YILDIZ JOURNAL OF ART AND DESIGN
Volume:1, Issue: 2, 2014, pp 07-15

TEACHING HISTORY THROUGH ART: THE CASE OF THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS OF GREEK CIVILIZATION IN EVIA, GREECE[1]

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Abstract

The purpose of the educational project was the development of historical thinking and historical consciousness among primary school students through exhibitions which involved their participation in relevant art creation and play. An experiential learning approach, museum educational techniques and methods of teaching through art, play and material culture were used. Three children's museums were organized during 2010-2013 at three different primary schools in Evia Island, Greece. During the school year the students of each class were working on a specific historical period of Greece under the supervision of their teacher. After studying museum albums and different history sources, students participated in archaeological simulations, visited museums, and created daily life objects from Ancient Greece and Byzantium using a variety of materials. At the end of the school year, the children organized a children's museum, open to the local community, where several activities took place. Object construction was used as a method of teaching history. To (re)produce the object, children had to 'learn' about it, i.e. gather information regarding the object's age and its use and also about the culture and the most important events in the relevant historical period. Besides being an innovative way of teaching history, education through art can be used to bridge the gap between school and community life and encourage both historical literacy and creativity development in children.

Keywords: learning through art, experiential learning, history education, museum education, innovation.

INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century takes place through a variety of formal and informal approaches and pedagogical roles and redefined objectives. Nowadays, the school cannot be understood as the only place where the child's knowledge is constructed. Modern learning theories combined with rapid socio-cultural changes are leading to the revision of previously didactic and pedagogical views about knowledge and education.

In recent years there has been a growing awareness of the need for a fundamental change in the role and the objectives of the school in Greece. The 'New School', as it is customary called, is an extrovert institution, open to the community (local, national, European, global), that develops channels of communication between humans and 'shatters' the spiritual and physical walls that entrap the development of imagination, critical thinking and creative expression. The New School is a school of life that involves accumulation of information, but in order to shape attitudes and values; it does not imprison, but releases any creative and innovative

[1] Bu metin 2014 yılında, *Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi* çatısı altında düzenlenen *Uluslararasi Sanatı Yönetmek Sempozyumu*'nda bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.

initiative; it does not impose, but invites the learner to be detached on a journey of emotions and experiences, where learning is perceived as an act of joy and a sharing of thoughts and feelings between instructor – learner – learning object.
Apart from teaching traditional courses, new subjects assert their place in the school curriculum: health education, environmental education, peace education, museum education, etc. According to the literature, a human being is determined firstly by relationships with other people and also by the environment – natural, social, historical, cultural, economic, political – and that knowledge is not given but is constructed, i.e. it is a product of socio-cultural processes. From this perspective, learning is realized empirically, experientially. These perceptions influence museum education, which aims to provide ways of reading and interpretation of material culture. According to Nakou (2001), "Museum education can enrich the school, shifting the learning process outside the walls of the school and connecting it with the wider social, cultural and natural environment".

How is museum education associated with the teaching of history? What new alternative forms can the museum take today? What is the interaction between the school and the museum and how it is crystallized as a new cultural formation in a society? What are the dimensions of museum education as a branch of pedagogy and how can modern pedagogical concepts be applied to the museum? These are some of the questions facing education systems, especially as regards the teaching of national history.

Although there is significant international bibliography about schools and museums (as two autonomous cultural institutions), there is nothing on the creation of a museum within the classroom, an area of material culture fully embedded in the school environment, where students and teachers interact daily, as found in Greece.

But, what is a children's museum, a classroom museum and a school museum?

Children's museums are institutions that provide exhibits and programs to stimulate informal learning experiences for children. In contrast with traditional museums that typically have a hands-off policy regarding exhibits, children's museums feature interactive exhibits that are designed to be manipulated by children. The theory behind such exhibits is that activity can be as educational as instruction.

A **classroom museum** is a collection of items and artifacts related to a specific theme. Items and artifacts are brought in or made by the children for display. Using this approach of show and tell, the theme or topic is motivating, and the exhibit grows gradually and joyfully. Children practice decision-making, problem-solving, and communicating skills as they share their special selections (Mayesky, 2014).

A **school museum** is a display area at the school building where one or several exhibitions take place. The exhibits can be organized by different classes according to the curriculum (i.e. science museum, history museum etc.) or can be dedicated to

a concrete theme, such as local history or school history. The exhibits are aimed at the students of the school, the students of other local schools, and the local community members.

A museum *created by children and addressed to children* is a good opportunity for students to pose the following questions: "What is history?", "Why is history important?", "What has it to do with me as a person in the present day?", "What is the relationship between humans and historical objects?". On the other hand, it is a useful 'tool' for the teachers for the application of new teaching activities, which aim at experiential learning, group collaboration, and the interaction between subjects and objects (building blocks of the material world).

This article is about the Children's Museums of Greek Civilization in Evia Island, Greece. During 2010-2013 three children's museums were created in three different schools in three different cities of Evia: in Karystos (2009-2010), in Eretria (2010-2011), and in Psachna (2012-2013). The creation of these children's museums was based on a pedagogical project entitled "Building a Children's Museum of Greek Civilization at Primary School", which won an Award of Excellence from the Greek Ministry of Education. Below we will try to describe briefly the main objectives, actions, and outcomes of this innovative project.

OBJECTIVES & METHODS

General objective: The development of historical thinking and historical consciousness of the students (historical literacy) through the arts in general and in particular through plastic arts.

Specific objectives: Students were invited to:

- understand the use of objects as historical sources;
- 'read' an object (perceive the information that the object gives us);
- correspond objects and historical periods according to the special characteristics of art of each period;
- compare the works;
- learn the 'language' of history and archaeology;
- be familiar with the research methods and techniques of the sciences of history and archaeology;
- distinguish the differences between history and archaeology and understand the ways of interaction and cooperation between the two disciplines for the study and the understanding of the past;
- develop aesthetics, imagination, and creative thinking, as well as technical and artistic skills through a variety of psychomotor tasks.

A cross-curriculum approach was used, trying to approach 'knowledge' in a holistic way. Through the sciences of history and archaeology, the teacher teaches in parallel other subjects including the natural sciences, math, language, geography,

social sciences, and the arts. Knowledge makes sense as a whole unity and not as separated items. This approach is consistent with the Core Curriculum changes being implemented across Greece.

Based on Aristotle's view about learning ("For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them"), we used experiential learning methods, as well as cooperative ones. Students were learning via personal activation, experimentation, and social interaction. The role of the teacher was that of guide, facilitator, and animator.

ACTIVITIES

The activities that have been developed within the framework of this pedagogical project can be divided into three main categories:

a) ***Inside the classroom*** (artwork, crafts, constructions)
b) ***Outside the classroom but inside the school*** (simulated archaeological excavation)
c) ***Outside the classroom and the school*** (visits to museums and archaeological sites)

Below we will present each type of activity, giving an example from each museum.

A) *Activities inside the classroom* (The example of Children's Museum of Karystos. Project's title: "Daily Life in Byzantium through Art Reproductions of Everyday Objects")

During the history course, the teacher used both traditional – as narration – and modern methods – as dramatization and information and communication technologies (i.e. 'Google EARTH', websites of virtual tours into museums and archaeological areas) –, but also innovative methods – as teaching through comics, material, and through the creation of a museum (classroom museum, community-based museum). For the evaluation of the course a combination of traditional (written and oral exercises), modern (through drama and undertake individual and group work) and innovative methods (evaluation in the natural environment through simulations) was also used.

As accompanying educational material to the textbook, the educational package 'MELINA' entitled 'Mosaics of Byzantium' was used, and original material was designed by the teacher, (training package with notes and study outline for each chapter, additional information from historical sources accompanied by creative and pleasant individual and group-work activities). Below we will present briefly some plastic art activities, from the teacher's educational package, which are designed to cultivate students' critical and creative thinking.

The students with the guidance and the encouragement of the teacher initially made a careful study of museums' albums and photos that they themselves gathered during their visit to the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens, and then proceeded to the visual representation / construction of the depicted objects – exhibits. They discussed the concepts 'original' and 'copy' as well as the role objects – original and copies – in the museum.

The objects are divided into the following categories with respect to their use: a) *household utensils* (cups, plates, jars, etc.), b) *cult objects* (icons, processional crosses, chalices, etc.), c) *imperial symbols and jewelry* (crown, crusader orb, scepter, rings, clothing, etc.), d) *artwork* (floor mosaics, wall mosaics, paintings, etc.), and e) *military equipment* (swords, shields, pan with liquid fire, etc.).

Students built a scale architectural model of the Hagia Sophia in cardboard boxes, after having studied the architectural drawings of the church, having read history books describing and depicting the beauty, having watched documentaries on DVD and, using new technologies, toured the outer and inner space through three-dimensional imaging software.

The construction of the scale model was a good opportunity for the students to approach empirically concepts of mathematics (i.e. cycle length) and natural sciences (i.e. dynamic energy) that they had met in the curriculum. Copies of Byzantine objects created by the students, with informative labels (the syntax of which familiarized the children with the archaeological vocabulary), were placed in the library, which was the 'classroom museum'. The classroom museum was visited by many school pupils during breaks, guided by the students of the E class.

At this point there should be a short report on the assessment of students' knowledge and specifically the innovative form of assessment applied by the teacher through simulation in the natural environment. During a walk on the beach at the beginning of the school year, children built Hagia Sophia and the Hippodrome on the sand. At the end of the school year the walk was repeated and the children remade Hagia Sophia and the Hippodrome. In these constructions, seen as a kind of *pre-* and *post-testing*, it was found that on the first occasion the children's work was characterized by abstraction, and their knowledge was limited, whereas the second time the constructions were characterized by precision in construction and connected with historical knowledge.

B) *Activities outside the classroom and inside the school* (The example of Children's Museum of Eretria. Project's title: "Ancient Greece through Ceramic Art")

Outside the classroom, in the courtyard of the school, a simulation of an archaeological excavation took place. The pupils were divided into two groups:

each group was an archaeological expedition. A manual was given to each child in both groups which the child could consult at all stages of the excavation.

The students were taught archaeological survey methods. The manual contained instructions for making an archaeological excavation, an archaeological glossary, which familiarized them with the scientific terminology of archaeology, and photographs with explanatory comments, additional information in context, and exercises in the form of worksheets.

In the manual there was an ancient oracle (historical source). The children had to solve the puzzle, the solution of which led to the point where they had to dig. Equipped with sand pails and shovels, children dug at the point where they believed the ancient pots were buried. Digging, children began to find fragments of pottery. The items found were placed in the pails.

After that, using a sieve, they sifted the soil where they found very small fragments. In order to understand the correlation between 'time' and 'ground' (the deeper we dig, the more we go back chronologically), pottery with geometric shapes (Geometric period) were placed deep in the soil, while closer to the surface were patterned vases of the Classical period.

After the completion of the work in the yard, the children returned to the classroom, which functioned as an 'archaeological laboratory', and carefully they placed all the pieces on benches. In the 'laboratory', the students learned that archaeology is not just finding interesting objects. The finds must be washed, sorted, identified, conserved, analyzed, and reports written.

So, the next step was to group the pieces and to try to assemble the vase. But there were pieces missing. These pieces were replaced by others in a different color (white clay dried in air). Thereby children could understand which pieces were found in the excavation (originals) and which were manufactured later (copies). They welded all the pieces using crystal glue and the broken vessel regained its shape. Then the children completed a form with information about the type of the object, the material, the colors, the designs, its use and the time of its construction. Finally they created labels with the information about each object, which were added to the objects in the window of the 'classroom museum'.

C) *Activities outside the classroom and the school* (The example of Children's Museum of Psachna. Project's title: "The Garden with the Greek Statues")

This category includes visits to cultural places, such as museums and archaeological sites. The students visited the Ancient Agora of Classical Athens. They visited the Museum of the Ancient Agora, which is housed in the Stoa of Attalos. The most important exhibits are the objects associated with the various

departments of civic life and the institutions of the Athenian Democracy and are dated from the Classical and Late Classical periods (clay, bronze and glass objects, sculptures, coins and inscriptions from the 7th to the 5th century BC).

Students had the opportunity to look closely at fine specimens of black-figured and red-figured pottery inside the museum and to observe the different types of columns (doric and ionic style) outside the museum. After their visit, they had an outdoor class about daily life in Ancient Athens during the 5th Century. They made black-figured or red-figured clay vases (pottery), and they designed the two types of columns (design).

After the outdoor workshop, they wore handmade ancient Greek clamys and walked in the area of Agora visiting notable monuments, such as the Temple of Hephaestus, the Metroon, and the Heliaia. A public forum was held on the topic of 'ostracism'. The students debated the issue and also participated in the dramatization of historical events.

The Children's Museums of Greek Civilization in Evia, Greece

What are the Children's Museums of Greek Civilization in Evia? How do they work? What are their characteristics and their innovative aspects?

The Children's Museums of Greek Civilization in Evia created by primary school students and addressed to children. Students' crafts constituted the objects of the exhibits in these museums. The three children's museums have been hosted by local cultural centers (i.e. Cultural Center of Eretria "K. Kanaris") or archaeological monuments (i.e. late Byzantine castle in Karystos).

Children recorded all the objects. They put them into packets, transported and placed them on display in the museum. They participated in all the stages of a museum exhibition. Their facilitator, apart from their class teacher, was an expert (i.e. archaeologist) who showed them how a museum exhibit is designed and is implemented. For the exhibitions, posters and pamphlets were designed by the children in order to communicate the cultural event among the local community members.

Before Opening Day of the Museum, students had known what information was offered at the exhibit. They had also given and received constructive criticism for their work.

An Opening Day ceremony, including music, dance, and a theatrical performance inspired by Greek history, was presented to the local community. The event was displayed in the local media and received very positive feedback. The exhibition ran for five days, attracting many visitors, young and old.

During the opening hours of the museum a team of students with a special badge had been entrusted with the custody of the exhibits and the tour of the visitors. There were a lot of 'surprises' awaiting the young visitors, like parties and body painting with motifs from ancient Greek vases and drawing from Byzantine shields.

This project is characterized by several novelties. One novelty of the Children's Museums of Evia – in relation to conventional museums – was that visitors could touch the objects and interact with them, and also there was no restriction on visitors (they could be people, but also animals; children could visit the museum with their pet). A characteristic comment was from a little girl who visited the Children's Museum of Eretria: "This museum is more beautiful than the other (archaeological museum). We can touch the things and we can play with them!".

Another innovative aspect was the function, in the Children's Museums of Evia, of art workshops, libraries, laboratories of new technologies and 'cinemas' (free of charge). During the exhibition, children who were visiting the museum had the opportunity to take part in art workshops (pottery, theatre, dance, etc). In the showroom there was a computer where the visitor could wander virtually inside great monuments of Greek Civilization, such as the Parthenon and Hagia Sophia. Also in a specially designed area located in a library-cube, children could sit on cushions and read books about Ancient Greece and Byzantium. Finally, each day the visitors could watch a different documentary about a specific historical period.

CONCLUSION

Experiential activities are among the most powerful teaching and learning tools available (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006). The role of emotion and feelings in learning from experience has been recognised as an important part of experiential learning (Moon, 2004). According to John Dewey (1934), ***art is an experiential process***. Based on Dewey's concept and on contemporary cognitive psychologists' theories about concept formation, many educators highlight the primordial role of aesthetics during the learning process (Brigham, 1978). Art is a means for acquiring information about and experiencing the 'world'; history is a tool for understanding the present, culture and society. Teaching history through art is the best way to develop ***consciousness*** in children.

The philosophy of children's museums, classroom museums and school museums is based on the principles above. They are experiential and child-directed; they encourage children to experience, to experiment, to create; they link mental processes with psychomotor activities; thus knowledge becomes action and action becomes knowledge. Children learn to ask questions, to explore, to discover, to make connections, and finally to construct their 'reality' (to learn).

The Children's Museums of Greek Civilization in Evia offered children knowledge, stimulation and entertainment, all of which should be offered by every museum according to the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

Our challenge today is to provide communities with resources that enrich children's lives. By creating children's museums in educational settings, such as classroom museums and school museums, we transfer knowledge from one generation to another in an entertaining way, and more importantly, we create creative and critical thinkers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What can be concluded at this stage of the action research? We developed one educational model that links school and museum for learning purposes. The model needs revision and should be tested in other thematic classroom-based or/and school-based museums. Below, we propose some kinds of indicative thematic classroom museums according to the school curriculum for the primary school: The Museum of the Writing (Language), The Museum of Mathematics (Maths), The Museum of the Human Body, The Museum of Universe, or The Botanical Museum (Sciences), The Museum of Nations, The Museum of Religions, or the Museum of Toys (Social Sciences), The Museum of Plastic Arts, of Music and of Theatre (Arts), The Museum of Olympic Games (Sports).

Future primary school teachers should be able to transform their philosophy of teaching into practical learning activities, and to search for alternative methodologies that can support their students' critical thinking and reflectivity on the one hand and creativity on the other hand.

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