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"TWICE AS IS THE SAME AS SAME AS BUT TWICE": children discerning a basic mathematical concept during a learning study process in preschool

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This article is reporting on a learning study process conducted in Swedish preschool. The theoretical point of departure is such a process is variation theory (Holmqvist *et al.*, 2008; Marton & Booth, 1997; Lo & Marton, 2012). Studies on this topic in educational settings have previously been conducted around the world, especially in Asian countries but also in for example USA, UK and Sweden. The learning study model has been found to improve learning, reduce the gap between high and low achievers and contribute to teachers and researchers learning about teaching and learning (Lo & Marton, 2012). Published studies have also reported on research intended to develop education and learning in preschool settings (*see e.g.*, Holmqvist *et al.*, 2010, 2011; Ljung-Djårf & Holmqvist Olander, in press). These studies suggest that the learning

the artists children decided to type their photos and work with collage technique.

C. Application (creation of visual forms)

Children took photos with digital cameras. They focused on details and they discovered that even in a familial object or person there are details which are not obvious. This "new" view helped children to strengthen their views and be more careful about the realities around them (Daucher - Seitz, 2003: 42, Costantino, 2007).

After typing their photos children were encouraged by the artists to use them in order to create collage artifacts. Artists helped children to understand that artistic practices are ways of putting down your expressive initiatives.

After completing their task children organized an exhibition in the schools. In this the final artifacts as well as all those materials which present the whole project were exhibited. So, they had the chance to discuss about the whole procedure, the tasks and the techniques they applied to fulfill them (Gaillet, 1997: 179-183).

Final Comments

Our target in this project was to examine if the basic principles of ETRA Program for the art of photography could be applied in a preschool setting. An informal way of teaching art through active participation in artistic art was chosen. Artistic expression is nothing else but the "translation" of an existing idea (Merleau-Ponty, 1993a: 64). Artifact is the result of a procedure, and it is revealed gradually.

From the very beginning we did not care that much for the artifacts themselves. We do not put into question the artistic quality of them, which is a matter of a further discussion. What we want to argue in this point is that everybody has the right to make art, to enjoy through art, to play with art, to express him/herself with art (Ardouin, 1997: 177, Parsons, 2002: 26). What seems to be fact is that a valuable artistic result can only be the final stage of an authentic artistic experience.

Our main concern was the grade and the quality of children's interest throughout the project. And we think that this project was success. Children had the opportunity to participate to a holistic esthetic experience, to decide among various possible ways, techniques and perspectives. Based upon our own experience we argue that art in school should not be taught in an organized and close way, with certain knowledge and techniques. Our didactic efforts should be initiated by children's expressive needs.

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Description of educational activity

The group under consideration consists of twenty three pupils of a kindergarten in Patras, Greece. For a period of two months the children worked with their teacher accompanied by two visual artists, Ganaelle Bressoud and Irene Mprati. Their activities were watched by some students of the Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education. The target was to give children the chance to be engaged in an authentic and holistic experience of art of photography. Our activities had two parts:

- Activation of interest for the expressive possibilities of art of photography
- Production of artifacts based on photographs

Based upon ETRAs suggestions we didn't teach any theoretical or practical knowledge, but these were emerging during the activities. Working with the children artists had the chance to create authentic artistic conditions and to link children's experiences with various issues concerning questions, practices and knowledge about artistic act.

The program was divided into the following three stages:

A1. Preparation (*desire for artistic expression with the art of photography*)

In order to ensure children's participation we tried to engage them in authentic communicative activities. Children studied journals and photographic albums and they were encouraged to comment their photos. Through the discussions children understood that photography is an artistic form, which offers many and various chances not only to "speak" about reality, but also to understand it. Different persons choose different aspects of the reality and different people understand in different ways the same photo.

Children divided the photos into categories such as: photos about important events from different time or cultures, photos in which the person(s) depicted was/were aware that (s)he/they was/were photographed, portraits, and photos from natural or artificial environment.

Children were, also, shown the work of various artists and especially those who have worked with collage or digital processing. This gave them the chance to discover the artists choose different topics, different modes of processing, as well as, different ways of presenting their photographic work. The discussions about the communicative and expressive possibilities of art of photography were very vivid and children's interest was warm.

A2. Conception of a general idea

According to our view for the art of photography there is no a topic could be seen as simple or not important. What makes a photographic artifact remarkable is the way of its processing. In any case our ideas are connected with the reality, with our questions and our interests. So the topic is not given, but it arises through personal or collective quest.

We asked children to bring to class, show their classmates and comment their favorite family photos. Our target was to give them the chance to realize that they are unique persons but they belong to certain social groups and they live in a certain social and natural environment.

Through discussions children decided the topic of their work. This was to present themselves in the school setting and to work with photographic collage.

B. Investigation (mental elaboration of the initial idea, enrichment, suggestions)

The art of photography is based upon selective gaze, upon the artist's ability to cut of aspects of the surrounding reality in a certain time and highlight their importance. So, visual experience is considered of great importance. Conscious observation demands efforts and it is more or less a creative action. Children were given cardboard frames and they were encouraged to look around through them. We wanted them to understand the difference between simple looking and focused one. With this game children had the chance to isolate and observe the details of their familial space. After that the initial idea was modified and children decided to take photos from their own bodies and the playground. Working together with

learner realizes from within artistic concepts and develops the essential skills. Thus, ETRA Program introduces teachers to an alternative way of teaching and doing art.

Artistic act and educational intervention

The basic element of our perspective could be summarized in our effort to highlight the artistic act as a par excellence expressive attempt. It is taken for granted, that any artistic doesn't allow any kind of methodological restrictions and it can exceed all the contracts and blocks (Merleau-Ponty, 1993b: 60-62). On the contrary, artistic art eludes any kind of codification, it cannot be determined and it cannot be standardized. As Merleau-Ponty (1993a: 78-80) argues, artistic act is an expressive act, which signals human experience. It is an attempt to be given a form to all those which, in other way, would be remained trapped.

Education act in school settings has to activate a procedure during which children will come across questions such as: which is the reason we create artistic forms, how these forms are created and which is their function. Child's active participation in an artistic procedure refracts the art itself, refracts child's desire to create art, as well as, child's desire to meet the art. Familiarization with the various processes of composition and acquisition are part of the procedures to synthesize a holistic view of any kind of art and these processes should be considered as inseparable ones (Herrmann, 2005: 42). By composing artistic forms one's experiences about the expressive modes are broadening and simultaneously his/her abilities of understanding these forms are deepening. And vice-versa, the knowledge about art strengthens expressive abilities. For that reason in the program described in this paper activities regarding both the creation and the commenting of artistic forms were included. In this way we think that children had the chance to be engaged in the relatively same to the artists' processes.

Based upon Chapman's (1978: 45) suggestions, in order to fulfill these requirements the artistic act was analyzed in three, discreet but overlapping, stages: *desire for artistic expression* – *conception of an idea*,

mental elaboration of the initial idea, and *creation of visual forms*. These stages should be seen as a general framework for facilitating esthetic experience rather than a strictly structured system.

The advantages of this framework could be summarized:

- offers an open and multidimensional context for the examination of various aspects of artistic phenomenon.
- introduces learners to a perspective, according to which every artifact is the result of a complicated mental and practical procedure
- offers learners the possibility to compare their methods to those of artists'
- offers teachers a valuable tool for the evaluation

It is noteworthy that these stages are analogous to the creative and investigative teaching methods (indicatively: Galliot, 2002, Epstein & Trinnis, 2002), which suggests the following stages: *preparation*, *investigation*, *suggestion*, *application*. Nevertheless, current teaching methodologies of teaching art incorporate in some extent the same suggestions.

To sum up, the first stage includes the desire for artistic creation, the searching of inspirational sources and the composition of an idea, the determination of the idea and the way of its making in the second, and, lastly, the creation the visual forms in the third.

During the initial stage, that of *preparation*, an issue facilitates children's interest. This could be an examination of an artist's technique, a visit to a museum, the review of an artist's work. This gives the starting point for a project. During the next stage, that of *investigation and enrichment*, children examine various sources and get deep knowledge about the issue. Given that artistic act is open to various and alternatives ways, children are expected to make many and different *suggestions*, before deciding to take the final one. In the stage of *application*, children are engaged in artistic act and produce artistic forms or produce a final synthesis. The project comes to an end after commenting upon various aspects of the whole way.

- *Photo*) was taken into consideration in the following two dimensions: the first has to do with the utilization of photographic art as way of constructing an image for our and others selves, and the second concerns the didactic practices. The later is put through indirect ways and in any case through involvement in artistic processes. These two elements, targeting in an essential artistic experience, offer an excellent example of how teaching art could be implemented in preschool education.

Utilizing photo art in preschool education

E.T.R.A. Program encounters photography as a privileged art form, especially for any person's attempts to record and comment on the reality and at the same time to compose and highlight his/her own personal and unique identity.

This perspective reveals many aspects of photographic art, which could be considered extremely valuable for preschool and first school age, during which children are at the starting point of a long journey investigating and determining who they are. In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory there is a fundamental concept about the way young children face themselves: the mirror - phase (Lacan, 1966: 93-100). Infants, unable to form a whole image, form a picture for themselves which is in scattered pieces. Their very first image could be likening with a mirror image. They see their bodies as they were belonging to other, a body in "reversal". Through the images of others infants form their very first consciousness of themselves.

Art photography functions exactly around this axis. Photography is nothing more but a construction of a mirror image. An image, which is triggered from the reality and it records real instances. On the other hand, a photograph is a construction and forms a more or less a virtual or ideal self image to be shown to others. The construction of a portrait consists at attempt of interpretation. The illustrated person, as well as, the artist and the possible viewer put on screen their own social concepts and pursuits. So each one of them re-construct, in some extent, the image of him/her and the image of others.

Art as purely personal creation addressed to others either as individuals or social group contains a form of reflection: the artist constructs an image of him/her taking inevitably into account the eyesight of others. Freud referred to sublimation mechanism, as a source of artistic creativity (Freud, [1905] 1985: 83). Through this process artist undertakes to create an ideal form of unresolved conflicts of his/her childhood, adopting a socially accepted context, which presupposes a positive signification of other. Moreover, Barthes (2002: 815) refers to the "mask" of photography. A photograph, as a social construction, has never an absolute meaning and it cannot be seen without its symbolic signals.

These perspectives highlight the dynamic complexity of photographic art, which has to do with every one's interrogations about his/her own identity as well as the understanding of the complex social and cultural reality. Photographic art is based upon an intensive and penetrating gaze. Thus, any kind of artistic lessons have to empower children's intrinsic curiosity for any aspect of the world. This framework gives us the chance to see artistic education as an important challenge: as a chance for a broad cultivation, as a way which helps pupils to understand themselves and the others deepening at the same time their relationship with the world (Ardouin, 1997: 24, Daucher & Seitz, 2003).

Looking for an appropriate didactic context

One of the elements of ETRA Program, which could be considered relatively innovative, has to do with the didactic practice, which is a non-formal one. More specifically, it contains a situation in which professional artists and children construct groups and create artifacts together. So any kind of instruction has to do with specific questions and is put through in an indirect way. This procedure cannot be considered a linear one, moving from easier to more difficult knowledge and practices, as in formal teaching. Moreover, there is no a certain and predetermined amount of knowledge to be acquired. This program adopts an alternative perspective. Questions, concerning specific issues, are emerging in vivo in an unpredictable and a fuzzy way. By participation in an artistic act the

podían lograrse por esta vía, compartiendo su trabajo entre pares, sincerando las fortalezas y dificultades, debatiendo alternativas, realizando devoluciones a los capacitadores sobre las instancias de formación y los proyectos definidos en los documentos de desarrollo curricular.

- Visitas de asesoramiento pedagógico a cargo de los especialistas / capacitadores y de referentes pedagógicos locales. A lo largo de la implementación del proyecto la gran mayoría de las escuelas fueron visitadas dos veces. Estas visitas resultaron instancias de formación tanto para docentes como para especialistas y ocuparon un lugar fundamental para el alcance de resultados adecuados.



THE ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PICTURE OF MYSELF AND OTHER: A PROGRAM FOR PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

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This work has to do with pilot educational project about the art of photography, which was designed by the Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education of University of Patras and it was applied in a preschool class. Its target was a composition of an innovative proposal, which would be usable in the field of preschool education.

During both the composition and the application of the program the perspective of ETRA Program (*Education through Rehabilitative Art*



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