

#QuadrosDiscentes: Research into memes and art in teacher training in Brazil and Spain

QuadrosDiscentes: Pesquisa sobre memes e arte na formação docente no Brasil e na Espanha

#QuadrosDiscentes: Investigación sobre memes y arte en la formación docente en Brasil y en España

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RESUMO

Neste artigo refletimos e apresentamos os resultados de parte de um projeto de pesquisa que realizamos no ano letivo 2019-2020 com alunos da Dupla Licenciatura em Educação Infantil e Primária da Universidade de Girona - UdG (Catalunha, Espanha) e alunos do Curso de Licenciatura em Artes Visuais da Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina - UDESC (Brasil), sobre memes da Internet e suas estratégias linguísticas. Para aproximar os dois campos de estudo e facilitar a colaboração, foi utilizado um grupo fechado dentro da rede social Facebook como espaço de interação entre os sujeitos da pesquisa. Os pesquisadores participaram da experiência, de acordo com os protocolos do método de pesquisa-ação. Os resultados apontam para reflexões e possíveis modificações que poderiam ser introduzidas em novas pesquisas sobre como aprender e ensinar sobre imagens voláteis – típicas da cibercultura – em processos educativos para formação de professores.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Memes da Internet; Linguagens Líquidas; Formação de Professor; Ensino de Arte; Cibercultura.

ABSTRACT

In this paper we reflect on and present the results of part of a research project we conducted in academic years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 with students of the Double Degree in Infant and Primary Education of the University of Girona - UdG (Catalonia, Spain) and students of the Degree in Visual Arts of Santa Catarina State University - UDESC (Brazil), concerning Internet memes and their linguistic strategies. In order to bring the two fields of study together and facilitate collaboration, a closed group within the Facebook social network was used as a space of interaction between the research subjects. The researchers took part in the experience, in accordance with the protocols of the action research method. The results point towards reflections and potential modifications that could be introduced in new research into how to learn and teach about volatile images—typical of cyberculture—in educational processes for teacher training.

KEY-WORDS

Internet memes; Liquid languages; Teacher training; Art education; Cyberculture.

RESUMEN

En este artículo reflexionamos y presentamos los resultados de parte de un proyecto de investigación que realizamos el curso 2019-2020 con alumnos del Doble Titulación en Educación Infantil y Primaria de la Universidad de Girona - UdG (Cataluña, España) y estudiantes de la Licenciatura en Artes Visuales de la Universidad Estadual de Santa Catarina - UDESC (Brasil), sobre los memes de Internet y sus estrategias lingüísticas. Para acercar los dos campos de estudio y facilitar la colaboración, se utilizó un grupo cerrado dentro de la red social Facebook como espacio de interacción entre los sujetos de la investigación. Los investigadores participaron de la experiencia, de acuerdo con los protocolos del método de investigación acción. Los resultados apuntan a reflexiones y posibles modificaciones que podrían introducirse en nuevas investigaciones sobre cómo aprender y enseñar sobre imágenes volátiles –propias de la cibercultura– en los procesos educativos para la formación docente.

PALABRAS-CLAVE

Memes de Internet; Lenguajes Líquidos; Formación Docente; Educación Artística; Cibercultura.

Towards a definition of meme

We are living in a time when images invade our everyday lives, when we use icons to express our feelings or to emphasise certain messages, memes form part of our habitual communication patterns on social network applications. However, school-based education has paid little attention to these language resources in its literacy strategies, teachers are not being trained to work with these media in a critical and reflective manner. This fleeting, fluid and complex characteristic of the way we live today has been conceptualised by Bauman (2009), where he defines our changing society through the metaphor of liquidity, as opposed to solidity, since liquids cannot hold their shape, fix space or bind time.

The cultural mobility has come about through mobile communication. Ubiquity and virtuality are aspects that have brought about instability in linguistic systems. Communication is no longer restricted to fixed places, since we are living in a time of mediated presence, in which telecommunications media have produced changes in the “structure of our everyday conception of time, of space, of ways of living, learning, acting, engaging, feeling,” which have led us to other kind of affective, sensual and emotional responses (Santaella, 2007, p.25).

In order to understand the fractured and volatile scenario in which we are currently immersed, Santaella (2007, p.17) has looked at concepts set out by Bauman, Deleuze, Guattari and Maffesoli. Some of these authors, such as Guattari and Maffesoli, do not use the metaphor of liquidity in their writings. However, their works are “permeated by concepts whose semantic field is imbued with meaning of liquid movements and things.” In order to better understand the liquidity and volatility of contemporary languages, Santaella also presents the work of Sloterdijk (2014), in particular his use of the metaphor of foam, which evokes an even greater sense of lightness, subtlety and delicacy. He uses this playful metaphor in order to find another way to understand the complexity of contemporary life. Thanks to digitalisation —the pixel revolution—, images behave like foam, rearranging themselves when touched, becoming an infinite set of other images that can be restructured and lost in an instant.

These volatile images are also the ones created and handled by independent media and people, shared in an infinite set of possibilities in the foam era. These images form part of what Santaella (2007, p.24-25) —inspired by Bauman (2001)— calls liquid images, in which:

Text, image and sound are no longer what they used to be. They slide towards each other, overlapping each other, complementing each other, fraternising with each other, joining together, separating, crisscrossing each other. They have become light, wandering. They have lost the stability that the force of gravity of fixed supports gave them. They have become apparitions, presences that flee, emerge and disappear at the delicate touch of a fingertip on tiny keys.

In order to integrate the hybrid and mutant visuality of cyberculture in the training of art teachers and infant/primary education teachers, an international research study was conducted during academic years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 that connected two different academic settings: Florianópolis (Brazil) and Girona (Spain). The study entailed offering students from these two places the chance to share their experiences creating and analysing memes. The platform chosen for this purpose was the Facebook social network.

In this cooperative experience involving Brazilian and Spanish students, the idea of studying the visuality of memes was inspired by a viral phenomenon started by a Spanish tweeter known as Maestro Jota (Teacher J) in 2018. He proposed a challenge with the hashtag #CuadrosDocentes (#TeacherPictures) that involved encouraging teachers to appropriate well-known images from the history of art in order to explain the everyday travails of their profession in an ironic, good-humoured manner. They were to be clear and concise messages displayed in a square format, designed to be viewed and easily shared on social networks, in other words, they had to be memes. The hashtag went viral, becoming a trending topic in Spain at the time.

The intervention involved in the #CuadrosDocentes memes consists solely of an inserted text that accompanies the image of the digitalised work. This text has the effect of shifting the meaning of the image to another territory, in this case the classroom. Most of the appropriations carried out by artists over the course of the history of art have direct visual references to the original works. Their goal is to question the very concept of art. The memes that we have studied produce a straightforward shift in meaning. They are designed to be read in a quick and fluid manner, and to be subsequently shared. This is a characteristic of volatile images (Santaella, 2007).

To recap, Internet memes consist of virtual images which are created or adapted from existing images and take on a variety of forms, ranging from standalone images or verbal messages to syncretic, verbal and visual texts. They are usually humorous and address hard-hitting social or political topics, which generates another of their characteristics, namely the potential to go viral, spreading quickly across the virtual universe.

The term meme comes from the ancient Greek *mīmēma*, meaning “imitated thing”, which itself came from *mimeisthai*, meaning “to imitate”. More recently, the British biologist Richard Dawkins has used the term “meme” in his bestselling 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. The meme metaphor is analogous to that of the gene, the basic unit of genetic information. It follows that the meme is for memory what the gene is for genetics. While some interpret this use to refer to an information unit that is multiplied by spreading from person to person, Dawkins used the word to designate the phenomenon of *replication* in his biological studies. Pinto (2015, p.112) argues that “On the basis of these conceptions, the transmission of culture entails a process of mental and affective assimilation through interaction with the cultural medium, and this involves the manifestation of a phenomenon with characteristics similar to those of an evolutionary process.” Therefore, what Dawkins proposes is an evolutionary conception according to which memes constitute cultural replicators that function in the same way as human genes, obeying similar rules to those of natural selection.

Santaella (2007, p.191) is critical of the author's metaphor, considering it inconsistent. She argues that

[...] what is striking about this, is the fact that the most important signs are not those which wander, move around or play on our mind, or which jump—who knows how, like fleas perhaps—from one mind to another, as Dawkins would have it. The signs that are important are those which are externalised through communication. The signs that materialise—beyond speech, which is fleeting, appearing and disappearing in the very moment it is emitted—are even more important, since they occupy places in the world, last over time and survive their authors, acting as a sort of mild revenge on mortality, and enabling incessant communication.

However, Heylighen (1996) argues that memes are also characterised by their reproducibility—reproduced by means of sharing, in this case—, hence the use of a metaphor analogous to the gene. Pinto (2015, p. 115) concisely argues that “Nowadays, in digital culture, memes are commonly understood as being any text, image or video with a humorous element that is shared on social networks.” Vélez (2012), meanwhile, points out that the meaning of the term “meme” in virtual communities has developed independently, being shaped over time through use. In the absence of an academic definition, he argues that the wiki website TV Tropes offers a good understanding of the phenomenon in its definition of the term, according to which, “Sociology notwithstanding, on the Internet, a meme is usually described as a catchy derivative of some aspect of pop culture, parodied and repeated to the point that its origins and original meaning become muddled and completely mutilated beyond any point of recognition or humour.” (*apud* Vélez, 2012, p.114).

The definitions of the term “meme” highlight the aspects of resignification and loss of the original meaning, which is exactly what we observe in the #CuadrosDocentes memes, where the images appropriated from the history of art alter the meanings generated in their plane of visual expression due to being accompanied by a phrase that subjects its original meaning to a process of deterritorialization, creating a new territoriality of meanings constructed by means of an intertextual resource, whereby the added words redirect the interpretation of the image.

Viral phenomena such as #CuadrosDocentes crop up daily on our social network profiles. These ephemeral images, constantly flipping by on our screens, fill our everyday lives with colours and shapes, meanings and concepts, signs that often pass by so quickly that we not always manage to properly reflect on them, grasping only their most superficial and obvious meaning, giving them no critical analysis.

However, Pinto (2015, p.122) plays down the importance of this lack of reflection on the many Internet memes that pop up on our devices on a daily basis. Instead, he highlights the “resemanticization” carried out by users, who assign a new meaning to something that had previous meanings, since the mutation that a meme undergoes is due to a new meaning added by an Internet user, generated through new and different writings. As such, the author defines Internet memes as “a phenomenon of digital culture whereby the engaged subjects reinterpret definitions of reality, creating

their own meanings. In this respect, variation as a characteristic of memes can be explained from the communication perspective through resignification.” (Pinto, 2015, p. 123).

Taking into account all these definitions, we conceive memes as a viral, volatile, apocryphal, critical and ironic genre that plays to recontextualize images and texts with intermedial strategies and thus impel a new approach to social topics based on resemanticization.

This resignification process, so characteristic of memes, is the aspect of our research project #CuadrosDocentes#QuadrosDiscentes: how we learn with and about images that we have chosen to focus on in this paper. We will show how the subjects of our research project attached new meanings to images from the history of art in order for these images to reflect their everyday problems as university students, just as teachers have done on social networks previously, as described above. Accordingly, the UdG and UDESC students were assigned the challenge of creating their own #QuadrosDiscentes memes. In this paper we will analyse the intertextual constructions —memes— that were posted in the #cuadrosdocentes#quadrosdiscentes Facebook group, a virtual space of collaboration created for the purpose of this research project.

Research field

This research project is one of the academic initiatives that forms part of the agreement between the University of Girona (UdG), in Spain, and Santa Catarina State University (UDESC), in Brazil, in 2016. The aim has been to conduct a shared research project, connecting the training of future teachers specialising in visual arts with that of future teachers in infant and primary education. The project is led jointly by —on the one hand— a lecturer and holder of a PhD in Art and Education of the Department of Area Didactics of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology of the UdG, and member of the Research Group in Education, Heritage and Intermedia Arts (GREPAI); and —on the other hand— a lecturer and PhD holder in Visual Semiotics of the Arts Centre of Santa Catarina State University, and subleader of the Core Research Group in Transdisciplinary Semiotic Studies (NEST).

There are two groups of participating subjects in this research project. The first group comprises students of the Musical, Visual and Plastic Art Education II subject of the Double Degree in Infant and Primary Education of the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the UdG. In the first semester, the classes are taught for 35 fourth-year students. This subject is structured in the form of two weekly sessions, each with a duration of 90 minutes. One of the sessions is attended by the full group of 35 students, while for the other session the group is split into two smaller subgroups of 17 students. This is one of the four compulsory subjects in the area of Visual and Plastic Expression that these UdG students complete as part of their university training.

The second group of participating subjects in the research project are students

in Brazil of the Degree in Visual Arts, which is a specific degree for the training of art teachers. Students who complete this degree are qualified to teach visual arts at all levels —infant, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary— of formal educational institutions, as well as in museums, art galleries, after-school workshops, etc. The subject in which the research has been conducted is called “Reading of Images for Education”, taught in the fourth semester in a single weekly three-and-a-half-hour session for around 20 students.

Research methodologies: How to engage young university students?

The methodology chosen was the Action-Research (THIOLLENT, 2011). The students participated in the experience but they themselves were not research subjects. It is therefore a method which involves participation, but which is not participatory research as such. In this case, the professors were the researchers who appropriated the data and could modify and improve their classes, considering the results.

The research was qualitative, since it involved the collation of theoretical propositions related to the topic of the “virtualised” world, which encourage reflections by future teachers on the use of memes in art and visual education classes or plastic arts classes. In other words, the visual and verbal data were processed by means of a reflective analysis, which is descriptive. Marconi and Lakatos (2010) explain that descriptive research is that which proposes to know the nature of the studied phenomenon, as well as the characteristics and processes that form part of it.

The study analysed here may be considered exploratory. According to Gil (2009), exploratory research is that which aims to find out more information on the topic of study. Its main goals are to improve ideas, confirm intuitions and uncover unexpected data. Its planning is characterised by its flexibility, enabling the consideration of a wide variety of aspects related to the subject of study, including bibliographical studies, interviews and the analysis of examples. Although the phenomenon under analysis was previously known; that is, it was already known that the students use many virtual, ephemeral and volatile images on a daily basis, and that they share them through their mobile devices on social networks, the research wanted to delve into the the ability of future teachers to resignify and their critical reasoning.

The research project was presented to the students of the two universities in academic year 2019-2020. There was a certain amount of puzzlement initially in both groups, since the students are used to dealing exclusively with academic topics, while Internet memes might be considered a trivial phenomenon of everyday life. Nonetheless, once they began to take part in the proposed activities, the students in each group soon realised that they were learning not only about art and volatile Internet images, but also about the relations, customs and reality of the other group, which were similar in some respects but less so in others.

An important issue that we observed in the ways of sharing information was

language choice. The Catalan students are bilingual and switch seamlessly between Catalan and Spanish. In our project, this meant that the students communicated in all three languages, with Spanish being the predominant one. In addition, the researchers translated what was written in the memes in instances where the short text had not already been translated by the students themselves.

Given the difference in time zones, it was not possible for the students in the two groups to communicate with each other online in real time. As such, Facebook proved to be a suitable network, despite the fact that students do not habitually use. The Facebook group didn't require synchronicity and enabled the students to post their contributions, and to read and comment on their fellow students' posts in their free time, as they do with their friends in their personal lives. We also considered it a suitable research instrument as it allowed gathering all student contributions and interactions in a comprehensive and non-invasive manner.

The students were assigned several activities in order for the two participating groups to engage with each other. The first activity comprised choosing an image — any image — by a visual artist in the history of art and changing its meaning associating it with an element or situation related to their lives as university students. This, then, was the proposal to create the #CuadrosDocentes#QuadrosDiscentes memes.

Data of the research study

Mememes created during academic year 2019-2020 by the students of the UdG

The UdG students posted 20 memes in the Facebook group. We selected ten of them for our analysis, using various criteria: the memes had to be comprehensible when translated into a different language, they could not repeat an idea already used by a fellow student, they had to be fun or ironic, and they had to have some connection with studies or university life. In this article we will present the analysis of three memes produced by students of each university.

In a joint analysis of the memes, we observed that the students had chosen a wide variety of artists —both in respect of historical periods and nationality— and types of works, ranging from paintings on canvas to mural paintings and sculptures. The chosen artists included Vernet, Rodin, Magritte, Michelangelo, Münch, Frida Kahlo and Fra Carnevale; the selection was also representatives of several countries, such as France, Italy, Germany and Mexico. We observed that some students were not interested in knowing the source or context of their chosen image, since they did not add any details identifying the works, such as the name of the author and the year of its creation. The students' carefree attitude towards artistic references may be due to a lack of any in-depth knowledge of this universe. This would confirm Vélez's observation (2012) that in virtual communities in which memes are used, the original reference is lost.

One of the main goals of the #CuadrosDocentes#QuadrosDiscentes project was for the students to substantially change the meaning of works of art. They achieved this goal easily through verbal discourse; since the visual substrate was not modified in any significant way—at the most, some cropping was done, as observed in the works by Magritte and Michelangelo. This resignification of the image is what Pinto (2015) refers to with the term *resemantization*, since not only the image acquires new meaning but also the subjects of digital culture themselves suggest new approaches to reality.

The first meme analysed (fig. 1) shows the face, at a diagonal angle, of a man with a hat and beard. The figure has divergent strabismus; he appears to be smiling but it is hard to discern what type of feeling his smile expresses. This painting, which appears to have been cropped for the purpose of the meme, was not identified. With its incorporated verbal text, the meme criticises the teacher's absence, after the student has made all the effort to get to the university, more specifically, it is critical of the teacher's last-minute notification of his absence. It is noteworthy that this notification has arrived "por correo" (by mail), this being understood as email. The man's seemingly undecipherable smile takes on another meaning, that of a student who is powerless to take any action to express indignation to the teacher.

Fig. 1, 2 and 3, Memes created by the students of the UdG, from #QuadrosDiscentes, 2019



The painting chosen by the author of the second meme (fig. 2) we analyse is *Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa*, by Horacio Vernet. It is a 19th-century painting of a very important 13th-century battle, which resulted in the defeat of the Muslim population of Al-Andalus) at the hands of the Portuguese and Spanish forces, who expelled them from the Iberian Peninsula. Given that it is the depiction of a historical battle, it is full of symbolic figures, such as the clergyman, the warrior and the moor, each identified by their headgear. The white horse upon which the warrior is mounted is another noteworthy element. As in the case of all battles—including theatrical, symbolic and bloodless ones—it depicts a clash in which one group is attacked by another. The meme takes on a meaning related to student life with the following text: "When you leave an exam and the other class wants to know what was in it." In other words, the students leaving the exam feel besieged—although not physically attacked—by the students from another class who are eager to know the contents of the exam. The

meme indicates that it must be a recurring situation in the Faculty of Education.

The next meme (fig. 3) to form part of our analysis was produced using François Auguste Rodin's *Le Penseur* (*The Thinker*), the famous work created by the French sculptor in 1880. This title in itself gives an idea of the content of this sculptural masterpiece, an excuse for Rodin to demonstrate his artistic mastery and exhaustive knowledge of human anatomy. The students chose this seated, thinking figure in order to add the following text: "When you've got so much work that you don't even know where to start." They used this seated thinking figure to transmit the feeling of tiredness and being overwhelmed, wondering which task to begin with from such a long list. A great work in which a statue about philosophy, reflection and stillness becomes an illustration that captures a somewhat trivial everyday concern.

It is also worth pointing out the use of the Catalan colloquial word *faena* (work) in an otherwise Spanish sentence. This mixture of Catalan and Spanish is typical of bilingual students in Catalonia.

Memes produced by the students of the UDESC in the second semester of 2019

In the case of the memes produced by the Brazilian students, we also selected ten of the twenty memes posted in the Facebook group, using the same selection criteria. The memes had to be comprehensible when translated into a different language, the students could not repeat an idea already used by a fellow student, the memes had to be fun or ironic, and they had to have some connection with studies or university life.

On observing the set of memes produced by the Brazilian students, it is clear that most of them chose works by contemporary artists, with a few exceptions: *White on White* (1918), by the Russian painter Kazimir Malevich, *A prece* (*The Prayer*) (1922), by the Brazilian painter Arthur Timotheo da Costa, and *A Morta* (*The Deceased Woman*) by another Brazilian painter, Victor Meirelles. This artist lived from 1832 to 1903 but the date of this particular painting is unknown. We also observed that the students predominantly chose Brazilian artists, both in the case of contemporary and older works. Furthermore, most of the images do not have much colour. We can find photographs of performances and paintings among the images used by the students of the UDESC to produce their memes. Last of all, unlike the Catalan students, the *catarinenses*⁴ were more diligent about giving the details of the chosen works. This is probably because these students have artistic training and searching for images in their case is a task with a stronger academic basis in which they have become experienced and skilled.

Using the same criteria as with the UdG students, we will offer a more detailed analysis of the first three works. There are some similarities in the plane of expression,

4 Referring to Santa Catarina State, where the Brazilian students live.

while the same occurs in respect of the change of meanings in the plane of content of the memes. Of the ten examples chosen for this paper, the students attributed meanings to their images that are subtly critical of student life, even if they were trying to present other ideas.

The first image (fig. 4) is a photo of a 1968 performance by the Brazilian artist Lygia Pape entitled *O divisor* (*The Divider*), which was presented again in 2017 by the Metropolitan Museum of New York, as part of a retrospective of her work. The student has added a new meaning through the following text: “When you’re out in the street with a class and you can’t lose a child” (*Quando você planeja uma aula externa e não podes perder nenhuma criança*). By having people participate in the performance, Lygia Pape aimed them to grasp the need for the social fabric to enter into some sort of negotiation in order to decide what direction to take. However, the student did not give the image a sense of working together but rather it has been interpreted as a sort of device with which to imprison children, the potential pupils of students who will become art teachers in schools.

Fig. 4, 5, and 6, Memes created by the students of the UDESC, from #QuadrosDiscentes, 2019



The next meme (fig. 5) used a work by Kasimir Malevich known as *White on White*, in English, or *Blanc sur Blanc*, in French — in Portuguese it is *Quadrado branco sobre fundo branco* —, which forms part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MoMA). The original Russian title is unknown according to specialised sources⁵. The total whiteness gave the student the idea of one’s mind going blank in an exam, expressed through the following text: “When it’s exam time” (“*quando chega a hora da prova*”). In Brazilian Portuguese, the phrase “*Deu um branco*” (“He/She went blank”) is typically used when someone cannot think of any ideas, or when he has forgotten something he knew. This is another meme with a negative feeling about student life, when the pressure of exams becomes so great that one can have a memory lapse.

The last image is *A morta* (*The Deceased Woman*), a work of art by Victor Meirelles,

5 Cf MARCADÉ, Jean-Claude. K. S Malevich, du “Quadrilatère noir”(1913) au “Blanc sur Blanc”(1917). De l’éclipse des objets à la libération de l’espace. Lausanne, L’Age d’Homme, 1983.

another Brazilian artist from Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, where the Art Centre of the UDESC is located. The city is in fact home to the Victor Meirelles Museum, which is a house-museum; that is, the house where the artist was born, in 1832. *A morta* forms part of the collection of the Victor Meirelles Museum and is one of the artist's most impressive paintings, according to some experts. Taking the metaphor of death as total exhaustion, the text accompanying the image in this case explains how the student feels "When the semester comes to an end" ("*Quando o semestre acaba*", in Portuguese). Nothing more negative than death could be used to describe the physical and mental fatigue suffered by students during their studies.

Results and reflections regarding the research process

Considering the experience as a whole, we can state that the results varied widely: some students produced their memes and completed all the other tasks of the respective subjects, showing interest and dedication, while others made less effort. In respect of the collaborative efforts and interactions between students, the results were also uneven. Examples of the most dedicated participants include a Brazilian student who translated a text into the language most used by the Catalan students — Catalan, rather than Spanish —, and some students from the two countries who set up a WhatsApp group to discuss issues at greater length. Conversely, there was a low level of participation in the discussions on memes in the Facebook group; the memes of the Catalan students generated more views and received reactions in the form of emojis. However, many of the memes of both sets of students were viewed without receiving any comment or "like".

Meanwhile, the learning generated by the proposal for the students to create memes can be identified on the basis of the characteristics listed by Pinto (2015), such as skills, knowledge and attitudes.

One thing that all the students of both groups had in common was the scope of the main objective regarding the creation of the memes; that is, the resemanticization of the works of art. Some of the memes were smarter than others, some were funnier, some were more obvious and others were more obtuse, but they were all capable of changing the meanings of the chosen images through the addition of a short text. The dominant strategy of resemanticization was to superimpose a sentence that evoked a different context to the original image. Students did not fragment or manipulate the images, nor did they embed the text within the image (in the form of a comic bubble, for example).

Another conclusion that can be drawn is that the students in general keep on considering university a serious place—in a negative sense—, a formal place that can make life uncomfortable with rules such as deadlines for submitting pieces of work, tests, guidelines, etc. We had a creeping suspicion that through the creation of memes and the other assigned tasks of the shared research project, we were taking away the

freedom intrinsic to virtual language by imposing the rules of an official institution — the university—, although our aim was to make the official institution more relatable to their everyday lives. In other words, it appears that students found it difficult to contemplate using social networks in a way that involved following standardised guidelines, such as pedagogical ones. The spontaneity and fluidity of communication on social networks has been reduced in a setting of institutionalised learning. Despite having good storage and organisational resources for collecting the research data, Facebook did not become a proper architectural space that could be inhabited spontaneously. As Santaella suggests (2007, p.17), the conception of architecture in cyberspace is more musical: “For the first time, the architect does not draw the object but rather the principles for which the object is generated and varies in time.” The academic orderliness, necessary in order to collect the research data, has entailed the loss of the freshness and spontaneity of sharing and collaborating that characterise social networks. The existence of deadlines and schedules creates an organisational structure which is not the type that characterises cyberspace, according to Santaella (2007, p. 123), who in respect of its collaborative nature says that the “emergence of new structures of knowledge and creativity depends on deliberations and solutions to shared problems.” Faced with the challenge of an international collaborative research project involving future teachers from two very different realities, along with the accompanying challenge of a virtual learning space, another issue that must be considered is that of different time zones. Having groups with matching schedules might perhaps provide more direct communication, along with telepresence resources. This would generate more empathy, trust and fluidity in the relations and learning to be shared. It is also possible to explore the absent presence (Santaella, 2007, p. 235-236) that is generated in cyberspace. Despite these limitations, students played with art and irony. They overwhelmingly explored the resource of playing the victim, but they caricature these concerns with irony, generating humour, a typical attribute of Internet memes.

We observed that the students spent a long time searching for images in the visual universe of art works that could reflect their status as students. It is important to bear in mind that various applications are available for the creation of memes. These so-called meme generators even have image banks, which greatly facilitates the creation process. The fact that the Spanish students chose classic works of art while the Brazilian students mostly picked contemporary works is attributed to the pilot experience; the Brazilian students had access to the Facebook group of the second semester of 2018 and observed two aspects that they frowned upon: the predominance of classic art and of Spanish artists. The Brazilian students, instead, made a visual choice using criteria such as the nationality of the artists and artistic manifestations mostly in the category of contemporary art. They put their knowledge of local art and contemporary art to the test in order to present their reality as students at the Art Centre of the UDESC.

An important aspect of learning proposed by Pinto (2015, p. 128) is related

to attitudes, such as respect, along with creativity, curiosity and social criticism. This author argues that the sense of humour that is characteristic of memes can generate social criticism: “Being critical of one’s environment is an attitude that students should develop on all levels. By being critical, not only do we think about reality in order to detect problems but also we will be closer to finding possible solutions.” This critical positioning has been achieved in some of the memes created by the Brazilian students, as we can observe in the weeping of the character, who represents a programme of the Ministry of Education of Brazil called Future-se, which subliminally prepares a privatised future of Brazilian education (fig. 7). Or as we can observe in the meme in which another Brazilian student criticises the classmates who leave the classroom to smoke drugs and come back into the room red-eyed like rabbits, almost hallucinating (fig. 8). And as we can see, in the ambush carried out by one class of students of the UdG on another class that has just completed an exam, in order to find out what the teacher has put in it, highlighting an ethical issue related to student practices in the university (fig. 2).



Figs. 7 and 8, Memes created by the students of the UdG, from #QuadrosDiscentes, 2019

On the two occasions on which we have carried out this research experience, both socio-political contexts had changed and intervened in the sphere of the official, formal classroom-based education of the university. Firstly, in Brazil, a general election was held. Social networks mostly contained polarised information either in favour of or against the candidate who won the election, as we can see in the article *É verdade esse bilhete: memes e a disputa pela verdade (Is this note true?: memes and the dispute for the truth)* by Rangel (2018), published in the Meme Museum of Fluminense Federal University (Brazil). Meanwhile, in the academic year 2019-2020, Catalonia was still suffering the aftereffects of the independence referendum held in late 2017. This political event led to repression by the Spanish central government, which punished Catalan disobedience with convictions for several political prisoners. This reaction caused popular unrest and led to several strikes by students over the course of the term, along with demonstrations and revolts on the streets. Once again, the socio-political scene. These turbulent social contexts led to a lack of interest in the official proposals and topics of the institution. On future occasions, students can be invited to reflect on hot socio-political debates through works of art, which would allow us to know if they participate in public debates with a critical perspective.

We observe the emergence of efforts in teacher training to analyse the visuality produced and shared in cyberculture —whether specifically related to the arts or not—, to slow down ways of seeing. These efforts to provide greater contemplation of ephemeral images and to encourage reflection may lead to another literacy of liquid languages in the era of mobility, as addressed by Santaella (2007). New research projects on art teacher training should analyse how students use memes in different contexts and compare their ways of resignifying and reading such volatile images.

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