

## **Current challenges in art education - A review in order to knowledge transversality**

Education is the biggest challenge of a society. On the one hand it is about passing knowledge to new generations and on the other hand is about preparing children and youngsters for the future challenges. In a changing society like ours, attention is being increasingly driven to the inadequacy of the present educational system model.

This system have been coined in the illuminist culture for the precise purpose of serving industrialization economics of the past and today it's revealing itself as unfitting to the present goals. The industrial logic of its structure in production lines, standardized tests and curricula as well as the disseminated practices of an extreme rationalism that excludes and penalizes divergent thought and creativity are the mainlines of the education current model.

Robinson (2006), a defender of a change of paradigm not reforms, drives our attention to the alarming signs of this unfittingness as well as to the future consequences the maintenance of this logic will have, since millions of children are being diagnosed attention deficit disorder (ADHD) and being precociously prescribed dangerous drugs that alienate them.

The academic inflation is another phenomenon to count with. The traditional degrees are not enough and more intense and extended schooling is needed. Another signals come from the working world, were employers are valuing other then academic abilities, that are revealing themselves as most valuables to the quality of the workers performances. Pink (2010) refers to those abilities as transgression, invention, metaphorization, ability to see the whole and its patterns, and empathy. It's easy to realize that the current system doesn't develop these abilities and in many cases they are unvalued and repressed to favors specialization, enumeration, sequence, functionality, textuality, analysis, separation and discrimination.

This has to do with the formal education strong hierarchical structure that all over the world values languages and mathematics followed by humanities, and devalues arts, that always come at the end of the hierarchy (Robinson, 2006). Reasons for this common hierarchy can be, primarily found in the eighteen century mentality priorities based in the reason priority over intuition and science over art, and secondarily on the current visual arts discredit phenomena.

We have witnessed what can be described as the arts incarceration inside this mighty structure because arts are something that always escapes from the extremes of such a limited vision of intelligence. A divorce has been the result of such problem, and no conciliation is at sight. In the arts educational effectiveness is being called into question and it is understandable if we consider the ambiguities and paradoxes resulting from the disagreement between form and content. Or, in other words, between the system structure subverted by the arts teaching practices that are

replacing intellectual massification for bodily individualism, industrial for handcrafted, rationalism for creativity, etc.

Our argument is that it is precisely from this ghetto where arts are living in, that we can expect to find some answers and the right kind of knowledge needed to give response to the future requirements and design a new educational system.

A first attempt in the search for an alternative education consisted of the so-called education through art that emerged in 1943 based on the homonymous work of Herbert Read (2001) and through the Society for Education through Art, founded and directed by Read since 1953 and that had branches in various countries.

In fact these ideas have achieved great popularity for two or three decades, but its practice, resulting from several uncoordinated experiments that took place in some countries, turned out to be ineffective. According to Ross (1998) when misunderstood, Read's ideas proved abortive and when understood they resulted in threatening vested interests for ideological reasons, even though they have managed to influence curricula and pedagogies in several systems, namely in children's teaching.

Admittedly anarchist, the education through art was created after the war as an instrument of ideological struggle to create a peaceful alternative to the seemingly endless cycle of violence established. Articulating a response to an education system that cultivated the intellect separated from emotions, Read advocated an amoral revolution, that he saw as a personal mission, arguing that to create an educated civilization, education had to be moral, and moral education is an education of emotions and therefore a matter of art.

The theory was grounded on the pleasant belief that every child is an artist and was organized around a somewhat fuzzy concept of expression that came from Psychology, its major source; Read linked Psychology with Art and Education in order to achieve his ultimate goal: the complete reorientation of the human personality.

In practice, this highly speculative, propagandistic, pseudo-scientific, mystical and transcendental theory that puts all the emphasis, not in art but in the child and his personal development and self-expression, leading all technical issues and academic matters to a mere subsidiary role, resulted in a polarization between manual instruction and moral support (Ross, 1998).

In what concerns Read's concept of art it is very blurred and dated as it stems from Read's referred ideas (2001) mingled with the aspiration of teachers and artists of that time in implementing the modernist teaching spirit of the time. The result was the connection of this theory to the modernist - abstract educational practices that were spreading everywhere, rooted in the Bauhaus writings and especially in Kandinsky's and this led to the academical teaching practices based on abstraction (Vallier, 1986), installed till today as an authentic flag of modernism.

The search for a universal art language was the main concern that led Kandinsky to abstract art which, like music, tries to express human soul feelings in an immediate way. It is precisely this concept of expression that connects Read's ideas to abstract art that has become so popular in teaching in the mid-twentieth century. The

influence of Kandinsky postulates of the visual arts in the curriculum was huge and spread everywhere.

Kandinsky's ideas (1988) were imbued with a spiritual charge that was strongly influenced by the modern theosophy founder Blavatsky and Kandinsky's pure abstraction practice, as well as his writings, both clearly shear a theosophical view of the world and follow its principles specially the mystical "Spiritual in Art"(1988) published in 1911.

However, he curriculum most influential theoretical work is the 1926 Point, Line, Plan (Kandinsky, 1996). The idea of the existence of a "visual language" that structures a "science of art" is the assumption that has been mixed with the concepts steaming then from gestalt theory and geometry, to form the theoretical basis of these programs, also mixed with Read expression concept in the younger's curricula and mixed with a somewhat mythical idea of creativity in the older students curricula. Being so specific of an abstract view of art the long maintenance of this premise in the curriculum is only explained by the new glow that has been given to it by semiotics as it looks at the visual phenomena using writing as a model.

This art teaching practices promotes a fusion between the arts despite the internal inconsistencies it also generates, but it also serves the purpose of keeping the arts knowledge form strongly separated from sciences, letting the other areas of knowledge unworried to the fact that are focusing too much on the exercise of pure rationality as we have seen earlier.

One can conclude that this model reveals major weaknesses in the feasibility of ensuring the intersections among very diverse art systems, as its theoretical basis is rooted on a very restrict concept of art – the abstract art.

We also find that, by focusing on the internal transversality in the arts, this psychologist model has contributed to widening the gap between the valued world of science and the devalued world of arts doomed to isolation and distrust. Indeed, this model has proved itself unable to overcome the separation between art and science that the current education system undesirably loads and spreads. The internal contradictions of artistic style have contributed to the discrediting (Molina, 2002) that today visual art teaching carries and that has been angularly described by de Duve (2005).

We can also conclude that a new aggregating vision, capable of transdisciplinarity will have to focus on a universal element, transhistorical and knowledge structuring: an element common to the arts and all kinds of knowledge. Drawing, taken here as all graphic notation, is proposed as such a conceptual tool, capable of building the needed bridges between diverse kinds of knowledge regardless of whether they belong to the sphere of art or of the various scientific fields, since drawing is a communication tool that, unlike language can change its structure when the function changes (Massironi, 2001).

Questioning the concepts that have served as the basis for visual arts teaching since modernism is a task of our research area for which we modestly hope have contributed here. A reassessment of the drawing concept in the light, not only of

current Psychology, but also of Neurology, Cognitive Science and Communication Science, which allows us to define drawing as a universal human mental technology that forms the base of all known information coding systems - writing, dance notation, numbers, etc. – that is vital for any human cognitive function (Pelayo, 2009) and has been neglected and poorly framed in the processes of formal education since its foundations.

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