

**EFFECTS OF ART EDUCATION
ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY OF PUPILS
– A Field Study of Teaching Processes in Four Countries**

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Project overview

Personality development is one of the main objectives of art education programs. The objective of our research project was to identify teaching methods that foster creative processes relevant for personality development while others develop useful visual skills but do not touch on the human experience of self-consciousness and related visual identity.

Prabha Sahasrabudhe postulates that dealing with art strengthens the power of understanding and helps comprehend the meaning of one's own experience. An optimal time for personality development through art is adolescence, when verbal expression fails to reveal the richness and variety of the growing identity. *Visual symbolisation in adolescence* is equally important and powerful as in the years of "fabulous realism" of the young child aged 3-6. To prove this, we developed a comparative study of the effects on personality development of students in Finnish, German, Hungarian and Spanish art education.

Our *research methodology* varied from site to site with some common features. In each of the four countries, we raised *teachers' awareness* of developmental potentials of different methods of art education: interviews, classroom observations. We co-designed with artist-teachers - the regular art educator of the school - *developmental programs from 3 up to 6 month*, 1-2 lesson hours per week, complemented with project type homework. The experiment involved 6 months treatment, with pre-and post tests and tasks in each country. The effects of certain methods on personality development were measured through standardised tests and tasks (Hungary) in the course of an arts examination (Germany) or through open-ended project tasks (Finland and Spain.)

Student population selected in Germany, Finland, Spain and Hungary represents differing methods that seem to be relevant for personality development: lower secondary school grades (ages 14-16). 20-30 students per country participated in the developmental programmes included.

Background variables for assessment included national / regional / school art curricula, educational culture of the experimental schools, art related attitudes of students. Teaching strategies and art related attitudes / values of the art teacher were also evaluated and considered when assessing the usefulness of selected methods.

Methods employed in self-symbolisation processes to raise awareness of personal characteristics and promote a deeper understanding of self ranged from open-ended tasks (installation in Spain) through semi-structured visual exercises (the "Visual Diary" task in Hungary and the "Present and Future Self Portrait" task in Finland) to structured art examinations (Germany).

Evaluation of the effects of art projects matched project methodology but always included peer review and expert assessment of the central task. Portfolio and logbook assessment in Finland and Spain, standardised psychological tests in Hungary provided additional data on students' average art skills level and visual problem solving processes. *Interviews* with art teachers with self-evaluation of lessons and general reflections of student development and selected students (based on portfolio results) complemented the assessment procedure of art works created during the teaching experiments.

National projects

As the Finnish experiment will be described in detail in the co-presentation, this paper summarises results of the German, Hungarian and Spanish national studies.

Personal Art Spaces - Installation as a Method of Self-Expression (La Serna School, Madrid - Fuenlabrada)

Personal spaces were created in the course of 5 art lessons (50 minutes each) in the 9th grade. Fuenlabrada is a workers' settlement in the suburbs of Madrid. 23 students participated in the project that intended to create a transition between the everyday environment and one created with artistic intentions. The topic was selected to show how art transgresses the boundaries of everyday life and changes our emotional and logical perception of the environment. During the opening session, the art teacher and students reflected on the way art penetrates life and engages us in communication about basic existential problems and sharpens our sensitivity. As a homework and mental follow-up, students had to photograph their room and create small changes that would make their private space more pleasant and personal.



The self-reflection exercise was done by a few students only, and discussions about the visual and emotional perception of the environment was slow to unfold. Those who photographed and altered their living space did so on a superficial, technically oriented level: a girl made an altered digital image of forms and colours, a boy dimmed the light to soften the shapes. The second task was to seek out school spaces that radiate energy and assume a special meaning for the students. These spaces had to be altered in order to enhance the expressive effects of the space. Spaces selected were “hiding resorts” of students used for chill-out and eventual smoking. Discussions about the special meaning of these spaces led the group to develop trust and accept their art teacher and share with him ideas about meaningful space alterations: installations about “Habits of the young” and “Drug culture”.



The process of individualising the environment started with splitting the class into small, creative groupings that started out with pasting leaflets with figures and words of aggression on school corridors while another group changed the arrangement and created the word PEACE (paz in Spanish) out of the initials of the words of aggression. Another group painted a path that lead out of school while the fourth group covered the stairs with pieces of clothing to create a “tactile staircase”. The closing assessment revealed that students developed a sophisticated conceptual network about creativity but their knowledge about artists was still mediocre – partly due to lack of artistic experiences in private life. The neglect of “high culture” by parents creates a socio-cultural context that is extremely difficult to modify through art education. The project therefore aimed at awareness development about the *intimate relationship of art and human existence* and proved to be successful in providing a meaningful experience of how art may affect our everyday environment and make it a space of self-expression.

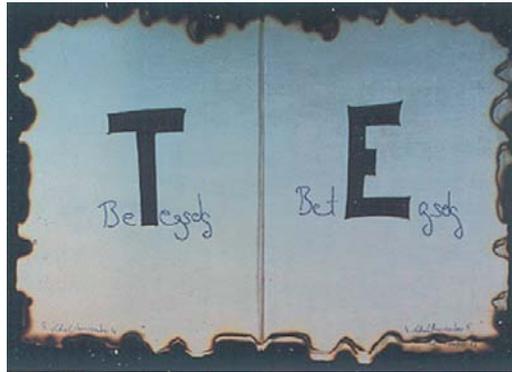
Visual Diary Project – Hungary - 15 secondary schools in towns and cities

In Hungary, where fine arts and high culture in general were in the focus of educational efforts of art teachers for more than 150 years, educational reforms begun as a result of political changes in 1989 representing an overwhelming challenge. Art teachers of teenagers ready to modify their curricula need insights into the emerging teenage subcultures their students are part of in order to understand their visual world and incorporate it in art education. In the course of an ongoing study on symbolisation processes in adolescence, we have been interviewing and photographing young people and their homes between 14-18 years of age in 1997-2000. More than 100 fully documented case studies and 4 television films of 35 minutes each were produced. Questions focused on the following areas:

- 1) *Communicative value of dress, make-up and hair style* (appearance at home, at school, at leisure - basic differences, assessment of actual looks, description of desired looks, ideals/models to follow, best places to shop for clothes, assessment of wardrobe items)
- 2) *Favourite objects* („totems”, hobby accessories, status symbols, gang relics etc., objects to be proud of, collectibles)
- 3) *Desired objects*
- 4) *Symbolisation of self*: „Design a Coat of Arms”, self-portrait, „My Family as Animals”, “Visual Diary

As a result, an analysis of teenage subcultures was described and published. Data served as a basis for the modernisation of *Visual Communication* and *Environmental Design curricula*. (Both disciplines

are taught as legally accredited alternatives for the previously high art focused “Fine Arts” curriculum in Hungary since 1998).



In 2006, we decided to continue studies on youth subcultures with a special focus on the *symbolisation abilities of individuals* manifested in their written and oral representations. The pilot study reported here was executed in preparation for a nationally representative survey on teenager subcultures and their visual signs and symbols. Our sample included 15 secondary grammar schools from Budapest and other large Hungarian cities with distinct youth subcultures formed or adapted from international models. One boy and one girl aged 15-16 was randomly chosen from each grammar school. Half of the sample of 30 students showed special visual talent (students of schools with an art and design focus) and the other half was tested through as average by standardised drawing tasks.



Each of the students was invited to keep a “*Visual Diary*” for 14 days. This task was developed by Prof. Irmgard Zepf at Cologne University in the 1980ies and standardised as a symbolisation measurement device by the author of the present paper in 1998. Subjects are asked to choose an exercise book, a book to be discarded or just a collection of A/4 format papers to be used for keeping a visual diary for two weeks. Every evening they are supposed to prepare an imprint of their moods of the day each evening through any chosen two-dimensional technique: drawing, painting, collage, frottage, mixed media etc. They are allowed to “destroy” a page if they so wish through burning, dripping molten wax on top or simply covering it with dark paint. Each daily entry should be given a title. Text may be added as necessary for the expression of the dominant mood of the day of the author. Background information on students are also collected in order to

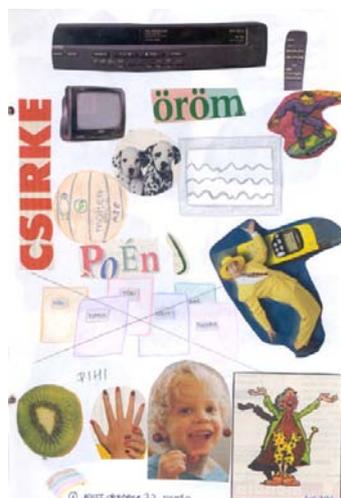
better understand the symbolic messages and evaluate the level of visual expression manifest in the diaries.

- *Test for Creative Thinking – Drawing Development* – a standardised image completion test of two independent though interrelated task sheets for the assessment of creativity through drawing. International standards available for ages 6-18.



- *Semi-structured interview* on events of the 14 days of diary keeping – with a focus on happenings and related feelings.
- *Portfolio of work* produced by students during the previous school term (2005/2006) to judge average visual abilities through a variety of school tasks.

The diaries were scored for *general aesthetic quality, level of symbolisation skills and expressivity*. Individual, group and cultural signs and symbols as well as gender differences were identified and their relevance for teaching visual expression and communication discussed with local art teachers.



The comparison of the diaries with the Test for Creative Thinking – Drawing Development (TCT-DP) revealed a much higher correlation than that of the school portfolio of works. The diaries represented perfect examples of expressive, creative and highly individual “private art” while portfolio work had to be considered “school art” where not only creative solutions but often also the technical drawing level was found lower than those of the TCT-DP or the visual diary. The diary proved to be a powerful method for eliciting expression of the self in a variety of forms. Students selected moods and events of a day based on their preferences and chose visual media that enabled them to fully represent their “private views”. (For example, sophisticated experiences like

homesickness and envy were shown through collages, digital drawing or highly abstract linear compositions. Titles and captions added a second layer of meaning to visual sensations.

The weeks of the project included 15 March, an important national holiday in Hungary (start of the revolution against the Hapsburg Empire in 1948) that is commemorated through a strong visual exposure of patriotic feelings: wearing of national colours and mass visits to the memorial sites of the revolution. This year, however (2007), patriotic demonstrations turned into anti-government uprisings in many Hungarian settlements. In Budapest, the angry crowd tore up the pavement and threw stones on police battalions that tried to dissipate the crowd using water-cannons and tear gas grenades. In the diaries, however, almost no sign of the revolts were manifest. Other, milder social or political events did not occur either. *Diaries concentrated on soul-searching and turned inside, neglecting the outside world.*

A new form of examination in Germany – presentation for the Middle School Art Exam – Berlin, 10th grades of secondary grammar schools

The topic of research for the Berlin team was the fourth component of the MSA examination for the discipline “Fine Art” („*Priifung in besonderer Form*” – examination through special task format). The special feature of this task is, that examinees – students of Grade 10, aged 15-16 years) have the freedom to choose a topic and also select a medium for its expression. Even the format may be specified by the examinee: project work, portfolio (collection of sketches and finished works of art / design) or a competition entry. Art teachers are invited to support students in their efforts to prepare their selected art work. Four standard secondary schools (*Oberschule/Gesamtschule*) and two secondary grammar schools (*Gymnasium*) have volunteered to participate in the experiment and 17 students in all have submitted examination work for evaluation. 8 questionnaires about the structure, process and overall quality of the examination have been returned by them.



Project topics selected by students included a variety of art tasks, some of which were directly related to self-expression (“Models That Influence My Fashion Design”, “Graffiti”, “The Road of Hundertwasser towards Abstractionism and Our Encounter with His Work”). Other works related to art criticism (interpretations of art history icons in modern art) or a topic on the history of culture. *Media* choices included a wide variety of traditional and new media ranging from text and image collage to PowerPoint. Interviews and surveys revealed that creative efforts of students were hindered by certain *technical and theoretical deficiencies*, including

- Lack of creative experiences (“no desire”, “no talent”, “no opportunity”)
- Lack of significant museum encounters with fine art
- Restricted access to media (art educator preferred painting and drawing)
- Evaluation found meaningless and pointless “you cannot judge a painting”)



However, the creative process proved successful and in many instances revealed important personality factors. *Skills enhancement and development of positive attitudes* was observed in many activities:

- Topic choice highly individual, is based on cultural interest or personal experiences
- Photography and graffiti art selected as a suitable topic for self expression – and an unusual examination medium
- The multidisciplinary aspect of themes were found especially motivating: students were ready to cross boundaries to arrive at new combinations of art and science knowledge practices.
- Empathy was developed towards contemporary art forms and self-expressive topics
- Project work was characterised by focused, patient work, long-lasting, in-depth studies and intense curiosity.
- A variety of presentation forms (lecturing, role play, PowerPoint slide show) were mastered to perfection and practiced eagerly.
- Team work associated with project tasks was highly esteemed.

Conclusion

Our results prove that symbolisation is a major characteristic feature of adolescent art. No decline in visual skills development is observed in this age, in case adequate methods, media and topics are provided. *Defining relationships with the environment* was part of all the projects described above, and it seemed to be especially suitable for revealing individual symbolisation processes and iconology.