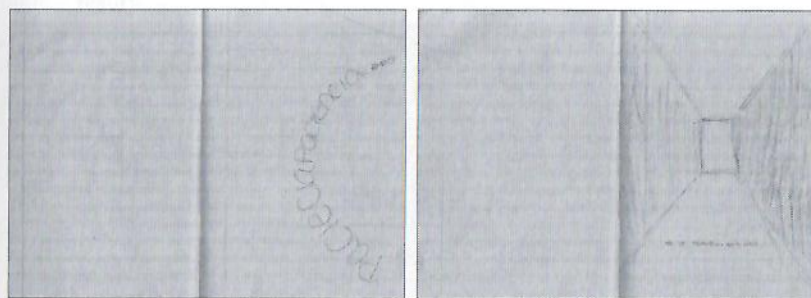

Fig. 3 and 4
Photos of notebooks created in the Edupunk? Workshop

The third workshop focused on what we do during the school holidays and was entitled ¡Aquí no hay playa! (There's no beach here!) This workshop took article 25 of the UDHR as its reference:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.

The workshop was organized as a way to reflect on urban space as opposed to beach spaces. Starting from the reconstruction of a large-scale map of the city of Madrid, participants were encouraged to discuss the theme of life in the city and the elements needed to survive in it. As our model, we took artistic projects carried out by local collectives from Madrid, such as Todopor la Praxis (Everything for Praxis, www.todoporlapraxis.es) or Estaesuna Plaza (This is a Square www.estaesunaplaza.blogspot.com).

Fig. 5 and 6
Photos of the production and transformation of the map of Madrid during the ¡Aquí no hay playa! Workshop.

Área de Salud (Health Area) was the title of the fourth workshop that referred to other aspects of Article 25. For this workshop, the participants planned a mobile rest-area to be installed on the street, close to the hospital. This was an intervention in a public space designed by the urban artist Raquel Sacristán. We transplanted aromatic plants into face-masks intended for hospital use,

Fig. 7 and 8
Photos of the preparation of the installation and the final result of the Area de Salud workshop

momentarily turning them into hanging plant pots. These plants were placed outside, above a hammock, to create a space in which passers-by could relax and escape from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Rotolando: Using Placenta Methodology in a Workshop About Migration
Rotolando was the fifth workshop making up the *curArte en Verano* program and was designed by a collective of artists called Núbol (www.nubol.net), a usual collaborator of the curArte project. Rotolando took its name from a popular song by the Italian group Negrita. Rotolando means "rolling along" and refers to travel by road. The song speaks of a journey to the south and the magical sensation of discovering new territories. This workshop is based in the Article 13:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
>
> Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

We have chosen to describe Rotolando, the last workshop of the program, in greater depth in order to illustrate our methodology. Rotolando and the other five workshops have adopted the Placenta Methodology developed by María Acaso (2009) in her book *La educación artística no son manualidades* (*Art Education does not mean handicrafts*). The aim of this methodology is the creation of artistic/educational projects in which participants develop a critical view on the world surrounding them, as well as zero tolerance towards behavior that violates human rights. The Placenta Methodology attempts to serve as an alternative to Goal-Based Pedagogy.

Bases of Placenta Methodology. Placenta Methodology is based on four ideas extracted from Elizabeth Ellsworth's *Teaching Positions* (1997). To paraphrase:

- The educational curriculum is a system of representations, it is not reality.
- Education is a communication process where what is taught is not learned, due to a third participant, namely the unconscious that modifies the process.
- Learning is not just a matter of welcoming every kind of knowledge, it also means rejecting certain kinds of knowledge that is already a part of us. Learning involves being ignorant in an active way.
- Education is a performative practice, a practice that is never completed and that should change reality somehow.

Following these ideas, Placenta is not a recipe. Placenta is a proposal for rebuilding an educational system closer to the needs of our society. It believes: students need to develop their own knowledge; there is not one universal truth; educational practice has to be focused on the learning process and not on final marks; the educator should promote passion for learning; the political dimension

of the educational process has to be explicit by using micronarratives and by deconstructing metanarratives; conflict is an essential part of the learning process, and education is not a way to solve problems but to ask questions; the educator has to pay attention to the hidden and absent curriculum, making it visible. Placenta is a proposal for encouraging reflective art education professionals to develop perfomative and unfinished learning processes.

Educational practice needs planning. Traditionally, this planning is organized in a unit of work designed with the main goal of acquiring certain skills. With Placenta Methodology, Acaso rethinks that process according to the principles mentioned above, trying to help inexperienced art educators to design and plan their first educational program by suggesting six steps to follow:

1. Manifesto: the execution of a Teaching Manifesto, that is to say, an explicit reflection communicated on the basis of a political-educational positioning of the educator.

2. Mapping: an analysis of the time-based, geographical and human layers covering the project that Acaso referred to in her text as *Mapeo educativo* (Educational mapping, Framing or Mapping).

3. Ready, Steady, Go!: teaching work is recommended in open and not necessarily assessable guidelines as general goals and immediate goals.

4. Fluid Contents: the educator has to look for, select, produce and organize the information that will be used in the educational action.

5. ProceSOS (SOS Processes), which is in turn divided into four sub-steps: Trigger, Discussion, Workgroup and Sharing.

6. Boomerang: to complete the experience, the sixth and last step of the Placenta, Boomerang, was implemented: this is a two-way system for thinking about what has happened during the educational action. In order to carry out this reflection, the qualitative data collection techniques we used were the preparation of field notes and the recording of interviews with participants and educators. After each session, this material was meticulously reviewed to be able to detect the achievements and difficulties found and so improve the workshops.

Bases of the Placenta Methodology (Acaso, 2009)

PAE (Postmodern Art Education)

Efland, A., Freedman, K., Stuhr, P. (1995): *Postmodern art education an approach to curriculum.* Reston: NAEA

CAP (Critical Art Pedagogy)

Cary, R. (1998): *Critical art pedagogy: foundations for postmodern art education.* NY: Garland

AEVC (Art Education based in Visual Culture)

Freedman, K. (2003):*Teaching visual culture: curriculum, aesthetics, and the social life of art.* NY: Teacher's College Press

AERP (Art Education based in Regenerative Pedagogies)

Ellsworth, E. (1997): *Teaching positions: difference, pedagogy, and the power of address.* NY: Teacher's College Press

Steps	Description	Types
I. Manifesto	think about if you want to reproduce how you have been taught	• Personal manifesto (conscious and subconscious) • Manifesto for the students (syllabus) • Manifesto for people we don't know (web) • Recommendation: video manifesto
2. Mapping	exploring the different contexts of the project	Temporal map: • calendar • Geographic map • MACRO • Map A. Urban / rural • Map B. Size of city (big, medium…) • Map C. Neighborhood / • Map D. Immediate surroundings (museum, hospital, school) • MICRO Immediate surroundings • Human map: me and them
3. Ready, steady, go!	think about the open aims that you want to achieve with your students.	**Generic level aims:** related to the hyperdevelopment of visual language. Students have to develop a critical vision of the visual world that surrounds them **Middle level aims** • Be suspicious of metanarratives • Understand and be able to build micronarratives • See the difference between reality and representation **Immediate level aims:** related to the specific contents of the project we are developing

4. Fluid Contents	choosing critical visual content.	Metanarratives: visual culture, advertising, entertainment. Micronarraives: contemporary art, anti-advertising, etc.		
5. ProcesSOS	establishing the group dynamic for the class.	PARTS		
		1. The spark: little performance activity that lets students know they are in an alternative learning atmosphere		
		2. Critical debate: a two way conversation based on a visual presentation with the content chosen in chapter 4		
		3. Practical activity: students carry out a mini project		
		4. Sharing: sharing the findings with the class		
6. Boomerang	checking the experience from everyone's point of view.	• Self-boomerang • In depth interview • Visual portfolio • Blog		

Rotolando workshop step by step

Manifesto. The following is the text written by the Núbol collective to explain their positioning as artists and educators:

> Núbol collective is named after the brain-cloud metaphor taken from the work of Juan Zamora (www.juanzamora.com), in which clouds represent the inevitable free nature of the world of ideas. Núbol works with the idea that education and contemporary art have a common objective: the need of questioning everything that is assumed without thinking. For that reason, they think that contemporary art practice should be incorporated to any educational context. They believe in a transversal, multidisciplinary art like the world in which we live. Núbol means cloud/brain in Catalan: ideas live in the brain, just like clouds in the sky. Neither can be touched. They escape physical limits. They are free, ethereal, transmutable, ephemeral. They can combine with others or simply disappear.

Mapping. The workshop was developed in the Adolescent Psychiatry Unit of the Gregorio Marañón Hospital of Madrid. The objective of this hospital unit is the study and stabilization of teenagers with psychiatric disorders that need full time hospitalization during an approximate period of three weeks.

While teenagers hospitalized in this Unit have specific needs due to their individual problems, in general the behavior observed during the workshops was no different from the usual behavior of a group of teenagers outside the hospital.

Fig. 9 and 10
Photographs taken for the execution of step number two in the Placenta Mapping (city area, hospital unit and room within the Unit)

However, regardless of these similarities, an educator that works in this context has to bear in mind the following factors:

- Some of the patients present a low level of concentration because of medical treatments that inhibit their capacity for prolonged concentration
- Some of the participants have behavior problems
- Often the use of scissors or other cutting tools is forbidden
- Themes related with food are not possible because a lot of the patients have eating disorders

Ready, Steady, Go! From the general goals of *curArte en verano* project, Núbol selected the following ones:

- Understanding art as a way to reflect on the world and analyze problems
- Discovering that art can be useful to understand ourselves better
- Approaching an artistic genre that combines action and art as a performing act

The immediate goals, based on the Article 13 of the UDHR, were:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Fluid Contents. As for the Conten(idos) [Content(ed)], Núbol selected visual representations taken from the mass media, specifically the images appearing on the Google search engine in response to the words traveler or immigrant, taken from the web page for the Spanish TV program *Españoles por el mundo* (Spaniards in the world).

ProceSOS. The Trigger consists in a strategy that attempts to capture the attention of the participants, it must be surprising and unexpected, it may be a question, an action, a game or an object breaking with the dynamic the participants expect of a teaching action. In order to start this session, Núbol

decided to take a real plant root to the hospital and ask participants "do you have roots?" Next, they placed a large sheet of paper on the floor of the room and asked the adolescents to draw the outline of their feet on the paper in white chalk. Once the silhouettes of the feet were drawn like islands, in order to show that we all have common roots the sheet of paper was placed on a table and the teenagers began to place "bridges" to link the feet together looking for points in common (shared roots) regarding their places of origin (many of the patients in the unit come from abroad) or other cultural aspects. As one of the participants put it "We are all connected by something, even if we don't want to be."

Fig. 11 and 12
Photographs taken for the execution of step number two in the Placenta Mapping (city area, hospital unit and room within the Unit)

Later, in the part called Discussion, Núbol read out the aforementioned Article 13 to analyze its meaning. All together they wondered: Are we free to travel unrestricted around the world? Are we entitled to leave our country in total freedom? Do people living in rich countries have the same rights as those living in developing countries? During this discussion, the images taken from the mass media referring to the concepts of traveler and immigrant were projected and the debate continued with the formulation of such questions as: How do travelers appear in the media? What differences exist between the representation of immigrants and travelers?

Fig. 13 and 14
Final phase in the realization of the Sharing

The Discussion concluded with the following phrase: plants have roots, people have feet to fly. The workshop continued with the Groupwork session in which the participants, working in groups, designed and manufactured wings to be placed on their feet in tribute to Article 13, which speaks of freedom of movement. To conclude, during the Sharing phase, each group explained the sensations they had felt with wings on their feet.

Boomerang. Is contemporary art an effective resource for learning about human rights in contexts of social exclusion? The answer to this initial question on which we have based our teaching experience cannot but be affirmative. Specifically, contemporary art has, in our opinion, been useful to boost these three aspects:

1. **Contemporary art develops a critical spirit.** The experiences proposed by the Núbol collective usually start from a reflection on the ideological discourses of those visual products generated by power groups. These discourses, known as meta-narratives (Acaso, 2006), use stereotypes in order to stigmatize or extol the group referred to. In the case of the Rotolando workshop, the discussion phase analyzed visual representations of travelers versus immigrants, taken from the mass media. Through visual deconstruction of these images, the Núbol collective tried to make visible the latent message contained in this kind of visual representation, thus denouncing the visual injustices arising every day in the media: Do immigration policies respect article 13 of the UDHR? Does everyone have the right to leave any country? Or is this right only the privilege of a few?

2. **Contemporary art connects with real life.** The Núbol collective tries to take these issues into the terrain of everyday life. Through the creation of the *Mapa de las raíces* (Root Map) on rolls of paper, participants work on Article 13 starting from an analysis of their own reality. The production of this map was used to let the participants represent visually their shared cultural origins, connecting their personal experience with that of the rest of the people involved in the action, thus illustrating the group's inter-cultural nature.

3. **In contemporary art, manual ability is not strictly necessary.** In the Rotolando workshop, the artistic genre used was performance. This is a universal genre, originating in the human need to create symbolic rituals as a way to cope with the problems of daily life. In the case of the Rotolando workshop, performance was used as a tool to represent symbolically such aspects of Article 13 as belonging to a particular place or culture and the right to travel freely around the planet. In addition, all the material used to carry out the actions proposed in the workshop can be found in any classroom: chalk, rolls of paper, scissors and colored pencils. These materials were

FINAL THOUGHTS

With these examples, we the team of researchers of the *curArte project* have tried to show that contemporary art is a suitable tool for working on the UDHR with teenagers in hospital, as its characteristics are accessible, connect to our present reality and allow for critical reflection. We also believe that working on aspects related to this Declaration in a hospital context is a way to enrich adolescents' stay in hospital. For us, reflecting on human rights through art education is a vehicle for mainstreaming the life of hospitalized children and teenagers and must be understood as a right. Apart from that, working on the UDHR in the hospital using contemporary art has been useful for reflecting upon some issues related with teenagers' everyday life outside the hospital. With these five workshops the participants have thought carefully about the Spanish education system and the urban environment.

The Placenta is a suitable methodology that helps art educators to design educational projects, stressing the importance of self-reflection. This methodology understands art education to be a process that generates knowledge about our world. It allows an analysis of subjects such as visual culture, identity and desire that becomes a powerful instrument for creating high quality art education projects. From the *curArte project* we want to express the need to devise a personal research method adapted to each educator and each context by encouraging professionals in the area of Art Education to create their own method as a step towards high-quality Art Education responding to the needs of contemporary society.

But this methodology needs to be adapted to every context. Reality for the hospitalized patient is reduced to a minimum performance context compared with usual contexts of active socialization. The lack of chances for social interaction deeply affects their concept of quality of life. This is a research project in which a bad experience could turn into a good or a better experience. The point is to use the Placenta methodology on art work activities so that patients can set up ways of socializing in a hospital context. The role of the educator is to provide tools in order to change the perception of the hospital setting, reformulating existing systems and introducing new devices, to generate positive and enriching experiences. This figure shows the dynamics which restricted the hospital setting. Using the Placenta Methodology could develop new creative spaces and opportunities for teenagers in a restricted hospitalized context.

The Placenta applied in the context of adolescent patients follows this schedule.

1. Manifesto	The teacher's role is as an *agent provocatuer* able to break these restricted contexts through Art Education.
2. Mapping	We work in a specific context where acting within hospital routines is quite difficult because of the place itself and people working there. On top of which illness, isolation and family separation are hard situations to deal with and they tend to lead the adolescent to an introverted form of behavior which quickly becomes the norm for the group. But this introverted behavior could be changed if we consider the adolescent as an "active" person with possibilities for action and creation.
3. Ready, Steady, Go!	Our workshops try to create new dynamics of Art Education in this restrictive setting in order to change the participant's perception of their surroundings, their situation and themselves.
4. Fluid Contents Metanarratives and Micronarratives (in contemporary art)	It is a good idea to use these narratives but we have to be careful with some elements in this setting (such as food, the body and drugs) due to possible problematic issues that participants might have (eating disorders, drug addictions, etc.) Always check with healthcare professionals about the specific cases of each participant before commencing a series of workshops.
5. ProceSOS	Contemporary art is the ideal platform for working in this setting precisely because manual ability is not necessary, and often the participants are not able or allowed to use scissors and other cutting tools.
6. Boomerang	As the workshops take place in a "non-formal" setting (unlike a school or University) it is not necessary to evaluate the outcomes in a traditional way. The assessment is done by everyone and focuses on the activities, the educators and the process, not the role of each participant. Furthermore this assessment is of great value for future projects because there is such a lack of documentation of these new dynamics of art education in this setting.

Contemporary art is a useful tool to work with hospitalized teenagers on the issue of human rights. We believe that the future of art education in health contexts depends on the use of new methodologies. Restricting artistic expression to handicrafts will only help patients connect to their immediate surroundings. However, the use of intellectual art education like the Placenta Methodology (based in emergent trends of the art education field) adapted to the particularities of this setting, is one of the best ways to connect the hospital setting with museums, galleries, cultural institutions, etc., that is to say, with the real outside world. This research project about human rights with hospitalized teenagers is only the first

step to giving an important place to contemporary art as an educational resource in a hospital setting. Contemporary art connects us with the UDHR because, in fact, art is a human right in itself.

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Violation of Human Rights As Revealed in Afghan Children's Artworks

Themina Kader

ABSTRACT

Throughout recorded history the arts and literature have played a life-saving role in circumstances wherein human rights were threatened. During the first decade of the second millennium September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina 2005 became symbolic chapters in American history. Both adults and children, who suffered emotional and physical trauma found release in graphic imagery and creative writing. And while print and electronic media has brought war in Afghanistan nearer to home, we in America remain largely ignorant of how victims of human rights abuses in Afghanistan have found solace. This article discusses two interrelated variables from a socio-historical, political, ethnographic, gendered, and religious stand points: first, violation of human rights as evinced by children's artworks; and second, what role, if any, art educators have played in the current debate on human rights in Afghanistan.

INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this article is to examine two interlinked and interdependent variables that speak, first, to the efficacy of art works as credible tools for recording violations of human rights and, second, to the role art educators have or have not played in raising the consciousness of students they teach regarding the war in Afghanistan. Artists have always been chroniclers of events whether those events are a result of natural catastrophes or instigated by human machinations. Although not many Americans had heard of Afghanistan before October 7, 2001 when the invasion began, it seems logical to ask why artworks depicting events in Afghanistan (Wintour et al., 2001) shouldn't have any relevance for art education.

International human rights have been enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and for over half a century successive UN declarations on human rights, including women's rights, have been accepted and have become part of the constitutions of most countries, including Afghanistan. In spite of that a plethora of articles and interviews collected on all electronic and digital formats have documented human rights violations in the aftermath of conflicts as they occur and affect the most disenfranchised sections of a population—women and children in every war-torn country, including Afghanistan (Ishay, 2007).