Volume 13 Issue 36
Originally issued as C5



Global Journal of human social science
Sociology & Culture
Volume 13 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2013
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Expressive Creative Encounters: A Strategy for Sociological Research of Expressiveness

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Abstract - Expressive creative encounters (ECE) are designed as spaces for the subjects to express and interpret their emotions in the context of social research. The expressiveness of the social subjects has always been a controversial issue for social sciences, because nobody can "live-within-the-other". But the "development" and "improvement" of qualitative social research strategies incorporating the "expressiveness capture technologies" in a progressive yet steady way have been able to bridge the gap between what the researcher sees and what the subject expresses.

In this work, creativity is taken as a starting point to produce expressive experiences where individuals "share" and interpret, both with the researcher and with others, in particular social conditions of existence, their sensations and emotions.

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GJHSS-C Classification : FOR Code: 160807, 160899



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I. Introduction

Expressive creative encounters (ECE) are designed as spaces for the subjects to express and interpret their emotions in the context of social research.

The expressiveness of the social subjects has always been a controversial issue for social sciences, because nobody can "live-within-the-other".

But the "development" and "improvement" of qualitative social research strategies incorporating the "expressiveness' capture technologies" in a progressive yet steady way have been able to bridge the gap between what the researcher sees and what the subject expresses (Given, 2006; Kanstrup, 2002).

From the traditional use of recorders to the digital video camera, social scientists have been attempting to expand the capabilities of "apprehending" the social world and the voices of the people who build it (McGettigan, 1998; Penn-Edwards 2004; McNaughton 2009).

Considering from "participant observation" to the use of "theater" and "dance" (Chakravorty, 2004; Malo, 2009) there are many strategies of inquiry that have been able to capture in an ever improving way the indeterminable and expectable performance of subjects in social interactions.

In this work, creativity is taken as a starting point to produce expressive experiences where individuals "share" and interpret, both with the researcher and with others, in particular social conditions of existence, their sensations and emotions.

Consequently, the argumentative strategy is as follows: a) First, a concise statement of what is meant by the relationship between expressiveness and creativity is presented and, b) a definition on what constitutes what we call the Expressive Creative Encounters (ECE).

Being two central and complex issues, the discussion on how to analyze the results of the proposed applications and how to validate them epistemologically is left for another opportunity.[1]

II. Experiences, Creativity and Expressiveness: Some Introductory lines

The creativity of human beings is a recurrent issue for social sciences (Bielsk, 2010).

By experiencing creativity as potency to capture and transform the world, qualitative inquiry ruptures and builds renewed paths to see-the-world with others and along with those involved in research. As they create, subjects inscribe different ways to express their emotions and sensations on multiple surfaces. If creativity is used as logic to inquire what emerges from subjects and what is expected and "interests" the researcher, they become aspects that are mutually put in tension. These "findings" are transformed into a knot in which what the researcher is looking for and what the subjects "do" become articulated.

Expressiveness is just making explicit what was implied, it is a des-wrapping action, a de-compression. In expressiveness the tacit (what is assumed according to the "social bearability mechanisms" and "regulatory regimes of the sensations") manifests itself, it becomes present. At the same time expressing oneself is a vehicle to disarm the "packaging" of class habitus, in order to get off what was wrapping and put it in connection with what was wrapped. Moreover, the expressiveness of subjects unpacks what was "tight", "concentrated" in the silent yet systematic differential appropriation and uses of word as the only way of speaking.

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[1] In other articles we have anticipated some clues to answer both challenges, Scribano, 1999; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2009.

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As itinerant mediations, contingent relations with the world ("natural", social and subjective) present the different positions of being-in-the-world resulting from lived life. These sets of mediations are social experiences. Social subjects shape their bio-graphy in a network of everyday life that is lived from class positions and conditions. At the same time, the flow of life as experiences is formed at the intersection and "re-assimilation" of sensations produced by that life and the emotions that those sensations trigger. The passage from the experience to the narrative of the aforementioned social experiences can be "captured" through a network of expressiveness.

Social subjects have social ways of evaluating and answering to the connections between social conditions of experiencing and their individual aspects, biological and physical. Such connections are made possible by the fact that what appears to be "an-individual-sensation" is a social construct, and by being such reproduces itself.

The organic and social senses lead what seems to be unique and un-repeatable such as individual sensations, and elaborate the "unnoticed work" of the in-corporation of *the social* transformed into emotions[2].

All societies and groups have "social intermediaries" for subjects to ex-press, to make public, to put on stage what, after being made into bone, appears to be an indeterminate and individual "non-social".

By paying attention to these facets of the actualization of lived experience, qualitative research is gaining ground on what reproduces "in/through" the body yet only being seen as mere individual "coincidence", or extreme classification of dramatic performance in terms of class "positions and conditions" of research subjects. In these interstices of the expressed experience it is possible to rupture and re-take the action in its "particular" way of becoming an "action". Precisely the intention of this paper is to summarize some possible ways (as "notes" for further development), to inquire experiences along these paths of creativity and expressiveness.

Although the ECEs presented here are related and anchored in what for some time now has been under discussion in qualitative research referred to investigation based on art, nevertheless art is not exactly what motivates them. While it is true that, as argued by Maggie O'Neill "*Art makes visible experiences, hopes, ideas; it is a reflective space and socially it brings something new into the world—it contributes to knowledge and understanding…*" (2008, p. 21), human creativity also presents such features without necessarily transforming that practice into art. It is precisely the potential of creating and imagining what makes ECE possible and, in fact, makes them worthwhile.

The ECE is also close to the intentions expressed, among others by Forest (2009), to connect a creative process with ways in which subjects who have lived certain social experiences are enabled to express their emotions.

III. Design of Expressive Creative Encounters

ECEs have emerged as a response to demands from various studies which have examined the interrelations between bodies, emotions and social conflict. For several years we have been[3] working on research projects referred to the configuration of social sensitivities using quantitative and qualitative investigation strategies. One of the qualitative procedures we have used is the ECE. In what follows we summarize one of such experiences.

The project "Mechanisms of social bearability and devices for the regulation of sensations of subjects involved in collective actions (2008-2009)" was oriented to the identification and description of the functioning of such processes[4] developed in the city of Córdoba, Argentina between 2001 and 2007. In this direction we believe that the practices of social bearability decreased the disruptive potential of the conflict networks and collective actions related to them that were deployed among those years.

Below we summarize the requirements to carry out an ECE, based on the example of one of our researches.

ECEs do not claim to be original nor thorough, just to mention a few examples let us recall what we have mentioned above: performance, street theater, dramatization of individual and collective problems is

[2] With respect our approach on the relationship between body, emotions and social structuration CFR Scribano y D`hers (2013)

[3] "The operation of social phantoms and fantasies through collective action and conflict networks. Córdoba, Villa Maria and San Francisco 2004-2008". Director Scribano, Adrian CONICET PIP 2009-2011" Interstitial and Expenditure Practices Holidays 2010-2011 ", Director: Scribano, Adrián Oscar, Co-director: Magallanes, Graciela to guarantee academic subsidy. Research Institute UNVM, Ministry of Research and Extension, Institute of Social Sciences Academic Teaching. "Social Diagnosis from the expressive capacities / creative territorial organizations of the city of Cordoba", Director: Scribano, Adrián Oscar PROTRI Program (public communication of science, transfer of research results, MinCyT), Córdoba, res. 000,240, December 16, 2010.

[4] By one hand, the "mechanisms of social bearability" refer to a set of embodied practices that focus on systematic avoidance of social conflict (Scribano, 2007). On the other, the "regimes for the regulation of sensations" are regulatory devices that stress the relationship between sense, perception and emotion. These manners of recognizing the world, that subjects and classes have, entail a perceptual structure that guides how to act and feel. In this way the validity of sensations that are suitable and unsuitable is produced. These devices are processes of selection, classification and production of perceptions, socially determined and distributed (Scribano, 2007)

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part of the background that can be recognized as their development platform. They are a set of inquiry experiences that articulate with some creative practices connected through the active participation of those agents involved in them.

Within the context of ECEs the possible connections between sensations, emotions, biographical scenes and social sensitivities are enhanced in order to articulate the individual experience with collective/group experiences. It is necessary to understand that this process of inquiry should be associated with a research project, with a problem and defined objectives, and should preferably be coordinated with other quantitative and qualitative procedures used in this investigation.

At the ECE three organizational units can be distinguished: moments of expression, expressive components and recording strategies, which should be thought in a continuous interaction, communication and tension, establishing a flow of action. Each of these units will be described in what follows.

a) UNIT 1: Moments of Expression

The moments of expression are individual and collective/group activities consisting on pursuing motivation and realization of expressiveness. These moments must be understood as opportunities to create and to imagine, by evincing the feeling structures of agents. In a ECE four (4) moments of expression are experienced, the first one of motivation/consensus, the second of individual activity, the third involves an action of collective creativity and the fourth a space of interpretation/accounting of the encounter experiences. In all four moments the researchers' records, the participation of agents and their interpretation are articulated as a contingent totality.

First Moment: The ECEs begin and are immersed in the previous activities of the research as a hole; this is why the first moment of motivation/consensus about what will happen in the encounter is based on the established trust between the agents who participate and the organizers. The participants are suggested to use a camera so as to get involved in recording the activity, in this way making it possible to have other views about what is happening. To study in depth expressive possibilities a video is projected related to the topic that is focused in that ECE, and where partaking individuals can recognize themselves in connection with that topic. After the screening, the participants are asked to express their points of view, which will serve as a bridge for the second moment.

Second Moment: In this section the theoretical/empirical/experiential connections between colors, sensations[5], emotions, biographical scenes and socio-historical flux are applied. This is an activity focused on individual expressivity, seeking to facilitate creativity in the selection, use and assignment of emotional value to the colors. Participants have at their disposal blank papers and must color them expressing sensations and emotions which they associate to different biographical scenes in the context of a timeline that represents the social historical reference flow. Once the papers are colored, they should place them on the timeline and tell why they chose that color and why was it put in a given position. This interpretation exercise allows completing the expressivity table and also runs as a link to the next stage.

Third Moment: In this section the experience of a collective practice of creativity is applied/motivated which selects, manipulates and redefines different expressive materials so as to express the shared emotions. Within this space of expression the cooperative creation of a drawing or collage is proposed that entails answering the question about how they live/experience the central issue of ECE. The activity involves a set of non-formal organizing interactions of the collective/group, "rules", volume and intensity of individual participation established by agents in a spontaneous way. Once the drawing or collage is prepared, the collectives/groups are asked to specify an interpretation for it, evidencing the mediations between what was done and the issue of the encounter.

Fourth Moment: As a “closure” of the previous stage, it is intended to set up a space of exchange primarily oriented to link the individual and collective/group moment, the created expressions and the central issue of the ECE, which means to offer the last word of interpretation to the subjects. Finally the participants are asked to narrate how they have lived the ECE, what has happened to them and what it has meant.

Outline of an Expressive Creative Encounter

1st Moment:

a) Presentation of the purposes and aims of the ECE.
b) Proposition to "record" the activities, by the participants.
c) Trigger: eight minutes video and/or photos
d) Expression of ideas about the video.

2nd Moment:

a) Individual expressive activity: "Coloring sensations"
b) Placing the "papers" in the timeline.
c) Interpretation/accounting of what was expressed

3rd Moment:

a) Collective expressive activity: creation of drawing-collage.

[5] In relation our approach on the connection between colors and emotions CFR Scribano 2012

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b) Interpretation/accounting of what was expressed
c) Plenary of Collective Activity.

4th Moment:

a) Interpretation/accounting of what was expressed throughout the encounter
b) Accounting of what was experienced

UNIT 2: Expressive Elements

Expressive elements are the materials used which, given the characteristics of ECEs, acquire such significance that they constitute a unit itself in the action flow of the encounters. The social agents have knowledge at hand that allow/hinder the selection, handling and provision of meaning to these materials. The subjects have or do not have the ability to manage certain expressive resources that obstruct/enable their experiences with the social world. Therefore, materials and resources are considered as common objects widely known by the participants. Basically, the used supplies are: a) pieces of blank paper, b) pencils, crayons, paints, etc. and c) elements for the collage: magazines, newspapers, colored paper.

UNIT 3: Recording Strategies

ECEs are recorded simultaneously from diverse perspectives and using different means, trying to grasp what is plural and multiple in actions guided by creativity. Recording strategies are procedures (standardized or not) that allow to "store" at least two features of the encounters: materiality and processuality of action. In this way the views of investigators are overlapped and crossed with the participants views. The narratives, bodies in action and emotional emphasis of the interaction itself are woven. The encounters are recorded through audio, semi-structured observations, videos and photographs taken by the research team and by participants.

Using digital recorders the audio of the four moments of the encounter is documented, with the purpose of obtaining, in first place the truest most accurate capture of what individuals speak as a process of attribution of meaning to what they have created, and secondly, to collect what is narrative in agent interactions when they are creating.

During the meeting one or more researchers carry out a semi-structured observation of events, relationships and creative processes in order to collect information on what happens during the three (3) outlined first stages. The observation guide follows the flow of action with the following components: **1st Moment**: a) Who is (are) it (they)? b) Connection with the Coordinator, c) Relationship with the instructions, d) Miscellaneous; **2nd Moment**: a) Who is (are) it (they)? b) Connection agent-activity, c) When is it? Practice context, d) Miscellaneous; **3rd Moment**: a) Who is (are) it (they)? b) Relationship between each participant, c) When is it? Practice context, d) Miscellaneous.

Photos are also taken by the research team with the purpose of storing at least two important types of information: objects that are an outcome of creativity, and turning points in the interaction that could be remarkable.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the encounter, the participants are asked to get involved in its recording, taking pictures of what they consider to be relevant. The purpose of this information is to conserve some of the impressions of the agents that could be compared with those recorded by the research team.

At the same time, the entire encounter is recorded with a digital video camera to capture the set of interactions, procedures and creative acts that take place in the ECE.

These three units: moments of expression, expressive elements and recording strategies are prepared, from the design of the ECE itself, to execute, document, analyze and interpret, aiming to facilitate and enhance creativity for the emergence of sensitivities related to the topic of investigation. Now then, all ECE design is subject to amendment guided by what is uncertain, circumstantial and contingent.

IV. Regarding Participants and Research Team

To complete the description of ECEs as procedures, it is relevant to clarify two equally important factors: a) the selection of participants, and b) the roles of the research team.

a) Selection of partaker subjects

As in focus group, the proposal of ECEs is to cover the tension between maximum homogeneity and maximum heterogeneity. The partaker subjects must be selected among those who have a direct link with the whole set of social practices to be put into discussion during the investigation. The number of participants should not exceed twelve people, and their participation must follow all the recommendations of consent involved in the research process. Collective/group activities must be planned with a balanced distribution of age, sex, class position and connection with the central issue of the encounter. It is relevant to underline the key importance of procedures for initial contact with the participants, considering that comprehension and consensus around the goals of the meeting provides the creative potential of the encounter.

b) Roles of the research team

The team must designate a coordinator, a person to carry out the recording, a photo and video camera operator and an assistant to the operative demands of participants. The attitude of the whole team should be guided by a tension between active presence and disregard as long as the aim of promoting creativity

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implies the least incidence in the context of action and interaction with and among participants.

The design and implementation of ECE intend to pull together the powers of creativity, enabling interpretation from and by the agents, and performing an action where emotions are made public as constituents of social reality.

There are many features of ECEs that cannot be explained here: units of experiencing, the coordination with other strategies of inquiry, the possible ways of understanding, and probably other challenges that the research practice will bring in the future.

ECEs are a systematic commitment to the creation of world images where the voices of social agents appear as creativity and where reality is painted with the colors of multiplicity

V. Conclusion

There are many features of the ECE that we cannot explain here: the experience units, the forms of articulation with other inquiry strategies, the posible paths for comprehension; and surely other challenges that the investigative practices will bring in the future.

The ECE is a systematic commitment to the creation of images of the world where the voices of the social agents appears as creativity and where reality is painted with the colors of multiplicity.

The ECE provey methological instruments that allow to capture, register and interpret sensibilities from the point of view and voice of the subjects of the investigation.

The ECE deny, at least partially, the objectivist postulation conserining the impossibility of inquiring expressiveness tied to the subjetc's emotions and sensations as traces to analyze society.

Creativity and expressiveness are two of the central axes through which the paths of social inquiry open to autonomy cross, in the commitment of building happier societies.

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