

Visual Arts Education and its important role in Shaping Personality

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Abstract

Visual Arts consist a strong media of messages expression and communication. Through the rich vocabulary that the Visual Arts offer as a human privilege we can present our inner thoughts, hopes and beliefs, to transmit and receive messages. Reflected evidently are the historical presence and the human agony to define and identify the position in space and time.

The most important characteristic of Visual Arts is the aim not only to reveal the personality furthermore to act as a transforming factor. Setting as an epicenter the personality development we face the question: whether the Visual Arts are capable to play a role or not towards this address. We have a clear answer accepting that via Education we provide a holistic adaptive process, focused on shaping life skills in long term.

In this paper it is analyzed the epistemological background that serves to enrich the Art educational system, practicing different pedagogical approaches. The aesthetic criterion is cultivated through art interventions, however, we reach major results when art education becomes a tool transferring ethical values.

We define the interpretation mechanisms for the learning process implementation to be facilitated when applied in the classroom. We demonstrate their effect in students' capacities and skills, being reinforced.

The proposal is being accomplished with an exhibition of children's creations, realized in Athens, Greek primary schools. Making obvious due to the results that Visual arts offer the most benefits, highlighting their role in elementary education.

Key words: Art intervention, Visual Arts Education, Personality.

“The ethical truth is the criterion of the value of Art”
Plato

1. Aesthetic and Ethical perceptions

The phenomenon of Art concerning the humanizing privilege in all Art forms expands the limits of our perishable nature. The philosophical life attitude, the ethical attendance for quality and moral virtues are depicted in every day human's creations. The spiritual agony for definition in space and time reveals the basic need for the person's conscious expression (Chandrinou, 2014)¹. Our position in universe is presented through our imprints, Art as a vehicle carries and facilitates the spread.

¹ Chandrinou, Theodora, (2015), *Classical Greek philosophy and visual art aesthetics forming the personality*, in: *Review of Artistic Education No. 9-10/2015*, Center of Intercultural Studies and Researches-Institute of Pedagogical training and counseling “George Enescu” University of Arts, Iasi, Romania, Artes Publishing house, Iasi Romania, p. 232 -240.

Ancient Greek Art reached the higher of its aesthetic level on the 5th century B.C.- the Golden Age of Athens. **Karouzos C.**,² in his historical leading studies focused on a decisive element in Art of that period: that is how “*the human spirit is being mirrored in the conscience*”. Crossed by self-awareness and self-definition, the Greek “*Morfes*” (“Shapes”) in Art creations is the real willingness as a mental, spiritual need.

Beardsley³ is helping us to unfold the thread of ethics and aesthetics in those Ancient Greek centuries and confirms in his essays the Art’s power of expression and communication. According to **Plato** “*Art was becoming a confession of spirit and material substance, object and subject*”. The overflow of conscience by the “*Beautiful*” (“*Oreon*”) as it was inserted into art and finally upgraded to a way of life of the “*Ideal Beauty*”, that is the “*Divine Archetype*” on earth. As criterion of the Art’s value is setting “*the ethical truth*” – in the level of its existence in Art (Beardsley p. 42-43). Art harmonizes the human existence with the powers of the Universe placing things in order as offered from the regulating, organizing and cathartic process.

Plotinus (204/5 – 270 AD.) on his essay: “*Sense- Perception*” introduces the important role of the “*Beauty*” as *the person “has to become beautiful in the spirit and supreme in moral in order to know the Perfect Beauty*”, (p. 77). The perceptible beauty prompts the soul in the supreme knowledge. Finally, Art forces the Artists’ creative spirit and engraves the path joining the “*Sense*”, through the Aesthetic Art beauty, with the “*Archetype*” essence. All the activity is overflowing to contact with the public, making clear the interaction of the aesthetic values and the ethical virtues.

The mental, psychological, social and cultural evolution of human beings are stimulated from their free will, according to **Aristotle**. Being completely aware of their action’s purpose, people are responsible for the “*virtues*” that they have chosen to flourish their soul with, targeting the highest of all the “*wisdom*”- (*sabiduria*). Through education we can achieve this goal thus the pedagogical character of Art as a stimulating factor of the personality is underlined from **Aristotle** and **Plato**. The interconnection with other modulus under a holistic multilateral approach was a practical motive proposed from the philosophers.

“*On the Sublime*”, **Dionysius Logginus**⁴ placed the value of height as the one feature that brings people close to “*divine nature*”. The really high sense of virtue has the power to call the soul on “*standing up and filling with joy and pride*” (Logginus, p.77). Concerning the works of high spiritual value - including Art works- we assure that they reveal the mental height of their creator as reflected, through personal experience, to the surrounding environment.

The definition of Art as a factor for cultivating “*inner beauty*” and to reflect it, in our contemporary times is more than a fact it is a necessity. This paper consists an admitted starting point, concerning this aspect.

2. Child and Art games

² Karouzos Christos , (1900 – 1967), was a Greek Archaeologist and Academician. Existed director of the Greek National Archaeological Museum, Was granted to him the Seneschal of Palm, while existed also member of Archaeological Institutes of Berlin and Vienna. Here the book used: Karouzos, C., (1981), *Ancient Art –speech study, reproduction completed*, Ermis LTD, Athens, p.9-19.

³ Beardsley Monroe C., (1989), *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present- A short History (in Greek – The History of the Aesthetic Theories*, Nepheli, Athens).

⁴ Logginus Dionysios, (1990), *On the Sublime (Περί ὑψους , “Peri Ipsus”)*, Explanatory edition- M.Z. Kupidakis, Hellenic Vikelaiia Library, Heraklion, Crete.

Childhood as a first vital part in human's life, places the base terms for the natural and social environmental adaption. Education offers the structures and progressive rhythms to facilitate the paths. **Jan Piaget**⁵ through his epistemological researches emphasizes on the focal point that the personality formation is being composed: "*In the potential research, life skills cultivation, the balance between subject and object*". The environmental and external surrounding frame define, evidently and compulsory the stages of the child's evolution, as are counted the:

- adjustment of the person's kinaesthetic perception (Arnheim Rudolf⁶, 2005)
- external's data assimilation that a person confronts in life
- distraction of attributes
- imitation
- acceptance and rejection of the present reality

Our healthy attitude towards life is signalled by the way we can be trained to administer and handle things that affect our behaviour and the image we create for ourselves, but also the one we radiate to others. The impact we experience from these elements in our personal, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships is what finally shapes our personality (Jung⁷, 1953).

Considering **Vygotsky's**⁸ social transaction theory for the development of structure elements in human's personality concerning the "**Zone of Proximal Development**" we notice the active role of the games in early life time. Main function of the games (of any type) in the school field is **not only the entertainment** further more is for the child to procure ways for expressing the imagination and inventiveness. On this topic **Piaget, Dewey** and **Claparéde** insist that "*the compulsory work is an anti-psychological irregularity*". The pedagogical system by embedding psycho-motoring activities such as **art lessons** is opening a luminous and creative passage for the child and "*by transforming the real to set a base for the ego's multiple needs*" (Piaget, p. 164).

The Playing process through **Art as a vehicle** in childhood has shown the aims that are: the intervention and the development of forms of expression that will reveal and smooth the problematic aspects of the character. The effective treatment of conflicts and the resolution of dysfunctional situations are regarded as factors that act decisively to the child's growth.

3. The experiential Learning Character of Visual Arts

Arts' character has an **experiential profile**. Contemporary pedagogues locate the need of the new methods attached in the learning theory. The transformative learning, provides a complex of experiential knowledge acquirement and the focal axis of "*transforming experience to knowledge through experienced practices*"⁹

⁵ Piaget, Jean, (1969), *Psychologie et Pédagogie*, ed. Denoel – Gonthier Paris, here : in Greek ed., (1979), Publ. A. Livanis & Sia E.E. "Nea Sinora", Athens, p. 164-167.

⁶ Arnheim, Rudolf, (2005), *Art and Visual Perception*, in Greek ed., Themelio, Athens.

⁷ Jung C. G., (1953), *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Edited by H. Read et al., Princeton and London: Bollingen Series XX.

⁸ Vygotsky, L. S., *Child Psychology-vol. 5*, in R.W. Rieber ed., Plenum Press- New York .

⁹ Kolb, David, A., (1984), *Experiential Learning-Experience as the source of learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, p. 41.

(Kolb, 1984, p. 41). **Kolb** in his theory develops the interaction between thoughts, sentiments and behaviours, inherent in all his phases as an element additional to be depicted in “*circles*”. On that base we will continue,

4. Visual Art Interventions in Elementary Education

Recent year’s researchers offer creative ways to detect the learning action in a lifelong dimension. The cooperation of Educators, learners and parents in the first place with researchers, social institutions and foundations, as well, offer the most on positive results. It is remarkable how the social structure is being strengthened under this common goal (Rusu, 2014)¹⁰.

The multiple students’ needs and multicultural options in Art teaching approaches lead to the conclusion received from **Cizek’s**¹¹ research. According to this we must not accuse the child for not being affective but “*it is the Pedagogy that faults*”. The methodological base of **Visual Art Interventions** is flexible but requires good organized plan. Art Teachers are encouraged to choose the appropriate model, by combining aims and methods, suitable to the needs and necessities of their learning groups, targeting the cultivation of both aesthetic and moral parts of the personality.

Practiced in the elementary education, the creations of the children were realised in Athens Greek primary Schools¹² during 2014-2015 academic year, targeting ages 7-12 years old. In this paper we explain the interventions we used, in the frame of the Visual Arts lesson, also the results and evaluation.

4a. Transformative Learning through Art

The methodically constituted activity of thought, which is based on the evaluation of the subject data, the review and revision, forms the general frame of “*critical rethinking*”. In his essay **John Dewey**¹³ is focused on the psycho-dynamic action of “*the aesthetic experience as fundamental element of the learning activity, while constitutes eminently the mean for the growth of imagination and challenge for thought*”. Via the “*converting learning*” we acquire the possibility to intervene in problematic frames, as **Jack Mezirow**¹⁴ reports. He selected ways to change the dysfunctional structures and make them “*comprehensive, distinct, open, meditative and sentimentally receptive in change*”. Many discussions have become with regard to the application of programs in the education, additionally (Mezirow 2009, 1990).

¹⁰ Rusu, Marinela, Rusu, Marinela, (2015), *Intercultural study of art - contemporary dimension*, in: *Review of Artistic Education No. 9-10/2015*, Center of Intercultural Studies and Researches-Institute of Pedagogical training and counseling “*George Enescu*” University of Arts, Iasi, Romania, Artes Publishing house, Iasi Romania, p.255-263.

¹¹ Cizek cited by Daria Harpin, (2003), *The Expressive Body in Life, Art Therapy: working with movement, Metaphor and Meaning*, Publisher: Jessica Kingsley, London.

¹² 11th & 13th of Ilion, in the curricula in the frame of the Visual Arts Lesson, and 5th of Dafnis -“Georgios Bouzianis”- Athens, Greece, under the eTwinning European project collaboration.

¹³ Dewey, John, (1934/1980), *Art as Experience*, The Penguin Group, USA, , p. 285.

¹⁴ Mezirow, Jack & Associates, (1990), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, Jossey- Bass, San Francisco.

In Greece **A. Kokkos**¹⁵ is suggesting his method for practical usage in the classroom. Based on the development of Art works observation and through the process of questions - as spark of thought is sought the activation of meditative "*creative thought*". Kokkos is also taking advantage of the technique in Harvard issued **Perkins D.**¹⁶ His technique: "*Visible thinking*"¹⁷, is flexible for that reason is advised in this proposal. Through the obstetrical process, questions and argumentation in the answers we achieve intensely tangible results.

For the practise of our project in classroom, high aesthetic quality works of Arts were used, through on line Museum galleries by internet exploring and printed photo albums, as well. On this topic our pupils inspired from the Great Art Master's creations and worked on groups as suggested, using a variety of plastic arts media, materials, and techniques. They worked on dedicated themes about:

- Health education and negative behaviours prevention such as: "*Cultivating emotional Intelligence*", "*Personal relationships*", "*Against-bullying project*", "*Portraits and emotions*" (fig. 1), "*Diversity*".
- Environmental sensitiveness: "*Our relationship with nature*", "*Recycling with imagination*".
- Cultural cultivation: "*The power of Art*", "*The creations of the Great Masters inspire the children*" (fig. 2), "*Art: The mirror of the soul*".

Conclusions were obvious, factual visible through the Art works of the students and the workshops realized in classroom. For our projects evaluation we followed the steps including: Interviews from the pupils, written compositions, exhibitions and conference presentations. Also, used the "*Perkins' evaluation table*". In the continuation we keep some paragraphs from the children's confessions: ~"*There are many different paintings and many different ways to see and depict the same theme!*", ~ "*Now I understood that there are not "bad" or "good" art works, not as I thought about abstract Art*", ~ "*We are different but we have a common way to speak and that is through Art*".

4b. Visual Arts Therapy School Projects

Free expression allows people to develop interpersonal abilities, to succeed in managing their negative emotions and their impulsive behaviours. Already from the first years of our lives, our tendencies become apparent. Through their creations, children express themselves hearty and as a result they reveal a part of their point of view and the way they feel and perceive the world (**Lowenfeld**¹⁸,1978).

The therapeutic role of Arts is an ability underlined and practiced further in recent decades, after the researches on Psychology, Pedagogy and Anthropology, as their synergy revealed the importance of coexistence in innovative motives adapted. The power of Art to help people therapeutically, even if they are young aged, is placed in search of the ways. In this paper we are focused on Visual Arts Education. It is possible to intervene to the defence mechanisms that will shield us psychologically in our struggle against traumatic experiences, negative thoughts and emotions. We can

¹⁵ Kokkos, Alexis, & Associates, (2011), *Learning through Arts*,(in Greek), Metexmio, Athens.

¹⁶ Perkins, D. (1994), *The Intelligent eye: learning to think by looking at Art*, The Getty Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles.

¹⁷ <http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/>

¹⁸ Lowenfeld, V., (1978), *Creative and Mental Health*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

"read" the data revealed by the children's paintings so as to help them in a substantial way, mainly because of the emergence, the recognition and the management of emotions. The "**Cathartic**" experience helps children to uncoil feelings and emotions: guilt, anger, stress, fear, or to uncover trauma and cause relief (Buchalter, S., 2004)¹⁹. Pictures and symbols, the vocabulary of Visual Arts, provide the means so as to let them express their inner world and activate psycho-analytic functions and processes of the Super-Ego. The shapes, forms and their position on paper, the relationship between the theme choices and colours, sizes and the construction of compositions and also the textures become elements so "*as to detect the aggression and others existent emotions, even in a latent period of time*" (Marinela Rusu²⁰, 2013).

Healing **through Visual Arts** -in an Art Therapy frame- and the technique of self-expression through Art interventions, do confirm their importance when they are applied, by specialists and trained teachers in the educative system. Teacher's essays from around the world, based on research for the utilization of Art as an education tool, making the benefits possible, have been presented to the scientific community.

In the teaching process we chose themes to irritate the interest and the child's imagination, to help introspection and self-awareness. We asked from the children to be direct and clear in the motives and feeling to be depicted, and to work in a short time. Some of the themes entitled: "*Inner faces*"(fig. 3), "*How should I be if I was a tree?*", "*How should I be as a flower*".

The evaluation of the project included interviews from the children as a strong criterion of its notable value. We mention a sample of their opinions recorded: ~"*This lesson was very special!*", ~"*My idea was unexpected, I left my anger in this picture*", ~"*This is not an abstract painting from me, I drew something that makes me feel scare*".

4c. Printmaking Techniques in Primary School

An innovating art intervention, considered by giving venerable permanent results in future terms, is the printmaking technique. As a project applied in the elementary Greek schools, for enriching the Visual Arts methodology, since 2005 I improve and impart the benefits. Children are impeded to test their personal and social skills, to increase them through practice, in "*Personalized Education*" or working on "*Learning Groups*".

Main targets of the practice are the development of "**life skills**" and the "**Emotional Intelligence**" cultivation, in priority. Concretely, to increase the childrens': *personal skills, *self-control, *self-awareness, *motivation, *social communication skills, *empathy. Additional skills concerning the cognitive and meta-cognitive sectors are included. (Chandrinou, Theodora²¹, 2013). We gain results by using the printmaking technique, due to the particularity on the media and tools to be used- as mostly are sharp enough to engrave. More **benefits** are the required: responsibility, concentration, active attendance, patience, insistence, methodological and organizational spirit, critical thinking, cooperation and pleasant

¹⁹ Buchalter, Susan, (2004), *A Practical Art Therapy*, Publisher: Jessica Kingsley. London.

²⁰ Rusu, Marinela, (2013), *Manifestarea și auto-reglarea emoțiilor*, Publisher: Ars Longa, Iași, Romania.

²¹ Chandrinou, Theodora, (2013), *Innovative Art Interventions in Primary Education Providing emotional intelligence and life skills*, in Ed. Marinela Rusu, "Manifestarea și auto-reglarea emoțiilor", Publisher: Ars Longa, Iași, p. 161-177.

noble attitude. The above points are making us to suggest the **Printmaking Techniques** in Primary School unreservedly.

There is a variety on media, tools and materials that can be used, depending on the pupils' class. For the Primary School first levels are suggested stamps prints and monotypes to be practised with, by using natural materials (potatoes, carrots, etc.). Also, cartons, linoleum and plastic surfaces. Combinations with painting and other media of the Plastic Arts are admitted. As children grow (after 10 years old) they are capable to use more special surfaces in order to create their personal imprints, in numbered series (fig.4).

We are referring, as an example, to the technique practiced in Athens primary schools curricula in 2014-2015, targeting 8-12 years old pupils. Our **goals were completely full-field**, concerning permanent beneficial results, assuming from the evaluation interviews from the pupils who participated and from their creations exhibited. Most children, on the first lessons, were negative on trying to engrave with sharp tools over a plain surface. In contrary, pupils that had an aggressive attitude in the classroom were more daring on try. Their reactions in the **introductory lessons** were: ~*"It's impossible to achieve that"*, ~*"I am not able even to make a beautiful painting... I will not be able to engrave!"*, ~*"I want to tray sure but it seems difficult"*. **During** the progress of the lessons the comments were different: ~ *"It is so good... I feel completely concentrated"*, ~ *"Very interesting, I want to see the results of my efforts"*. After **the project completed** we testify, from the interviews recorded, that the reactions of all the participated pupils were enthusiastic: ~ *"I never imagined I could do such a creation!"*, *"It is so great I love it, thank you teacher!"*, ~ *"I think I can manage well, shall I teach that technique to the other children?"*(meaning of the other class levels).

We had the opportunities to exhibit the children's creations in Greece and other European countries and received worth mentioning comments.

As personally do believe in the effectiveness of printmaking projects in primary education, the necessity for teachers' training became priority ²². The interest from the part of the Teachers must be counted, also.

5. Results and Evaluation of Visual Arts applications

Each educational policy in order to be characterized as a *"successful"* one it is more than obliged to be set under evaluation discretion according to **Glenn Turner**²³ of Southampton University. Even if it concerns Visual Arts teaching, the practical results can be under rethinking as positive and effective or not. Besides, we are not referring to measure the knowledge recall but the substantial contribution of the approaches in future time. The **principal schedule** and the **target setting** of each project are the base for our critical procedure. Through the evaluation practice we certificate the quality and effectiveness of our methodological applications. The data can be used as a feedback source for future use and improvement. The archive, we are

²² Due to this address designed and organized by Theodora Chandrinou experiential workshops for adults and more in cooperation with the offices of *"Primary School Educational projects"* of the Greek Ministry of Education and other foundations especially for the Teachers needs to enrich their learning practices.

²³ Turner Glenn, Unite of research and evaluation education section, Southampton University. in: KETHEA –TACADE, (1990), *Life skills for children of Primary School*, Shape and Color, Athens, p.31-35.

called to create, can be for our personal usage or to be flowed in wider public. Turner is setting the “**basic stages**” of the evaluation, that we admitted and followed, also, for the improvement of our projects:

- **Programming:** calling us to make concrete: “*on which terrain*” our project is completed and “*on which aspect*” (KETHEA -TACADE, p. 32).
- **The indication’s collection:** making a separation of the methods in categories we are ready to *observe, *register in a form of interview, personal or in groups, the learners opinions, *set questionnaires, *exercise registration and progress tests (in verbal or written form) in order to make clear the evaluation course, also to impress the level of knowledge acquired.
- **To present and exhibit, to diffuse and communicate the results:** * Convoking written compositions with clear definition of the themes and its aims, the methodology, the progress in stages, tools used and finally conclusions and suggestions, * to make presentations to the public officially and unofficially, * the use of Internet and soft ware programs are helping tools to spread the practices.

Learning from the experience, that our colleagues share, we illuminate our pupils’ paths. We help them to find their own way to participate in our community by imitating their Teachers’ admirable behavioural skills.

6. Feedback

The creations of the children that were realised in Athens Greek primary Schools, as a sample result of “*good practices*” to be applied in classroom, were presented on Internet²⁴. Exhibited, also, in extended hospitality to the locations of the Conference²⁵ organized in Iasi-Romanian Academy and in Athens-Greece, Bouzianis Museum²⁶.

The methodology as was analyzed above and the evaluation of practices testify that the Visual Arts Education in primary school certainly can play an unrivalled beneficial role in shaping personality. The reflexion to society raise the pedagogical aim on moral and aesthetic values as transferring factors in the creative vital activities.

Elytis Odysseus²⁷, is referring to the evolution of Art that can be regarded as “*transposition*”. The quintessence of Art is that it radiates the light in our souls as “*phototropism*” (Elytis, p. 222) and preserves it as something precious. In that way Art serves as an antidote to modern materialism, “*when theories at times deceive people into believing that their soul is lost*”.

Acknowledgments

The most of gratitude, as I acknowledge the contribution and dedication to the importance of the projects, I wish to express to the Head Masters: * Dimitrios Galounis – 11th

²⁴ 5th of March 2015, 2nd *Creative Classroom-Online Unconference*”, e Twinning groups.

²⁵ 15th of May 2015, *Ethics and Aesthetics in Personality development – education and self-shaping through Art*, Organizer: Romanian Academy, PhD Rusu Marinela, Iasi, Romania,.

²⁶ 21st of March 2015, Painting - printmaking and ceramics exhibition, *Children Play...*, in the “*House-Museum and Cultural Centre, George Bouzianis*”, Athens – Greece, organizer: Head Master of the 5th Pr, School of Dafni, Nikos Efstathiou, Athens – Greece.

²⁷ Elytis Odysseus, (1992), *En lefko* (title means *In White*), , Ikaros, 1992. p.222. On 1979 Nobel Prize in Literature was bestowed on him.

Primary School of Ilion, Athens-Greece, * Apostolos Katsaounos – 13th Primary School of Ilion , Athens-Greece, * Nikos Efstathiou – 5th Primary, School of Dafni, Athens-Greece.

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