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The importance of “Art Education” courses in the education of prospective teachers

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Abstract

In this study, the necessity of the Elementary Art Education courses as the requisite courses, after re-structuring their contents with the practice, and how the contribution of these courses would be effective for the prospective teachers will be discussed on the theoretical basis. The importance of the students’ being in the creative activities process and having the opportunity to express themselves and to realize through art, and the contribution of these courses to their professional education will be emphasized. Moreover, the results of the study made among the students of the Faculty of Education, titled “The Participation of the Students to the Artistic Activities”, will be evaluated.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Art and Human

When we consider the undergraduate curriculums of the faculties of education, we meet some courses related to the field under the names of Music, History and Culture of Music, Fine Arts and Art Education. The above mentioned courses cover only the theoretical knowledge as their contents. In other words, the students do not have an experience like playing an instrument or making new discoveries by entering the world of colours by painting in oils, by ceramics or expressing themselves through their own bodies at a dance course. Through the theoretical knowledge the students learn some strategies for their prospective students. Therefore art becomes only a course in which some theories are learnt by heart to be forgotten for having a passing grade without internalizing the artistic activities.

Art education, artistic works and activities have been accepted as a special, different field ever since, the professional career in this field have not been deemed enough secure and have been underestimated, moreover they have been excluded. Art is sometimes credited as luxury, the artist as idle and unreliable; the real worth of art and of the artist, their contribution to the process of people’s development and how they affect their way of perception of the world have been ignored.

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Through the historical development in the West many different meanings have been rendered to the elementary art education. People who appreciate art still as a provider of balance and catharsis intend to bring up the perfect and competent people through art education. Another view credits the art courses as a balancing element in contrast to the courses and learning sphere based on intelligence, wisdom and cognition. The therapeutically aspect of the art education is emphasized by various groups. According to some education programmers art courses are the courses which can be put aside when there is a need for time restriction. For some people art is an inevitable value for the human existence. Or, again within this context, it is a free play. Art involves and should involve a means of utilizing the leisure time or a pure irrational component in the human lives. According to some views, people should be educated through art. According to some others, people should be educated for art. Some people talk about the elementary art education, some others reject by saying that art cannot be taught, therefore there could be no courses of art. (San:28)

In his work The Republic, Plato (427 BC – 348 BC) emphasizes the enthusiastic aspect of art. He states that the people should base the regime upon wisdom, common sense and virtue, and that the people should control their emotions. It is the wisdom which should control the people, not the emotions in times of trouble. He states that – through the inclination towards the emotions and enthusiasm and through its aspect of presenting the enthusiastic, exuberant and versatile characteristic of the human being – art would nurture the bad side of the people consequently. He mentions that art would nurture the inferior drives of the people which could not be controlled by virtue or wisdom, and it would wither the superior characteristics of the people. On the other hand, although Plato has a negative attitude towards art in general, he judges art in two ways positively. Firstly he assumes art as a product of the drive to achieve the immortality; secondly he believes that art would provide practical benefits by serving to reason and virtue in the social life. The artist is the person who is in search of the beauty with his power of the inclination to the beauty and who satisfies his urge to create by generating the beauty. (Şener, quoted by Tunali: 12)

The first philosopher who presents his views on art as a whole is Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC). The difference between his and Plato’s philosophy is that Aristotle puts the poetry in a respected place within the society. Aristotle signifies that art can not be harmful; that art can not contradict the reality and the common sense; and that the artistic enthusiasm can not affect the individual negatively. Aristotle also mentions that the artistic works should not contradict the value judgments of the society although he does not attribute any task to art in terms of moral education. (Şener:12)

As it is seen, the place, importance and necessity of art in the people’s education are being mentioned since the Antiquity and maintaining its importance. However, noticing that the children and the youth should both theoretically and practically be educated through art during their educational process is realised at the end of the Baroque period, with the rise of bourgeoisie. It has started with the development of some ideas related to bourgeoisie itself and with the thoughts such as educating “compatible personalities”. (San: 55)

In 1800s it is emphasized that art, especially classical art at that time and working on it, is educating the people. Johann Gottfried von Herder’s inclination to folklore, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s study on the perception of colours, Friedrich von Schiller’s “the play drive”, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s view that the natural and creative artistic works and activities are only a medium for the development of the self being of a person, Wilhelm von Humboldt’s tendency towards evaluating the drawing activity as a kind of language are some important views in terms of art education. According to Immanuel Kant, the human life is a process continuously conflicting among sentimentality, sensibility and reason. Schiller, by holding the same opinion, proposes that the people would achieve the ideal harmony when they integrate the sensual-impulsive with the mental-rational on a higher level. By dealing with art the people can achieve this harmony. Schiller anticipates the education of the people through art and imagines an education towards aesthetic humanity. (San:56-57)
Art means the utilisation and evaluation of the people’s skills not only for useful objectives, but also to achieve the secrets of the universe and the world, to overcome their personal dismays, to satisfy their appetites and to announce them publicly, and eventually, to use their psychological longings to live at the appropriate level. In a broader sense, art is the effort to overcome the fate and condition of being human and to be able to exceed oneself. Creativity is the most important factor which underlies this urge of exceeding oneself.

The undeniable existence and necessity of art provided different definitions and the “artistic value” of its creator was being discussed. Within the scope of art, the formulation of the concept of the Fine Arts started to establish the distinction of a specific subject matter besides the approaches and needs of people in their daily lives. Generally the mentality which sorts the Fine Arts as Rhythmic (theatre, mime, performance, etc.); Phonetic (music, poetry, etc.); Plastic (architecture, sculpture, painting, decoration, etc.) and Mixed (opera, cinema, photography, dance, etc.) excluded bricklaying, weaving, carpentry, forging, etc. – the fact which we can mention under the heading of “craft” – from a subjective concept such as “fine”. (Alemdaroğlu)

1.2. Teaching and Elementary Art Education:

Theoretically artistic education includes four different relations with art.: 1-Evaluation 2-Performance 3-Analysis 4-Sociological awareness (Goldberg:10)

Evaluation is related to the reaction of the receptor (the consumer of art) and to the communication he established. To establish a communication with the work of art means having a dialogue with it, in other words, the process of trying to understand it. The aim is to accumulate the knowledge behind these reactions. Within this process the receptor should be supported with practical training in visual plastic sphere, with theoretical information of the field and with the information based on science of art. “Evaluation includes reasoning, judgement, control and – chiefly – self-criticism. Within this process in which the learning processes are arranged, organised and could be oriented ideally, the participants can directly see that all they have lived and tried did meet a creative expression one each and that the facts of “expressing oneself”, “realising oneself” were realised. The connection which could be established directly with the reality, with the material, with the outer world strengthens the understanding, evaluation and interpretation of the art products of both the reality and the creation of every kind which have similar processes.” (San:25 )

Performance includes learning the techniques in which all the arts present themselves. Abilities and skills can only be internalised by seeing, modelling, drawing, structuring and constructing, mainly by getting in touch with the objects and reality. “Performance activates all the emotional and intellectual processes of the children and adolescents, such as impression, perception, observation, research, memory, connotation, imagination, cognition, innovation, consideration, reasoning, and evaluation starting with the senses and sensations.” Establishing practical communicative relations in the visual and optic spheres, or with the material, voice, body, or words in the fields of music, dance, drama / theatre, and literature generate new arrangements, new formalisations and some new perspectives. They broaden the horizons. (San: 18)

Analysis is a detailed intellectual study to discover the philosophical dimension of this special experience and unavoidably comes next to the evaluation. The study of art as a sociological case is the usage of psychology and history – as a matter of fact, all the social sciences – in order to study the role of arts in the human life. Education cannot be finished unless these four tendencies are not put together through the “Art Education”. As a group activity it encompasses both the receiving and productive activities interactively. In other words, the student should internalise art by living in every aspect, by recognising, producing and consuming (receiving) it.
The main elements within the process of the elementary art education are observation, research, invention, practice, experiment, control and finalization. As being almost the same with the processes of scientific researches, they also prepare the children and youth for the scientific and technological world.

2. Research

In contrast to all positive contributions mentioned in the Elementary Art Education, within our context, the courses mostly base on the theory rather than the practice and the art courses are not adequate in structure in the Faculty of Education in which the prospective teachers are educated. The questionnaire study conducted among the students revealed that the students are even distant outside the university to these kinds of activities. The questionnaire study was conducted among the students of Hasan Ali Yücel Teacher Training Faculty. It was applied to 20 students from each of the departments of French Language Teaching, Social Sciences Teaching, Elementary Science Teaching, Religious and Moral Studies Teaching and Computer Education and Technologies, to 120 students in total. The students chosen were in their third year of study in their faculties. They were asked four questions. The first question was about the frequency of their attendance to the activities such as cinema, theatre, concert, opera and exhibition, and among the answers there was not a meaningful distinction between the departments.

Figure 1. Cinema

Figure 2. Theatre

Figure 3. Concert

Figure 4. Opera
As it is shown on the figures, most of the students frequently prefer to go to the cinema, whereas almost all of the students has never gone to the opera once in their lives; on the other hand, the ones who attend regularly to concerts are 5% within the total. When we consider the percentage of the following of the activities in general, the results are thus: 10% follow regularly, 27% follow casually, and 28% of them are those who have gone less than three times. The percentage of the non-followers is 35% which is a huge percentage to underestimate.

Another question is related to determine the percentage of those dealing with a branch of art.

Are you interested actively in any of the activities below?

a. Painting  
b. Playing an instrument  
c. Sculpture/Plastic arts  
d. Dance  
e. Non

As a result 48% of the subjects of the questionnaire are not interested in any of the artistic activities. Secondly, 32% are interested in playing an instrument (saz, bağlama and guitar), 10% in painting, and 10% in dance. There are no students who are interested in, and actively hang out with, sculpture or any plastic arts.

Third question was asked as, “What is the distinctive feature of an activity to follow? Grade them from 1 to 5 in the order of the activity.”

a. Time  
b. Money  
c. Interest-Wish  
d. Transportation  
e. Friends

Students mentioned that the most important determinant of following these kinds of activities is interest-wish with 41%; then comes time with 28%, money with 17%, and friends with 10% and transportation with 4%.
3. Conclusion and Proposals

As this questionnaire points out, most of the students of the Faculty are not interested in any branch of art and do not follow any artistic activity regularly. When we think about the opportunities in Istanbul, it is not difficult to follow these kinds of activities. Mainly, the problem is that the students are not oriented in these activities and these activities are not offered as the activities they necessitate.

Besides the theoretical courses, the practical art courses, the workshops for these practical courses, the announcements of the performances (theatre, opera, concert, and exhibition) and box-offices in the universities can attract the students’ attention. Moreover, if these courses would be the courses during which they would have the pleasure of producing and sharing them with others (without having the stress of grades and assessment of the course), then these courses would cause the students participate directly, and would bring them both in the production and in the consumer status of art.

It is a fact that the teaching profession has a privileged status than other professions. Because a teacher works with the children and youth who are the future of the country by reaching out to the very remote corner of his/her country with the education he/she had. Therefore the group with which he/she has the opportunity to practice the knowledge acquired during his/her education directly is the group which will form the future. Besides the professional education, expressing oneself, realising oneself through art education, the increase of the sensitivity through the connection established directly with the material, with the outer world, and the broadening of his/her horizon would be reflected upon his/her work naturally.

As a conclusion, it is a fact that the elementary art education courses would add values to the prospective teachers and help to educate responsive generations, both to themselves and to the environment. It is inevitable that the world view of a prospective teacher who does not make any use of the added value of art would be in certain limits while practicing his/her profession.

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