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## The Daily Masks and Socially Sensitive Identity: An Ethical and Aesthetical Proposal for Education in Brazil

Denise Bussoletti

Universidade Federal de Pelotas, [denisebussoletti@gmail.com](mailto:denisebussoletti@gmail.com)

Vagner de Souza Vargas

Universidade Federal de Pelotas, [vagnervarg@yahoo.com.br](mailto:vagnervarg@yahoo.com.br)

Luana de Carvalho Kruger

Universidade Federal de Pelotas, [luana\\_kruger@hotmail.com](mailto:luana_kruger@hotmail.com)

### Introduction

Dealing with identity in multicultural contexts, with all the subsequent hybridizations, requires a society that identifies and recognizes diversity as a phenomenon that not only values it but also is a part of it. The conceptual and semantic complexity of identity and the discursive practices in respect to identities in a contemporary multicultural context are notorious. So our working research group asks the question, in current contexts, can teachers still maintain traditional practices in their classrooms with methodologies based on linear thinking when their students deal with multiple information bases, languages, sources, and non-standardized identities?

This is not an easy matter to approach, specifically when considering educators' educations. We understand that pedagogical proposals that aim to expose issues of this magnitude must, before anything else, ponder what would be the dialogic means to effectively achieve the reflexive goals needed. In this paper, we present a view into an effort guided by the perspective that teachers have to reflect about their social and professional roles, proposing other strategies to approach diversity issues with their students. This view is important to be seen during teacher's education training, where art forms the basis for teaching about the importance of diversity in this educational setting.

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to present the overview of a workshop centered on a video performance titled *Daily Masks*, realized by members (graduate and post-graduate students, professors, teachers and artists) of the Programme Boundaries of Diversity (PBD)<sup>1</sup> and from the Nucleus of Arts, Languages and Subjectivities (NALS), of the Faculty of Education, from the Federal University of Pelotas (UFPEL), southern Brazil. We frame the *Daily Masks* program as a reflexive exercise in that the masks are used as an integrated arts approach to reflect multiple ways of knowing about identity in relation to educational practice. Starting from a workshop with the members of NALS, we presented this video performance for over 400 teachers in order to discuss what masks we are assuming in our educational practices and how we can, as educators, change some fixed paradigms.

This approach supports the presuppositions of a sensitive education, where subjectivity and reality merge, an educational place where educators are stimulated to keep their eyes wide open to what kind of border crossing contexts are present in their students' lives and how to use these characteristics to promote an educational environment valuing and respecting each one's uniqueness. Recognizing and assuming the plural matrix of the identity, we will seek to weave in the ethical and aesthetic argument for our efforts. Therefore, we will make a relationship of these considerations to the principles proposed as Border Pedagogy supported in what we recognize as an Aesthetics of Ginga, both of which will be described later in this article.

In the preparation phase of this activity, the workshop was done as an internal training, attended by about 20 members of NALS and PBD. In this workshop, first, we stipulated the concepts and procedures we would address through the theme "education and diversity". During this process, the group worked with graduate students from different areas of pedagogical training courses from UFPEL, and after a long process of discussion, concluded that there was the need for creating an introductory activity of sensitization for the workshop that would be developed with teachers from São Lourenço do Sul, another city in the southern Brazil (Krüger, 2012). In this workshop we planned to promote an intervention followed by a debate about teachers and their roles as educators in a Brazilian contemporary view. Through this, the NALS/PBD group adopted the device of reflexivity-action using the

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<sup>1</sup>The Programme Boundaries of Diversity, was classified and covered by proclamation No. 4 by University Extension Program, PROEXT 2011 - Ministry of Education and Culture of the Secretary for Higher Education from the Government of Brazil, has performed its functions since 2011 at UFPEL.

*Poema em Linha Reta (Straight Line Poem)* by Fernando Pessoa (1972) and, which centered the whole process of experimentation.

When we were invited to promote a discussion during the workshop, we intended to go beyond the commonplace, standard procedures, showing to these educators how music, video, poetry, theatre, visual arts, performance art and others can be mixed to show us many possibilities for thinking and reflecting about several themes. Our group is composed of people from many different art languages, but we decided to start with music. The lyrics were chosen specially to provoke some reflections about who we are and what we have done in our daily lives. Then, we showed the video performance where the poem criticizes our roles as human beings and what we contribute to our society. After this, some people from our group started talking about what we have done in our local society in order to promote reflections about differences and how we see them inside educational practices.

A transgender woman and a Down Syndrome man, both graduate students from UFPEL and members of PFD, talked about how their theatre and cinema experiences have opened opportunities to talk about their differences and diversity with educators and how it can be used to promote other viewpoints inside schools. After this, our supervisor started the debate, with these over 400 teachers, questioning them about what masks are they assuming in their classrooms, lives, and schools and how arts can be used as a way where these discussions can be made. The way we mixed languages in our work was another issue discussed. We opted for mixing languages because one of the goals of NALS and PFD was the hybridization of art languages.

The exercise using the poem by Fernando Pessoa allowed us to confront representations of existential "perfection" and address normalizations imposed by society. This activity included discussion about how diversity issues are being addressed in the Brazilian municipal schools. After studying and experimenting with the meanings contained in the poem, we created the plaster and paper masks from the face of each member from NALS and PBD. The process of experimentation provided an excellent vehicle for demonstrating the diversity present in the traces and history of each person, which, in turn, constituted a highly productive source for questions during the activity with teachers from São Lourenço, do Sul. We turn now to the conceptual foundations of this workshop activity.

### **Experimentation, Masks and Performance**

The mask can be considered as a model to cover the face, facing that which happens every day. The *Daily Masks* are understood as ways to experience what, through poetic language by Fernando Pessoa (2006), we can better define as that which enables "giving every emotion a personality, every state of mind one soul" (p. 59).

Covering, and dis-covering, the mask may be framed as a possible instance of identity construction, or even, of possibilities of being. It is engendered through a game that involves the conveniences, some fears, something fun, a lot of ourselves, giving to each state of the soul, a soul, susceptible souls, a place for exchanges, which if we are ready to play, we assume the infinity of others' potency in us, or even, the large dimension of our subjectivity, which always renews itself from every request of emotion.

In this context, the question became, would educators be willing to reflect about masks? Assuming that the mask is a template that covers the face seems to be quite convenient to an educational process, which may tend toward homogenization of teaching practices and experiences derived therefrom. Readymade masks, in this sense, are not up to the task of thinking metaphorically about sensitive educational practices. Instead of readymades, then, we need to invent masks for the purpose of identity exploration. We have to experiment with materials and forms of masks we create, coloring our way, and above all, extracting it as a template of the face, and beyond, as a template of the soul, which is an expression of life. Considering this, the working methodology proposed was to implement a

process based on the cycle of experimentation-discussion-theorization. This process was conducted in two phases: the preparation phase (discussions, theoretical debates with NALS during the workshop for creating the masks and later the video performance) and the intervention phase during the event for over 400 teachers.

After participants made the masks, the core group used them in a video performance. The script of the video was again centered on *The Straight Line Poem* (Pessoa, 1972) and the dynamics of the images that consisted of a successive process of presentation that transited through the masks and the faces of the group members in experimentation (Vargas, 2013). We sought through this methodology to encourage teachers to consider the tendency to transpose the knowledge, experiences, and feelings inherent to the *Daily Masks* activity that the exercise encompasses and enables. In the video performance we wanted to provoke the sensitivity to go beyond a general education that seems to us so stereotypical, restricted and downtrodden. Our research group sought to free teachers from the oppressed standard paradigm by mixing art languages and hybridizing boundaries to expand our reflexivity. The NALS group sought to foster sensitivity and an ethical approach to identity in and through aesthetics (Vargas & Bussoletti, 2012).

Conceptualized from the art theory, performance can be understood as plural expression of various artistic forms (music, theater, poetry, visual arts) into a single act/art object. It is a living art, takes place in real time, which has the power to reach the viewer by updating the poetic in movements, impulses, and actions that reach the spectator in real and present time (Archer, 2001). Conducting a performance does not focus on producing a final artistic object, but in the actual process of making "a recognition of the bodily presence of the artist as a crucial factor in this process" (Archer, 2001, p. 198). There may be a preparation for the performance, however the product of this artistic expression occurs in its immediate event: doing the artwork already is the artwork itself. In addition, performance is ephemeral and so must rely on the photographic or filmed record for an archival presence. Archer (2001) notes, "even when it happens in a gallery, a performance can only exist for all but the few present as audience, as a photograph or report" (pp.110-111).

So, the São Lourenço do Sul video performance was not just a video, but also a performance, an artistic experience, which recorded and explored the ability to be re-transmitted. Schechner (2003) established a relationship between performance and life in which daily life is full of performative actions, saying:

Performances mark identities, fold the time, remodulate and adorn the body, and tell stories. Performances of art, rituals, either everyday life are restored behavior, behavior twice experienced, actions taken for which people train and rehearse. (p. 29)

Thus, each mask, engaged in its own textual/life web takes a different direction, exhibits a different metaphor subjected to the life experiences and expressive desires of the marker. The concept of performance, which appeared to be only instructive in the workshop context ends up transforming the discussion, informing on the possibilities of thinking, identities, diversity, education, art and performance. Masks and performance coincide in their twofold implication: every performance is the birth of a mask and it seems that each mask will also require a performance that will be proportional to itself.

Gómez-Peña (2005), when speaking about performance art, said that the only social contract that exists is our willingness to challenge dogma and authoritarian models and continue pushing the boundaries of culture and identity. In this project it is precisely in the borders between cultures, genres, crafts, languages and art forms that we feel most comfortable and where we recognize our colleagues. We are interstitial creatures and border citizens by nature, members and intruders at the same time and we rejoice and hold up ourselves in this paranoid condition. Just in the act of crossing a border we find our

emancipation. And it is precisely along these paths that NALS proposals of aesthetics and pedagogical action transit. This leads us to the concept of Ginga.

### **Sensitive Education, Border Pedagogy and Aesthetics of Ginga**

The interculturality present in contemporary society can be used to enrich studies in education. Educators must understand different subjects within multiple, plural, and different identities that are always changing. This guards against fragmented, discipline centered educational practices that are restrictive cultural indicators of identities. Mediating knowledge to understand the human being and committing ourselves to ethics through aesthetics for the sake of broad life knowledge and the production of meaning is the goal of our project (Silva, 2012). To achieve these ends, we need to be sensitive to current teaching practices and take into account the contexts that encompass how issues can be addressed with students through reflection. Duarte Jr. (2001) stated that "Indeed, a sensitive education can only be carried out by educators whose sensitivities have been developed" (p. 206).

Traditionally, schools in Brazil have focused on linear thinking and fragmented disciplinary strategies in their education and learning practices with education for holistic sensitivity being considered less important (Pillotto, 2007). In this tradition there is generally a separation of reason and sensitivity in teaching and learning, which we believe is not appropriate for the twenty-first century. Our view is that education that is connective of reason and emotion can help us to overcome the current disconnect of people from each other and from the natural world and foster integration in a multicultural society. Such sensitive knowledge is inherent in the aesthetic (Pillotto, 2007). In aesthetically based pedagogical practice education the school ceases to play the role of mere transmitter of knowledge, to commit itself to the formation of individuals who can articulate issues and attain attitudes compatible with life in society (Silva, 2012).

The subjective signs of communication—the expression of a look, at the movement of the body, the tone of voice—make it clear that reason is not unrelated to the sensitivity, and that both develop through learning processes. Emotional apprehension is fundamental to understanding, knowledge and communication, and teachers need to develop their processes of emotions in order to understand themselves and to understand their students (Silva, 2012). Indeed, Brazilian curricular parameters state that:

The knowledge of art opens perspectives for the student to have an understanding of the world in which the poetic dimension is present: art teaches that our experiences generate a movement of permanent transformation which is needed for reordering references all the time, being flexible. This means that creating and knowing are inseparable and flexibility is fundamental for learning. (Brazil-MEC-SEF, 1998, p.20)

The processes of creation and realization of human growth are not stationary. We believe they are dialogical and contextualized in the cultural milieu. This relationship allows teachers to rethink and act upon new situations that may be unexpected and unpredictable (Pillotto, 2007). Buoro (2002) argued that the arts are intrinsic to the production of sensibility and suggested that art “can undeniably contribute to an educational project in which education plays a key role and not only participate as an adjuvant (p.41).

Our focus is on the critical reestablishment of pedagogical training, keeping the space where multiplicity generates questions which will foster more reflections than answers, allowing a different type of learning where students integrate whole contexts during learning processes, valuing and understanding all hues that constitute society (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013). The basis of these concepts arises through dialogues with the concept of border pedagogy proposed by Giroux (1992) and border identity reported by McLaren (1999) and for us constitutes *Aesthetics of Ginga*. The Aesthetics of Ginga builds on the conceptual work by Hélio Oiticica, a Brazilian artist who lived between 1939 and 1980 and a

revolutionary artist who, through his experimental and innovative work, has been recognized internationally. Oiticica would not accept predetermined classifications and definitions, questioning and extrapolating on his status as an artist. Challenging prefigured concepts, Oiticica assumed that an artist was someone who emerged in a peculiar state of creative action elaborating proposals that sought that which is beyond the art to what he called "invention" (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013).

To understand the Oiticica proposal, we need to reference his concept of anti-art. The principle of anti-art seeks to shift art from the intellectual and rational, to the field of creativity, experimentation, discovery, and participation, saying art is found in its "vital creative activities" (Oiticica in Jacques, 2003, p. 110). In this, Oiticica breaks definitively with the idea of an artist as passive spectator, a mere assistant who records what is, instead making him/her, through his/her art, a trigger of life experiences. Oiticica transfigures spectator into participator, a person who dances in space and crosses time giving plasticity to the work, which in this way, can also be recognized as a collective experience. Participator and artwork become, thus, inseparable products and producers of other aesthetic premises.

Considering this, we advocate art experimentation in education as a web that is realized among and across boundaries. Through the *Daily Masks* activity, we aim to engage in exercises for behavior (Oiticica in Jacques, 2003) operationalized through participation and the transmutation of the spectator into the narrator, whose authorship is a manifestation of life in the direction of creative activity (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013). Between imagination and ecstasy, this project deterritorializes behaviors and possibilities suppressed and/or concealed and grants educational space to the transgression and resistance of alternative practices, not submissive to the concepts gleaned from the historical and political tradition maintained by the cult of the regularities and stabilities consumable as products of a contestable order (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013).

Through this *Daily Masks* activity we propose to work in pedagogy where we don't just identify our diversities, but we choose to work from them, considering all singularities as ways for new questions, not fixing our efforts in traditional normative Brazilian education. The aesthetic viewpoint based on the concepts proposed by Oiticica is a way for considering all participants (students, teachers, artists and community) as active agents that can contribute to improving our ways for stimulating signification (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013).

Finally, we relate this to *Ginga*, a traditional way to move in typical Brazilian dances and *capoeira*, in the sense that in *Ginga* it is possible for us to be in some place and transiting in others in a movement that goes and comes back incessantly (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2013). It gives an idea that we do not think in terms of fixed activities, but can consider ourselves as interstitial human beings. This is important because when we talk about educational practices in a multicultural environment, we have to consider that there is a ceaseless movement in our society in which students and teachers exist to reflect about their identity as part of it and their role as active agents of these (changing) identities in their classrooms, as reflected in our *Daily Masks* workshop. This fluid border crossing, aesthetically based, and dialogical process developed by our group was taken into account as a way for training educators to address a contemporary educational need in a multicultural society.

We consider also to be said that our proposal in the Programme Boundaries of Diversity exists in just this sense, deterritorializing behaviors and norms, transgressing boundaries imposed, exposing them just as material for discussion, reflection and debate among all elements, agents that constitute it, to, thus, within their singularities, extrapolate their self perception and propose other alternatives of alterity where respect emerges as a result of an educational process (Bussoletti & Vargas, 2012). Aiming to achieve this proposal, art and all its possible hybridizations acted as master catalysts in this process, where the reactions resulted in knowledge (Bussoletti; Vargas & Bairros, 2013).

It was precisely in this sense that we proposed the artistic intervention through a video performance in São Lourenço do Sul, with the intention of stimulating debates and reflections about the issues that would be addressed during that event. During the elaboration activities of this video performance, the members of NALS and PBD took on the role of active agents with a focus on the fostering of reflexivity, more in-depth, coming from a start arisen through an artistic intervention. This way, these teachers would no longer be passive agents, a mere audience for an artistic performance, but instead participants in defining their lives, including their lives as teachers, through art.

### **Mask and Identity: Conceptual Unfolding**

The *Daily Masks* project fostered teachers to reflect on both their personal and professional identities. However, all the masks have "cracks" because they contain life experiences and desires that are part of each one, experiences that are incomplete and always changing. This too is reflective of life. The concept of *Persona* by Carl Jung (Saiani, 2000) enables us to understand the masks from their origins, through the actors in ancient Greece, where they served to provide a "... psychosocial attitude that acts as an intermediary between the inner world and the outer world, a kind of mask that we developed to display a relatively consistent face to the outside world, through which those with whom we met could be able to relate with us properly" (Jacobi in Saiani, 2000, p. 65). In this context, the masks allowed us to present another-me which is consistent, which enables us to, from that we show, maintain a relationship with others, as well as proper posture for each activity.

The *Daily Masks* project has lead us to reflect on various facets in our daily life. It allows us to consider feeling comfortable in differentiating ourselves overcoming the propensity for denial of the other-me. Of course, masking ourselves is natural, possibly involuntary, when we are subjected to different environments. Nevertheless, there is a fine line between voluntary and involuntary, in this sense, denying others-me is not knowing ourselves, but to affirm the others-me is to differentiate from our self. We could also ask whether at all times is it possible to differentiate from our self in a way that it will never be possible to know who we are actually. In the same way, saying that one is always the same is not admitting that we go through everyday situations that require distinct masks. In this perspective, our attitude in classrooms would be the same as at home, or then our school meetings would be the same as meetings I have among friends. So we should be sensitive to the nuances of identity that underline the masks' construction and use in identity development. Pessoa (1972) put it this way:

*I, who have been comic to the hotel maids,  
I, who have felt the blink of an eye of the young men of freight,  
I, who have made financial embarrassments, borrowed without paying,  
I, who, when the time of the punch came, have crouched me  
Outside of the possibility of a punch;  
I, who have suffered the anguish of small ridiculous things,  
I verify that I have not participated in all of this world.* (p. 418)

The *Daily Masks* are others-me, containing fragments, which interrelate with that we are or with what we have been at any given time. Engaging in this process, we choose to assume the plurality of sensitive identity and the reflections on what makes us teachers and their vicissitudes. The *Daily Masks* are the opposite of so called *Iron Masks*, which do not accept the change, do not accept restlessness and represent the subjectivity of resistance. In this case, the *Iron Mask* is created by habit and it is shaped by the belief that the action should be in the way that happens and there is no reason to go against it. It would work by removing the emotions and not allowing ourselves to feel and/or to touch. The *Iron Mask* is the problem we are trying to solve.

### **Mask Pedagogy and Sensitive Education**

The *Iron Masks* in education are related to the impediments of a practice focused on logical transmission-acquisition, an education focused on reason without sensitivity, a Cartesian educational experience. Pessoa (1972) provokes us to think about masks and education, when he suggested that one's emotions are the core of human development, and that experimenting and finding your weakness is not weakness at all. Conversely, by assuming your weakness you grow stronger because you know about what you should work inside you and what your qualities are. Putting yourself in a situation of experimentation is, somehow, giving rise to gaps and cracks that appear in the structure of shaped and polished rigid masks that give life to the mask and its creator.

Larrosa (2002) claimed that knowledge of experience rises not from scientific experiment, but in the event, in what happens to us. This experience frequently comes from what crosses us, and destabilizes us. This experience comes from experimentation that unsettles, which transforms something in the subject, so that he can no longer be the same. But in the workshop we developed with teachers, when we asked who were those who, from a first impression, will be unsuccessful at school, we heard as response: the most agitated, the gang of background class, those who do not react. This *Iron Mask* view is a view that makes education a place of anti-experience, in the sense proposed by Larrosa (2002). There is no space for listening to the transformations that occur within ourselves. The labels already marked places and pointed solutions. The school has established itself as a place of transmission-acquisition of ready experiences, especially, experiences of self. The *Daily Masks* counteract this tendency at school. Although the school seems to be a place of *Iron Masks* ready-formed, which in their rigidity do not allow the shape to adapt to the face, but instead, faces that adapt itself to the hardness of the material, we believe in the possibility of the invention of other masks, more capable and flexible masks. The school, thus, assumes the place for expression of diversity.

### **Final Considerations**

Through reflecting on social roles and identity, our *Daily Masks* project can help us to develop our personal and social sensitivities through the arts and to reflect on teachers' roles as educators and citizens. Further, we believe that education if it is to reflect society must be open to flexibility and change, a key feature of the *Daily Masks* project, especially in its border crossing and Ginga aspects. More broadly, we hope to stimulate a broader discussion about sensitivity education and how it can counteract linear, Cartesian, what we have called *Iron Mask* education. We also hope to make an impact on the discussion in diversity education. By proposing the concept of diversity more broadly, we realize that the subjects also end up pushing the boundaries of identity in a recognition game, constituting them as individuals and as a group.

The arts are key to all of this. The arts are the ground that enables us to deterritorialize reified socially constructed norms and dogmas. In our activities, the arts were essential for stimulating reflexivity in the importance of valuing diversity as a factor for social development. Consolidating a model of subjectivity that persists and resists on the borders, in the borderlands, seems appropriate for us.

Through the *Daily Mask* project we present an alternative the *Iron Mask* to encourage people to reflect about their roles, social functions, and professional activities starting from a pedagogy focused on educators as students who are developing alternatives for social changes. More than a methodological formula, the *Mask Pedagogy* can suggest a possibility for changing the analysis perspective to one that includes sensitivity development, which we believe can lead to positive social change.



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