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Aesthetics-based Arts Integration
in Elementary Education

MARINA SOTIROPOULOU-ZORMPALA AND ALEXANDRA MOURIKI-ZERVOU

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Marina Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, University of Crete, Greece
Alexandra Mouriki-Zervou,[1] University of Patras, Greece

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine how different aspects of aesthetic theory can be utilized in education so as to contribute to a workable, coherent, and multifaceted arts integration approach in elementary education. The authors begin by presenting specific aspects of aesthetic theory as indicative of the basic theoretical and philosophical approaches to the phenomenon of art. They then refer to examples of activities designed on the basis of these different aesthetic aspects, and finally, they present the findings that came out of these activities' pilot implementations in preschool and school classrooms. Based on the methodological analysis of these implementations, the authors examine the benefits of the activities deriving from each of the different aspects of aesthetic theory; how they differ depending on the aspect from which they arise; and how the implementation of these types of activities as multi-theoretical sets can reveal a new way to design a coherent and multifaceted arts integration curriculum. What the authors attempt to do is show that the variety of approaches to the definition of art and the analysis of aesthetics can be the touchstones for organizing arts integration in elementary education.

Keywords: Arts Integration, Aesthetics, Elementary School

Introduction

The relationship of aesthetic theory to arts education in school seems natural. It is considered self-evident that when educators have mastered knowledge about the nature of art and its role in life, they can better respond to their duties with regard to the art education of their students (Broudy 1987). Because of this, university departments of education frequently offer classes on aesthetic theory (Sotiropoulou-Zormpala, Trouli, and Linardakis 2015). Despite this, the relationship between aesthetic theory and arts education is confused and ill-defined for educators (Hagaman 1988, 1990). Both generalist teachers—who are overwhelmingly the main instructors in arts education, particularly in primary education (Eurydice 2009)—and specialized arts teachers do not seem to understand that terms such as representative theory, expressive theory, cognitivism, formalism, modernism, and postmodernism are related to the way they deal with arts engagement in the classroom (Hagaman 1990; Mouriki 2003).

A brief historical survey of contemporary curricula shows that though designing arts education is based on correlations with aesthetic theory, these designs are not continuous in time and not satisfactorily systematic. As early as the end of the nineteenth century, under the influence of romanticism, a tendency emerged in which the goal of arts education was to expand children's ability to express themselves creatively (Blocker 1979; Cuncliffe 1999). This trend became stronger because of a contemporary interest in children's art, carried on into the twentieth century, which was considered to be a free and unaffected form of expression. Educators and theoreticians such as Cole, Richardson, Read, and Lowenfeld were instrumental in the formation and dissemination of expressive theory (Cole 1940; Richardson 1948; Read 1943, 1956; Lowenfeld 1954; Lowenfeld and Brittain 1964).

Counterbalancing this approach, a model of arts education was established on formalist theories in the sixties and seventies. Within this context, there seemed to be a tendency to highlight the autonomy of the aesthetic element as a pedagogic factor (Beardsley 1982; Greer

[1] Corresponding Author: Alexandra Mouriki-Zervou, Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras, University Campus, 26500 Rion-Patras, Achaia, Greece. email: mouriki@upatras.gr

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1984). The main aim of arts education became cultivating children's aesthetic sensitivity, their responses to aesthetic forms (Broudy 1994), and opportunities for having aesthetic experiences in their school life (Smith 1991).

From another point of view, philosophers such as Goodman, Perkins, and Gardner and scholars such as Greene, Eisner, and others highlighted the learning processes involved in aesthetic experiences and delved into the possibility of art contributing to a fuller understanding of the world (Goodman 1968; Goodman, Perkins, and Gardner 1972; Greene 2001; Eisner 1976). From this perspective, programs arose in the seventies and eighties which sought a balance between knowledge-based skills and performance-based skills (such as the CEMREL programme, Project Zero, DBAE).

From the nineties on, many studies have increasingly attracted the interest of scholars in "arts integration" covering the whole range of the learning process (Burnaford et al. 2007; Catterall 2005; Deasy 2002; Denac 2014; Eisner 2002; Hetland et al. 2013; Leigh and Heid 2008; Reilly, Gangi, and Cohen 2010; Goff and Ludwig 2013; Greene 2001; Lynch 2007; Parsons 1990; Russell and Zembylas 2007; Walker et al. 2011; Winner, Goldstein, and Vincent-Lancrin 2013).

The general conclusion from the above is that, despite the evident correlation between aesthetic theory and arts education, the aesthetic approaches still do not have a systematic impact on arts education curricula. It thus seems necessary to explore how the relationship between aesthetic theory and arts education can become more systematic and how various aspects of aesthetic theory can be utilized effectively in education (Mouriki 2003).

In this article we will examine how these various aspects can be utilized so as to contribute to a workable, coherent, and multifaceted arts integration approach in elementary education (3–12). For this reason, we will begin by presenting the main theoretical focuses of four arts education approaches, which are based on some of the most influential philosophical theories of art: representationalism, expressionism, formalism/cognitivism, and pragmatism/contextualism.

We will then identify the characteristics of the teaching settings that are consistent with each of these four approaches and show how each can be utilized to design a corresponding type of art activity. Next we will present designs of four activities, which are suitable for use in teaching the same subject in preschool and school classrooms. Finally, we will provide the findings that came out of the pilot implementations of what we call an "aesthetics-based arts integration" program and comment on the evidence of educational significance of this approach to arts education. In a few words, an "aesthetics-based arts integration" program is one that uses all four approaches of arts activities to accomplish a wide range of educational benefits.

Basic Theoretical Aproaches

Regarding art education, aesthetic theory can be broken down into four main ways of thinking: the representative, the expressive, the formalistic/cognitive, and the contextualist (Efland 1990a; Brown 2006; Anderson and McRorie 1997). The following is an examination of ideology, learning theories, and practices that seem to be connected to each of them.

Representationalism

The model of representation is connected to the emergence of Western art and is a thread that runs through the history and theory of art from antiquity until at least the eighteenth century. It somewhat receded in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, as the expressive model arose along with the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde movements, and sprang back with the neo-realism of the sixties and the various neo-representational contemporary trends. Although there is no one unified theory on art as representation, what is articulated in its various versions (mimesis, ideal imitation, realistic, or photorealistic representation) is the idea of a connection between art and that which it represents.

The theory of art as mimesis or representation corresponds to the learning theory Efland called mimetic behaviourism: "Art is imitation, while learning is by imitation." (Efland 1990b, 14). A more contemporary definition is "predetermined art," due to the predetermined nature of the outcomes. This approach, at least in its traditional version, puts students' expressiveness on the margins (Richardson 1992; Blocker 1979) and becomes teacher-centered. Lessons in the corresponding teaching practice are highly structured. Teachers offer students models to copy in a learning environment that they control; they determine what the subject is and how it will be taught; they prepare, guide, control and assess the process and the students' performance based on standardized patterns and prepared outlines (Barnes 1987; Spidell Rusher, McGrevin and Lambiotte 1992; Herberholz and Hanson 1995; Bresler 1992).

The usefulness of this theory and practice cannot be ignored. Eisner, for example, maintained that representing makes it possible to stabilize thoughts and feelings, to invent or discover ideas; that "the act of representation is…an opportunity for creative thinking" (Eisner 1992, 317–18).

Expressionism

Another widespread approach to art education, which emerged as a reaction against the mimetic-behaviorist/pre-determined approaches, was the expressive-centered approach. It was founded on the belief that art is a purely subjective expression and that works of art are products of the externalization of the artist's states of consciousness. The philosophical roots of this expressive-centered view can be traced to the eighteenth century, specifically to Rousseau's *Emile*, in which the author maintained that children have their own ways of thinking and expressing themselves that adults should support (Rousseau [1762] 1921).

This model was called the Expressive-Psychological Model of Art Education (Efland 1990a) or creative self-expression (Herberholz and Hanson 1995) or the Romantic-Expressive approach (Marché 2002) or child-centered education (Burton 2000; Dorn 2000; Rasanen 1997; Henry 2002; Jeffers 1999). Child-centered educationalists claimed the starting point for all education should be children's inner powers and instincts (Dewey 1966), or else, the expression of the children according to their own level of thinking, feeling and perceiving (Lowenfeld 1982). The role of the teacher is non-interventionist: the teacher observes, acknowledges and responds to the individual needs of every child separately.

This view, although it does not constitute an adequate approach to the phenomenon of art (Mouriki and Vaos 2009), was adopted with great willingness as it seemed to be based on something very simple and self-evident: everyone, even small children, can feel and express emotions, can express themselves through different artistic activities, and can communicate with the expressive content of works of art (Mouriki 2003).

Formalism/Cognitivism

From the sixties on, doubts were articulated about the expressionist approach with regards to the fact that spontaneous, uncontrolled, free self-expression can only have little value (Manzella 1963; Entwhistle 1970; Marché 2002). Thus, in the last decades of the twentieth century, there was a turn to a formalist/cognitive approach to art education. Goodman, (1968) and Bruner (1960) had a great influence on this shift (see Eisner, 1998b).

For Goodman, the arts are symbolic systems of understanding. They contribute just as much as the sciences do to perceiving, understanding, and constructing our experiences. Under the influence of these beliefs, a group of researchers at Harvard, Goodman, Gardner, and Perkins wrote a report for the US Office of Education, called "Basic Abilities Required for Understanding and Creation in the Arts" (Goodman, Perkins, and Gardner 1972). With their creation of Project Zero (an inquiry project, focusing on understanding learning in and through the arts, into the arts, and art education), they set the basic principles to define a cognitively

oriented plan for arts in education which aimed to cultivate creative thought and learning. With similar goals, and influenced by Bruner's (1960) basic positions on education, a program of arts education came to prominence at the end of the twentieth century called "discipline-based arts education" DBAE (Greer 1984). This was a program that in Efland's (1990b) typology corresponded to the Formalist/Cognitive Model, which, like Project Zero, disputed the spontaneity of the expressionist paradigm, but did recognize the utility of techniques, control, and mastery of materials. Significant theorists such as Broudy (1987, 2000), and Smith (1989, 1991) have elaborated greatly on this view.

Under this model, "the arts are seen primarily as the fine vehicles of human understanding" (Abbs 1996, 70). They are regarded as cognitive at their core and are considered inherently of value (Davey 1989). According to these cognitive approaches, curricula of education in the arts are established whose primary aim is to encourage pupils to study and understand artistic structures and forms so as to cultivate their artistic and cognitive abilities. The task of achieving this is delegated to specialized arts teachers who teach arts classes that are part of the curriculum.

Pragmatism/Contextualism

The formalist modernist ideal was not the only trend at the end of the twentieth century. A more or less relativist/post-modern approach to art developed. Alterity and locality were posited against the basic beliefs of modernism, that is, uniqueness and universality (Mouriki 2003; Shusterman 2005). Within the framework of postmodernism, pragmatist/reconstructionist educational models were established, which claimed to avoid the dogmatism of the essentialist visions concerning the supremacy of the so called "aesthetic character" of art (Beardsley 1991). On the contrary, they adopted open practices and highlighted the continuous transformation and variety of the artistic landscape.

Contemporary art education also recognizes, as does contemporary art, the need to transcend or blend cultural differences and discriminations (Hassan 2001). Consequently, it emphasizes the contextualist and instrumentalist character of a "through arts" education, developing and adopting the connection of art with a variety of factors that are outside art. Attention is paid to increasing children's awareness of social and cultural context (Duncum 2000; Emery 2002; Freedman 2000). In order to do this, there is an attempt to connect art to children's social environment, either to examine it or to change it (Aguirre 2004; Duncum 2001, 2002). This task is usually undertaken by generalist teachers.

Designing Aesthetics-based Arts Integration Activities

Elements that each of the above aesthetic visions give rise to will be examined as indicators to design corresponding types of arts education activities. Regardless of their theoretical bases, these activities have a common trait: they have to do with integrating the arts into the teaching processes of a subject, encouraging children to process the subject as an aesthetic stimulus. They differ, however, depending on the theoretical basis on which they have been designed (representational, expressive, formalistic/cognitive, or contextualist) because they encourage pupils to regard the taught subject in a different way. For this reason, we suggest that these activities be referred to as "aesthetics-based arts integration" activities.

As can be seen in Table 1, in initially examining the structure of the aesthetic-based activities, this is predetermined when the basis is representational, undetermined-interpretative when the basis is expressive, discipline-based when the basis is formalistic, and open when the basis is contextualist.

In terms of the approach of the taught subject (aesthetic object) to which each aesthetic view leads, it seems that when based on the representative model children are encouraged to a rather mimetic approach to the subject; the expressive based model leads to a subjective-expressive

approach; the formalistic leads to an aesthetic approach, while the contextualist model leads to a pragmatist approach to the subject.

Finally, in seeking the teaching practices that each aesthetic view leads to, the representational model leads to teacher-centered practices, the expressive to child-centered, the formalistic to teaching art arising from the subject, and the contextualist to a multifaceted-through-arts teaching of the subject.

Table 1: Aesthetic-based Teaching Approaches and Practices

	Representationalism	*Expressionism*	*Formalism/ Cognitivism*	*Pragmatism/ Contextualism*
Structure	Predetermined	Undetermined-interpretive	Discipline-based	Open
Teaching Approach	Mimetic	Subjective-expressive	Teaching arts	Teaching through the arts
Teaching Practice	Teacher-centered	Child-centered	Aesthetic	Pragmatist

Source: Sotiropoulou-Zormpala and Mouriki-Zervou 2018

Example of Aesthetics-based Teaching Activities for One Subject

The following is a description of a program consisting of four aesthetics-based arts integration activities which was designed to teach the weather to kindergarten classes. The activities are described in the order they were implemented in their pilot runs.

The first activity was based on the representative view. It encouraged children to represent and recognize the subject by activating them musically and kinetically. The children were paired off. Each pair chose a weather condition (sunny, cloudy, windy, rainy, stormy) without telling the rest of the class. After a few minutes consultation, the pairs presented the condition they had chosen with movement and sound. The rest of the children were called upon to name the condition. A discussion was then held on the presentations and the weather conditions none of the children chose.

The second activity was designed based on the pragmatist view, and the purpose was to have children understand how weather influences their lives by means of a theatrical activity. The activity called upon the children to have a discussion on the question, "How would life be if some weather phenomenon never happened?" Children expressed their ideas and presented them as theatrical scenes.

The third activity in the program was structured based on the expressive model and provided each child with the opportunity to express his/her views and feelings about the weather by drawing. The children were provided with a variety of art materials and were given the following instructions: "Draw the weather you'd like it to be when you leave the classroom. It can be weather we've never seen before, something in your imagination." When the works were finished, each child explained his/her ideas.

The last activity of the program had a formalist basis as it guided the children to observe and analyze the manners and techniques of an artistic rendering of the taught subject. Working with the teacher the children transformed their classroom into an "art gallery with an exhibition of artworks." In order to do this, they classified the works produced in the previous activity based on their characteristics (e.g. the materials used, the colors, size, how fully the expanse of paper was used etc.). The groups of works were placed in different places throughout the classroom. The children then exited the class and entered again, acting like viewers at an exhibition. Finally, they were called upon to say what had made an impression on them in terms of how the weather conditions were represented in the various groupings of artworks.

Pilot Implementation

Purpose

The pilot program was implemented in pre-school classes so as to ascertain how teaching is influenced depending on the specific aesthetic approach underlying each activity's design. More specifically, for each of the four activities designed, the following questions were posited:

- What kind of focus did the students have on the taught subject? Did they focus on the represented subject; on the subject's characteristics; on the creators of the works produced regarding the subject; on the subject's form; or on the subject's context?
- What kind of benefits did the students gain in terms of the taught subject?

Method

The four activities were tried out in fourteen kindergarten classes consisting of 202 preschoolers: 92 boys and 110 girls with an average age of 5.2 years. The activities were implemented by the class teachers on two continuous days. The teachers were not informed as to the aesthetic model of each activity. The teaching sessions were recorded, transcribed, and codified into observation variables. Direct observation diaries structured for the purposes of the study were also filled in.

The data were analyzed based on criteria corresponding to the research questions posited above. For the first research question, four indications were sought with regard to whether the children focused on the taught subject; on the creators of the aesthetic works produced regarding the subject; on the form of the subject and how it is rendered in works of art; or on the social and cultural context in which the subject may exist. With regard to the second research question, four indications were sought as to the possible benefits each activity offered when integrated in the teaching process of the subject. More specifically, we questioned whether the benefits arising from the arts activities had to do more with mastering information on the subject; expressing meanings, thoughts, and perceptions on the subject; mastering techniques and knowledge on forming the subject; or connecting the subject with the children's experiences and life. Thus, the variables being measured were eight non-mutually exclusive ones. The transcriptions were analyzed to determine when a child presented some form of behavior compatible with one of the variables. Furthermore, every member of the sample exhibiting behavior compatible with a variable was counted only once under that variable, independently of how much or how often he/she exhibited the behavior. The indications measured were sought in the verbal participation of the sample while they were producing works and during discussions in which they analyzed their works and the works of their classmates.

Findings

The findings are presented in Table 2 (Descriptive Statistics of Children's Focus) and Table 3 (Descriptive Statistics of Benefits to Children). Based on the indications observed, it became clear that during the implementation of the activity that used the representational approach, pupils mainly (78%) focused on the subject being taught (e.g. Many pairs mentioned many weather phenomena so as to choose which to represent. Other pairs mentioned weather phenomena to explain a phenomenon which they recognized being the subject of another presentation).

The benefits the children gained from this activity seemed to have more (94%) to do with mastering information on the elements of various weather conditions (e.g. the teacher gave information to facilitate the process of representation, the children defined weather conditions, recalled and mimicked their traits).

Of the observations noted on the activity based on the expressive approach, it was clear the children's main focus (94%) had to do with the creator of each work (e.g. "George's lightning") and the meaning he/she ascribed to the weather phenomena (the children spoke personally, e.g. "I like the sun best; it warms my body inside"). Also, the activity seemed to benefit the children mainly (92%) on a level of self-expression with regard to the taught subject (e.g. they used their imagination: "a rain made up of drops of sweets," and they expressed the emotions a weather condition elicited). Furthermore, most of the children seemed to be deeply and spontaneously involved.

During the implementation of the activity based on the formalist approach, it was clear that the preschoolers were rather (88%) focused on the aesthetic characteristics of the taught subject (e.g. discussing one particular work, there was a conversation about how the dark tones that a stormy sky can have and can be rendered with magic markers, crayons, or paint). This activity seemed to benefit the children mainly (88%) on a level of mastering techniques on forming the subject. It is worth nothing that this activity was very popular with certain children exhibiting artistic skill.

In the contextualist activity it was observed that the sample's main focus (85%) was on understanding the subject as a factor that influences people (e.g. problems and disequilibrium in the ecological system from water shortages).

The benefits that almost all children (99%) gained from this activity had to do with the ways that weather phenomena influence their lives, as well as the ecological values and behaviors that arise from this subject (good environmental behavior, environmental conscience, active citizenship, volunteering, etc.). This part of the lesson frequently became interdisciplinary.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Children's Focus

	Representational Activity, N (%)	Expressionist Activity, N (%)	Formalist Activity, N (%)	Contextualist Activity, N (%)
Focus on the Subject	158 (78%)	72 (36%)	102 (50%)	40 (20%)
Focus on the Creators	40 (20%)	189 (94%)	37 (18%)	19 (9%)
Focus on the Form	78 (39%)	58 (29%)	177 (88%)	90 (44%)
Focus on the Social Context	49 (24%)	49 (24%)	6 (3%)	171 (85%)

Source: Sotiropoulou-Zormpala and Mouriki-Zervou 2018

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Benefits to Children

	Representational Activity, N (%)	Expressionist Activity, N (%)	Formalist Activity, N (%)	Contextualist Activity, N (%)
Mastering Information	189 (94%)	31 (15%)	37 (18%)	89 (44%)
Expressing Meanings	19 (9%)	192 (95%)	22 (11%)	72 (36%)
Mastering Techniques	60 (30%)	28 (14%)	177 (88%)	102 (50%)
Connecting the Subject	68 (34%)	140 (69%)	2 (1%)	200 (99%)

Source: Sotiropoulou-Zormpala and Mouriki-Zervou 2018

Discussion

This study examines a methodological concept in which aesthetic education programs consist of a variety of "aesthetics-based arts integration" activities, that is, activities whose design is based on various aspects of aesthetic approaches. It seems that depending on the theoretical basis, the activities have differing influences on what pupils focus on and bring different learning benefits to the taught subject. More specifically, from a combination of activities designed based on the representative, expressive, formalistic, and contextualist model, it seems possible to implement a

multi-focused and multi-targeted aesthetics-based arts integration approach in school (Brown 2006; Efland 1990a; Mouriki 2003; Anderson and McRorie 1997). It became clear (see Table 4) that children taking part in such programs have opportunities to focus on the taught subject (Blocker 1979; Efland 1990a; Richardson 1992); to interpret it and the meanings ascribed to it (Burton 2000; Dorn 2000;Rasanen 1997 ; Henry 2002; Jeffers 1999; Marché 2002; Mouriki and Vaos 2009); to identify the characteristics of the subject and its representations (Abbs 1996; Davey 1989; Goodman 1968; Goodman, Perkins and Gardner 1972; Greer 1984); and to distinguish the cultural, social, and political framework it functions in (Duncum 2000; Shusterman 2005). Furthermore, within this program, children have opportunities to master knowledge on the taught subject and its realistic traits (Barnes 1987; Bresler 1992; Herberholz and Hanson 1995; Spidell Rusher, McGrevin and Lambiotte 1992), express personal views on the subject (Dewey 1966; Lowenfeld 1982), develop their aesthetic vocabulary (Broudy 1987, 2000; Efland 1990b; Eisner 1998a; Smith 1989, 1991) and perceive the subject in connection with their lives (Anderson and McRorie 1997; Anderson, 2003).

In addition, besides the pre-determined indicators sought in the trials of the aesthetic-based arts integration activities it seemed that in the representational activity the children often asked questions requesting information on the subject. In the expressionist activity children frequently demonstrated signs of spontaneous engagement. The formalist activity was pleasurable for many children skillful in the arts, and the contextualist activity elicited interdisciplinary discussions.

Table 4: Conclusions

	Representational Activity	Expressionist Activity	Formalist/ Cognitivist Activity	Pragmatist/ Contextualist Activity
Focus	The subject	The interpretations of the subject	Forms of representations of the subject	The context of the subject
Learning Benefits	Acquiring knowledge concerning the subject	Recognizing the creator and expressing personal opinions concerning the subject	Perceiving structure and formal elements of the represented subject	Gaining awareness of social and cultural context
Other Observations	Interest in information on the subject	Signs of spontaneous engagement	Pleasure of children who are skillful in the arts	Interdisciplinary discussions

Source: Sotiropoulou-Zormpala and Mouriki-Zervou 2018

It was noted that all the activities encouraged children to become involved in various modes (audio, theatrical, kinetic, artistic) of approaching and understanding the taught subject and to frequently articulate metacognitive comments when taking part in focus group discussions.

From these findings, it seems possible that an aesthetically-based design of arts education can have a positive influence on teaching. More specifically, a program of arts integration comprised of arts activities based on multiple aesthetic aspects can enable children to cultivate multiple approaches toward the taught subject and to draw multiple benefits from it.

Based on these indicators, it would be useful to conduct further research into arts education based on the various aesthetic approaches. Given the pilot nature of the research more in-depth research is also necessary to demonstrate whether such activities create opportunities for fuller learning and aesthetic experiences, for multimodal and metacognitive learning.

Furthermore, it seems important to conduct arts-based research which, by analyzing the audio, kinetic, theatrical, and artistic works of the children, would shed light on the educational benefits arising from the use of each kind of aesthetic-based activity separately and on the programs that arise from combining many types of "aesthetics-based arts integration" activities.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marina Sotiropoulou-Zormpala: Associate Professor, Department of Preschool Education, University of Crete, Rethymnon, Crete, Greece

Alexandra Mouriki-Zervou: Associate Professor, Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras, Patras, Achaia, Greece

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