

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONTRIBUTION OF ART IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Art, especially art education, constitutes an integral part of education. Nowadays, engaging in art seems to take on increasing ground, incorporating innovative technologies, and being one of the key tools of transformative learning. This paper examines the contribution of art to personal and social development, emotional and aesthetic education, as well as to human expression. Possible approaches at school level are presented, concerning the use and exploitation of art, in addition to theories that have influenced the integration of art into the core of the educational act. The bibliographic review confirms research studies on the field, while the necessity of incorporating art in the educational process is demonstrated.

Key words: *art, art education, transformative learning*

Art Education - Conceptualization

Art can be designated as an open notion, which is constantly widening and reorganizing, a single but extensive one. It is a culture carrier, because the ideas of the artist spread and become the possession of many people, making each work of art an expression and a measure of the culture of a time. Art itself is a term difficult to be defined. It is no accident that the question “What is art?” cannot be answered without any other definition, such as “What is art in a particular time period” or “What is art in a particular cultural context”. Philosophers, such as Goodman (1951), propose the inclusion of the symbol in art in order to elucidate its essence, wherefore every form of art symbolizes an expression of ideas, being a way of externalizing emotions and thoughts, while its nature can be described as vague, indeterminate and enigmatic (Vaos, 2015). The artistic act itself is an expressive activity that does not obey to any methodological barrier, as everything can be put into its service. What is to be absent from art, is the unwillingness to eliminate habit and prejudice (Gombrich, 1952), since only in this absence will the artistic phenomenon be accepted.

Art education looks at two main and integral directions, two distinct but also involved fields. It is the process of creating and ingesting. What is crucial is the fact that the phenomenon of art can be approached through both its social dimension and the historical moment in which it is embodied. The framework of understanding and ingesting the artwork is characterized by fluidity and multiplicity, but the objective of an artistic intervention is the liberation of the personal viewpoint and the emergence of multiple dimensions (Vaos, 2015). Art education is integrated into school in order to broaden students' field of thought and imagination and to be exploited on equal terms, providing multiple benefits. The importance of integrating an artistic intervention into school is considered necessary, as, considering the way people react in visual forms, children acquire knowledge and become aware of their own ways of responding (Chapman, 1993). It is an expressive effort in the context of a conscious artistic research, a revealing intervention.

Thus, art contributes to social expression, because it emanates from social phenomena. Besides, as Hodge (2017) points out, some artworks are also instructive,

and, subsequently, the benefits provided to children are multidimensional. Through the study of social elements of art, students are led to personal fulfillment and various emotions and ideas are vivificated (Chapman, 1993). Especially in the classes of secondary school, young people are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that evaluative systems affect the way the world operates (Chapman, 1993). Art is experienced by children as a new form of expression and response to life. It is full of ideas, messages, stories, and much more that everyone discovers by themselves (Hodge, 2017).

Art, ascending feelings, makes us express them with words, images or even movements, transferring them to others (Tolstoy, 1994), so that this cycle of creativity can continue. Consequently, the function of art can be considered as important as that of speech, but also universal, as the value of the emotions it conveys (Tolstoy, 1994) is decisive for man.

Approaching the artwork

Every time we express our opinion of an artwork, or whenever we try to understand its aspects, the process of producing and using imaginative thought is enhanced (Kokkos, 2011). The process of producing and using imaginative thinking is reinforced whenever we express our view of an artwork or try to understand its multiple aspects (Kokkos, 2011). The artworks that emerge from the imagination or are interpreted on the basis of it, emanate from the ability to dream and construct, capturing the reality of our imaginative abilities (Chapman, 1993). After all, art is based primarily on the human ability of expressing and accepting emotions (Tolstoy, 1994), as we know stories and events through someone else's eyes, or even some aspects of the artist's imagination (Hodge, 2017), reinforcing our feelings of empathy.

Integrating art in education

Art is very different from the process of prime comprehension, since it requires neither preparation nor a certain set of knowledge, like, for instance, mathematics do. This is because art affects people mentally, irrespective of their stage of development and education (Tolstoy, 1994). However, the integration of art into school is crucial, since science and art are as closely interrelated as human vital organs, as one cannot function properly without the other (Tolstoy, 1994).

According to Mezirow (2007), the reasoning of transformative learning departs from the axiom that the way in which we interpret reality is determined by the system of perceptions that each of us possesses, having been imposed upon us by the cultural context, by instilling it unconsciously through the process of socialization. The means of achievement is reflection, that is, the process of reviewing perceptions and values on the basis of which we understand reality. Reflection is greatly influenced by the observation of works of art (Kokkos, 2011), which strengthen the stochastic mood. The concept of critical reflection describes the understanding of the underlying reasons and consequences of our behavior.

Aesthetic education seems to have entered the field of education, as top universities, like Harvard, have incorporated art into their curriculum. A typical example is Project Zero (Gardner, 2000), which emphasizes on production, perception and self-reflection through art. More specifically, students are encouraged in creative activities, in the search for aesthetic qualities of artistic forms, as well as in self-reflective exploration of

methods used by different artists. As the integration of art into education relies heavily on students' inherent curiosity, D.B.A.E. (Discipline-Based Art Education) exploits the cognitive dimension of art, focusing on the four areas that compose its world: art production, criticism of art, art history and aesthetics (Greer, 1984). It therefore appears that art is not only an aid to the educational process, but one of the most important bases for fulfilling educational objectives.

In a survey conducted regarding the view of teachers on the integration and effective use of art in their teaching work (Budda & Fragoulis, 2017), the results demonstrate what has already been mentioned. It seems that literature and painting are the most commonly used forms of art in the teaching process, as educators state that, while art in education is an easy integration into each subject, it also provides multifaceted benefits to students. Other researches, such as the one conducted by Papadakis and Fragoulis (2013), is advancing the exploration of the integration of art into education in connection with the use of ICT. The findings include students' development of critical thinking, and a great increase in interdisciplinarity is noted. In addition, cooperative learning seems to be favored, while at the same time, through the process, students' reflection is cultivated. According to Brookfield (2012), critical thinking is a process that requires a continuous examination of various assumptions, which starts with a stimulating event, followed by situation assessment and exploration, followed by the choice of alternatives and their application in everyday life (Raikou, 2013; Bouda & Fragoulis, 2017).

The Perkins method

That one may apply on classroom level all that has been precluded, the Perkins method (1994) will be fully exploited. This refers to an approaching style, based on creative observation and self-reflection, with a starting point for expressive effort. Thus, the work of art will be placed as a mental problem that is subjected to personal interpretation.

The Perkins method is divided into four stages:

- The first stage includes an initial observation and examination of the artwork, where students will formulate their initial thoughts and observations.
- In the second stage the observation becomes more intensive, signs which provoke impressions and/or emotional reactions are located, reference is made to the various means of expression and for the first time historical and cultural information are included
- The third stage includes an expressive effort, clarification, as well as documenting personal perceptions.
- Finally, in the fourth stage, the artwork is encountered coherently and holistically, based on the total personal experience that has been composed.

This particular method seems to operate both in primary and secondary school students, as well as in adults, and according to research (Alexandropoulou, 2015), this approach seems to lead to a more substantial assimilation of knowledge, while, simultaneously, helps promoting awareness, critical thinking and self-expression. At

the same time, it is also important that through the Perkins method, students are given the opportunity to contact the artistic phenomenon itself, knowing forms of art that they may not have known under other circumstances.

Critical and creative learning through aesthetic experience is based on philosophers and transformative learning theorists, such as Dewey, Eisner, Gardner, Perkins, Brookfield, Mezirow, who emphasize the importance of aesthetic experience in the learning process through the use of the Perkins method. A basic element of the learning experience is the aesthetic experience of the processing of the works of art. It is important for educators to create a learner-friendly learning environment that will lead them smoothly towards acquainting with works of art (Bouda & Fragoulis, 2017).

Art, craft and design are reproduction vehicles, ways of evaluating, perpetuating and refining materials and symbolic practices. Besides, pedagogical sites are the location of perpetuation and development of cultural values (Addison & Burgess, 2004). The implementation of a training practice of this kind may involve the creation of a virtual gallery with emblematic artworks at school, positively contributing to the contact of children with the artistic phenomenon, having a catalytic effect on the personal and social development of individuals, while, at the same time, enhancing students' personal expression. An action of this kind in the school environment can be exploited in a variety of ways, as through the aesthetic experience provided by art, students are able to reflect, to explore aspects of the world and of themselves that they have not discovered, but also to transform the knowledge they acquire, integrating their personality globally.

Conclusions

Communion to art in the school environment is a prerequisite for the integration and personal expression of children's emotions (Chapman, 1993). Personal expression is enhanced, as is the multiplicity of approaches and children learn, beyond all other, the importance of avoiding standardization (Vaos, 2015).

Approaching art presupposes the creation of a nexus, as we are thus being lead to the ingestion process, the main issue of artistic intervention. It is an expressive effort within a conscious artistic search. The concept of an idea is sufficient to trigger an intensive glance towards the world, with a demand and, at the same time, a consequence of, not the attitude towards the work of art, but rather the way we approach it in artistic terms (Vaos, 2015). This is an essentially mental process.

Aesthetic education entails multiple benefits, including giving way to different forms of thought and expression, a particularly important parameter given the heterogeneity of the classroom (Eisner, 2002). Art contributes to the maximum. The emotional world of students is exacerbated, with a significant impact on learning processes (Connell, 2005). Meeting with art not only requires knowledge but also extends it. Art, like speech, is a way of communication (Tolstoy, 1994).

Creating the conditions for effective learning provided through art-based teaching increases the active participation of both the student and the teacher (Kokkos, 2011).

However, it mainly contributes to the cultivation of the perception that culture in its various forms is not excluded from everyday educational practice; on the contrary, it is part of the learning process (Kokkos, 2011), leading to the holistic development of personality. Art has the characteristic feature that it unites people, making the recipients of the artist's feelings come mentally together with him (Tolstoy, 1994).

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