

Visual Documentation as Space of Entanglement to Rethink Arts-Based Educational Research

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Abstract

How can a practice of documentation escape from linear thinking and ways of seeing the world? How can the assemblages and entanglements that actors generate when participating in Arts-based educational research be accounted for? How can visual documentation open up other spaces of thinking and understanding in Arts-based educational research? In this paper, we mapped our understanding of these questions through a project focusing on the documentation of learning processes using a do-it-yourself approach that opened up new spaces of learning and agency for children aged 10 and 11. Through these processes, we approached Arts-based educational research (using visual documentation that both we and the children involved had generated) to explore educational entanglement, the becoming-child and becoming-researcher (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987), and visual documentation as an event. Our final aim was to explore the possibilities of visual documentation in the sense that it enables the emergence of a multiplicity of gazes and stories in and during research—what is becoming in the simultaneity of movements and speeds. We based this exploration on the concept of the pedagogy of the encounter (Atkinson, 2012). In alignment with this approach, our study's results and conclusions are part of the conversation rather than being located in a separate session.

Keywords arts-based educational research; visual documentation; art as event; educational entanglement; primary school

Bios

Judit Onsès is a visual artist and a researcher in art education. She is a pre-doctoral researcher in the Faculty of Education at the University of Barcelona in Spain and member of the quality research group ESBINA (Contemporary Subjectivities, Visualities and Educational Environments) Her doctoral research is part of the educational innovation project Do It Yourself in Education: Expanding Digital Competence to Foster Student Agency and Collaborative Learning (DIYLab). In this project, she explores the movements, intensities, and lines of flight within the phenomenon of visual documentation, as well as the notions of becoming-reporter, becoming-student, becoming-child, and becoming-inquirer based on the Deleuzian-Guattarian concept of becoming. To do so, she is applying the post-qualitative and new materialism theories in arts-based-research.

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Visual documentation as haecceity

Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) spoke of haecceity as a “mode of individuation very different from that of a person, subject, thing, or substance” (p. 261), comparing this concept to “a winter, a summer, an hour” (p. 261) and claiming that haecceities “consist entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected. . . . concrete individuations that have a status of their own and direct the metamorphosis of things and subjects” (p. 261).

Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) differentiated the “the plane of consistency or of composition of haecceities, which knows only speeds and affects [from the plane] of forms, substances, and subjects” (p. 262). Therefore, by moving from a plane of forms to a plane of consistency when thinking of the world, the focus shifts from subjects, things, spaces, and so forth to haecceities, which are “relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed . . . that constitute collective assemblages.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 266).

Based on this ontology, in the case presented in this article, we think of visual documentation as haecceity, as this allows us to investigate events – actions, pauses, and movements – rather than subjects and things.

Becoming-child and becoming-inquirer

Consistent with our goal to investigate how an event takes place, and in particular, the visual documentation as an event, the subjects who were involved in our research “cease[d] to be subjects to become events, in assemblages that are inseparable from an hour, a season, an atmosphere, an air, a life” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 262). In our study, the subjects were inseparable from visual documentation because they became subjects in an involving process of documentation. To explore these movements, Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) proposed a new semiotics to serve as an expression of a consistency plan that has, as its content, a semiotics that accounts for haecceities, rather than for subjects or things. Hence, we take the term *becoming* to refer to the “multiplicities with heterogeneous terms, co-functioning by contagion, enter[ing] certain *assemblages*” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 242, italics in original). In the case presented, we consider the concepts of becoming-child

and becoming-inquirer, which allow us to understand children and researchers as involved in an ontology of the event—thinking of them as a whole composed of relationships or as a tangle of agencies that are constantly in motion, affecting and being affected by the visual documentation haecceity.

The DIYLab project and its haecceities

During first term of 2015, two groups of primary-school pupils from Barcelona (10 or 11 years old) participated in the project Do It Yourself in Education: Expanding Digital Competence to Foster Student Agency and Collaborative Learning (DIYLab), within the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Commission's Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency. The main objective of the project was to put DIY philosophies into practice (Guzzetti, Elliott, & Welsch, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) in primary, secondary, and higher education by proposing collaborative, meaningful, and authentic learning experiences. The program's aim is to promote lifelong learning and to expand students' digital competence, agency, and creativity. DIYLab favours the use and implementation of various technological tools (video-editing software, mobile and flexible applications, HTML5-based services for learning, etc.); the process of documenting learning movements; and the dissemination and construction of a DIY community (Kafai & Peppler, 2011), all linked to an open online platform called DIYLabHub (<http://hub.diy-lab.eu/>).

This school is characterized by its constant involvement in innovative educational projects. During the implementation of DIYLab in primary classrooms, we were able to observe various haecceities related to visual documentation, and this observation created new haecceities and opened new ways of understanding visual documentation, education, children, and modes of occupying school spaces. In this paper, first, we share a video that was made with rhizo-cuts that belong to one of the several intensities that arose during the process of the DIYLab project's development. That video was created by a group of six children (who used three tablets) and one researcher (who used a digital camera). All performed, recorded, and created haecceities in an art classroom. In the second part of this paper, we connect the resonances and wonderings that emerged from those haecceities to the post-qualitative concepts that are entangled with the arts-based educational research (ABER) process. In the following sections, we present some tracks of the rhizomatic experience, which is still a process of becoming in that we are recovering

and understanding movements and haecceities while we are thinking about and writing this research paper.

From aAr/tography to post-humanism and post-qualitative research in ABER

As we are seeking understanding of ABER in a post-human frame, it is relevant to pay attention to the transits in which a/r/tography has been involved.

In 2006, Irwin et al. defined A/r/tography as “one of many emerging forms of inquiry that refer to the arts as a way of researching the world to enhance understanding” (p. 70) and framed it in a post-structural conceptualization of practice. Moreover, Irwin et al. referred to A/r/tography as a “methodology of situations . . . [in which] rhizomatic relationality is essential” (p. 71). Therefore, Irwin et al. are immersed in renderings such as rhizomatic relationality, embodied living inquiry, and the constant state of becoming among others. We felt that this was moving a step beyond what ABR had meant before then.

In 2013, Jan Jagodzinski and Jason Wallin broke into the research scene with a disruptive provocation to (in their words) betray ABR or, as we understood, to shake the arising zone of comfort and celebration within ABR. Jagodzinski and Wallin opened with an interesting question about, why—if ABR is trying to explore other ways of doing research—it is still stuck in a human perspective of the world instead of taking a post-human perspective, as, indeed, some of ABR’s concepts and ideas (as they point out) are closer to post-human thinking than human thinking. In other words, “is not that it [a/r/tography] isn’t radical in relation to the state of the field of arts-based research, but that it is not radical enough” (Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013, p. 76). When analysing the Irwin et al. (2006) article, the reader gets the impression that the authors repeated a radical concept with variations but never fully develops its rhizomatic relations or relationality (pp. 70, 71, 84, 85), rhizomatic journey (p. 72), rhizomatic challenges (p. 75), and rhizomatic possibilities (p. 78).

In two 2014 articles, researchers proposed some ways of leading this human/post-human transition in ABR. In the first, which was an exercise of rhizomatic thinking, Adrienne Boulton-Funke (2014) mainly focused on the part of Jagodzinski and Wallin’s book in which they questioned a/r/tography by focusing their criticism on the above-mentioned article (Irwin et al., 2006); Boulton-Funke then connected this with some Deleuzian and “post” concepts

to propose an understanding of “arts-based research and a/r/tography as a methodology of intuition, a methodology that seeks to encounter thought and engage in the creation of the new” (p. 210).

In the second article, Teri Holbroock and Nicole M. Pourchier (2014) shared the tensions and contradictions they experienced as a/r/tographers who were aware of the need to rethink this approach in a more post-qualitative way, even recognizing that they also needed to keep some human thinking. Nevertheless, after sharing a thinking path in which they intertwined a/r/tographic, Deleuzian, and post-qualitative ideas and concepts, Holbroock and Pourchier proposed new concepts for approaching research in an attempt to “adopt alternative terms” (p. 758). In this way, Holbroock and Pourchier proposed concepts such as hoarding; mustering; and folding, unfolding, and refolding as acts of deterritorialization, which takes place when “textual research spaces where we have paused to take stock, exhale a breath” (p. 761).

After being part of a series of seminars on post-qualitative research, new materialism, and new empiricism as part of the Arts and Education doctoral program at the University of Barcelona, we considered the prior contributions to this debate and saw the necessity of reframing our ABER using children in a post-qualitative approach. From the beginning, something disrupted us when we tried to connect our research with the ABER literature. We focused on visual documentation, correctly, but in our research, visual documentation did not matter as either epistemology or methodology when capturing children’s displacements.

What mattered to us, and what attracted our attention, were the intertwined relations; the entanglement of facts, actions, attitudes, and spaces; the movements of becoming; the relational rhizomes, and so forth. There was a moment of entanglement when everything was in movement, both forward and backward; everything was negotiating and reacting to the changing circumstances and affecting and being affected by children, the researcher, the classrooms, the cameras and tablets, and so forth.

This entanglement demands new ontology, epistemology, methodology, and ethics to be experienced and thought. In what way can post-positionality help with this necessary displacement? Can the concepts of haecceity and of becoming-child and becoming-inquirer guide us in that process? How can

we create a visual narrative rhizome to better understand what happened there and to give an account of that in this paper?

The video

After it was edited, the video (Onsès, 2016) showed the movements of haecceity generated during the visual documentation of the research project. The following is a selection of the frames that allowed us to think about concepts such as events, enlightenment and wondering (in relation to visual documentation), ABER (from a post-qualitative approach), disruptive education, and becoming-children and becoming-inquirer.

For this purpose, in the video, we applied the various gazes and entanglements of each becoming-child-reporter and of the becoming-inquirer during the process of recording. In this movement, we extracted some frames that made this display of gazes explicit and provided them along with dialogue involving concepts that reframe ABER from post-qualitative research positionalities. This strategy allowed us to break the unique directionality of the researcher's gaze that is usually found in qualitative research and to explore the possibilities of visual documentation as research. Thus, instead of understanding the video-editing process as stable and the video as truthful data to be analysed from a predefined epistemological and methodological approach—or as an illustration or description of learning processes—in this case, we configured the process as an ontological (what reality is depicted), epistemological (which knowledge is generated), methodological (how entanglements are visualised), and ethical (how the actors' performances generate subjectivities) researching move (Onsès, Majó, & Hernández-Hernández, 2015). We shaped this process by combining some frames with reflections marked in different colours. The moments from the DIYLab implementation in primary-school classrooms are in green text boxes; post-positionalities are in pink text-boxes; and the ABER is in yellow text-boxes.

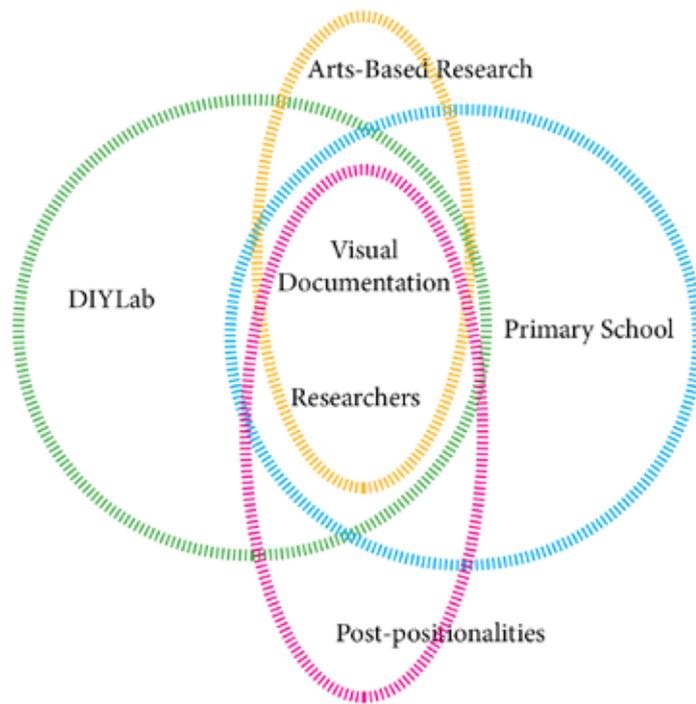
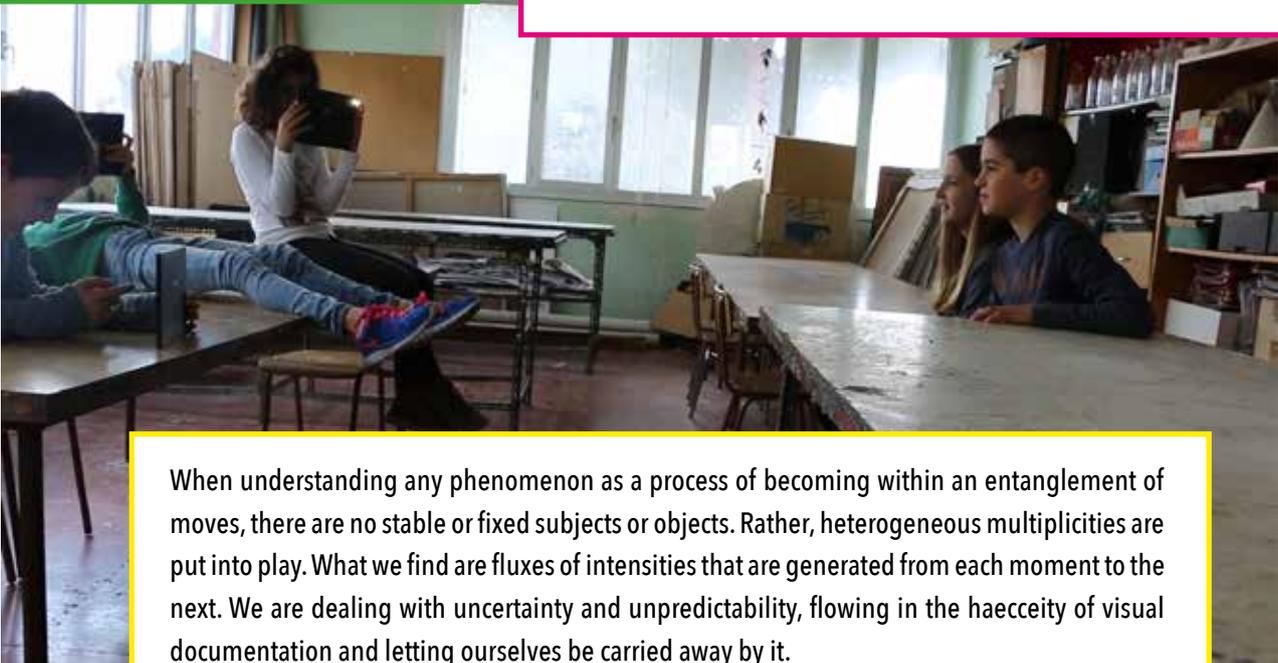


Figure 1. Diagram of the entanglement

Virolai School: 5th-grade children are developing an inquiry learning project and exploring systems of communication throughout history. Five students are visually recording and documenting in the art classroom.

Out of the frame: A becoming-inquirer is recording the becoming-child-reporters (two classmates), observing how they are talking about their experiences, both during the recording process and in their learning current project. There are three tablets (three gazes) but just one focus: the two becoming- classmates. These classmates are nervous and excited to be learning to perform as a reporter and as a classmate; they are thinking and reflecting about their own work in a dialogic form. They are not doing; they are talking about what they are doing and about how they wish to do it.



When understanding any phenomenon as a process of becoming within an entanglement of moves, there are no stable or fixed subjects or objects. Rather, heterogeneous multiplicities are put into play. What we find are fluxes of intensities that are generated from each moment to the next. We are dealing with uncertainty and unpredictability, flowing in the haecceity of visual documentation and letting ourselves be carried away by it.

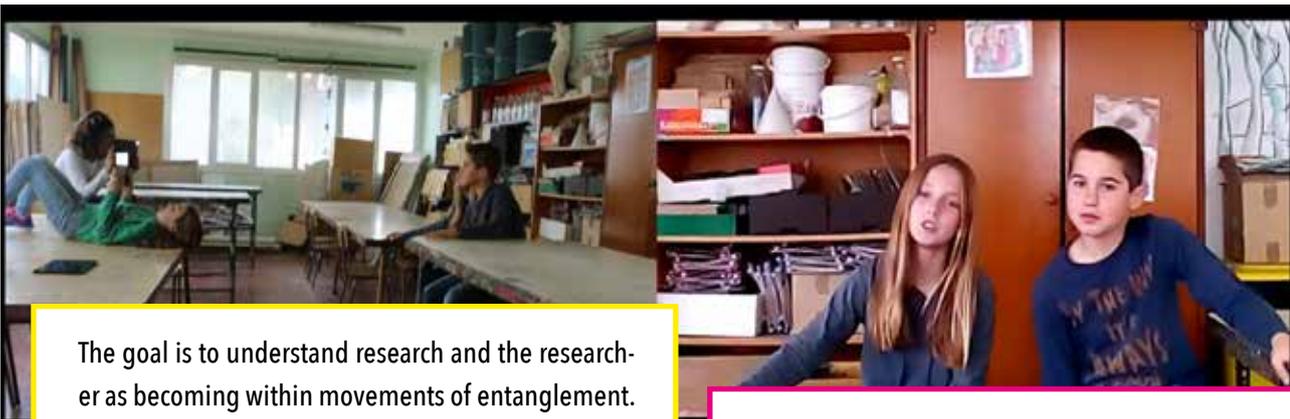


Out of the teacher's gaze and control of the teacher, the students are becoming in the art classroom. They are in the space in between the institution's regulations and margins—a space for exploring other relations and other roles and for reinventing their bodies' positions to visually document their bodies. They are living the experience of thinking in relation to the art classroom, their becoming-classmates, the becoming-inquirer, and their desires and imaginings. The tables and cameras act as part of the creators' bodies and as gazes. By changing their positions, they are changing their bodies. Bodies and gazes affect them and their experience of recording.



The students are playing and learning with tablets: exploring; recording possibilities; framing and re-framing; recording once, twice, or three times. They are looking for the best shot and learning to think visually about who they are.

After 20 minutes of recording, one of the children gets bored and starts to play with a ball. The others spontaneously decide to continue with the recording. The ball bounces into where the becoming-researcher is recording the scene. She decides not to stop recording.



The goal is to understand research and the researcher as becoming within movements of entanglement. When "everything is entangled and always already overlapping, dynamic, contested, multiple, antagonistic, becoming, in process" (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 619), that movement implies "rethink[ing] the nature of being" (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 654). How can we rethink education as entanglement? How does this conceptualization affect other understandings of ABER and propose new understandings?

After 20 minutes of recording, cutting, repeating, performing, and agreeing on what to say and how to say it, there is a disruption. The children who are recording and those who are explaining the learning process seem not to notice it. A becoming-pupil-reporter changes into a becoming-boy. Playing with a ball affects him more than using the tablet or the visual documentation practice. Through the movement of the ball, the boy disrupts the stability of the group and affects the becoming-inquirer's mood. A chain of affections constitute the scene. When the entanglement is modified, all the multiplicities are modified, but the becoming-inquirer keeps recording. She understands this as a part of the research movements and intensities.



During the process of implementation and developing the DIYLab project, we observed, recorded, interacted, and both affected and were affected. We were not only human subjects. The cameras mattered. The school mattered. The classroom mattered. The ball mattered. The inquiry project mattered. They and we were not a separate entities but rather an entanglement of elements (Barad, 2007), possibilities and intensities. Thinking about learning as an entanglement reconfigured the educational relations and allowed the event to occur.



Are the becoming-children in the art classroom doing art? They are generating and exploring art as an experience of relationality and understanding art as a cultural practice that has to do with participatory or socially engaged actions: "practices as effecting a disturbance in the world of visual art" (Atkinson, 2012, p. 6). They are living the arts as processes "composed of dialogical social relations between participants" (Atkinson, 2012, p. 6) in which the arts could have the potentiality of an event.

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