

THE FOUR ELEMENTS IN ART

PROJECT CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS PROJECT?

ABOUT THE FOUR ELEMENTS

WHAT IS ART AND A WORK OF ART

BEAUTY OF ARTS. ARTISTIC AND THE AESTHETIC

PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORKS OF ART

ON BECOMING AN ARTIST

LEARNING ARTS IN SCHOOL OR IN NON FORMAL EDUCATION?

Art is about human dignity

INTRODUCTION

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) French philosophers, define philosophy as an activity dealing with 'forming, inventing and fabricating concepts- Therefore a conceptual background is actually a kind of philosophy, in our case philosophy of fine arts and non-formal education.

No doubt, adult educators whose essential role is to address their learners' both implicit and explicit knowledge while directing their learning in the right direction (grounded in theories) need to have gained a wider picture of the topic before they start delivering an educational programme. In short, they need to be familiar and they need to agree with at least the main concepts of their topics or their project.

A conceptual background of both an educational programme and a project is necessary. It makes both educators and the authors of the project understand the philosophy underpinning it. Concepts help educators and authors abide by what is essential and agreed in advance. Concepts, however, are not only the idea behind the project. They are paving the way to reach project goals and objectives, they are a way avoiding their getting dispersed.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THIS PROJECT?

The aim of the Four Elements in Art Erasmus+ project is to enable learners to learn English and makes possible their intercultural learning through works of fine arts associated with the four elements. The project contributed to building European identity. Namely, paintings related to water, fire, air, and earth are deeply rooted and valued in local, national or European consciousness.

We are devoting this project - not to all manifestations and formats of art - that would be dispersive and would take us away from our goals, but to paintings/images and particularly to the paintings/images that embody the four elements: earth, fire, water and air. The meaning, the symbols the four elements represent.

The paintings/images collected and selected in this project – 8 of them per project partner- will be used as a learning tool and method in groups of adult learners. Teaching different learning audiences about art, fine arts, paintings/images and English are things to bear in mind while selecting and describing the paintings/images to constitute an educational programme adjusted to the needs of general adult learning audience and specific learning audiences like adult learners with hearing impairments, dyslexia etc.

Based on a system of symbols national identity, has many constituent elements, fine arts and paintings being some of them. No doubt, European Union was created, but Europeans are still to be made by all sorts of transactions and common endeavours. Numerous links between the nation states are needed - Europeans are supposed to work together towards common goals, comparing and finding similarities and dissimilarities of local, national or transnational cultures, where fine arts play an important role.

It is said that today's European identity is based on multiple facets of European cultures. But what is culture? In our view the idea of culture ", said the French poet Paul Valéry, " has always been associated with the very old idea of Europe." Moreover, culture is "the common language of 'Europe'" argues the French historian Fernand Braudel. "Europe will be cultural or there will be no Europe!" keep saying convinced Europeans.

Moreover, this project should help us understand the advantages of non-formal education, methods and approaches used in art education ways to transpose them to the rest of educational formats.

ABOUT THE FOUR ELEMENTS

In the four elements are concentrated the prevailing images of our culture. "The four elements are constituent of both the Universe and poetic imagination" argues Gaston Bachelard. The following example illustrates this point. Theo Van Gogh's brother offered Van Gogh a pencil to draw and sketch people whereas for Van Gogh the mountain in vicinity (earth) was an alive and an attentive listener. The force of Van Gogh's poetic imagination and images was immense. *In western civilization* earth, fire, water and air, the four material elements

were long believed to be essential for living. Moreover, in ancient Greece the four elements stood for the complexity of the nature and indeed of all substances. Universe and dreams were related to them as well as the fundamental images that still dominate our western culture. These images became archetypes of Man's imagination. "It has become obvious that Man has an excessive power to produce images, being more skilled at imagining things than thinking about them. With his power to imagine things, Man provokes Universe".

"The four elements are a concentration of rich, though unstable images that have been changing through the evolution of literature" argues Bachelard. Further, the four elements have been considered to be simultaneously material substances and forces dialectically related to each other. The four elements are constituent of both Universe and Man's imagery, giving Man the freedom to dig in depth the meaning of images.

Images of the four elements are everywhere, including paintings. That's how Man's affection for *water* has inspired thousands of stories and myths among them the Myth of Narcissus who loved no one till he saw his own reflection in water and fell in love with that; Moreover, there is no poetic soul that would not be able to admire water, its calm and serene surface, its power. Water has come to symbolize maternity, purification. Water has become a psychic element dominating both Man's conscious and subconscious.

In the eyes of Gaston Bachelard *fire* gives rise to images of destruction, flames of hell, of what is diabolical. Bachelard proposes to explore the ambiguity of this element and approaches it through the myth of Prometheus, the thief of fire.

The *earth* feels soft or hard. Mother earth symbolizes maternity but also rest and irresistible danger.

Finally, *air*, another element is related to the dream of flying, imaginary of falling, the blue sky, stars, clouds, trees and wind. In this Four elements in Art project partners will be collecting and analysing European paintings related to the four elements and their images

WHAT IS ART AND A WORK OF ART

Interpreting works of art is as perplexed as it is contradictory. A work of art is an attempt to express something that is unique, it is an affirmation of something that is whole, complete, absolute but likewise it is an integral part of a system of complicated relationships. A work of art results from altogether independent activity. A work of art, to exist at all, must be tangible. In a work of art, meet both *matter* and *mind*, both form and content. It is a translation of freedom and it exults dreams (Focillon, 1942).

A work of art belongs to *eternity*. It is *specific, local, individual* and rises proudly above any interpretation. To illustrate this point Le Louvre that was recently copied and built in Dubai is not a work of art since it does not correspond to the above criteria. Moreover, the more a work of art is used for a specific purpose, the less it is a work of art, a work of art exceeds what we see in art.

Paintings are works of art, therefore, they follow *the nature* and particular objectives i.e. to illustrate history and make individuals humans ...

In one of its political tracts Balzac says: "Everything is form", life is form. Form has to be envisaged as a construction of aspect and matter. A work of art exists solely as a form. It is not a line or a graph. There is a relationship between forms. Form has many faces, it is a construction of space and matter. Art is made up of works of art. It must measure and qualify space. Form has a meaning and a specific value. Art has a significance and is ...

<https://youtu.be/oafG5gprS-g>

Italo Calvino addresses indispensable qualities in literature that could be easily applied to fine arts. So, what is needed for creating a work of art? **Lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity and consistency.** (Calvino, 1985-1986). Encounters are needed. Encounters with arts where and when people learn what they need for accomplishing a task. (Deleuze)

BEAUTY OF VISUAL ARTS. ARTISTIC AND THE AESTHETIC

There is a significant distinction between the artistic and the aesthetic. Aesthetics is the field of philosophy that deals with appreciation of art, beauty, and taste. Aesthetics is the main part of any exploration of art. The word 'aesthetic' means "esthetic, sensitive, or sentient. To put it differently, aesthetic judgment refers to the sensory contemplation or appreciation of an object, while artistic judgment refers to the recognition, appreciation, and criticism of an art work.

Beauty is intended to appeal and connect with human emotion. Artists may express something so that their audience is stimulated in some way—creating feelings, religious faith, curiosity, interest, identification with a group, memories, thoughts, or creativity.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS WORKS OF ART

The attitude is what learners show towards works of arts. *Attitude* is a psychological concept defined as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour” Educators of adults will have to deal with their learners' attitude to language learning and their attitude towards visual works of arts as well as their learners' preferences. Learning a second language or learning about fine arts does not only depend upon learning methods but on learners' attitude towards them.

People can respond emotionally to music and rather less emotionally to visual arts. If you looked at a painting for one hour and then write down everything you see and think, you will start noticing many things, but you do not write about emotions. A work of visual art retains people typically very short time, but emotions to appear do need time.

Paintings done by artists are perceived as more structured and planned. Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume argue that we tend to experience strong emotions looking at horrifying images, but if they are art, negative feelings about the images appear along with positive ones. And the experience of being moved by such works is not only pleasurable.

ON BECOMING AN ARTIST

One becomes an artist when one is recognized by its peers, not by critics. An important role as concerns the process of becoming an artist is played by artistic socialisation.

Different formats of learning art, however, do not bring any data concerning their impact on learners and their identity and the impact learners produce on different formats.

One becomes an artist due to different structures around him; family friends, craftsmen, non-formal education structures. Learning arts encompasses meeting individual artists and collectives of artists.

There seems to be only a narrow gap between amateurs of arts and professional artists. Therefore, it is practically impossible to classify artists in this way. Techniques are taught in schools and the rest has to be acquired in most different ways.

Chantal Ackerman a Belgian film director argued that she dropped out of school at the age of 16. After a years of schooling for future filmmakers she discovered that the school for filmmakers cannot teach her how to express herself, how to be creative, so she quit. At the age of 21 however she produced her first film (the awarded Saute ma ville) under the influence of Jean Luc Godard's and his Pierrot le fou! »This is the kind of films I want to do, she said«. Her artistic socialisation is well illustrated in the following video:

Conversations with Chantal Ackermann in Venice.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUStWsegZ0k>

Plantu a famous French political cartoonist attended the famous Lycee Henry IV in Paris. Being a dyslectic, he went through his schooling collecting painful experiences but spent 8 hours a week in non -compulsory drawing education. He was studying medicine. He quit and enrolled in non-formal education. He has been drawing all his adult life.

What is characteristic of artists? Creative autonomy and productive constraints. Artists who are unique, while on the other hand many create artistic works. How one becomes an artist and which forms of knowledge is he or she supposed to acquire?

LEARNING ARTS IN SCHOOL OR IN NON - FORMAL EDUCATION?

Each work of art meets an artist's need, a passionate need to create a work of art. Then the need withdraws from the art-work as blood from a body and it is only our own need, our own passion which can summon it forth again. Without passion we pass in front of such works as if we were blind, we do not see and the impulsion that brings us to a painting shall be sufficient to open both our eyes at once (Malraux). Artistic education can definitely increase our readiness to see and feel a work of art. Art and artists can create and profoundly shape our feelings, *memories, and well-being and we must harness this knowledge to construct a world better suited to human experience*

We assume that arts and painting in particular have an immense impact on education of general adult audience and on specific learning audiences i.e. older learners, adults with dyslexia, people with hearing impairments, etc.

People learn in lots of places not only schools. Not all artists receive initial *institutionalised education*. They mostly learn through practical work and due to successive experiences. Training of artists is »a process enabling learners to acquire professional skills and competences together with another person, be it directly from the person or by observing the person, trying to produce or not to reproduce. In that case artists learn indirectly. *Long lasting observing brings training, learning and activity together.*

These specific learning groups are best addressed in non- formal education and generally out of school. One learns arts outside formal education. Nevertheless, in non-formal education learning facilitators should have »competences, “cognitive abilities and skills that individuals either have or can learn in order to solve certain problems, as well as the associated motivational, volitional and social readiness and abilities in order to be able to use the problem solutions successfully and responsibly in variable situations” (Weinert 2001: 27).

Learning facilitators should have subject and field specific knowledge, professional values and beliefs which are all aspects of competence (Lencer, Strauch, 2016) Learning facilitators in art should have at their disposal »ways of encouraging and evaluating student's creative development in adult art study groups: development of visual perception, manipulative skills, ability to generate metaphorical images and acquisition of relevant knowledge. » (Jones, 1978)

What is usually considered in formal education as a sin: intellectual dispersion, softness, lack of goals may be favourable to the emergence of independent personalities. There are authoritarian elements in formal education requiring a thinking consensus, where minds are shaped uniformly and manners as well.

Non-formal education can be much more dispersed and free. Non-formal education is more able to guarantee liberty, dreams, moods. Non-formal education can be fruitful, surprisingly vital and its mind is surprisingly curious and as such it is more capable of producing singular, seducing unique creatures, it is rich in individuals.

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