

NECESSITY AND NEED FOR ORGANIZING PRIMARY SCHOOL ART CLASSES IN ART MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES

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This paper is based as platform for research of optional learning resources and materials in settings of educational system in Republic of Serbia. Conceptual framework of the primary school education program for Fine Art subject, in lower classes (of mentioned environment), is carried through various organizational forms of teaching. Most of them involve work within classroom, depending on included curriculum topic. While there are many ways in which a scientific approach to teaching is important, too much emphasis on the science of teaching depersonalizes the teaching and learning process, and this does have certain ethical consequences. On the other hand, it is indicative that information, provided in different kind of circumstances rather exclusively in school classrooms, have much deeper impact on children and on the ways they receive and comprehend those information. Most efficient, as proven in practice, are methods which put children in adequate active position during learning process. In case of Fine Art subject that would certainly be organized visits to art museums, galleries as well as art studios.

Keywords: Art museum, gallery, Fine Art, active learning, experience learning, curriculum.

Engaging with various artworks, children can evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, visually as well as in words. Therefore, learning is appearing as a process in which concepts and knowledge are derived from experience. This sort of learning is called active learning because it involves acting on available information – including information from one's own thoughts, feelings, and impressions – in order to form new ideas. Indeed, such situations can influence both, the form of learning that takes place and gained knowledge, as much, if not more than the standard teaching method employed (in classrooms). Art museums, galleries and art studios as informal learning settings can invite children to become engaged in exhibits and activities and can result with more complete understanding of art as profession and phenomena. None the less, while standard teaching methods and learning environment can provide rational and correctly prepared information through proper didactic means, aforementioned surrounding can provide valuable details lacking in “classroom type” education.

It is suggested that promoting and adding art museums (art galleries and studios) to the traditional educational settings of school has significant singular and collective contribution to development of young children not just of their artistic skills and interests, but, as emancipatory factor, on their complete personality as well.

Formal education is provided either in the institutions for general education or in those for vocational education and implies a structured system of education spreading from preschool and primary education through secondary to college education.

Primary education is obligatory; it is organized in two 4-year-long stages: 1) from first to fourth grade is one teacher education stage – only one teacher does all the teaching, and 2) subject teaching from fifth to eighth grade as the second stage – the teaching is done by several specialized teachers depending on the number of subjects.

The specified goals and objectives of Art as a school subject, for the students from the first to the fourth grade, are accomplished through various organizational types of work at school, according to the educational standards regulated by law¹.

The *goal* of educational work in teaching Art is to encourage and develop the student's creative thinking and acting according to the character of this school subject and to the democratic orientation of the society. The *objectives* of teaching Art are:

- The development of the abilities for the perception of shapes, sizes, light shades, colours, the position of forms in nature;
- The development of memory and the correlation of perceived information which form the basis for the introduction into the visual thinking;
- The creation of conditions for the understanding of natural laws and social phenomena;
- The creation of conditions so that students can use the techniques and means of artistic and visual expression in the process of realizing the content during each class;
- The development of the abilities for the recognition of traditional, modern and contemporary art;
- The development of the students' potentials in the area of artistic and visual in order to help the students' self-expression by using the appropriate techniques and means;
- The development of love for the values expressed in the works of all artistic forms;
- The nurturing of interest and need for visiting exhibitions, galleries, museums and the preservation of cultural heritage;
- To apply gained knowledge in everyday situation and further education;
- The development of skills and sensibility for calligraphy;
- The development of the students' motor skills.

Appropriate choice of modern teaching methods and instructions appears as crucial in order to achieve and accomplish the previously mentioned goals and objectives. Within the curriculum framework students should be trained for: the systematization and use of information from various sources (specialized literature, the Internet, magazines, textbooks); visual perception,

¹ <http://www.zuov.gov.rs/poslovi/nastavni-planovi/nastavni-planovi-os-i-ss/>
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comparison and finding links between different elements (e.g. associating the contents of a subject with everyday experience and with the contents of other subjects, etc.); team work; self-evaluation and the evaluation of paintings and other works of art.

However, with global economic, social and cultural changes during the last decades, active self-oriented processes of learning that follow life outside the school context, are becoming more significant along with the concept of formal education (this can be seen in some current concepts such as *knowledge society*, *competence development* or *lifelong learning*). Therefore, as independent from the educational institutions, it is the so-called non-formal education that can be further divided into non-formal and informal learning processes.

Non-formal education implies any planned educational programme that is created for the purpose of improving the scope of skills and abilities outside the frames of formal education. As such, this kind of education can encourage *informal education* as a process of lifelong learning when an individual can acquire certain opinions, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment as well as from the everyday experience (family, a group of peers, meetings, library, job, games, etc.).

In the process of learning the priority should not be given only to one of the above-mentioned forms of education. Nowadays the forms of formal and non-formal education are connected and permeated in various ways. The effective learning involves a wide range of participants including educated experts, educational institutions, students, parents, state education authorities, public officials, non-governmental and youth organizations, media and more general public and at the same time all the resources for education and training, either formal or non-formal, which have their role in the learning process and are valuable for the promotion of its principles and for achieving its goals. The implications of this context on Art as a school subject will be considered further.

Art as a school subject (for the educational period discussed in this text) is directed towards discovering and understanding the (social, cultural, economic, ethnical and racial) world, kindling aesthetic sensitivity and creativity. Understanding the works of art from the national and world heritage as well as modern production has significance for the formation of positive attitude and responsibility towards cultural and artistic heritage and its preservation, for the formation and development of aesthetic criteria, for the development of critical thinking and visual culture. Taking into account that art is a field that deals with the material remnants of a particular epoch and space that can be interpreted in a certain (social, economic or historical) context, the contents of museums and galleries, exhibitions of retrospective character or of representative authors and collections, and especially visiting exhibitions of museum exchanges, can methodologically and thematically complete and enrich the proposed curriculums.

It has been a long time since museums and galleries are not exclusive places for the members of the privileged social classes with the impressive collections of chaotically piled paintings and objects from the past epochs (as aristocratic and bourgeois collections used to be once). From today's perspective, collections in museums and galleries are the constituent part of a creative and comprehensive continuum of the past and the present, science and knowledge, culture and art. Art ceased to be elitist or a status symbol a long time ago and nowadays museums contribute to the development and progress of the society. Modern museums and galleries represent exhibition spaces and collections restructured into institutions for display, which

equally offer to all visitors a clear view of collected, exhibited, arranged, classified works in various forms and discourses of knowledge, power, identities and differences (Macdonald & Fyfe, 1996:1-3). During the second half of the 20th century a completely new conception of creativity and artistic production contributed to this where “(...) *the author of production of one work of art, including its purpose and values, is not anymore the one who creates the object in the material form, but the whole range of agents engaged in the field (cultural production), such as critics, collectors, intermediaries, curators and all of those who are related to art*” (Bourdieu, 1993:261).

Therefore, since the exhibition lost its classic format of presentation and is not anymore the sphere of manifestation of the artist's creation solely, it has been relocated to the whole structures of post/production. Unfortunately the curriculums (at almost all levels of general education), as well as the teachers' competences, do not regularly follow these evident changes. In the present situation more frequent school trips and visits to museums, galleries, sites, institutions for the education of artists and art studios should serve as an adequate solution. This teaching method may be a routine but it is not practiced enough.

During the XIX century, the ideal museum was understood to be advanced school of self-instruction and the place where teacher should go for assistance (Hooper-Greenhill, 1991:25). This ideal, strongly resonates till today. Museums, galleries and all aforementioned sites are extraordinary places providing an incredible range of experience, ones that we would call educative. At this point educational theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget and LevVygotsky can relate to learning in the museum or, to learning on museum experience.

It can be stated that today it is generally accepted that experience forms the basis or the grounds for learning. This is actually the attitude established by John Dewey at the beginning of the 20th century, who was one of the founders and the most prominent supporter of “The New School”. What differs experiential learning from other approaches is the emphasis on *the experience during the process of learning*. By using the cognitive mechanisms, new information and findings are interpreted through comparison with the existing knowledge. On these grounds new correlations and associations as well as one's own solutions are conceptualized and synthesized. In this case experience appears to be a source of learning since there are no two perceptions, two thoughts, feelings or actions that are the same, considering the fact that experience mediates between them. From the standpoint of the experiential learning, this process is equally important or even more important from the very contents of learning. Dewey also warns that not every experience is equally educational but only the one that is cumulatively related, i.e. the current experience that resonates in the future (Dewey, 1963:25-28).

The conception of experiential learning is based on the idea that knowledge is not static but that it results from experience and the reflection of what is experienced. Therefore, the goal of experiential learning is not the acquisition of knowledge from above (Jarvis, 2006:115) as common in the traditional transmissible teaching. In all versions transmissible teaching is based on the assumption that knowledge can be directly transmitted from the teacher to the student in the ready-made and previously prepared form. The teacher is the dominant figure of the teaching process. He/she is the basic and often the only source and transmitter of knowledge (information, ideas, attitudes and beliefs that are very often not related to the real life to the student). This practically involves a low level of interaction between the

teacher and the student. The teacher most often verbally elaborates, describes, explains, comments or systematizes the contents of a programme, while the students are supposed to acquire, comprehend and accept what is revealed by listening, memorizing and repeating. As a reaction to the transmissible teaching, to verbalism and especially to the passive role of a student in the teaching process, at the end of the 19th and during the 20th century a whole range of new didactic movements and different attitudes towards teaching and school learning appeared (e.g. free instruction; active – working school; learning through solving problems; interactive learning and the like). While “The Old School” was primarily concerned with the question what children should learn, Dewey directs his attention on to the question how children should learn. While the traditional teaching was based on the activities of the teacher, Dewey wants to build “The New School” on the activities of the students. These propositions are very similar to Carl Rogers principles, who emphasised that education should be „person-centred“. Rogers developed „person-centred counselling“ in his approach to psychology and spread the concept to education. His belief was that what the student does is more important than what the teacher does, so the focus is shifted on the student. Therefore, the background and experiences of the learner are essential to how and what is learned (Rogers, 2003:388-391, 2013:6-66).

Experience is the result of the activity of an individual that has to be actual, realistic and lifelike activity, activity that is directly related to its surroundings. The knowledge that an individual actively incorporates in the context of one’s own experience has the real (useable) value. Thus knowledge includes the awareness of oneself and the world, of oneself in the world, and it leads to the complete functioning of a person. Authority is shifted from knowledge to experience, and the responsibility for understanding and discovering is on the person that learns. According to this approach to teaching process, special attention is given to the significance of the learning process itself, when direct experience is the key element of teaching. The crucial difference between teaching seen as the transmission of experience and teaching seen as the construction (discovery) of experience is the fact that the contents and the teacher are not in the centre of the teaching process but students and their activity of learning. What the student does during a class (the way he or she studies) is built into the result of learning.

Piaget draws attention to two types of experience – physical (that includes revealing the qualities and characteristics of physical things) and logical-mathematical experience (that includes the characteristics of one’s own actions and relations directed to physical things) that at the same time point to two types of learning – the learning of contents and the learning of learning (Piaget & Inhelder, 1978:113-117). The first type involves cognitive goal of teaching, and the second one the processing goal of teaching (e.g. creative and critical thinking). When syllabus does not direct habits towards the significant goals, then, it is only something what should be learned. “A student learns unaware that proclaimed forms of behavior and school system norms are actually object of the study (...). Thinking, caused in this way, is in most cases narrow and one-sided” (Dewey, 1966:111).

Dewey’s observation that “*much attention is paid to listening, reading and repeating of what has been said and read*” in schools (Dewey, 1966:111-112), i.e. mechanical reproduction of the syllabus, is a noticeable occurrence even today. The mind is not simply storage with retrieval functions, but an active agent involved in constructing knowledge. Students need the instrumentality to help them plan, reflect upon, think about and establish their place in their world. These meta-cognitive skills demand more

than memory and recall; they require real thinking, real-life activities, real investigation and inquiry. Vygotsky also warns that such inert knowledge, apart from mere acquisition of words and simple verbalism that simulates the existence of certain concepts in children, actually conceals the emptiness. In such cases a child does not acquire concepts but words and is aided more by memorization than by thinking being incapable to use the acquired knowledge with understanding (Vygotsky, 1977:187).

Furthermore, such limited forms of knowledge lead to the problem of taking actions in life. They are partially applicable or even inapplicable in everyday life, and they can also appear to be an impediment in further education. Mere exposition to raw facts, stereotypical concepts and statistical data does not provide any kind of comprehension for the students. The consequences of such learning can be evaded only if the conditions for creating links and interactions between concepts, the contents of school subjects and previous experience are established. This can directly lead to the integral unifying of knowledge and easier implementation in everyday situations.

In relation to this, it is important to add practical activities and active materials based on the spontaneous interest of children to the transmission of verbally mediated knowledge. This means that children should be encouraged to perform practical activities that are directly related to reality and also to develop and enrich those activities. The environment is one of the important elements in the acquisition of efficient knowledge. The environment or the surroundings is composed of those conditions that improve or impede, stimulate or hinder the learning process. In fact, the environment does not actually instill ideas directly but it can be an important element for the acquisition of knowledge.

Nowadays museums and galleries take the role of active and dynamic educational institutions in the true sense of the word and in this way there is a mutual benefit in the cooperation of these institutions with schools. Directed ones onto the others they can be mutually stimulated and improved in their work. It is of course necessary that the surroundings in which teaching is realized or conducted must meet the optimal conditions for accomplishing the predicted curricular and extracurricular activities while the teacher has to provide and enable the conditions suitable for creativity which are based on: the encouragement of general relaxing atmosphere, the appreciation of all ideas even though they appear to be strange, the expression of interest for what is individual and original, the restraint from criticism and silent preference of some ideas etc.

An encounter with a work of art is a special experience. Complete understanding of one work of art is not possible just by observing the creation. Physical presence of the work enables a person to understand it more completely, for example when talking about the dimensions of a painting (monumentality of a painting cannot be experienced through reproductions in a book or through slide presentations), brush strokes and color layers or the original coloring that is very often different on reproductions, regardless of the quality of the press. Such encounter enables students, through a personal experience, to understand a work in its aspects of form (aesthetic and emotional) and technique, as well as its meaning.

A visit to a museum or a gallery can be designed by didactic rules and be previously organized and planned or it can be completely of exploratory and intuitive character. Researches show success in both cases (Newson & Silver, 1978). A visit to a museum or a gallery gives the possibility of exploring the collection or the permanent exhibition through dialogues, improvised workshops and games (in cooperation with a curator or other

specialized staff). The creation of the adequate *learning situations* through different students' activities enables various ways of learning. Today most of museums and galleries offer (or make an effort to offer) activities like these. *Game*, as the most lively of all situations and most adequate activity for children of this age, is highly suitable, unobtrusive form of learning. Through game and conversation subtle encouragement for the exploratory activity of the students can be made. Changeability of the ambience (*ambient learning*) allows considering the same thing from various aspects in different surroundings and in different forms of appearance. Pair work or team work as well as *interactive methods* offer different forms of social participation and enrichment of one's own experience through exchange with others. Successful communication with students and among students themselves is reflected in (encouraged) original comments contrary to "guessing" or giving answers to the asked questions as usual.

Such process of knowledge construction offers correlation with other school subjects. For example, through the elements of exhibition or a certain artifact in correlation with the school subject Serbian language, it is possible to analyze certain character or wide range of subjects in literary works. A direct contact with a work of art can portray a literary work and add a completely new dimension to it, thus complementing and improving a literary work. This teaching approach actually reflects a concept of a Constructivist Museum, i.e. an idea of a museum as a place that offers a possibility of functional correlation of new ideas and new knowledge with the previously acquired one (Hein, 1998:155).

It is desirable that after a visit to a museum the other part of the teaching process should be prolonged in a classroom (or in an improvised room in a museum) where students, still under impression, work on the task based on their experience. In this way, based on the previous experience, encouraged interest and emotional reaction, experiential learning can be completed and cohesion of the acquired knowledge and new information can be provided. Visits to museums and galleries as forms of teaching encourage:

- ⇒ The correlation of related and other areas that can motivate and stimulate creativity,
- ⇒ Learning about the civilization legacies through authentic and reliable sources,
- ⇒ Learning about the cultural heritage of one's own country and of the world's heritage,
- ⇒ Understanding of comprehensive timeline which involves various social and scientific areas,
- ⇒ Understanding of the historical continuum and the position of the cultural heritage in it.

Moreover, it is of crucial importance to develop students' conscience that success in mastering skills and ability of understanding art are not based on the effect of a talent or a gift, i.e. on the capacity to do something without hard work or effort. In this way we can send a message that (any) success can be achieved by hard work and experience. It can be stated freely that the goal of Art as a school subject reflects the general goal of education, which is: 1) the initiation into the society of emancipated, into the society of truly equal people that does not know for division of those who know from those who do not know, and 2) cognition that the superiority of one's ability is only the result of fervent diligence, i.e. the inferiority of others is the consequence of the circumstances that did not force them to give more of themselves. In other words, "*the improvement of one's own skill is only an*

capability that is common to every intelligent being and that can be experienced by anyone" (Rancière, 2010:89).

Besides the understanding of the world of art and mastering skills, cumulative effects are also achieved. The creation of a general artistic context and its maintenance in the society can provide a wide range of cultural patterns or interpersonal relations. In this way, a more complete impression about the complex social structure or moral and cultural values is achieved, stereotypes are destroyed, the conscience of criticism is raised, and in one word the emancipating result is accomplished. That is how the future and prosperity of one society can be achieved. Art has an equally important role, place and contribution in the individual development as well as in the social progress. Its significance is important both as an integral part of general culture on all stages of the development of an individual and as one of the important factors of the progress of a society in all forms of life and work. Since children, i.e. students, will themselves make the society in the future, the nature of this society will highly depend on the fact how the activities of those children were directed in their early life.

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What is the reason of a constant questioning and improving the quality of Art as a school subject? Art can provide a visible shape to all forms of life, to every way of existence and function and thus it can create unity between perception and judgment. As an example, considering the fact that aesthetic experience and culture form a constituent part of a modern life, the need for and significance of aesthetic education become evident. Aesthetic education develops the ability to introduce beauty into everyday life so aesthetic becomes not only the means of enjoyment but also the means of changing the reality.

This is how a more complete sense of the world can be acquired; a person is capable to resist the influences and therefore achieve true freedom and personal integrity. Knowledge in this way includes the awareness of oneself and the world, as well as of oneself in the world, and it brings to the complete functioning of a personality. In other words, a devoted person participates in his or her own decoding, i.e. creation of a perceived world. Art education could provide this unique tool for the purpose of exploring and inquiring about and into lived experiences, and thus help students to discover themselves and their connections with surrounding communities and culturally embedded sensibility, which eventually enables them to enter into and dialogue with the larger cultural setting.

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