

3. OUTDOOR EXPERIMENTS IN THE PLASTIC ARTS

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Abstract: *The purpose of experiments in plastic art in different circumstances outside the classroom is that students have to find problems to solve, to interpret, using their own efforts, led and supported by teachers. This attitude is favourable for the transfer of the acquired knowledge and practice into profession.*

Key words: *experiments, creative thinking, discovery, originality.*

The influence of the environment and visual education contribute a great deal to the creative development of each student. The apparent connection with reality is accomplished through the students' activity structure. *"Reality is amazingly varied and constantly presents us simpler or more complex problems. It needs us to specify the problem and solve it by our own efforts."*²⁴⁸ Information processing, by adapting operational schemes based on the student's some experience, generates new information, and it is favourable for producing new knowledge about various opportunities of expression in plastic art and about original operations, techniques and modalities. A concrete example in the field of plastic art education for developing the ability of abandoning routine by new outdoor experiments is the organization of creative tasks, led and supported by teachers, in different circumstances outside the classroom, workshop on the streets. The purpose is that students equipped with the necessary tools for art tasks (drawing, painting) have to find problems to solve, to interpret.

How does someone measure *originality*? Which are the elements of originality in an art work resulting from these actions? As for the students' creativity, what more important and relevant is than solving art problems, is *asking new questions* regarding the approached topic. The student, driven by curiosity, wants to find answers to questions that occur regarding art problems; he/she can, after trying out more interpretative solutions, accomplish some performance of creative thinking. Outdoor experiments in plastic art include many *methods to activate creative abilities*, as it follows:

- Shaping the ability of recognising the artistic values of reality;
- Developing the ability of abandoning routine by new experiments;
- Stimulating perseverance in order to search for possibilities of interpreting reality and to search for unprecedented solutions;
- Provoking receptivity for what is new and original;
- Encouraging self-confidence.

New acquisitions in the students' searching process and artistic investigation in this art experiment are obtained through search led by the teacher. He/She favours finding solutions by asking questions from the students: "What connection can you discover between the forms applied in the composition, the

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²⁴⁸ Coord. Andrei Cosmovici și Luminița Iacob, 1998, "*Psihologie școlară*", Editura Polirom, Iași, pg. 175 (cap. IX/7. *Teaching methods – through the perspective of developing students' thinking - Metode de învățământ – în perspectiva cultivării gândirii elevilor*)

colours used and the artistic space? For what purpose can we use this configuration method of composing through partial overlapping of signs cut from other contexts, presented in an altered way, but with preserved meanings?”

The well-addressed questions of the teacher can lead to problem-solving operations, situations, which provoke unprecedented and original solutions. Motifs from reality are transformed into image through artistic processing and original interpretation, things are put to their place in time and space, resulting in comparisons, evaluations, analyses, argumentations, research and discovery. The questions and art problems proposed for studying are transformed into a research and analysis program with complex operations in order to find answers, solutions. Students engage into an investigation-discovery process and research in plastic art. The following types of discovery may be accomplished, which are connected according to the specifics of the problem to the particularities of the class:

- Inductive discoveries (that have inductive reasoning at their base);
- Deductive discoveries (that have deductive reasoning at their base);
- Analogical discoveries (that have reasoning by analogy at their base).

The immediate result is that “*the method of learning by discoveries is harder to use compared to other methods, however, in the same time, it is the richest in reverse information flow, which is so necessary for teachers.*”²⁴⁹ The direct artistic exploration of *reality*, of nature is accomplished with the help of some systems called *models*. These models are instruments with which students operate within the process of active, heuristic learning.

By “*model*” we mean a material or ideal system that reproduces the original more or less truly in order to ease the discovery of the original’s new characteristics. The use of the object model allows the self-regulation of the information system and the optimization of the pedagogical communication, for it reproduces the logical scheme of the transformation suffered by information in a determined context. The experiment consists of research, analysis, modification of some procedures, phenomena or artistic operations by students, in order to discover and study the laws that govern all these. This teaching-learning method has shaping and informative functions. The experiments with the characteristics of research, discovery and those which shape practical skills contribute to the accomplishment of an active, heuristic and creative education.

During this plastic art experiment and artistic activity, students work in micro-groups, each consisting of two students, having the easels put against each other. Why did we work on the streets? In order to create a real atmosphere of everyday life for inspiration. During work students speak about the methodology of using artistic elements, modalities of arranging and organising artistic space, about artistic means in order to work simultaneously on both pads. At first, student no. 1 tells what line he/she drew, how he/she proceeded and on what extend of the pad, with which colour, then, after applying all these, the other student proposes the next step of drawing, ensuring a parallel progress of

²⁴⁹ Miron Ionescu, Ioan Radu, “*Didactica modernă*”, 2004, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, pg. 144

both art works. At the end the two drawings of the students who worked “together” would have similar features, but different ones too, depending on the author. The joint analysis of the results may offer moments of deep professional contentment to the students, also motivation for creative activities and teamwork. This method assumes *cooperation* and *joint activity* in order to solve some instructive tasks. Group work makes use of students’ joint effort within a good and maintained organization. This creative method was imagined and drawn up together with preuniversity Visual arts teachers, the mentors of teaching practice students, interested in the subject of creativity stimulation.

We are evoking in this context of development of students’ creativity a relevant experiment-exercise, which refers to visual arts activities carried out by children aged 13 to 15 years: The High School of Arts from the city of Cluj-Napoca, the group of students aged 13 to 15 years at a visual arts activity in the street, coordinated by a specialized teacher. Micro-groups of two students each are formed and the easels are positioned face to face, so that during the exercise, the subjects cannot see how the drawing of the person they are collaborating with is progressing, but they are “directed” only through the verbalization of the artistic operations carried out by the colleague. The students are to draw a fragment of the urban landscape. Each group of students sits down in front of the real motif, chosen by them (a detail of a building, a street fragment, a road fragment, trees, etc.) and they are asked to look at it attentively, then they are proposed to draw according to the verbalization of the group colleague, applying simultaneously on both supports the graphic codifications.

A student remarks, slightly disappointed: “I cannot draw according to my colleague, because he’s not saying clearly what comes next in the drawing and in what part of the support.” Another student in the next group answers: “it’s very easy, just draw the lines, the spots as the colleague advances and describes verbally what he has drawn, then you propose a way to continue the composition.” Three types of behavior were observed:

1. Some students drew gradually the portion of the landscape with clear, well-observed contours, reproducing graphically and in lines what they have noticed and were working easily and quickly according to the “narration” of the colleague. They were carefully following the real motif, respecting with a certain fidelity the precise proportions and details. The emphasis was on the motif chosen, the drawings were figurative. The students collaborated very well, the works of the group presenting clear resemblances.
2. The group of students who from the beginning worked without paying too much attention to the real motif, finished first, realizing abstract compositions. The accent was on the organization of the graphic elements. The collaboration of the students was playful, the results were differentiated according to each one’s temperament.
3. Other students waited to be inspired by their colleagues from other groups, taking over their method, imitating “the graphic style” seen. The accent was on the desire to live up to the requirements, to take over solutions applied by others, considering them valid “recipes”. Their collaboration was a little bit tense and

slow, their drawings had similarities especially with the works they were inspired by.

Case 1, the students had the tendency to draw after the real motif by visual exploration and to transpose the information by the faithful preservation of the characters observed, of the details analyzed. *The perceptive image* of the motif was transposed, transferred to the graphic image directly, by the explorative mediation of sight, correct analysis and the execution movement of the hand.

Case 2, the students worked the fastest, they were not drawing according to the real motif, but were influenced by *the mental image* of the shapes, the analogical, internal image evoked from memory or from imagination.

Case 3, the students imitated the images drawn by their colleagues from other groups, carrying out *copied images* without personal graphic imprints.

In conclusion, the students interpreted the real shapes in compositions based on different codifications under the shape of lines, colours, spots, textures, expressive impressions or internal visions, images from the subconscious visualized graphically. The realization method of the art works by *cooperation* proposes an unprecedented context to the complex process of graphic creation, which triggers the creative potencies through the language of art. Applying this method does not need special conditions; it can be used with success in the classroom, as well. The greatest efficiency of this method is attained by groups of 4-6 students. The criteria, by which the groups are formed, are determined by the teacher depending on the nature of the artistic topic to be solved, on the age and level of the students and on the teacher's experience. The stages of organization are:

- Analyzing the topic and the instructive tasks;
- Forming groups and division of tasks;
- Documentation of the topic, research;
- Practical-applicative exercises, investigations;
- Recording and interpreting the results obtained;
- Solving and completing the task;
- Joint appreciation and evaluation of the results obtained.

The results of the groups, but also of each student are evaluated by a grading or scoring system, or by using a grid in order to cover the double character of the work (individual and collective).



Experiment exercise: “Doubled drawing”, students from “R. Ladea” High School of Visual Arts, Cluj-Napoca

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