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Arts-based Research and the Artistic and Creative Role of Artifacts as Stories in Literacy Practices

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ABSTRACT

This paper makes a debate on arts-based methodologies in terms of their application to literacy practices of students' wherein out-of-school artifacts are used to reveal stories about students' lives and strengthen their creative and critical thinking skills. It is argued that different stories and narratives emerge when we listen to students' narrating about artifacts, thus we claim that the application of arts-based methodologies to the field of literacy would enable educational researchers to obtain useful information about students' identities, values, and cultural backgrounds, and assist students artistically in using their creativity, imagination, and self-reflection in the narration process. Throughout the paper, the importance of multimodal literacy practices and how such practices can be enhanced through the use of narratives; the issue of self-reflexivity to emphasize students' subjective and reflexive presence as co-researchers in arts-based inquiries; and the issue of visual objects as modes of arts-based inquiries are discussed. A discussion on artifacts and everyday objects as reflections of others' lives and self-identities is also presented. Finally, artifactual literacies as both mode and medium in arts-based research are introduced.

Key Words: Arts-based research, narratives, critical thinking, literacy research.

Sanat Temelli Araştırma ve Yapay Olguların Okur-yazarlık Çalışmalarında Hikaye Olarak Artistik ve Yaratıcı Rolü

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, öğrencilerin okur-yazarlık uygulamalarına uygulandıkları anlamda sanat temelli metodolojiler üzerine tartışmalar yapmaktadır. Okul dışı eserlerin öğrencilerin yaşamları hakkındaki hikayeleri ortaya çıkarmak ve yaratıcı ve eleştirel düşünme becerilerini güçlendirmek için yararlı olduğu savunulmaktadır. Öğrencilerin eserler hakkında anlattıkları farklı öykü ve anlatıların ortaya çıktığı ve böylece sanat temelli yöntemlerin okur-yazarlık alanına uygulanmasının eğitim araştırmacılarının öğrencilerin kimlikleri, değerleri, ve kültürel geçmişe odaklanmaları ve öğrencilere sanatsal anlamda yaratıcılıklarını, hayal gücünü ve kendini yansıtmayı anlatım sürecinde kullanmalarında yardımcı olduğu tartışılmıştır. Makale boyunca multimodal okur yazarlık uygulamalarının önemi ve bu tür uygulamaların anlatıların kullanılması yoluyla nasıl artırılabileceği; öğrencilerin sanata dayalı araştırmalarda eş araştırmacılar olarak öznel ve refleksif varlığını vurgulamak için öz-refleksivite meselesi; ve sanat esasına dayanan araştırma biçimleri olarak görsel nesnelere konu da kapsanmıştır. Nesne ve günlük objeler üzerine başkalarının hayatlarının ve öz kimliklerinin yansımaları olarak bir tartışma da sunulmuştur. Son olarak, sanat temelli araştırmalarda hem mod hem de orta olmak üzere yapay edebiyatlar tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sanat-temelli araştırma, kişisel hikayeler, yaratıcı düşünme, okur-yazarlık araştırması.

INTRODUCTION

“I seek out ways in which the arts can release imagination to open new perspectives, to identify alternatives. The vistas that might open, the connections that might be made, are experiential phenomenon; our encounters with the world become newly informed. When they do they offer new lenses through which to look out at and interpret the educative acts that keep human beings and their culture alive.” (Greene, 1995, p.18)

This paper discusses the importance of arts-based methodologies for literacy practices and argues that listening to students’ stories about out-of-school artifacts can reveal creative, imaginative and artful spaces in their literacy practices as “every object tells a story” (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p. 23). With the emergence of multimodal landscapes, literacy practices in the 21st century have become more variegated, dynamic and interactive (Huber, Dinhan, and Chalk, 2015; Smith, 2015; Turkle, 2007). Multimodal literacy

practices have consequently replaced traditional text-based ones in some cases. Thereby, literacy educators and researchers interested in introducing new, multimodal spaces have begun to value and harness their students' out-of-school literacy resources, which are students' narratives about their out-of-school artifacts. The understanding of students' lives is now believed to reveal new spaces for literacy practices. Educators thus can now consider different methodologies to explore the lives of their students and therefore attain productive information about their identities, cultural backgrounds and values (Pink, 2007).

It is widely acknowledged that literacy researchers can use students' images, objects, and artifacts to better understand their students' worlds, and explore the dimensions of their creative and critical awareness (Banks, 1998; Barton, 2014; Freedman, 2003; Pink, 2007). Narratives about these objects and artifacts are said to convey information regarding the storytellers' lives and also bringing this information to life (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011; Sikes and Gale, 2006; Watrin, 2004). Narratives are often defined as an expressive and reflexive process which require an artistic style of thought (Barone and Eisner, 2012). Thus including everyday artifacts as stories in literacy practices opens artistic avenues and helps in fostering students' creative and critical thinking abilities (ibid.). Researchers and educators who are interested in investigating and exploring students' out-of-school lives, identities, and cultural backgrounds have recently considered arts-based research, as it requires the exploration of the "lives of others" (Banks, 1998, p. 45).

Visual objects and artifacts are multimodal and sensory texts. We can smell, feel and hear them (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). Moreover, artifacts and visual objects embody lived experiences, values, identities, and cultures. In other words, every object conveys something about people's lives. Therefore, on engaging with these artifacts and objects in literacy practices and valuing students' narratives about them, literacy becomes more than the mere experience of words on the written page; it becomes an artistic and sensory experience through which students can strengthen their creative and critical thinking skills and become effective communicators, collaborators, problem solvers and critical thinkers.

In this paper, we evaluate arts-based inquiries in terms of their application to literacy activities wherein out-of-school artifacts are used to reveal stories about students' lives and strengthen their creative and critical thinking skills. First, we define arts-based research by drawing upon available literature. We then shed light on the role of self-reflexivity to

emphasize students' subjective and reflexive presence as co-researchers in arts-based methodologies. Next, we examine visual objects as modes of arts-based inquiries, followed by a discussion on artifacts and everyday objects as reflections of the "lives of others" (Banks, 1998, p. 45) and "self-identities" (White and Lemieux, 2015, p. 94). We also introduce artifactual literacies as both mode and medium in arts-based research.

In the following section, we focus on artifactual critical literacy as an approach to study issues of power and social change. In the last section, narrative will be introduced as the primary mode of arts-based research. We claim that including artifacts as stories in literacy practices provides students with opportunities to empower their literacy skills in an artistic and creative way and promotes their creative and critical thinking abilities. We also argue that "every object tells a story" (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p. 44) and therefore different stories and narratives emerge when we listen to students' narratives about artifacts. Thus, the application of arts-based methodologies to the field of literacy enables educational researchers and literacy teachers to obtain useful information regarding their students' embedded lives (identities, values, and cultural backgrounds) and assist students in artistically using their creativity, imagination, and self-reflection in the narration process. In other words, through their narratives regarding artifacts, students artistically strengthen their literacy skills.

An Overview of Arts-Based Research

Before demonstrating the application of arts-based inquiry to the field of literacy research, it is important to define what arts-based research is. Here, we draw upon available literature to define arts-based research. In their book entitled *Arts Based Research*, Barone and Eisner (2012) defined arts-based research as follows:

"Arts-based research is an approach to research that we define as a method designed to enlarge human understanding. Arts-based research is the utilization of aesthetic judgment and the application of aesthetic criteria in making judgments about what the character of the intended outcome is to be. In arts-based research, the aim is to create an expressive form that will enable an individual to secure an empathic participation in lives of others and in the situations studied." (Barone and Eisner, 2012, p. 8-9)

As Barone and Eisner indicated above, one of the primary aims of arts-based inquiries is developing an understanding of other people's lives. To accomplish this aim, researchers should put themselves into others' shoes. According to Barone and Eisner (2012), this requires the creation of an expressive form. In other words, in the pursuit of learning about the lives

of others, researchers should use a particular art form to reveal what others feel and think about some aspects of their lives. Therefore, as McNiff (1998) notes, the object of research becomes a process of expression. In order to create such expressive form in arts-based research, according to Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, and Grauer, (2006), issues of “commitment for aesthetic and educational practice, inquiry-laden processes, searching for meaning, and interpreting for understanding” (p. 1234) should be fulfilled. Through these attributes, it is believed that the researcher increases his or her self-awareness and reflexivity, and thus gains a deeper insight into the lives of others (Bogumil, Desyllas, Lara, and Reshetnikov, 2015; Sinner et al., 2006).

Drawing on Finley’s (2008) work, Bogumil et al. (2015) claim that arts-based research has four distinct fundamental features that separate it from other postmodern qualitative research, that are:

“(1) makes use of emotive, affective experiences, senses, bodies, imagination, and intellect, as ways of knowing and responding to the world; (2) gives interpretive license to the researcher to create meaning from experience; (3) attends the role of form (e.g., artistic medium) in shaping meaning; and (4) exists in the tensions of blurred boundaries, between art and social science research.” (Bogumil et al, 2015, p. 2)

In the light of the above definition, we can state that various representational forms of expression exist in arts-based inquiries and these forms contribute to the understanding of others’ lives. Thus, as Cole and Knowles (2008) claim, these representational forms of inquiry enhance the perception of the human condition. Through subjectivity, interpretations, lived experiences, and revealing emotions, researchers and co-researchers can create meanings, which contribute to knowledge construction (Bogumil et al., 2015). The arts, then, can be considered as a mode of reflexivity in the process of research.

Reflexivity and Students’ Presence As Co-Researchers in Arts-Based Methodologies

As the researcher’s subjective and reflexive presence is the primary characteristic of arts-based inquiry (McNiff, 1998; Finley, 2008; Cole and Knowles 2008; Barone and Eisner, 2012), it is necessary to provide a brief overview of reflexivity. Reflexivity is defined as “the awareness of the researcher’s own presence and contribution to construction of meanings throughout the research process” (Bogumil et al., 2015, p. 3). This reflexive process requires interpretation, subjectivity, and self-reflection. In other words, researchers have the opportunity to be aware of their own subjective

emotions and discover their own “interior landscape” (Eisner, 2008, p. 11) while interpreting and analysing any art form. Therefore, researchers’ and co-researchers’ involvement within a particular art form enables researchers to reveal their embedded values and beliefs, thus personalizing the research process.

It is said that literacy researchers who use arts-based methodologies in their studies should provide students with opportunities to reflect on themselves by involving them in the research process as participants and co-researchers (Barton, 2013; Sullivan, 2005). One way of doing this, as also employed by the authors of this paper, is encouraging learners to generate questions, ideas, and examples about the topic in question, so that their flexible thinking can be stimulated. Another way is promoting learners with firsthand empirical experimentation. In our classes for example, we involve our students in specific forms of artistic expression, and then we describe and reflect upon what we did, through various comparisons between our experiences, others and with the available literature. This conviction and application stems from the idea that students can become part of the research process and make their voices heard as active participants. Moreover, it is said that students can go beyond themselves and discover or construct new meanings through reflexive practices, thus making such practices creative processes in which students as co-researchers “get outside themselves” (Micniff, 2003, p. 76). When students go beyond themselves, they enter the world of their imagination. As Sullivan (2005) states, “to create, the researcher has to enter into the realm of imagination, to take on the possible, as well as the plausible, and probable” (p.115). Therefore, the discovery of new meanings and the construction and creation of knowledge require imagination and an artistic way of thinking. Sullivan (2005) further adds on this by saying that research evolves into a creative and responsive process in which knowledge is posited “as sensory knowing and a form of critical engagement” (p. 60). In this respect, arts- based research bears some resemblance to heuristic research, which involves:

“a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and, while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge.” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9)

That is to say, when students are personally involved in the literacy research process and become a part of it as co-researchers, they experience a heuristic process that enables them to express themselves by exploring and

interpreting their own experiences; more importantly, it opens up artistic spaces that help nurture their creative and critical thinking skills.

Interpretation in artistic inquiry occurs through personal perspective and subjective involvement; thus, “every interpretation is based on the perspective of the interpreter” (Micniff, 1998, p. 53). Therefore, literacy researchers and their students as co-researchers conducting arts-based research are active participants and they use heuristic methods to reveal their embedded values and beliefs in the interpretation process to enable the creation of new meanings and to contribute to knowledge creation. This is clearly put forth by Micniff (1998) as:

“Art-based research expands heuristic research by introducing the materials of creative expression to the experimental process... An understanding of inner-directed heuristic research is essential to art-based research where there is a comparable emphasis on direct and personal participation. ” (Micniff, 1998, p. 54)

With their reflexive, expressive, and heuristic elements, arts-based methodologies offer “direct and personal participation” (Micniff, 1998, p. 54) and open new spaces to amplify student voices. Thus, adapting arts-based methodologies to literacy research affords student autonomy, participation, self-reflexivity, as well as expression, and more importantly, allows them to use their artistic, creative, and critical thinking skills to create meaning and interpretation. Arts-based methodologies, then, not only help students strengthen their literacy skills, but also provide them with opportunities to artistically perceive their lives and become art literate, creative, and critical thinkers (Barton, 2013) who can challenge expectations, change the way people comprehend the world, and break stereotypes (Greene, 1991).

Visual Objects in Arts-Based Research

We live in an era surrounded by a vast amount of visual data, which provides literacy researchers with the opportunity to elicit information about students’ lives and identities in their studies. Over the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in the use of visual objects, images, and materials in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). By investigating visual objects, literacy educators and researchers can obtain productive information about their students’ cultural and social lives and their identities (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011). In this regard, the use of visual objects and materials in literacy activities and research provides researchers with opportunities to enter their students’ worlds and lives because their lives contain vast amount of visual materials, as is discussed in detail by Cohen et al., (2015):

“Educational researchers can draw on a host of visual media in their research. These include, but are not limited to: film, video, photographs, television, advertisements, pictures, artefacts, objects of fine art, memorabilia, moving images, still images, media images, maps, drawings and sketches, illustrations, graphical representations, cartoons, everyday objects and deliberately non-commonplace, and so on. In short, anything we see watch or look at counts as a visual image; we are surrounded by visual images, and these can be used in educational research.” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 528)

Moreover, visual materials are important tools wherein students’ hidden lives can be embedded. By investigating each visual object, literacy researchers can unveil the unknown and the mysterious in their students’ lives. Every visual object that students’ use depicts what they value, that is, objects that hold parts of their lives. In other words, there is a hidden story behind every object. This is put forth by Pahl and Rowsell (2010) as:

“Objects carry emotional resonance, and these infuse stories. Objects uncover people and epistemologies. Not having respect for an object undermines a way of understanding the world, cutting off an important line of inquiry.” (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p.10)

Closely and analytically examining these valuable visual objects enables educational and literacy researchers to shed light on students’ lives and reveal their unknown sides. In this respect, as Cohen et al. (2011) claim, visual objects and materials cannot be neutral as they are message holders that convey messages to the world, whether deliberately or not. Each message embodies personal details about the possessors of these visual objects, which, more importantly, help researchers to highlight their students’ embedded values, identities, cultures, and belief. Furthermore, the messages conveyed by the visual objects can be interpreted in different ways (Bryman, 2016). At the end of each interpretation process, researchers and students, as co-researchers, contribute to the creation and production of meanings, and it is within this production process that they construct personal inferences (Margolis and Pauwels, 2011). Thus, both literacy researchers and students are active participants in the interpretation process, and their contributions to the research process as interpreters and analysers give them the power of self-analysis and self-definition. In this respect, as Rose (2012) notes, values, biographies, backgrounds, identities, and cultures are introduced in the research process while meaning is created from various visual objects. At this juncture, drawing on Barone and Eisner’s (2012) argument, we would contend that when students critically analyse objects as active participants, they use their artistic skills to create new meanings.

Throughout this meaning creation process, students are like artists; and visual materials and objects become artistic objects.

“Human activities become art when the process of attention is personally moving, when the forms used are imaginatively construed, when there is a sense of coherence and energy in the work. We follow Dewey’s (1934/1958) lead in recognizing art as a form of human experience. When human activities achieve that exalted sphere, we can justly claim that we are engaged in or beholding a work of art.” (Barone and Eisner, 2012, p. 46)

In the light of the forgoing, we hold that drawing on students’ everyday objects as a kind of artistic data in literacy practices affords student participation and reveals imaginative, reflexive, and creative spaces in their literacy classes. Thus, literacy practices become more creative, dynamic, as well as interactive, and enable students to develop creative and critical thinking skills. Moreover, the use of visual and everyday objects as data, along with hearing and sharing stories about such data, provide both literacy educators and students with opportunities to elicit productive information about each other’s lives (identity, culture, and values). Therefore, while explicating meaning from visual objects, “the process of data analysis becomes a creative act that itself engenders new ways of knowing and understanding the world” (Flewitt, Pahl, and Smith, 2015, p.1). Through this ‘creative act’, both literacy researchers and students become similar to artists and exhibit their artistry as creative; furthermore, they become critical thinkers and assign shape and meaning to their arts forms (visual objects). In this respect, ‘creative act’ becomes a fundamental feature that differentiates arts- based research from other traditional forms of literacy research. Barone and Eisner (2012) highlight this characteristic as “Arts-based research is, at its deepest level, about tentative artistic and aesthetic explorations of problems that may not see the light of day in traditional forms of search” (p. 61). That is to say, literacy researchers and teachers who draw upon visual objects and implement arts-based methodologies in their inquiries open up creative spaces in students’ learning environments to enable students to reveal an artistic way of thinking and strengthen their creative and critical thinking skills. In the following sections, we focus on artifacts as sources of visual data that help in fostering students’ artistic thinking through created stories and narratives about their lived experiences.

Artifactual Literacies As Mode And Medium in Arts-Based Research

In the preceding section, we noted that artifacts are visual data and, like other visual data, they send messages (Cohen et al., 2011). As Cohen et al., (2011) note, there is a great variety of artifacts filled with messages:

“Artefacts include for example, objects in interior design and equipment..., desks, tables, chairs, textbooks, exercise books, equipment, ornaments, display materials, clothing, pictures, maps notice boards, lesson plans, smart boards, athletics equipment, science materials, etc. They include children’s toys, reading materials, DVDs, clothes, etc.” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 531)

The multiplicity of artifacts attracts the attention of literacy educators and researchers; which consequently prompts them to consider these artifacts and use them as primary sources of information about students’ lived experiences. These experiences then help literacy educators and researchers in creating dynamic, reflexive, collective, and cooperative learning environments. We can see, touch, hear, and smell artifacts, which are multi-sensory. Therefore, as Cohen et al. (2011) note, they can be used to “stimulate discussion, to glimpse into the past or, indeed, the present, to reconstruct or help to imagine a scene, to remind people and bring back memories” (p.532). All these practices provide literacy educators and researchers with the opportunity to receive stories about their participants’ lives because, as Pahl and Rowsell (2010) state, every object conveys something about its possessor’s life. Thus, within educational and literacy inquiries, artifacts can be used to unpack students and epistemologies as this unpacking requires the in-depth investigation and analysis of the objects. Within this exploration process, both literacy educators and students are active participants and work cooperatively to elicit information about their lived lives. Thus, throughout this interpretation and analysis process, students’ voices, values, belief, emotions, senses, and imagination emerge, and their contribution to the research and learning process become artistic and creative. Students’ imaginative, interpretive and analytical views and their reflexive presence in the research process make them similar to artists working within educational studies (Slatter, 2001). More importantly, they are provided with opportunities to share their views with others and contribute to changing the perceptions and perspectives of others in their social environment (Finley, 2008).

The nature of literacy has undoubtedly changed; has become very divergent, multifaceted, and more importantly, materially situated (Pahl and Rowsell, 2011). Therefore, educators in the field of literacy are in search of

different disciplines through which they can comprehend contemporary meaning-making (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). As noted by Flewitt et al. (2015), visual modes of inquiry have gained popularity in literacy studies. Similar to other visual materials, artifacts are multimodal objects that convey messages. More importantly, they depict sections from students' lived lives. Thus, engaging artifacts as multimodal objects in literacy studies and using students' views about these objects constitute a shift toward a creative and critical inquiry process:

“Such a shift potentially affords a renewed awareness of the critical and creative meaning-making activities of researchers and opens new possibilities for what is considered data, as well as how data is reduced, represented and interpreted.” (Smith, Hall, and Sousanis, 2015, p.3)

Drawing on artifacts in literacy studies requires a creative and critical perspective. In other words, learners must use their self-reflexivity and think artistically to create meanings and stories about artifacts. As White & Lemieux (2015) argue, meaning-making and storytelling evolve into a creative and artistic process. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) similarly claim, “artifacts give power to meaning-makers” (p. 134). Thus, valuing learners' material culture and creating stories about these materials and objects provide learners with opportunities to activate and foster their creative and critical thinking skills. Artifactual stories and narratives are embedded lived experiences and require dynamic, interactive, self-reflexive, expressive, and artful practices to convey their messages (Huber et al., 2015). Now, we will focus on critical artifactual literacies and indicate how drawing on students' material culture gives power to students' voices and reveals creative and critical spaces that make literacy more meaningful.

Artifactual Critical Literacy

Artifacts are engaged with critical pedagogies as they hold different social worlds and messages and represent parts of students' lives (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). Students' stories and narratives about their home artifacts enable the acknowledgement of their identities, and social and cultural lives, as well as the creation of listening opportunities for communities. Furthermore, artifacts as stories help learners to reveal their identities and provide them with opportunities to explore inequalities and discern the existence of other identities, cultures, and social norms. Thus, artifacts as stories can be a powerful link to an approach to critical literacy because stories about objects raise power issues and can contribute to social changes.

Pahl and Rowsell (2010) claim that artifacts open up spaces for “building community, developing critical stances, fostering critical inquiry

and analysis, focusing on action, advocacy, and social change” (p.126). Furthermore, they are powerful sources of ways to promote critical literacy within classes. When students talk about their out-of-school artifacts, they mirror their values and communicate a critical perspective. In other words, they find a space where they reveal their identities and convey personal messages from their social and cultural lives. At this point, artifactual literacies become “lived and embodied critical literacy practices” (Johnson and Vasudevan, 2012, p. 34) that allow different social and cultural norms to be circulated. When home artifacts are valued and acknowledged in classes, educators can create social inclusion and open up communal and social spaces in literacy practices:

“We argue that cultural artifacts-that is, objects, symbols, narratives, or images inscribed by the collective attribution of meaning- can help transform communities if they are brought together in social space and collective experiences. Public story sharing is a way in which changes can be witnessed. Narratives are sites where people can transform and experience social space” (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p.62).

In the light of the given information, we contend that students share stories about lived experiences and create their own literacy texts based on everyday objects and artifacts. As noted by Pahl and Rowsell (2010) “these experiences are translated into texts, into writing, talk, and pictures” (p. 25). Thus, home objects pave the way for critical literacy practices that enable learners to tell their stories in different modes and help them “improve their critical literacy skills in a community context” (p. 67). Students use artifacts in these modes (texts, writing, listening, and pictures) as tools to create stories, and within these modes, their social, cultural, and ethnic identities and stances are revealed. Therefore, these narratives create a critical space where different voices from different social and cultural norms and stances are shown and circulated.

In their book, Pahl and Rowsell (2010) draw on a case study (The Giant’s Footprint) to illustrate how literacy practices using the artifactual experience of a giant stimulated students’ imagination and opened up a communal, social, creative, and critical space in their learning. The study provided students with opportunities to share their identities, personal opinions, and stances with others and enabled them to reflect their values and social norms through their stances. The study suggested that the inclusion of an artifact (Giant’s Footprint) in literacy practice engages the students in a social action and enables them to activate their artistic skills and thus critically question, analyse, and interpret different perspectives and stances. Therefore, the inclusion of the artifact (Giant’s footprint) makes

inroads into variegated literacy practices, empowers students' critical and creative skills, and levers power for learners. In sum, as Pahl and Rowsell (2010) note:

“The experience of the huge artifacts created opportunities for new kinds of language. From this came experiences, which became stories... Artifacts entered the classroom as if by magic and left traces of a mystery presence. The power of artifacts to evoke a world, to create other, “figured worlds” (Holland et al., 1998), or spaces where children can enter and emerge more richly engaged with literacy, can be used in many settings. The giant provided an imaginative space that the children could enter into. It was a “space that imagination seeks to change” (Leander & Sheehy, 2004, p. 4). The giant lived among the children, and they responded to his presence. These ways of using artifacts in schools can provoke more imaginative forms of expressive writing and have a powerful role to play in opening up imaginative spaces.” (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010, p. 122)

That is to say, the nature of critical artifactual literacy experience is closely tied with arts practitioners who engage in critical and creative process through self-reflexivity, meaning-making, communication, exploration, and discovery (Finley, 2008). Thus, critically and creatively literate students can use their voices and languages to change the way people apprehend the world by challenging and breaking existing, cliché perspectives and stereotypes (Greene, 1991). Through artifacts, artifactual critical literacy approaches become a means of power issues and social change.

Artifactual Narratives As Primary Modes of Arts-Based Research

According to Turkle (2007), “we live our lives in the middle of things” (p. 6). Thus, closely focusing on students' out-of-school objects, is likely to shed light on their unknown lives, identities, values, and cultures; furthermore, valuing what students value (out-of-school objects) enables literacy teachers and researchers to gain productive information about their out-of-school lives and opens up their stories (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010). When students tell stories about their valued objects, they create narratives that enable them to mirror who they really are and where they belong. That is to say, the artifactual nature of narratives becomes the voice of the students. In her paper, Davies (2015) highlights “how narrative has been theorised as part of the social science narrative turn” (p. 397) and recognizes the idea of a narrative “first, as a human impulse; second, as an act of identity; and third, as an indicator of culture, or discourse” (p. 397).

Sikes and Gale (2006) note that people are storying creatures and they create narratives to explain and interpret their lived lives to others. In their paper, Cremin, Chappel, and Craft (2013) similarly foreground the role of narratives in early education. Their study shows that early narrative competence can help students attain “a secure foundation for emergent literacy” (p.138); more importantly, analysis of children’s oral stories “highlight the significance of narrative for social, cognitive and identity work” (ibid.). In other words, young learners are able to combine their life stories with their imagination and create “complex narrative structures that stimulated exploration of the physical and social world” (ibid.) through storytelling.

When out-of-school artifacts are valued and used in literacy practices, they can become bridges that connect students to their narrative worlds and enable them to use their imaginations freely to create and share their unique stories and explore new social worlds. Students try to weave meaning into these artifacts when sharing their stories and narratives with each other. They also try to comprehend the message that lies behind each story; by telling and hearing these stories, their voices become echoes. Each telling and re-telling, structure the everyday and modify the perceptions regarding other’s lives (Davies, 2015). Thus, students’ narratives should not be used merely as tools to improve their literacy skills but should also be used to acquire their voices. As Davies (2015) suggests, narrative should be used “as a source of data, as a lens through which to regard data, and as a vehicle for the presentation of data” (p.397).

As we note above, a narrative is postulated as an act of identity (Davies, 2015). It is not easy to discover who students really are and gaining information about their real identities requires investigation and discovery. Their narratives provide literacy educators and researchers with opportunities to reveal and unpack their real identities. Giddens (1991) discussed the importance of the storytelling process as it establishes our identity:

“A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor –important though this is- in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self.” (Giddens, 1991, p. 54)

Here, narrative is shown as a reflexive process. Students’ embedded values and real identities are revealed through storytelling. Thus, those who

listen to or read these stories can view the world through the students' eyes. In other words, valuing students' stories paves the way for understanding their underlying values. Therefore, as Davies (2015) notes, using the narrative as a method provides researchers with opportunities to "gain insights into how people see the world and their place within it" (p. 398).

In their paper, White and Lemieux (2015) highlight how important it is to value objects that are valuable to students as they uncover the truth about their identities. They point out that producing written narratives about objects and artifacts allows artful expressions by participants when recollecting their past experiences and memories and reflecting their identities and values. Through these artful expressions, researchers are provided with an opportunity to attain productive information about their subjects' (pre-school teachers) past experiences and real identities. In short, narratives about artifacts offer people an opportunity to reveal the values in which their identities are embedded. As Ayers (2010) states:

"we need to talk of values -of what ought to be- if we are ever to really understand ourselves, our situations, and our options, and if we are ever to undertake meaningful action toward improvement in schools or in society." (Ayers, 2010, p.36-37)

In her book, Mitchell (2011) similarly highlights how "objects serve as entry points for the telling of stories about the self" (p. 41) and emphasizes the importance of personal narratives about various artifacts (such as family albums, dresses, gifts, and heirlooms) as a significant arts-based methodology that can be implemented for creating "personal and social meanings and engaging in social research" (p. 43). She quotes Taylor (2002) to state that "no more elegant tool exists to describe the human condition than the personal narrative" (p. 43). Listening to narratives on students' valued objects provides researchers with the opportunity to unveil their embedded identities and values.

As mentioned earlier, students' valued objects are good cultural resources (Pahl and Rowsell, 2010; Mitchell, 2011; White and Lemieux, 2015); furthermore, as Freedman (2003) notes "a good illustration of the complex connection between image and meaning can be seen in the visual choices people make to reveal cultural identities" (p. 97). Valuing and listening to students' narratives about their valued objects will provide literacy teachers and researchers with an opportunity to hear about the different lives that different students lead within various cultures. Narratives (written or oral) about valued objects do not merely enable students to enhance their literacy skills artistically but also enable them to mirror their

lived experiences within their cultures and share these experiences with others. Thus, as White and Lemieux (2015) note “one’s values may find expression through creative work” (p.269).

In addition to the foregoing, listening to and reading narratives concerning other’s values and common artifacts help learners enact culturally relevant peer interactions (Watson and Marciano, 2015). Students undoubtedly engage in literacy practices more when they are given an opportunity to talk about common and shared subjects. Drawing on students’ common popular culture (common valued artifacts) provides them with opportunities to better interact and communicate with each other and enables them to reflect and extend their knowledge and lived experiences. Thus, literacy educators and researchers can obtain fruitful information about students’ cultural backgrounds and use this information as strength “ in recreating, recycling and sharing knowledge ” (Watson and Marciano, 2015, p. 37).

In sum valued artifacts as stories are infused with the “lives of others” (Banks, 1998, p. 57) and can be used to elicit information about students’ identities, cultural background, and values. Literacy educators can thus use artifactual narratives as a means of better comprehending their learners’ worlds. Moreover, through meaning-making, evaluation, and interpretation, students engage in creative and critical thinking skills and artfully create artifactual narratives; students thus become “literate in aesthetic discourse” (Barton, 2014, p. 23).

CONCLUSION

In this paper we focused on arts-based research within artifactual literacy. We highlighted the importance of valuing visual objects and artifacts, as they represent and reflect students’ identities and social and cultural backgrounds by exploring the affordances of artifacts as stories. Combining artifacts and objects with the literacy practices and listening to students’ stories and narratives about them can generate many possibilities (Barton, 2014; Cole and Knowles, 2008; Finley, 2008). Firstly, artifacts as stories provide students with opportunities to empower their literacy skills artistically because, as mentioned earlier, telling a story requires creation, artistic, and imaginative expression, and reflexivity. Narratives enable students to share their voices, identities, values, and cultures in a dynamic and indigenous way (Cremin, Chappell, and Craft, 2013). Second, artifacts are combined with critical literacies, which account for their power. Artifacts

as stories help students explore the lives and identities of others through their social interactions. They can recognize and acknowledge inequalities, and power relations and can “challenge expectations, break stereotypes and change the ways in which persons apprehend the world” (Greene, 1991, p. 155-156). Artifacts as stories can become forms of human experience and, therefore, works of art (Barone and Eisner, 2012). When students create stories and narratives about their valued objects they not only empower their literacy skills but also engage in artistic way of thinking through interpreting and meaning-making. The story telling and narrative creation process becomes a social act because when students share their lived lives (values, cultures, and identities) through their narratives, different social norms emerge; furthermore, these social norms are circulated through interpretation and meaning-making (Johnson and Vasudevan, 2012). Thus, artifacts as stories are powerful art forms that engage students in social, creative, and critical acts in literacy practices and spur them to be critically literate people.

Although artifactual literacy and arts-based methodologies have gained crucial importance in countries like USA, Canada, Australia and United Kingdom especially in the last two decades, it has not been given enough attention in Turkey yet. Overseas studies on the phenomenon demonstrate that when students are given a chance to create stories based on their valued objects and artifacts, they start using their language in a very artistic way (Barone and Fisner, 2012; Davies, 2015; Eisner, 2008). Moreover, they experience how to direct their learning and speak for themselves. Studies conducted in the USA and the United Kingdom, for example, show that use of artifacts stimulate learners’ creativity and creative thinking to a great extent (Cremin, Chappell, and Craft, 2013; Flewitt, Pahl, and Smith, 2015). However, arts-based approaches are deficit in Turkish literacy curriculum, and no current discussion or exploration seems to exist on the phenomenon. Teachers still seem to use traditional, teacher-centred methods in literacy classes. These methods make learners develop their literacy skills through rote-learning (memorization). That is to say, students only learn what is given to them. In other words, they do not have much freedom to control their learning so that they can empower their analytic, creative, and critical thinking skills. Bearing these in mind, we believe it is the time for Turkish authorities responsible from curriculum design consider the recent developments in the area of literacy, and interpret the positive outcomes of such research on literacy and embed them into Turkish curriculum on literacy. Only by this way, education of new generation would be compatible with the generations of the developed countries. As Micniff (2003) states, democratic societies require education systems that value

student voice and provide students with opportunities to engage in discussions, express their opinions freely, critique, question and value other perspectives. Therefore, countries that value democracy and want to educate democratic citizens should change their traditional, teacher-centred approaches. They should leave the education systems which only allow teacher voice and start employing new methods that encourage student voice and help them gain essential literacy skills to be democratic citizens in the future.

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