

THE ARTS IN MODERN TEACHING

What is the importance of art in shaping a child's personality and molding them for the future?



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Terms such as subjectivity, creativity, imagination, and expression immediately conjure up ideas relating to the value of art in education. Contemporary education is at certain crossroads, between the traditional way of thinking about teaching (transmissive teaching) and a more modern way, where we talk about innovation, openness, the ability to construct knowledge, experiential learning and problem solving, and reading and interpreting the signs and symbols of contemporary culture. How does art fit into this picture, what dimension does it have, and does this young generation, now growing and developing, truly need it?

Today's globalized and technologized world robs children of their unrealized individual potential and possibilities. It takes away the time meant for their personal development, and in fact, stupefies them. There is no space for reflection, asking questions, searching for answers, experiencing the world, and gaining experience. Under such conditions, can children develop the kind of imagination that nurtures their creativity, creates a balanced way of thinking, maintains inner order, and encourages growth, and not the type that destroys their inner balance and their empathy towards the other person and the world? Art, its influence, and freedom of expression foster the development of imagination, allowing an individual to

grow. Such use of art is a difficult task and a challenge for the contemporary education of children and the young generation.

In my research and in my teaching practice, I want to show the broader perspective on working with art, i.e., the possibility of shaping an individual's personality. When teaching art, one should use the knowledge of human development. There is great power in art, so why in teaching do we resort mainly to copying and lapse into the pattern of talking about art while not getting immersed in it, thus not developing children's abilities?

Interest in the creativity of children has a tradition going back more than a hundred years. Observing a young person in different periods of their life, we wonder what phenomena influence the dynamics of their development, to what extent creativity understood in an egalitarian way allows their life and creative activities to be defined. I have been looking for answers to these questions in art education, or more broadly – in visual arts education, which is the subject of my research and teaching activities.

Fields of visual arts education research

Different approaches can be distinguished in visual arts research, drawing upon a multitude of fields of science: psychology, sociology, pedagogy, theory and history of art, theory of communication, new technologies, etc.; these approaches also influence each other. This begs the question: amidst this diversity of analyses of the phenomenon of artistic creativity, including in children in the course of curricular education, are we truly creating the right conditions



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for participants to reveal their creative potential in the classroom?

There are three streams of art education, based on educational methods that shape children's development in a more or less creative way. Until the 1960s, drawing was taught in art classes using traditional methods based on models and imitation – called mimetic pedagogy. This is a concept of art education focused on imitating models of nature and art (the classical canons of beauty) and realistic rules of representation. Under this method, the knowledge accumulated and revised over the centuries by artists and educators is passed on to the pupil by the teacher-master.

Changing views on children's creativity, a growing interest in its psychological dimension, as well as the emergence of new directions in art itself (impressionism, expressionism, abstractionism), contributed to the birth of the pedagogy of expression, which is based on assumptions about mental and physiological spontaneity and human creative activity. Its foundation lies in the use of the student's spontaneous artistic abilities. In contrast to the pedagogy of expression, what emerges here is a pedagogy of form, called

a visual pedagogy. It is based on such trends in art as constructivism, cubism, neoplasticism, geometric and visual abstraction. Pedagogy of form focuses more on the student's intellectual potential (perceptive and logical thinking) than on the sum of their experiences (including free imaginative and expressive activity).

In the 1970s, a new agenda was developed based on contemporary assumptions of art pedagogy. The notion of "artistic education," which had been introduced in the 1960s, came to be replaced by "art class." One novelty involved introducing elements of art knowledge already in the first grade of elementary school. This program was built on the principles of expressive pedagogy with elements of mimetic pedagogy. However, despite these newer developments, is still the expressive-mimetic trend that prevails in teaching visual arts at kindergartens and at subsequent stages of education where visual arts are included.

In my analysis of scientific approaches to children's artistic creativity, I have identified the following streams of research: 1. reaction to stimuli, internalization of experiences and their impact on the formation of understanding of visual values in children, 2. devel-



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Painting by Michał, age 7:
"Red and green balloons
at a ball held by yellow
and blue Christmas tree
ornaments"

opmental manifestations of higher cognitive functions in relation to artistic activities, 3. specific types of manual activity, 4. art as one of many ways to express children's experiences, 5. non-verbal indicators of creative development in children, 6. creation of an artistic sign, 7. modern technology in children's drawing activities.

Art education for children

What skills do children develop during the art education process: do they just learn to recreate the world, or do children think as they create?

Each educational system, in conjunction with the education model that underlies it, guides patterns of behavior, including creative behavior. Art is a vital part of the educational process. It fosters an understanding of different values in a very broad and narrow sense. How can a child be helped to develop their potential? A child sees, experiences, and expresses itself in their drawing, painting, and molding. Will they become fully aware of their abilities over time?

Childhood is the most dynamic and significant period of development self-expression, of the child's creativity, including the visual arts. In its development process, a child creates an image of an object in their artwork – be it simply scribbles or a fully-fledged scheme. It is a developmental feature of a child's creativity, but is it possible to stimulate its development outside the framework of this process, to go beyond the boundaries defined by their developmental dynamics, and to transcend it? I do think that it is possible, and to do so, one should consider knowledge from the field of developmental psychology, the psychology and pedagogy of creativity, the psychology of visual perception, aesthetics, and art.

One of the crucial ways of stimulating a child's artistic creativity is actually shaping their visual per-

ception, rather than just educating. This is not about technical mastery but about increasing the child's experience when it comes to their visual perception and applying it creatively. The child's visual perception is cultivated in the course of experiencing particular stimuli of a general nature, such as color (e.g., reds or blues, etc.), contour, shape. It is connected with the possibility of their free interpretation by the participant, taking into account the given visual quality. This kind of art education is absent or minimally present in the education of preschool and early elementary school children. Instead, if it is present it is included in the education of adolescents. This way of teaching has its roots in the pedagogy of form; it has also been and is a part of various pedagogical, psychological, and artistic concepts and is put into practice by such artists/educators as Rudolf Arnheim, Antoni Buszek, Bogdan Urbanowicz, Roman Owidzki, Nela Samotyhowa, Jan B. Deręgowski, Piotr French, Stefan Koscielecki, and Urszula Szuścik.

A child's eye can see much more, as the prominent Polish psychologist Stefan Szuman noted long ago. So what should be done to awaken and stimulate this potential for visual perception? What influences the development of artistic creativity, the way children perceive works of art, and the visual phenomena they encounter in their lives? In my research with children at preschool age (two and three years old) and at younger school age (7 to 10 years old), I have demonstrated that it is possible to shape children's visual perception, which in turn stimulates their artistic creativity. This experiment was conducted as part of an art program designed to shape visual perception through "visual qualities" (color, contour, and shape). The artistic activity of the children was based on direct action and creative interpretation of the perceived "visual qualities," along with the visual problems contained in them and with the use of applied artistic knowledge. This research is a good starting point for developing a new didactic concept to stimulate children's creative activities. Such stimulation opens doors for children to experiment with visual and artistic problems and provides them with the opportunity to develop their own framework of particular visual qualities. They can then transfer their experiences and the acquired knowledge to other areas of their cognitive activity. Thus, visual arts open them to new ways of perceiving various phenomena, facts, images of the world and of themselves. This is not illustrating, then, but creating an image through the prism of their own experience, as a result of visual perception training.

In 2008, new standards for cultural education, including visual education, were developed, in Poland which put a strong emphasis on the training of visual perception at all stages of education of children and adolescents. However, the project was not implemented in educational practice, which is a pity because it

was modern and presented a holistic approach to education, including art. It lived up to the requirements and standards of education in the twenty-first century. It was a proposal for open education through artistic activities.

Children's visual creativity and the artistic sign

What, besides visual perception and its development in gaining life experience, including educational experience, can be considered when analyzing a child's artistic creativity when it creates an image of an object in its work? As we observe a child while drawing, it is important to pay attention to the word associated with it. Both the word and the drawing are an expression and a record of thoughts. The child's artistic creativity can also be viewed as a process resulting from the relationship between linguistic stimulation (speech), and therefore a verbal sign, and artistic activity (a plastic sign such as a drawing). The direct, as well as the indirect influence of words on children's drawing activities, is the subject of my research interests and of studies I have conducted with preschool children (aged from three to six years) about this matter (U. Szuścik, *Znak werbalny a znak plastyczny w twórczości rysunkowej dziecka* [The Verbal Sign and Artistic Sign in the Drawing Work of Children], Katowice 2006). The Polish psychologist Maria Tyszkowa's considerations are significant here, as she drew attention to new possibilities in research on children's drawing, which can be accessed by including studies from linguistics, semiology, and semantics. In her opinion, this creates a new perspective for the study of children's drawing creativity concerning the evolution of drawing signs, their meanings, and communication processes. In this approach, a child's drawing is perceived as a form of expression of their experiences and as an activity aimed at forming signs and meanings based on the child's own experiences and transforming them through signs from the real world. This is important for the formation of the child's inner life and their intrapsychic activity. In their development, a child comes into contact with a system of signs typical for the culture from which they originate. In the process of artistic education, children learn to recognize those visual signs, name them, classify, assign meaning and create new signs in terms of shapes, colors, sizes, textures, etc. Words are not involved in creating a child's drawing directly, which is important for the child's development. Drawn signs are the outward expression of a child's thoughts, ideas, words, and actions. Words help to remodel and develop the child's drawing. A child is an explorer of signs, which are an integral part of their environment. It tries to decode them.



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In the course of developing their artistic creativity, a child learns the principles of pictorial communication. This leads us to conclude that we should consider educational programs for children and similar, which would address the problem of development and integration of experiences based on education in verbal and visual linguistics. This opens up new possibilities for influencing and stimulating the overall creative development of an individual.

Attention should also be paid to transformations that occur in art thanks to new methods of working with participants of classes, workshops, and other forms which facilitate students' development and improve their skills. These include happenings, artistic performances, artistic installations, drama, and the like (e.g. the activities of the PARTner group, which brought together artists who were involved in promoting art and incorporating it into everyday life, the artistic performances of Wiesław Karolak, Jacek Bukowski, Janusz Byszewski, Eugeniusz Józefowski, Blanka Gul-Olszewska, or the artistic-happening-like activities of Wrocław School of the Future under the guidance of Ryszard M. Łukaszewicz and others). These proposals force a different approach to the very essence of the creative process, its organization, and course. Both creators and creative teachers incorporate this kind of activity in their work with children, adolescents, and elderly people.

Therefore, the answer to whether art is needed in contemporary education is a resounding "yes." Without art, there will be no us, we would become barbarians, a point already stressed by the well-known promoter of education through art, Herbert Read. Art reflects the times, people and their spirituality. It imparts a deep humanistic dimension to the education and upbringing of children, as Professor Irena Wojnar reminds us. ■

Painting by Nadia, age 3.
"Red and green balloons
at a ball hall by yellow
and blue Christmas tree
ornaments"