

**VISUAL ART EDUCATION AND CONTEMPORARY
LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Maya Raunik Kirkov

ABSTRACT:

Contemporary understandings of the world we are living in are that its main characteristics are complexity, digitalization and multitasking. Educational systems all over the world are struggling with the aim to enable children to participate in life actively, with confidence and deep understanding. Is it possible in such a messy world, where a dominance of visual images in children's life's is evident? The aim of the work is to examine actual theoretical analyses for development of modern learning strategies in visual art education.

The actuality of visual images and demand for new abilities has transformed educational workplace (NAEA, 2016; Wilson McCay, 2006). The purpose of educational systems are to provide adequate strategies for reaching knowledge and abilities to understand and to communicate with this proliferation of images transmitted through traditional and digital media. Interdisciplinary knowledge is necessary to understand values, principles of living, achievements' in our world. The work presented analyzes of the latest scientific publications in the field. The results present conclusion that knowledge and understanding can be achieved through the process of critical engagement based on gained knowledge. Aesthetic and creativity are just as important as technical knowledge in the new world of science, economy and philosophy (Inhulzen & Reeve, 2014; Apkon, 2013), which situated visual art education in much higher place than it was in the past.

Knowledge in visual art education can be achieved not only for memorizing facts, but can stimulate sophisticated cognition and understanding with creation (Eisner, 2008; Marshal, 2014; Sandel, 2006).

Key words: visual art education, learning strategies, visual images, interdisciplinary knowledge.

1. Introduction

Contemporary learning processes are influenced with ever changing reality. Computers, digital media, and video games with their increased presence have revolutionized the way young people today communicate and make meaning of the world (Becker, 2000).

Dominance of visual images transmitted trough digital technologies transformed the meaning of knowledge established centuries ago. The need for development of a new set of skills and abilities arise and became

a base for development of various theories by the numerous researches, where demand for a new approach in education is crucial.

Proliferation of an enormous number of visual images, place a premium on the types of abilities which can be developed by visual arts educators: visual-spatial abilities, reflection, experimentation, practical realization of ideas. They created a base for reaching and development of visual literacy, needed to enable students to be engaged in everyday life successfully.

NAEA (2016) reports that daily, "American young people spend more than 4 hours watching television, DVDs, or videos; 1 hour using a computer; and 49 minutes playing video games. In many cases, youths are engaged in two or more of these activities at the same time. Little wonder this era has become known as the "digital age," and Americans born after 1980 have become known as "digital natives". Based on the researches of Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout (2005, p. 36) more than eight in ten (83%) young people have a video game console at home, and a majority (56%) have two or more. About half (49%) have one in their bedroom, and just over half (55%) have a handheld video game player.

Importance of visual art education and its contribution for aesthetic development from preschool till university level is emphasized by Baker (2013) in his research report – "Art integration which involves learning core content subjects (math, reading, language, science, social studies) through the arts (drama, dance, music, visual arts) provides dynamic educational platform and enriches curriculum with concepts to promote cognitive development". The aim of this work is to examine actual theoretical analyses dedicated to development of modern learning strategies in visual art education.

2. Contemporary aims of visual art education

The period of the dominance of World Wide Web and social media brings at the surface the importance of the role of art education in society with the urgent need for visual literacy. (The ability to understand and to communicate with visual means). Eisner (2002) underlined that art education helps students to stimulate and developed their active perception, sensitivity, imagination, and integration skills.

Contemporary art educational process has to overcome strong connection with traditional implementation of art instruction for creation of paintings, sculptures, prints, design. The students of 21 century have to be able to implement critical thinking; to understand new ideas and different ways of their realization in numbers of visual disciplines. Students have to become familiar with the criteria for evaluation of artistic work

and be able to implement them in real life situation according with their age. Contribution of visual art education for development of a special set of skills and abilities as:

- **Creative thinking and expression:** See & Kokotsaki (2015) pointed out that “a high quality art and design education should engage, inspire and challenge pupils, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to experiment, invent and create their own works of art, craft and design”. Olson (1990) explains that “everyone is free to create” and to “experienced events can be cast in the attempt to make them comprehensible, memorable, and shareable”, but the ability to do so lies in the quality and persistence in visual art creation.

- **Imagination** is ability which can be stimulated through visual arts by bringing into existence an alternative “reality,” as Maxine Greene (2007) noted. She further explains that art education opens the possibility for creating a completely different, new world, with contemporary solutions and options.

- **Individualization** as “one of the main goals and one of the most important and effective pedagogical principles of visual art education” (Podobnik, 2007), because it enables students to “express their own specific perception, subjective experiences and individual art abilities, presenting personal view and solution on visual art problem” (Ibid, 2007).

- **Self representational** role of the art creation has an excellent explanation in Geertz’s work (1983, p. 120) where he pointed that “the interplay of story, art and identity is like the fingering of clay, casting our mindsets into forms where the senses, and through the senses the emotions, can reflectively address them”.

3. Visual art education, cognition and learning

The potential and value of art education to provide students with sophisticated cognition was recognized by Eisner (2008). His famous statement “With the arts, children learn to see,” further explains another domain of cognitive development, active perception - seeing and understanding. Focusing on the educational processes in visual art, term “body geometry” was coined by Papert (1993), with focus on cognitive – spatial aspect of learning. It means that children do not to learn the formal rules, but instead develop insights through the way they interact with space. It is a process of constructivist learning in which a person translates a personal experience to construct his own knowledge (Braden, 1996).

The term **constructivist learning** refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves-each learner individually constructs meaning. Constructing meaning is learning (Hein,1991). Learning is not

understanding the “true” nature of things, nor is it (as Plato suggested) remembering dimly perceived perfect ideas, but rather a personal and social construction of meaning (Hein,1991).According to Papert’s Mindstorms (1993), students’ learning have to became self-motivated and self-directed. He stated that active learning process appears when one`s attention is attracted and when is involved in the process. Further he explains that students are no longer the information consumers; they construct their own knowledge and solve problems during the active learning process. With this individual selection and response to the information provided by the use of digital media, constructivist learning appears when the role of teachers is to guide, help, and encourage students to think, find the problem and solve it.

With the acceptance of the constructivist position teachers are inevitably required to follow a pedagogy which provides learners with the opportunity to:

- a) interact with sensory data, and
- b) construct their own knowledge system.

Both options are essential to art education, and in thus, visual art expression as unique domain of human activities, have to be consistent part of each serious curriculum.

Contemporary Learning Strategies in Visual Art Education

Parks (2008) stated that “over the past decade, scholars in the field have been calling for a re-envisioning of visual art education with the aim to transform it form disciplined, comprehensive approaches in classical visual art media, to a range of approaches that recognize the role of technology in reshaping teaching and learning in the 21st century”.

Maxine Greene (2001) pointed out that the aesthetic frame in education begins with perception, since we “look for resemblances, seek out connections, identify possibilities, go in quest of meanings”. Anderson (1997, p.72, 73) suggested that art educators have to explain that artworks as a constitutional element of culture are embedded in a cultural web, with definition, meaning, and value of expression adequate for the cultures in which they exist.

Ching (2015) spotlight that teachers must first understand art, and more specifically - contemporary art and its significance. With that base they will enable student’s understanding of the context of the work, the reasons for creation, and significance and deep reflection.

Menzer (2015) presents findings that arts participation shows strong evidence of considerable positive effects to early social-emotional

development. She further suggests that art activities have to be implemented in teaching and learning to stimulate development of complex set of skills within social-emotional development, such as emotion regulation (Brown & Sax, 2013); sharing, helping, and cooperative problemsolving behaviors (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010); general social and emotional skills (Muniz et al., 2014).

Patton & Buffington (2016) underlined that a new set of digital standards were developed as media arts, separate from the visual arts. Visual art educators are the best equipped to address the new digital media arts standards, so they suggested that university art teacher preparation programs have to design courses to relate qualitatively to contemporary art practices with educational uses of technology.

To enhance and support student's motivation, understanding, and active involvement in learning, persistent teachers are already familiar with the implementation of **brainstorming** as a thinking strategy to stimulate analyses of various aspects of studied topic; **discussion as a cooperative strategy** to learn in cooperation with others, to see the problem from different points; **oral explanation** to clarify thinking, to justify reasoning, and to communicate their understanding; **experiment** as one of the most important methodical tools in art expression which enriches student's experiences with understanding the connection between abstract concept and practical findings; **graphic (visual) organizers** to make the topic more comprehensible with systematic way for to present key segments and their connections (examples: timeline, cycle diagram, T-chart (visual representation of comparison and contrast), Venn diagram, story map, flow chart).

An essence of methodological approaches in visual art education is the use of **focused exploration** followed by and **free exploration** which are used when specific visual art technique has to be understood and implemented. **Individual studio art projects** is the basic method for learning and exploring the ideas and ways of finding the solutions in art creation. This is a key instructional activity initiated by students, using the materials available in the classroom in ways of their choosing.

This method is complemented with **collaborative studio art projects** or work in pairs (or in small group of students). These approaches are especially effective for collaboration, social interaction and sharing the gained knowledge or skills, as well as reaching and mastering new ones. With implementation of cooperative-learning techniques teacher allows students to work as a team to accomplish a common learning goal/goals.

To stimulate fluent and flexible thinking contemporary methods can be implemented in teaching/learning process in visual art education:

- **Conference** where during a student–teacher conference, students can report on their progress, consider problems and solutions, and note strengths and areas for improvement. Conferences therefore require an inviting and supportive atmosphere to encourage open discussion, and is a methodological tool that provide teachers with an opportunity to guide and support learners.

- **Lateral Thinking** is a method of a thinking process first described by (Edward di Bono, 1967) who recognized that the mind can perceive issues from many angles, can reviewed a problem from multiple perspectives, to think critically and to recombine the elements and recombining them in different ways.

- **Simulation** is useful when students are learning about complex processes, events, ideas, or when they are trying to understand the emotions and feelings of others. This is a method where students can participate in a replication of real or hypothetical conditions, to understand, respond and act as though the situation were real.

- **Visualization** is a process of making an object, an event, or a situation visible in one’s imagination by mentally constructing or recalling an image with the use of a variety of visual stimuli (e.g., illustrations, photographs, reproductions, videos, real objects, graphics) to assist students in generating ideas, as an exercise in image creation prior to creating an art work.

- **Art Criticism** activities are particularly suitable for whole class instruction with the components like: describing, analyzing, interpreting and judging. Visual Thinking Strategies focuses on the step of interpretation that improves critical thinking and language skills through discussions of visual images.

Visual art education and a concept of play

When contemporary online components integrate into the traditional academic course, the instructional approaches can be more diverse, fascinating, and practical (Abrahmov & Ronen, 2008). Hicks (2004) used the concepts of play and finite and infinite games as tools for re-envisioning art education.

Kirkley & Kirkley (2005) presents an evidence that suggest that educators and instructional designers can create highly interactive and learner-centered learning environment for students when combining computer games and Web-based learning.

Games and simulations encourage learning because students absorb the information and patterns during the game playing, and games also produce fun, which Koster (2004) defined as “the feedback the brain gives us when we are absorbing patterns for learning purposes” (p.96). Students can be motivated and entertained when they are involved in these types of game-based constructivist environments. Games supply competition, immediate feedback, and playing rules, so players are motivated to engage in the virtual environment. Along those lines, Pierfy (1997) concluded that instructional games provide a permanent interactive setting, apparent and consistent objectives, and high-level inspiration. Bonanno and Kommers (2008) stated that, ”computer games are a neglected but very important area of computer supported learning, which can promote critical thinking, strategic and logical skills, as well as cooperative and negotiation capabilities. Game learners discover, contest, collaborate, and value the victory in games when they confront difficulty and mistakes during game play, and even young learners are able to manage this complication (Becker, 2007). While integrating games into the instruction, students can have fun, effective, and powerful learning (Kirkley & Kirkley, 2005).

Conclusions

Contemporary methodological strategies with introduction of creative processes in students life, equipped art educators with strong base to enable students to reach conceptual and technical skills, to execute ideas in different visual art media. In the same time, they also challenge students to think in ways that promote discovery and exploration, to understand that possible failure is a part of moving ahead, and that element of creativity stimulates new qualitative solutions.

Contemporary approaches to teaching and learning suggested that educators have to be able to :

1. Give students options: introduce multiple artists and media sources.
2. Push beyond a media-driven curriculum.
3. Emphasize process over product.
4. Use themes and big ideas driven by essential questions to frame your investigation.

Hetland & Winner (2007) discovered that while students in art classes learn techniques specific to art, such as how to draw, how to mix paint, or how to center a pot, they’re also taught a remarkable array of mental habits not emphasized elsewhere in schools.” These habits include observing, envisioning, innovating, and reflecting as well as visual– spatial abilities, self-reflection, and experimentation. David

Perkins (1994) states that these abilities develop children's intelligence, with the help to learn to observe and to form mental images and use them to solve problems.

With findings presented it's undoubtedly, that integrating arts in the school curriculum introduces fun into lessons, which consequently leads those students experiencing greater enjoyment and better motivation for learning.

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Author Info:

Maya Raunik Kirkov, Assoc prof. PhD
Ss Cyril & Methodius University, Skopje, R. of Macedonia
raunik@pfsko.ukim.edu.mk
m.raunik@gmail.com