

VISUAL AND MENTAL ABILITIES - CONNECTIONS AND DIGRESSIONS

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Abstract

Art educators have always been intrigued by psychological findings proving that there are no or just insignificant correlations between the developmental level of mental skills and visual skills and abilities. In the course of a Hungarian national project for curriculum development for the elementary school (8 grades, ages 6 - 14) that was tested for 3 school years we utilized a set of six psychological tests to see how five different approaches to visual art education: 1) emphasis on environmental culture / design, 2) color use and perception, 3) photography and video, 4) integrated arts program / aesthetic education and 5) focus on art criticism and art history affect different areas of mental development: a) general intellectual abilities, b) creativity, c) visual memory, d) observation.

Pedagogical tests and tasks that were incorporated in the curricula and also included portfolios and ethnographical observation of the classroom environment assessed the educational validity of the programs and yielded data that explained the results of psychological measures.

This paper introduces the psychological tests used in the project, shows examples pedagogical tasks and explains how *art education programs* in Hungary were found to successfully *develop mental skills and abilities of students*, especially their *visual memory and spatial abilities*. (Pedagogical test results are discussed elsewhere and will only be referred to.) We also outline how scientific assessment may directly influence pedagogical practice and show the *new Hungarian examination system in art education* (regular, secondary school final and college entrance levels) and national art contests presently in the making.

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SUMMARY