How to Instill Cultural Values in the New Generation through Cultural Promenades and Ancient Drama: A Field Research

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Abstract: The present study investigates whether experiential learning through cultural promenades and ancient Greek drama can constitute an effective method of instilling cultural values in the new generation. For this reason, field research was conducted in the broader area of Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Qualitative research through in-depth interviews followed, in order to record 42 student teachers’ perceptions after their own experiential contact with the method of cultural promenades. This research method with teacher candidates during their vocational training as future teachers is of great importance, as it will indicate whether the method of instilling cultural values through cultural promenades and ancient Greek drama is effective enough to be adopted in later teacher candidates’ teaching in schools. The choice of the sample is strategic, since the teaching specialty of the majority is economics and management, and thus teachers get acquainted with an innovative experiential methodology on teaching economic and cultural sustainability, which—according to literature—are interconnected. The findings reported valuable insights on the effectiveness of the said teaching methodology. The present research is the first that focuses on the descriptive interrelations among cultural promenades, experiential learning, cultural values, and sustainability, and thus it provides policy makers and teachers with invaluable insights.

Keywords: cultural sustainability; landscape economy; sustainability in education; cultural promenades; cultural routes; experiential learning; field research; teacher education; cultural values; cultural identity; ancient Greek drama; drama in education

1. Introduction

According to Nassauer (1997), cultural sustainability should include and support landscape ecology [1]. This should happen especially in cases of landscapes which consistently evoke people’s attention and interest, and which, therefore, seem more possible to be ecologically sustained in the future. Similarly, Naveh (2007) suggests that cultural values should be modernized, yet, at the same time, appropriately adapted, in order to inspire the development of strategies that will benefit people as well as their economy, culture, urban landscapes, and rural landscapes [2]. For this reason, in the present paper, the notion of cultural sustainability and landscape ecology is explored through cultural promenades and an innovative teaching methodology which involves experiential learning.

Experiential education and the philosophy that it represents through its sub-fields, such as experiential learning, were heavily influenced by John Dewey, and have been the subject of discussions since 1938 [3]. As a result, the main objective of the present paper was to explore and examine how cultural promenades and ancient drama, as tools and methods of experiential learning, can help teacher candidates develop their cultural identity, and thus instill cultural values connected to sustainability in their students later on.
The methodology was based on field research, conducted in the broader area of Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Qualitative research through in-depth interviews followed, in order to record 42 teacher candidates’ perceptions after their own experiential contact with the method of cultural promenades. The teacher candidates that had the opportunity to participate had a teaching specialty in economics, informatics, and business administration, and will teach “principles of economics”, “political education”, or “informatics” and “research projects” in primary and secondary education schools. The promenade and the role-playing techniques through ancient drama were organized by the Teacher Education Program of Athens University of Economics and Business.

This qualitative method with teacher candidates is of great importance, as it will indicate whether the method of instilling cultural values through cultural promenades and ancient Greek drama is effective enough to be adopted in later teacher candidates’ teaching in schools. Moreover, the present research is the first that focuses on the descriptive interrelations among cultural promenades, experiential learning, cultural values, and sustainability, and thus it provides policy makers and teachers with invaluable insights. At the same time, it fills a significant gap in literature regarding the appropriate methodology for teaching notions like the above to teacher candidates who will teach cultural sustainability in their future classes.

2. Literature Review

According to Tibbs (2011), sustainability as a concept puts emphasis on two approaches: The predictive and the normative. The predictive approach suggests that the global socio-economic system is in peril [4]. For this reason, the second approach, the normative one, suggests that this peril should be addressed through systemic shifts. Tibbs (2011) also claims that cultural values have dramatically changed and, for this reason, they call for the appropriate changes for enhancing sustainability.

Cultural sustainability and cultural economy have been discussed by several scholars over the past few years [5–8]. However, the aspect of culture and its contribution to sustainable development have not been thoroughly and systematically examined in the past [9]. The appropriate methodology to teach the notion of cultural sustainability and landscape ecology to teacher candidates who will teach such notions, as well as to students themselves, has been even less examined.

Even since ancient times, experiential learning has played an important role in the evolution and development of (adult) education. Aristotle himself, in his work *Nicomachean Ethics*, emphasizes that “for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them”, highlighting the importance of learning by doing [10]. Bloom, a world-renowned educational psychologist, in his *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* established the main theory regarding educational objectives through which a better understanding of the experiential learning procedure can be achieved. According to this framework, students progress through certain stages of learning. More specifically, at first, the learner is able to remember ideas (knowledge), acquire a fair understanding of them (comprehension), and apply them in an abstract way (application). Then, the student is able to dissect ideas into their components (analysis) to develop new ones (synthesis), and in the end, assess their value [11]. Through an extended effort for the development of this framework, researchers came up with the *Revised Taxonomy*, in which two new dimensions of learning are presented: The cognitive process and the knowledge dimension [12].

In the process of developing the experiential learning theory, David Kolb was largely influenced by Dewey, Piaget, and Lewin’s contribution [3]. Kolb displays an experiential learning cycle with four learning objectives, suggesting that a concrete experience is followed by a reflective observation process of this experience, resulting in an abstract conceptualization [13,14].

Experiential learning incorporates many practices and methods, including outdoor education. As Simon Priest proposes, Outdoor Education: (1) Is a method for learning; (2) is experiential; (3) takes place primarily in the outdoors; (4) requires use of all senses and domains; (5) is based upon interdisciplinary curriculum matter; and (6) is a matter of relationships involving people and
natural resources [15]. According to the above-mentioned definition, cultural promenades and ancient drama are practices of Outdoor Education. Peter Borsay underlined the provision of recreational spaces associated with traditional games, festivals, military training, and the habit of public promenading through them in England since the 17th century [16]. Promenades were undoubtedly an important recreational, architectural, and cultural element of observing London’s inhabitants and buildings since the 18th century [17]. Promenading, as previous studies suggest, has been a significant component of the Western culture identity.

Art Education is definitely a very innovative, pioneering field of academic interest that has been rapidly expanding, especially during the last few years. Ancient drama, subsequently, constitutes a very interesting aspect and practice of this field and experiential learning overall [18]. In combination with Outdoor Education, ancient drama inevitably contributes to the enhancement and enrichment of the learning process, and the student–teacher engagement and experience, while making the adding value of the learning outcome emerge. Ancient drama, as a result, offers invaluable cultural and social values stemming from the tradition and cultural heritage, embracing cultural and social diversity under the scope of democratic education [19,20]. As Brinia and Psoni suggest in their study regarding playfulness, through re-enactment and role-playing, learners attain a new set of skills by better comprehending complex cognitive concepts [21].

According to Jacobs, experiential learning is “a process through which a student is able to develop knowledge, skills, and value through direct experiences” [22]. Values originate from a cultural environment. As a result, all experiential education programming is established upon that same environment [23]. Teachers are integral parts of the learning process, and thus, as Salas and López state, teachers enter the public schools with a knowledge background which is influenced by the cultural environment in which they are born [24].

Teachers’ cultural identity plays a crucial role and therefore should be developed, since understanding their own cultural background and connecting that background to the students in their classroom creates a rich learning environment in which the teacher and students value each other [25]. Each student adopts different styles of cultural learning, and as a consequence, they should be respected, encouraged, and even incorporated into teaching by culturally receptive educators [26]. Teachers, and generally educators acting as mentors, help the students by answering their questions, coordinating this cultural experience, and cultivating incentives, while making learning fun, encouraging students to participate and be part of the team, and developing their interpersonal skills and monitoring the formation of dynamic relationships [27–29]. Therefore, the necessity of reform, methods, and programs implementation regarding experiential learning should be established [30,31].

The teachers’ social identity should also be highly valued and esteemed, since they constitute indispensable parts of a community and their intellectual involvement in it is an eminent need even in terms of their professional development [32,33]. As for students, Vasbinder and Koehler, whose research focused on the student engagement in experiential learning practices, claimed that they would be more willing and eager to participate in experiential management projects which concentrated on socially conscious firms [34]. Moreno -the father of Sociodrama from which Psychodrama later emerged- explains the therapeutic concept of the Aristotelian “catharsis” that occurs in the theatre out in the open, indicating through the dramaturgical approach the sociological importance of the group and the interrelations found between the participants [35]. In this sense, sociodrama can be used as a teachers’ method or tool for limiting and resolving personal, intercultural conflicts, even leading to social inclusion and increases in emotional and social intelligence [36,37].

As a result, it is safe to say that art and culture are inherently connected to the course of human society [38]. According to Geertz, the symbols of culture are shaping the directions that constitute the cultural, moral, and social models [39]. Through cultural promenades, students are able to explore the natural environment and landscape, and as a result approach the concepts of culture, myth, and spirituality [40]. The environment is not only relevant to telling stories as a narrative, but also relates to the place where stories are passed down from generation to generation [41]. According to the work
of Terkenli (2012), the landscape is considered a mirror of the social and cultural groups that shape it [42]. Cultural promenading, under the scope of the interdisciplinary, outdoor, and place-based education, will also lead students and teachers to observe and admire the aesthetic value of the natural environment and their surroundings. The aesthetic approach of the world can improve the quality of life and enhance the way people understand themselves, others, and the world they live in [43]. Besides, the human elements in the environment are shaping the secular order of society and are forming the rituals through which the individual and collective identity is recognized [41].

3. Methodology

3.1. Method

First of all, the field research during the cultural promenade included the following stages:

1. The 42 participants were split into groups of seven persons each and were assigned a team leader who had prepared beforehand material for the tour of the group.
2. Groups were separated in terms of location and played a warm-up “getting to know each other” game with the guidance of the team leader.
3. Tour at the ancient Theater of Dionysus was then conducted.
4. Representation/role-playing on an excerpt from the famous “Wealth” (“Ploutos”) play by Aristophanes at the Theater of Dionysus followed. The play dates back to 388 BC. Teacher candidates discussed the deeper meaning of the play and made connections with its present value.
5. Tour at the Stoa of Eumenes followed. The fable of the name of the city of Athens was narrated. Connection was also made between the couples of ancient times and the couples of modern times which promenade in this same area.
6. Tour at the Odeon of Herodes Atticus was accomplished, and connection to its more recent history and its value was made. Special reference was also made by the team leader to Maria Callas, who sang at the Odeon, in order to inspire students through the modern use of the theater. At the same time, an aria from the opera “Norma”, sang by Maria Callas, was played. Personal experiences of the teacher candidates regarding the Odeon were discussed.

Afterwards, qualitative research through in-depth interviews was considered as the most appropriate tool, in order to gain descriptive insights. Qualitative research contributes to the emergence of new elements and theories to be tested [44] (p. 320), which is of great significance in topics that are very innovative and have not been researched in the past, like the one investigated in the present paper. In-depth interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to explore a social or educational matter in a holistic and deep way. An experienced interviewer makes the interviewees feel comfortable enough, in order to be able to freely express themselves and elaborate on the topic [45,46].

3.2. Sample

The sample is a convenient sample and consists of 45 teacher candidates aged between 21 and 35 years old. 15 of them are males and 30 are females. 30 interviewees have a teaching specialty in economics and business administration, and 15 interviewees have a teaching specialty in informatics. At the moment of the field research and the interviews, they were studying at the last year of their undergraduate studies for acquiring their specialty degree, and they were also studying in the Teacher Education Program of Athens University of Economics and Business at the same time. To ensure interviewees’ anonymity, their names have been replaced by a letter of the alphabet in the analysis of the findings that follows.

3.3. Data Analysis

According to Dana and Dumez (2015), with a view to avoid possible circularity of an argument in a research, there should be a comprehensive approach in qualitative research [47]. This is accomplished
by coding theoretical constructs, among other methods. For this reason, the present study included
the coding suggested through the method of thematic analysis. Authors spotted, presented, and
critically analyzed common topics that consistently derived from the primary data collected through
the interviews [48] (p. 116). This method of data analysis is, according to Holloway and Tondres (2003),
very useful, as it helps draw complex and descriptive conclusions on the research question. Some of
the themes that the authors retrieved were “the timeless approach”, “the differentiated perspective of
the site”, “the role of the natural environment”, and “the collective identity of the landscape”, among
others [49].

4. Findings

The Teacher Education Program students were honestly eager and ready to share their views
regarding the cultural promenade and the overall experience concerning ancient theatre, the natural
environment, and the landscape. Through the extensive interviews, six main thematic areas emerged:
The timeless approach of the surrounding environment, the different perspectives on the historical
site, the contribution of the natural environment in the experience, the use and purpose of pauses,
the messages regarding the collective identity of a landscape and its inhabitants delivered through the
monuments, and the symbolic meaning of the natural environment.

The first question normally asked by the interviewer was related to the emotions created by the
travel back in time. The majority of the interviewees focused their answers on the pleasant connection
between the past, the present, and even the possible projection into the future. Some interviewees even
replied that they were really surprised that such a link could emerge and still exist. More specifically,
eleven out of the forty-five interviewees expressed that they felt curious and in awe of the monuments
and the environment. They felt proud and were given the opportunity to admire what their ancestors
had created over the years. In eight cases, they expressed emotions of nostalgia for the life in the
past, melancholy, and even sadness that arose from the connections with the stories and important
personalities that are associated with the monuments.

Interviewee X. explicitly stated: “It was a journey back in time that was achieved in an experiential
way. Every step, place, and monument of the cultural promenade was connected to the lives Ancient
Greeks led”.

J.J. mentioned: “We traveled back in time and were deeply moved; we had the chance to admire
what our ancestors had created”.

Student L. answered: “… We felt nostalgic and curious about ancient times, interested in all the
stories, and in awe of the monuments of the certain era”.

The second question asked was about whether the students had the chance to perceive the
historical site in a different way. The majority of the students answered that they finally understood the
importance of “today” and the value of the monuments. In addition, interviewees felt that their lives
were connected to the ancient people’s lives, and felt that they were and still are part of the history
themselves. Moreover, some students stated that they had the chance to learn a lot of previously
unknown information through the role-playing. One student revealed that they were really happy to
share this experience with their fellow students and that they were not alone.

Interviewee Q. answered: “The stories narrated during the promenade were connected with and
reflected on the monuments. This is a very different approach than what we are used to”.

Student X. said: “The cultural promenade was different from a simple guided tour to a historical
site. The information regarding the historical site was provided in a way that impressed the students
even more and helped them make the connection with the antiquity”.

A.J. stated: “There was interaction, individual contribution, and dialogue. We felt part of the
history”.

Student K. added: “I perceived the cultural site in a different way while linking every little “piece”
together, especially through the role-playing. I also learned about the reasons behind the special
architecture we encounter in ancient theatre”.
On the question about whether the natural environment played an important role in this experience or it would be the same in case students were shown pictures of the monuments instead of being in the landscape themselves, all the interviewees strongly believed that it would not be the same. More specifically, they added that since it is an experiential activity, their senses came into play. They had the opportunity to touch the trees and even sit on the benches. In addition, the fact that students could interact with nature, listen to various sounds, and smell was really intriguing and helpful.

As student A. revealed: “In no case could a simple image projection replace the real experience, which would not be focused on the image of the monuments but on the surrounding atmosphere”.

Interviewee K. claimed: “The natural environment visually helped us absorb new information and come up with an experiential approach which developed our skills”.

Question number four was included in order to investigate the use of pauses during the cultural promenade, and the emotions and thoughts that they could possibly generate. Some students argued that the pauses were not that long, but in any case they provided the required time in order to think in retrospect about what had been said by the tourist guide. The majority of the interviewees mentioned that they had the necessary time to think and reflect on the monuments, and this triggered the students’ eagerness for future research and visit. Additionally, at the same time, students could discuss within their groups in order to better comprehend what they saw and heard during the guided tour.

According to student W.: “Pauses during the promenade were quite important. We had the opportunity to process what we heard, saw, or discussed. Communication within the team was absolutely necessary in order to interpret what we saw”.

Student E. argued that: “There were essentially no pauses, but instead a continuous flow was followed. It would be interesting if we could just stand and reflect on what we experienced”.

The fifth question was about the messages that concern the collective identity of a nation and how cultural sustainability can be achieved through the exploitation of it. The answers regarding this question varied a lot. However, a large number of interviewees stated that they felt respect for their country’s rich history, and that they should promote this history and cultural heritage through their teaching in order to enhance cultural and economic sustainability. The messages perceived regarding the collective identity of the nation and the timeless values still hold true in our days. In addition, two students out of the 42 mentioned that people’s needs practically have not changed over time and as a result, the past should not be excluded from the present. Moreover, the students had the chance to admire the ingenuity and innovation of the monuments, which made them feel proud to be Greek, as they realized that they are part of the Greek history. In the same context, the patterns that are found in all monuments and that are representative of each specific era, became in the teacher-candidates’ eyes an integral part of the landscape. Some other messages that emerged were the respect for one another, collaboration, lack of greediness, and love. Finally, yet importantly, the contribution of ancient theatre, history, and culture to the development of identity and personality was also highlighted.

Interviewee G.J. stated: “Connection between past and current reality, people’s stories and experiences that are attached to every landscape, and the importance of history and culture in the development of modern history and individual identities are some of the most important of today’s lessons”.

Interviewee G. mentioned that: “. . . The messages had to do with the culture and history of our city. I learned about how Athens got its name, what the olive tree represented, how ancient theatres were created and what they represented, and who the tragedians and comic playwrights were”.

Student A. added: “Through the monuments, I understood that the collective identity of a nation and a land is timeless, and cannot be explored separately”.

Student K. said: “The message for me was that cultural sustainability can be achieved through organized and collaborative activity, which will reveal a nation’s culture”.

The last question was about the symbolisms of the landscape that were obtained through the promenade. The most frequent answers were art, culture, peace, democracy, and experiential learning.
In addition, students also connected the experience to the calmness of nature and generally the ancient culture identity. Two students specifically emphasized the fact that they will always remember the people with whom they lived this experience. According to student J.: “Personally, I found that the landscape represents peace, culture, and the Mediterranean identity, which should be first deeply understood, then promoted, and finally sustained in the long-run”.

Student N. claimed: “Ancient theatre and drama, and the cooperation among the students were the main symbolisms, along with the Greek civilization identity”.

5. Discussion of the Results

The findings offered several indications of the effectiveness of the described teaching method. Interviewees mentioned that they felt the pleasant and unexpected connection between the past and the present, confirming Stavridis’ view (2006) in this way [41]. They also felt in awe of the environment and the monuments that their ancestors had created over the years [17]. They had the opportunity to touch the trees, sit on the benches, interact with nature, listen to various sounds, and smell the atmosphere. The pauses gave them the opportunity to reflect on the monuments, and this triggered their eagerness for future research and visits.

They expressed emotions of nostalgia and melancholy that arose from the stories about the personalities that are associated with the monuments, agreeing in this way with Stavridis (2006), who suggests that the environment is not only relevant to telling stories as a narrative but also relates to the place where stories are passed down from generation to generation [41]. This finding also agrees with Terkenli (2012), who mentions that the landscape is considered a mirror of the social and cultural groups that shape it [42].

Teacher candidates felt that their lives were connected to the ancient people’s lives, and that they are part of the history themselves. This reminds of Geertz, according to whom the symbols of culture help shape cultural, moral, and social models [39]. Therefore, students were able to explore the natural environment and landscape, and thus approach the concepts of culture, myth, and spirituality, as Terkenli (1996) suggests [40]. According to Kelehear (2008), this aesthetic approach of the world is what can improve the quality of life and enhance the way people understand themselves, others, and the world they live in [43].

This feeling of continuity was exactly the intention of the present teaching methodology designed and proposed. The symbolisms of the landscape that were obtained through the promenade were about art, culture, peace, democracy, the calmness of the nature, and generally the ancient cultural identity, which led to the better understanding of the modern cultural identity, as Stavridis (2006) suggested [41].

Students declared that they were happy to share this experience with their fellow students. They underlined that they could discuss within their groups in order to better comprehend what they saw and heard during the guided tour, which reminds of Priest (1986), who mentions that outdoor experiential learning is based upon interdisciplinary curriculum material and involves relationships of people and natural resources [15]. Through the above, O’Byrne’s (2003) view about the importance of the cultural promenades and their connection with the cultural, architectural, and recreational traits of the people is confirmed [17].

Regarding this interdisciplinary curriculum in the present case through ancient drama, student teachers had the opportunity to enact an ancient Greek play, which, as they pointed out, helped them understand the value of the monuments and the landscape even more, therefore confirming Harfitt and Chow’s (2018), as well as Moss’s (2008), views [19,20]. This statement also reminds of Brinia and Psoni’s research, according to which learners acquire a new set of skills through re-enactment and role-playing by better comprehending complex cognitive concepts [21]. At the same time, participants confirmed that through such experiential activities, learning is made fun and internal incentives are
developed in students, who get encouraged to participate, be part of a team, and develop interpersonal skills [22,27–29].

Overall, the understanding of the necessity of promoting cultural sustainability was evident through the teacher candidates’ answers [1,2,5–8], confirming, in this way, the appropriateness of the specific interdisciplinary methodology developed in order to instill cultural values and teach the notion of cultural sustainability.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present study was based on field research followed by qualitative research through in-depth interviews. This means that it followed a vertical in-depth approach and not a horizontal broader one with more population included, which could have generalized the results to the wider population. This happened because it is not safe to try to generalize the results if a sound model of teaching through cultural promenades is not first established.

The present study provided the appropriate background on the method in order for future research to build on it and test more similar didactic approaches. Apart from instilling cultural values, with a view to enhancing cultural sustainability, future research can also focus on how to develop other attitudes and perspectives in students through cultural promenades and similar experiential methods. It is very important to focus on a variety of experiential learning methods and try to capitalize on them in order to construct valid teaching models of wide acceptance.

7. Conclusions

The present study has presented strong indications of the effectiveness of the teaching method proposed in terms of teacher candidates’ discovering their cultural values, the historic and cultural continuity, their ties with their ancestors and their past, the value of the monuments, and the importance of cultural sustainability. This is a sound background for further research on how cultural promenades and ancient Greek drama activities can instill values and help develop attitudes in students in an experiential way. The field is new to literature and needs to be examined further in order to develop a comprehensive model that will be possible to replicate and be implemented in schools. The findings of the present study are of value for policy makers and practitioners who wish to put emphasis on instilling cultural values in students and on teaching notions of cultural sustainability and landscape economy.

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