Aesthetic education in Romanian kindergartens diachronic approaches

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Abstract

Although the founding of the pre-school education institutions took place with more than 200 years ago, the paper refers to a period of 50 years, from the moment it was published the 1961’s curricula. Certain enlightened scholar’s valuable initiatives of the period led to the founding of schools for little children, of the “gardens for children” – the first forms of social and educational protection for children – the kindergartens – the first step to the next level which is school. A whole set of laws point to the perenniality of the concerns regarding the organisation of pre-school education, the continuing of tradition of the pedagogical systems. The period after 1989 is a window to the future. This fact can be noticed by the changes made in the school curricula, which has evolved gradually, reaching a higher level, corresponding with the society’s needs. Aesthetic education had a spectacular evolution, we are able to say that by making a comparison between the studied curricula. From an austere, assertive curricula, which imposed immobile, certain subjects, in time we had a very permissive one, in which we have professional terms and which allows the options to be taken by the children and the teacher. The accent is more and more on creativity, on stimulating children creativity, on improving pre-school children talent from this early age. The relation between this branch of aesthetic education with other disciplines from the school field in order to create together an ensemble, needed in developing children personality is also important. The paper was made in the project „Investing in people!”, PhD Scholarship, Project co/financed by the European Social Fund, SECTORIAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT 2007/2013, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

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Keywords: preschool education, aesthetic education, curriculum for kindergarten.

1. Aesthetical Education – A Dimension of Education

This paper was made as part of the project “Investing in people!”, PhD scholarship, Project co-financed by the SECTORIAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAM FOR HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT 2007/2013. Priority axis 1. “Education and training in support for growth and development of a knowledge based society”; Key area of intervention 1.5: Doctoral and post-doctoral programs in support of a research. Contract nr. POSDRU/88/1.5/S/60185 – “INNOVATIVE DOCTORAL STUDIES IN A KNOWLEDGE BASED SOCIETY”, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

As a dimension of education, aesthetical education is an indispensable component of personality formation through which it aims to develop the ability to receive, interpret and create beauty. “Art”, says D. Salade, “responds to real needs that any person feels: to clarify some ideas, to motivate certain behaviors, to substantiate some attitudes...
by suggesting, explaining, drawing or problematizing. By its stimulating, tonic, optimistic nature, art shows the way to the love of truth, goodness, science and life”. ("Education through art and literature", p.17). Because its leaven force, art has been used since ancient times as a mean of education. From Homer, the ancient Greeks, concerned with the realization of that kalokagathon (combining beauty with good), through the Renaissance concerned with achieving a multilateral development, reaching the eighteenth century, highlighting the role of art in education and until modern times, people have always been concerned in various ways to achieve aesthetic education. Mutations in the contemporary world, progress in science, technology and art, increased urbanization and industrialization, computerization undoubtedly influenced the aesthetic, which penetrated all spheres of life and human activity. Today it is generally accepted the idea that human existence and becoming in all its determinations should be run after the laws of beauty and harmony, in a word - after aesthetic laws.

2. Specific General Finalities of Aesthetic Education

Aesthetic education has many positive effects on learners personality. The most significant of these is concerning with the quality of children socialization, socio-moral maturing (courage, interpersonal communication skills etc.), training and refining the structure of rational intellect and mental evaluative-critical level, pleasant and efficient organization of free time by recreating a universe within his own imaginative, affective, motivational, traction and volitional sphere, affirmation of cultural identity closely linked to stimulating children’s ability to love the national artistic heritage, to stimulate initiatives in practicing arts etc. In a synthetic form aesthetic education is the one which has revived the child "to live the inner harmony and balance between the forces of imagination and action, between dream and reality, between self aspirations and acceptance of reality, between duties to self and to the others. To live in beauty means interest in harmony and measure, so a higher morality; a higher moral training leads to joy - effect and sign of inner harmony and balance - and on the action plan it leads to fecund dynamism". (Neacșu, I., ”Aesthetic Education" in Pedagogy course, T.U.B., 1988). Stimulating in its own way expressiveness and originality, aesthetic education is in line with a pedagogy of creativity. It requires to develop children’s desire of well and good, high standards and good taste to any industrial product, sense of balance and beautiful, civilized simplicity behavior. Preschool aesthetic education is aimed essentially to children personality formation through beauty of art, society and nature. As a central part of aesthetic education, artistic education has a narrower scope (it concerns only the values of art), but probes deeper, requires a higher degree of initiation, employing more subtle qualities and requires more complex personality as a whole. Objectives, contents, methods and forms of artistic education are highly individualized, they are expressed through special languages and specialized techniques and involve a specific system of professional skills that enables its effective achievement in school and outside school. The distinction between aesthetic and artistic education is relative, it is primarily determined by the particular aesthetic values that they convey and promote.

3. Finalities of Aesthetic Education in Romania – Diachronic Approach

We further propose a diachronic approach to aesthetic education in Romania regarding the evolution of its educational aims for the pre-school education over time.

Generally, aesthetic education aims to form and develop the following aspects:

a) Children’s ability to perceive and understand the beauty of nature in art and social life;

b) Aesthetic sense, aesthetic taste and aesthetic appreciation ability of reality and feelings, beliefs and aesthetic concepts, especially through artistic creations knowledge;

c) Creative skills through exercises of artistic creation in various fields of art, accessible to different ages, and children’s knowledge of the technical means of artistic expression and introduction of beauty into environment.
At preschool age, children tend to express in their works what they have lived or heard. Therefore it is better to give children the freedom to find ways, means and forms of play in order to represent the first impressions about the world, to reflect emotions and feelings experienced in finding objects and surrounding reality phenomena.

Some of the objectives from *Educational Activities Curriculum in Kindergarten* (program published by Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House in 1987) are:
- Enriching and specifying a series of children’s representations of objects and phenomena from surrounding reality observations made during trips, excursions, from illustrations in books and magazines, directing them to notify the shape, color, size and some specific particular aspects;
- Encourage children to move easily from games to pen (brush, stick etc.), to the writing of expressive forms, with a specific subject or one chosen by the children, surrounding the "storyteller" drawing through which the children express ideas and feelings;
- Developing necessary skills for the proper functioning of artistic activity (practice and proper use of utensils, of materials), aiming to their proper handling;
- Growing children interest for using in their works various drawing tools and several lines of different colors, chosen by preference, in order to present the expression and movement of objects, beings, simple phenomena.
- Stimulating the creative imagination of children, suggesting some ideas from stories and engaging children in expressing those ideas in their works of drawing, painting, modeling;
- Cultivating the habit of painting and drawing on various materials, surfaces, sizes and colors;
- Functional development of hand small muscles, motric coordination of hands, fingers and at the same time preparing the children for writing and for some useful activities;
- Educating independence in actions, perseverance in carrying out the works and also stimulating cooperation between two or more children in achieving collective works of drawing, painting, modeling;
- Fostering the spirit of critical and aesthetical taste by assessing their own work and other children works from the same group or from the kindergarten.

Formulating these objectives in the *The Program of Educational Activities in Kindergarten*, published by Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House in 1987, had as a support the *Program of Obligatory Activities For Pre-school*, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1961 and 1963. The objectives presented in the program published in 1961 were formulated as follows:
- Formation of basic and advanced skills to represent in drawing the proportion of drawn elements;
- Improving the habit of seeing the human figure in the most simple stage - the man seen from the front;
- Continue and refine the skills of adorning a drawing of any form by placing decorative elements in the middle and corners, employing different colors: colored pencils, watercolors, tempera etc.;
- Training the skill of representing in drawing those features which distinguish objects, animals, plants etc.;
- Forming the habit of going from respecting the proportion between the elements of a design to respecting the proportion between the positions of the same object;
- Forming the habit of drawing human figure seen in the position of front and back, with some expression;
- Training the skills of presenting in drawing spatial relationships between objects; placing far images related to the same content, on a wide strip which occupies much of the paper (from a third to half of it);
- Forming the habit of going from drawing events in different places and time to drawing consecutive events of a story;
- Training the skill of drawing various forms of leaves, flowers, fruits etc.;
- Training the skill of using in drawing a wide range of colors and corresponding colors of drawn objects, plants and animals;
- Forming the skill of planning the drawing in watercolors or tempera by leaving empty spaces for those items that will later be drawn with another color;
- Forming the skill of using different colors and different shapes of paper for decorative drawing: triangular, hexagonal, oval etc., harmonizing colors with the background color;
- Forming the skill of drawing preparatory writing elements - by introducing them as decorative elements in the drawing.

*The Program of Educational Activities in Kindergarten* (Ministry of Education), published in 1963, has no changes regarding the aesthetic education topic.

*The Curriculum and the Program of Educational Activities in Kindergarten* (Ministry of Education and Science), published in 1991 by Didactic and Pedagogic Publishing House, brought - as a novelty, the following objectives:
- Fostering the spirit of observation to perceive categories of lines in the environment, education of perception and ability to distinguish between shapes, sizes, positions and arrangements of the graphic signs in space;
- Familiarize children with some elements of visual language and some forms of achieving them (basic colors and their shades), black and white;
- Forming the skill of organizing the compositional space and the expressive presenting in drawings of objects, beings, natural phenomena, actions, feelings, emotional states, taking into account the compositional laws (achieve contrast in color, size, shape; keeping the balance in the distribution of plastic components in space, color accent, color dominance of warm colors, movement etc.);
- Involve children in the practice of art drawing and painting helping to identify, discover and express in their works the meanings and expressive possibilities of visual language of each element;
- Familiarize children with some works of fine arts (painting, graphics, sculpture);
- Stimulating and fostering the talents of children in their development, from preschool age.

Unlike the previous programs, there are for the first time mentioned concepts such as elements of visual language, basic colors, notions about black and white as noncolors, plastic composition, compositional space. Also, there are no longer provided fixed inventories of topics to be covered, but there is a relative freedom of action left, there are contents and means of achieving presented, an indicative thematic, focusing on the manifestation of creative teachers, the creativity of children, the cultivation of artistic inclinations of preschool for their development.

Another studied program was released in 1993, *Curriculum for educational activities in kindergarten* (Ministry of Education). We signaled the emergence of a general objective, namely: the child should be helped to understand and absorb the beautiful from the environment, in harmony of nature and arts; to be himself a creator of beautiful things; but we also remarked some particular objectives, of which novelty must be mentioned: the development of plastic effects - plastic stains, drops of color, color prints - using different instruments; development of spontaneous forms, interpreting the splash of color and filling it with black dots and lines; representing visual elements using different techniques; to compose plastic space using elements of visual language; to combine colors, to prepare color tones and shades of colors appreciating thermal effects; to exploit their work in beautifying the environment, other activities organized in kindergarten and on different occasions (birthdays, competitions, exhibitions etc.).

As it can be noticed, the trend to an education reform plan is obvious – the aesthetic education – a greater freedom offered to the child, to its capacity of expression, a "release" of formalism. We also noticed the diverse range of techniques and tools used in art education activities, with a final recovery of work performed.

Ministry of Education issued in 2000 a new curriculum - *Educational Activities Curriculum in Kindergarten and Preschool Regulation*. Aesthetic education curriculum refers to the acquisition of instrumental skills on visual expression techniques in drawing, painting, collage, and the capacity of perception of surrounding reality through the artistic process and the implementation with elements of visual language. We consider that: there is no more emphasis on exact representation of reality, but attitudes, creative solutions and original works are encouraged instead; drawing and painting are means that may accompany any of the categories of curricular activities.
The Curriculum for Preschool, published in 2008, brings a new approach to curricular nature of modernity. Thus, we meet the aesthetic and creative framework that has the following objectives: training of working skills for making drawings, paintings, modeling, implementation of correspondence between various elements of visual language and forms, objects in the environment (nature, art and social life), stimulation of expressiveness and creativity through drawing, painting, modeling. Among the benchmarks, there can be mentioned: to obtain plastic effects, spontaneous and developed forms through painting techniques; to recognize the elements of visual language and to differentiate shapes and colors in the environment; to use appropriate language on various plastic concrete activities; to compose the visual space in an original way, using various materials and techniques chosen by the children; to interpret freely, creatively artistic works, expressing aesthetic feelings; to watch and recognize the artistic creations appropriate to preschool age and its concerns.

These objectives are more structured, comprehensive, in a specialized language, giving aesthetic education the place it merits, as it was marginalized or even ignored for a long period of time.

Considered as a form of expression of interior dynamism, drawing in all its forms (such as decorative, artistic, technical drawing etc.) is the main means of familiarizing children with the language of fine arts, to stimulate the visual expressiveness. This part of aesthetic education aims to develop children’s ability to discern beautiful painting from nonpictural, figurative from nonfigurative, to form visual and manual skills, taste and imagination, and elements of thought and arts communication (draw and understand a plan, an outline, a project, to communicate in visual language what he feels, thinks and lives). Arts education also aims to engage children in perceiving, understanding and creating plastic relationships - colors, lines, harmonies and forms of visual representation, to develop the ability to see space as compared with two and three dimensional techniques, to improve their methods of interaction between psychomotor behavior and visual control, the reports from horizontality and verticality as elements of composition morphology.

4. Conclusions

Although the establishment of the first institutions of preschool education was made 200 years ago, the paper focuses on a period of 50 years, since the emergence of curriculum in 1961. Traditional pedagogical systems have deep roots in the organization of "kindergarten” in Romania, and the philosophy that underpins "early education” refers to what can fill in an institution that prepares children for another stage of life - school activities.

A whole legislation certifies sustainability concerning the organization of preschool education, the tradition continued in new pedagogical systems. The period after 1989 is that of an open window to the future. This can be seen from changes in curricula, which have evolved gradually, reaching a very high level in accordance with the requirements of society.

Aesthetic education developed spectacularly, as we could notice from the above comparison between the curricula covered. From a simplistic, categorical curriculum, which required clear, precise subjects, it was the time for a very permissive one, not lacking in specific terms, but which gives great freedom, both to the teacher and the child. The emphasis is increasingly on stimulating creativity, on talent exploitation since preschool age. It is also important to establish links between aesthetic education and other dimensions of education in order to achieve overall development of the child’s personality, to accomplish an integrated education.

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