



# Street Art: From Impertinent Transgression to Inclusive Citizenship

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**Abstract.** The image, whether produced or enjoyed, is the first symbolic communicative act based on processes that manifest themselves outside one's bodily self. Starting with the very first drawings of small children, we can easily trace our need/desire to share messages, perceptions, doubts and ideas with other people. Street art, thanks to its technical characteristics, its particular expressive form, and the original canvas it uses, can be a very important stepping-stone for the development of creativity and divergence of thought, a creativity that must not be confused with the messy and chaotic defacing of public spaces. It must coincide with the ability to find alternatives to linear ways of learning, experimenting and finding original strategies that can provide more articulated answers -- thus more adapted to the complexity that characterizes one's awareness of being and feeling part of a community. Street art can be a methodological strategy for opening up education for citizenship, legality, and respect for the *res publica*. Young students of all types and school levels can appropriate the concept of collective heritage, the sense of belonging to the territory where they live, transforming an act that is in itself transgressive into a recognized and shared action, into a legitimate product that leaves a permanent trace of their passage in the schools they attend, in the public squares they cross, in the cities where they live.

**Keywords:** street art · civic education · transgression · education

## 1 Toward a Common Inclusive Goal: *The School Enter Out*

Perhaps more than in other areas, when it comes to addressing civic education, it is first of all important to experiment, and then verify how much this particular subject runs through all our actions and characterizes them, permeating both our institutional education and that deriving from the non-formal and the informal.

It is essential to become aware of this if the school is to free itself from the rigidity in which it is sometimes enmeshed, a spasmodic attempt to identify patterns, timetables, times and spaces within which to structure, in addition to others, even teaching concepts of legality, citizenship, and respect for the environment, neglecting in fact the fundamental image that distinguishes it as an institution dedicated to learning: the school must not teach civic education, as it is itself its theoretical and operational emblem, the school is civic education -- teachers offer an example for their students, who may then build their

own perspectives on life and their choices. It penetrates and belongs to all contexts of life, so must also consider what happens outside the classroom, and the school itself is required to promote an operational project involving the entire community, giving life to visible and shared actions that facilitate the appropriation of those same duties and rights enshrined in the law for the protection of one and all (Eurydice 2017).

Education must go beyond the canons of a traditional discipline, assuming more properly the position of a transversal value matrix that is combined and inflected in the disciplines of study, in order to avoid superficial and unproductive aggregations of theoretical content, instead developing inter-connection processes between knowledge and experience (Dewey 1915; Bruner 1967; Bateson 1972).

Thus, nourishing an ethical space means developing autonomy as well as a capacity for critical thinking and judgment. Today, it is more necessary than ever to recover a sense of mutual belonging, that is to feel part of and therefore responsible for the community, while also feeling recognized and thus sharing, in order to identify with that community we want to protect and that protects us.

It is therefore a question of building learning paths that develop outside of mere metaphor, outside classrooms, and involving neighborhoods, parks, and streets, leaving traces of their passage in order to be recognized, to be a part of them.

Civic education should not consist of merely reading the Charter; we accept rules if we have had the opportunity to experience their validity and to personally appropriate their value. If we help build those same dictates, their observance does not depend.

[...] on the rational act of merely calculating the costs/benefits of complying with or infringing the law, but on an accordance between individual law and the official law present in a social context. In this second case, the law must not be considered in terms of usefulness, respect or fear, but instead must be accepted as just, shared with others and made one's own; education in legality becomes education in the social contract that binds (or should bind) individual and collective subjects to one another. An even more refined objective is that not only does the possibility of transgressing the law not cross the threshold of 'conscience', but neither does the idea of respect for the law, since in Kantian fashion the law is as one with individual and universal moral law (Tramma 2012, pp. 11–12).

The school has yet to fully embrace the scientific awareness that in order to arouse curiosity and interest in students of all ages, it is necessary to leverage their needs and desires and last but not least, their desire to feel acknowledged in the actions they perform. We must have the courage to risk by choosing attractive strategies that encourage children to enter into the norm to share it, so that in addition to being inhabitants they also feel they are citizens - fellow citizens.

Addressing the law via its exact opposite, transgression, can be a winning viaticum; using a sort of "intruder" represented by the broken rule itself in an official context such as school becomes the scandal, the stumbling block that opens up unprecedented ways of thinking about education, and above all unleashes in students a creative approach that will inevitably lead them not to merely passively read about the laws, but rather to know their passages and especially the reasons that make them indispensable (Fantozzi 2020). Educating young people about the duty of rules is not enough. The motivations behind the rules must be experienced, young people must experience them in themselves

and in their group in order to be able to internalize them. If they can feel as though they themselves were the lawgivers of those rules, they can reach a level that allows them to think that being law-abiding does not mean simply obeying but acting as if one were the legislator who drafted the law one obeys (Arendt 2001, p. 144).

In reality, we set up a sort of cage within which one believes that it is correct to contain all the rules and laws, the duties of each of us, believing that we must propose them to students from this point of view. Perhaps out of a kind of awe, perhaps because we experience them as obligations, they also inspire those who must present and teach them with a kind of awe. When it comes to introducing children and young people to the Law, we often limit ourselves to reading the articles to them, accompanying their recital with examples of high caliber, unattainable, thus paradoxically making their realization, in the imagination, almost impossible (Fantozzi 2020).

In reality, coming out into the open, *letting the school go out into* the neighborhood and its context, generates a profound and constructive relationship between the children and the territory, consequently building not a superficial and induced respect, but an entire complex of ethical values that nourish the profound concept of community.

## 2 From Impertinent Art to a Feeling of Citizenship

A vast amount of educational and cultural knowledge and growth, too often neglected by both family and school, is contained in artistic expression. The possibility of representing what we think, know and do through artistic performance - be it musical, dance, pictorial, sculptural or literary - is often left to spare time and almost never enjoys the typical consideration of orthodox and official performances as regards learning and cognitive development.

Although art has undoubted educational characteristics that are difficult to find in other forms of communication and culture - just think of what it can offer for the development of creativity - both the family and the school often devote less or only left-over time to it.

Too often we insist on attempting to modify the learning process, trying to make it conform to theoretical parameters of normality that do not correspond to reality. Instead, there is a need to remodel the teaching process, which must be able to draw on the curious and original ways of seeing and knowing of children and young people, and the opportunity to have fun while learning. And inclusive processes must also be activated, based on methodologies that seek to cancel differences and obstacles by pursuing strategies and results that are truly inclusive, and do not emphasize the distance between “normal” pupils and pupils with Special Educational Needs.

In this sense, the proposal to adopt street art is oriented to bringing students closer to civic education, thus also restoring dignity to an expressive form that only in recent years has been passing from an illegal act, and therefore condemned, to real art. (Quinn et al. 2012; Ciotta 2012; Dal Lago-Giordano 2016).

Through heterogeneous group work, where children, teenagers and teachers of various school levels compare, plan, and collaborate under the careful supervision of expert adults, seemingly non-school activities come to life, and precisely for this reason can be an effective tool for raising awareness, and encouraging participation, dissemination

and growth. It can also unleash respect for the *res publica* through the appropriation by the very young of an awareness that what is in common belongs to everyone, and for this reason must be protected by everyone much more than the private good.

Learning about civic education, legality and citizenship is thus conveyed by street art, transferring the works of young students onto a concrete canvas, replacing vandalism with works that can be recognized over time as signs, traces left by the people who were living it and living there, in a territory, an environment, a space and a time.

This activates the possibility of generating a sort of *contamination* of institutional intervention through forms and strategies not contemplated in school curricula, an incursion with the aim of showing the inseparable links between rules and transgression.

In this way, a project is realized that manages to intertwine a series of apparently distinct objectives, generating a pedagogical network that binds knowledge and skills together for a single final, complex and transdisciplinary purpose (Morin 1999).

The cardinal principle is self-awareness, an indispensable experience in learning to acknowledge oneself as a present and active citizen, able to decide and share ideas with others.

The constant reminder by the scientific community of the need to educate in creativity and consequently in critical thinking finds its ideal seal in similar experiences, since they rest on a channel that children always keep open, that of curiosity:

When a child sees an adult doing something, he wants to see what they are doing and then wants to do it too. This is the most direct way to let children know something without many words and without constraints. The children are there, ready, waiting for something to happen (Munari 1977, p. 155).

By *contaminating* the established institutional intervention with forms of expression and communication strategies not covered by school curricula, it is possible to facilitate development of life skills with a critical spirit. Intersecting the many experiences, breaking through the rigidity of institutional certification and recognizing that education is nourished by many physical and virtual meeting places, often found outside the usual paths (which does not necessarily mean they are extraneous), further opens up new inclusive spaces precisely by reason of an approach released from rigid evaluation grids, calibrated to high standards that are based exclusively on quantitative parameters.

Through street art, the walls of public buildings (especially school buildings) can become the setting of a real permanent open-air street exhibition, an artistic expression for future memory as well as being a gesture of real appropriation by very young students, of the school context and the territory of life. It is thus possible to nourish a feeling of belonging, sharing, reciprocity and respect, and of an inclusive process.

Through the experience of street art, generally considered a performance at the margins of legality, they are able to activate pedagogical-didactic processes that favor the construction of paths that literally emerge from school classrooms and from the pages of books to manifest themselves in actions that affect that territory and those fellow citizens, so that they become contexts and interlocutors for children and young people with whom they can perceive mutual responsibility by crossing, paradoxically, the territory of transgression.

Furthermore, teaching (and learning) through art encourages the activation of a transversal process which almost spontaneously opens the way to trajectories that intertwine seamlessly, giving life to cognitive and affective networks that are indispensable for the education of aware and responsible citizens.

Street art (and performance arts in general), thanks to its creative and playful characteristics, and the fact that it can be a collective experience with room for everyone's skills, offers countless ideas for the construction of a program founded on interdisciplinarity and cooperation and aiming at inclusion and universality. It is also a winning strategy for developing observation and perception not only for storing visual data, but to develop the ability to immerse oneself in one's environment, in the natural and anthropic landscape, present and past. It can even foster the possibility of projecting oneself into the future by designing it and imagining its development, resources, and respect, taking responsibility for an ecological attitude against all types of abuse and vandalism.

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